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Hostages in the homeland, orphans in the diaspora : identity discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac elites in the European diaspora

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Hostages In The Homeland, Orphans In The Diaspora

Identity Discourses Among The Assyrian/Syriac Elites In The European Diaspora



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Various images of pupils and teachers at the Assyrian Orphanage in Adana, 1919-1921. Source: Modern Assyrian Research Archive.

Map of the 'Homeland'. Source: Malik Yaqo d Malik Ismael (1964).

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HOSTAGES IN THE HOMELAND, ORPHANS IN THE DIASPORA

IDENTITY DISCOURSES AMONG THE ASSYRIAN/SYRIAC ELITES IN THE EUROPEAN DIASPORA

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
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Geboren in 1972

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Prof. dr. H. Teule

Dr. W. Hofstee

To my parents Seyde and Barsaumo

To Yauno and Soner

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Preface

Ever since my parents settled in the Netherlands, I grew up with the 'name question' of 'my people' hovering in the background. At a different level, this topic confronted me even more starkly during my study at the Free University of Amsterdam in the mid-1990s. This was also the period in which I began to have access to the Internet, of which I enjoyed making use with the greatest excitement, especially because it offered the opportunity to communicate with 'community members' elsewhere in the world, through both e-mail and Internet forums. Although this time my confrontation with the 'name question' was at virtual level, I experienced it more intensely. Perhaps because individuals from different parts of the world had something to say about this topic; the extent of the boundaries was therefore unlimited.

The 'name question' was articulated in the symbolism and texts produced on Internet websites, in private e-mails but first and foremost in the Internet forums where the different discourses of individuals and institutions met and engaged in a burning debate, or so it seemed. It was in this period that I began to think actively about the 'name question' and to participate in the discussions taking place, especially at virtual level. Intellectually, I experienced it as a challenging question; the lively debate revealed the diverse dimensions and the difficulties in finding a clear cut solution for something which has been experienced as a central question in the life of Assyrians/Syriacs in the modern era. When my MA thesis supervisor, Joost van Loon, asked me why I was not pursuing a PhD, it was easy for me to choose the topic. Ever since I made that choice, I began to engage in this topic at a different level; I wrote a preliminary research proposal and tried to find funding but without success. In the mid-1990s, there were no universities in the Netherlands interested in this question and Assyrian/Syriac institutions did not have the financial means to fund such a project, although they expressed their moral support. This changed almost a decade later, when researchers at Leiden University planned two different projects in relation to this question. Heleen Murre-van den Berg contacted me about writing a research proposal and participating in a project based on this topic which she had planned but could not take place. It was through her that I got in touch with Bas ter Haar Romeny who had begun a broad

project with a more historical focus for the purpose of studying identity formation among the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. He invited me to join in and add a modern component to the PIONIER research project 'The formation of a communal identity among West Syrian Christians' which has been directed by him and made possible by the Dutch Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). I would like to thank Ter Haar Romeny for the freedom with which he entrusted me in developing this research project. The fieldwork was made possible by a generous grant from the *Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions* (LISOR) and also a grant from the *Leids Universiteits Fonds* (LUF). I would like to express my gratitude to them for their financial support. The *Amsterdam School for Social Science Research* (ASSR, University of Amsterdam) provided an inspiring learning environment during the period in which I attended several courses there. In this context, I would also like to acknowledge the pleasant involvement of Ernestive van der Wal in the early period of my research. I am very thankful to Rosemary Robson who has put great efforts into the English correction of this work and I have valued her personal involvement and moral support.

Here I also would like to mention the late *juffrouw* Ida Kormelink (Enschede) who taught me in Dutch classes with great love and dedication during my first year in the Netherlands. Joost van Loon (Free University of Amsterdam) also gave his lectures with great dedication and inspired me wonderfully. And, was it not he who asked me the question: 'Why don't you pursue a PhD?' Had he not done so, I would never have thought about such an opportunity. Thank you Joost! I should also like to remember a pleasant and talented colleague who passed away too early as the consequence of a tragedy, the sociologist Fuat Deniz (Örebro University). I enjoyed the short period we worked together. It was a bitter moment in my life when I heard the news that my colleague Fuat was no longer with us. Fuat, your memory will live on among us.

I wish to thank various individuals and organizations which have been supportive in the process of conducting my research and writing my thesis. I started off doing research in three countries: the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden. In the Netherlands, I wish to thank the *Assyrische Mesopotamische Vereniging Enschede* (AMVE) and *Platform Aram* for opening their doors to me when I wished to attend their activities.

In Germany, I would like to mention the organizations *Aramäer Gutersloh*, *Mesopotamien-Verein Gutersloh*, *Tur Abdin Gutersloh, Föderation der Aramäer in Deutchland* (FASD) and *Zentralverband der Assyrischen Vereinigungen in*

Deutschland (ZAVD). My deepest gratitude goes to Helga Anschütz and her husband Boulos Harb who welcomed me to study their visual archive. Furthermore, I am very thankful to my *qarito* Shmuni and her husband, Habib Gabriel, with whom I stayed during my fieldwork in Gütersloh. They offered me a warm home and their friendship: *taudi sagi*! I am also grateful to some other friends with whom I stayed during shorter visits.

I spent most of my fieldwork time in Sweden and owe much to the organizations and people there who have been supportive of my research in several ways. I wish to thank the following organizations for their co-operation: *Assyrian Democratic Organization*, *Assyrien Kulturcenter i Botkyrka*, *Assyriska föreningen i Södertälje, Assyriska fotboll föreningen, Assyriska kvinnoförbundet, Assyriska riksförbundet i Sverige, Assyriska ungdomsförbundet, Syrianska/Arameiska akademiker förbundet, Syrianska Assyriska akademiker i Sverige, Syrianska föreningen i Södertälje, Syrianska fotboll Club, Syrianska riksförbundet, Syrianska ungdomsförbundet*, *Syriac Universal Alliance*, *Suroyo TV* and *Suryoyo SAT*. I would like to express my special gratitude to the *Assyriska riksförbundet* for the access it provided to its archive and Tomas Beth-Avdalla and Hanibal Romanos for their kind help in providing me with material from the *Modern Assyrian Research Archive* (MARA). Last but not least, I am deeply indebted to Jan Beth Sawoce (Mesopotamian Library, Södertörn University) who has been of immeasurable help throughout the period of my research. He has always been there whenever I needed any material from the *Mesopotamian Library*, which he set up with tireless efforts. I admire his dedication and hope that he can continue doing this work for future researchers.

In the Stockholm area, specifically in Södertälje, many people have been hospitable and helpful during the course of my research for which I am very grateful. I would like to mention some of them and thank them for their enormous effort and support. To start with, my cousin Saro and her husband, Esmer Aras (Tumba,) with whom I stayed during the whole of my fieldwork period and during shorter visits to Sweden afterwards. They offered me a warm home and a pleasant environment even in the coldest and darkest days of the year in Sweden: *taudi sagie*! I am much indebted to my friend Hanne dbe Yahqo (Södertälje) for his great help, inspiration and the humour with which he introduced me to the field and for reading some early writings. My colleague and dear friend Mariam Garis, with whom I stayed in Gotenburg, has been an important support in various ways. *Taudi* Mariam!

Two families whom I would like to thank for their hospitality in Jönköping are *malfono* Eliyo Dere and his wife, Fehima, and *malfono* Simon Barmano and his wife, Samira. In Örebro I would like to thank *malfono* Hanna dbe Asmar and his wife, Bercin, for the several times I was able to stay with them and for their support during my fieldwork in this city. Many thanks are also owed to *malfono* Hanna dbe Asmar and Bahcat Barsom who opened their archives to me.

This book could not have been accomplished without the help of all my respondents, whom I cannot mention by name for reasons of confidentiality. They know that I spoke to them and they know the value of the conversations we had, which I have enjoyed tremendously. *Taudi sagie* from the bottom of my heart for your kind co-operation.

The writing process has been the most challenging. Therefore I am enormously grateful to Abdulmesih Bar Abraham, Febroniya Atto, Jean Fathi, Hanibal Romanos and Soner who have read and commented on a concept of the whole manuscript. I also owe a debt of gratitude to several friends and colleagues who read earlier concepts of my chapters: Jan van Ginkel (Ch. 4 and Appendix 1), Francio Guadeloupe (Ch. 10), Chris Nierstrasz (Ch. 3 and 4), Basna Beth Yuhanon (Bethzero) (Ch. 3 and 4), Tycho Walaardt (Ch. 4), Mariam Garis (Ch. 4, 8-10), Han Vermeulen (Ch. 8), Nicolien Montessori (Ch. 1 and 2) and Ton Zwaan (Ch. 1 and 11). I am also very thankful to *malfono* Aziz Tezel with whom I have communicated about the meaning of specific words in *Suryoyo* (*Surayt*) and greatful to my brother Simon Atto who helped me with the translation of *Suryoyo* and Syriac texts whenever I needed greater clarification. Many thanks also to those friends in different parts of the world who read shorter pieces or who could answer questions of mine at whatever stage.

I would like to thank a few friends and colleagues more specifically. Jan van Ginkel with whom I have spent much time at Leiden University and who has been a great friend. Chris Nierstrasz, Ton Zwaan and Joop for making space in their diaries and offering me the support needed to continue my work with joy.

My deepest gratitude goes to the members of my family who have functioned as the essential, strong foundation for completion of this thesis. My father Barsaumo, who passed away in 1987, has not been able to witness the progress his eight children have made after they settled in the Netherlands. His absence threw the engagement and dedication of my

mother Seyde to the upbringing of her children in the context of the diaspora into even sharper relief. Although illiterate, they stimulated their children to complete their education and created a warm loving space with the straightened means they had at their disposal in their new country. Over time, my mother seems to have understood my research project. Many times I have had conversations with her about the life in *Tur 'Abdin*. She has been able to give me new insights and I realized that indirectly, by asking my questions, I was teaching her the importance of historical material. Often she would say: 'Our old people used to talk a lot in the old days, but we never paid much attention, because we did not realize its importance.' With enormous pride, upon the completion of this thesis, I reflect on the process my mother has passed through in her development during the thirty years of her life in the Netherlands. Although she has taken little part in the broader social life, she has managed to learn from and develop herself by absorbing all the knowledge her children and grandchildren have brought back home, her base from where she has dedicated her life to them. I shall bear it with me as a great example for life.

My siblings have been a source of love, inspiration and dedication to life. They have encouraged me continuously, borne with me at the most intense moments and spoiled me in compensation for my work in isolation. I thank them for financing the visual equipment which I used during my research and for financing the several assistants I worked with for the translation of Swedish texts with me. My nephews, Nisho and Yamo, and my nieces, Babel and Izla, were born during the time of my research. My phone calls with them and the short visits to Enschede have been an inspiration to continue writing with great pleasure.

In the last stage of writing, Soner came into my life. I am grateful to him for his unconditional, loving support which has brought me to where I am now. He has borne with me during the tensest period of writing, read the whole manuscript carefully and helped me technically with the layout. And above all he has kept reminding me what is most important in life. A few months after the completion of this work, our dearest son Yauno was born who has since then introduced me to a whole new dimension of a beautiful part of life.

List of Abbreviations

ACSA	Assyrian Chaldean Syriac Association
ArDO	Aramaic Democratic Organization
ADM	Assyrian Democratic Movement (ZOWAA)
ADO	Assyrian Democratic Organization
AMS	Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen (Labour Market Board)
AMU	American Maronite Union
AMVE	Assyrische Mesopotamische Vereniging Enschede
ANSA	Assyrian National School Association. It has been renamed the Assyrian Orphanage and School Association of America.
ARS	Assyriska riksförbundet i Sverige (Assyrian Federation in Sweden)
ASALA	Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia
ASSR	Amsterdam School for Social Science Research
Assyriska FF	Assyriska Fotboll föreningen
AUA	Assyrian Universal Alliance
AUF	Assyriska Ungdomsförbundet (Assyrian Youth Federation)
AUK	Assyriska Ungdomskommittén (Assyrian Youth Committee)
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (People's Republican Party)
CPSOK	Central projektgrupp för den Syrisk ortodoxa kyrkan (Central Project Group for the Syriac Orthodox Church).
DKP	Devrimci Komünist Partisi (Revolutionary Communist Party)
DT	Discourse Theory

ACE	Assyria Council of Europe
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
EIFO	Expertgrupp för invandrarforskning inom Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet (Swedish Expert Group on Immigration Research)
ESU	European Syriac Union
GFA	Gabo d-Furqono d-Assyria (Assyria Liberation Party; also known as *Furqono,* meaning 'Salvation'.)
HAS	Huyodo Suryoyo d-Almanya (Föderation Suryoye Deutschland)
ISDP	Iraqi Sustainable Democracy Project
KFUK-KFUM	Kristliga föreningen av Unga Kvinnor - Kristliga föreningen av Unga Män (The Swedish YWCA and YMCA)
LISOR	Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions
LUF	Leids Universitair Fonds
MARA	Modern Assyrian Research Archive
MED	Midyad El'Aziz Diyarbakır (Cultural Association)
MEZO-DER	Mesopotamia Solidarity Association
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party of Turkey)
MSP	Millî Selamet Partisi (National Salvation Party)
NMG	Nineveh Music Group
NWO	Dutch Organization for Scientific Research
PKK	Partiya Karkeran Kurdistan (Workers' Party of Kurdistan)
SAAF	Syrianska/Arameiska Akademiker Förbundet (Syriac/Aramaic Academic Federation)
Saais	Syrianska Assyriska Akademiker i Sverige (Syriac Assyrian Academics in Sweden)
SAEYC	Syriac Aramaic European Youth Committee
SDO	Suryoye Democratic Organization
SEERI	St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute

SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIOS	Samarbetsorgan för etniska organisationer i Sverige (Co-operative Group for Ethnic Organizations in Sweden)
SIV	Statens Invandrarverk (Swedish Immigration Board)
SOKU	Syrisk Ortodoxa Kyrkans Ungdomsförbund (Syriac Orthodox Church Youth Federation)
SOU	Statens offentliga utredningar (Swedish Government Official Reports)
SRF	Syrianska riksförbundet (Syriac National Federation)
SRFUS	Syrianska riksförbundet Ungdoms Sektion (Youth Section of the Syrianska riksförbundet)
SUA	Syriac Universal Alliance
SSNP	Syrian Social Nationalist Party
SSV Edessa	Suryoye Studenten Vereniging Edessa
SUF	Syrianska Ungdomsförbundet (Syriac Youth Federation)
SAUF	Syrianska-Arameiska Ungdomsförbundet
Syrianska FC	Syrianska Fotboll Club
TMS	Terraki Medresse Süryaniye (Progressive Suryoyo School)
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and People Organization
VPK	Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna (Swedish Communist Party)
TKP/B	Türkiye Kommünist Partisi/Birlik (Communist Party of Turkey/Unity)

1 INTRODUCTION

> The purpose of this report is to inform the reader of the alarming concerns/matters... Mor Gabriel Monastery is currently facing. The great injustice that may occur within the following weeks demands an immediate attention...
>
> Archbishop Timotheos Samuel Aktas, 2008

> We are all sons and daughters of Mor Gabriel. So let us join together in struggle...' [*Ahna kulan abne u bnotho d-Mor Gabrial na! So lass us gemainsam kämpfen*...]... Our heritage, our culture, our religion, our history, [and] our language are at stake. Are we going to allow ourselves to be robbed of all these?... Come to the big demonstration in Berlin on 25 January 2009. Defend your people and your history!
>
> From the rap song Mor Gabriel by Ninjos de Dios[1]

> We appeal to the Turkish government, to do all in its power to protect and preserve the monastery as well as do what is necessary for the Syriac Orthodox Christians. In consideration of Turkey's own interest we request the enforcement of religious freedom, the protection of property and the guarantee of Minority Rights according the Treaty of Lausanne and the Copenhagen Criteria... Not least it is demanded that the undemocratic feudal structures and the by the authorities financed paramilitary system of the so-called village guards is abolished.
>
> Memorandum *Aktion Mor Gabriel*, Berlin Demonstration 2009

On 25 January 2009, about 19,000 Assyrians/Syriacs walked the demonstration from the Berliner Dom to the Branderburger Gate to show their solidarity with the Mor Gabriel Monastery in *Tur 'Abdin*.[2] At that

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[1] The original in German: 'Es steht auf dem Spiel unser Erbe, unser Kulturgut unser Glaube, unsere Geschichte unsere Sprache unsere Existenz, all das lassen wir uns rauben?… Komm zur Großdemonstation in Berlin am 25-01-2009 in Berlin, Verteidige dein Volk und deine Geschichte.' Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJo_wgQrOCg. *Ninjos de Dios* consists of the artists: Salo, Christine, Svenji & Ben E.

[2] *Tur 'Abdin* is a geographical area in South-East Turkey where many of the Assyrians/Syriacs who migrated to Europe have been living in the last century. *Tur 'Abdin* means 'mountain of

moment the monastery is being confronted with the occupation of its lands and being charged with serious allegations which could threaten its very existence. Responding to these threats, thousands of Assyrians/Syriacs raise their voices and make themselves heard: *Peace for Mor Gabriel! Peace for Tur 'Abdin! Freedom for the Suryoye!* Slogans in *Suryoyo* and German are shouted, punctuated by the ululation *kililililililili* by women. Different generations, many of them born and raised in Germany, joined by a great number of clergy bearing banners, carrying placards (most of them in German) with such texts as: 'You have taken enough from us already! YESTERDAY Hagia Sophia, TODAY Mor Gabriel Monastery, TOMORROW Kölner Dom?'[3] Young people bear the Assyrian and Aramean flags high or wear them wrapped around their bodies. No matter what their ideological adherence, Assyrians/Syriacs from the 'four corners of Europe' but especially from Germany, have gathered in Berlin to make their voices heard on a matter which is dear to their hearts: the survival of Mor Gabriel Monastery in *Tur 'Abdin*. The discursive field of the demonstration has not been limited to Berlin. During the whole process of the organization of the demonstration Assyrians/Syriacs around the world have been informed and prepared through their media and local institutions. People who cannot join the demonstration had the opportunity to watch it live on the Assyrian/Syriac digital TV channel *Suroyo TV*.[4] The phrase which has functioned as a red line and which was on everybody's lips is 'I am the daughter/son of Mor Gabriel' in *Suryoyo* (*Ono u abro/bartho d-Mor Gabriel no*). It sums up and conveys the link between any Assyrian/Syriac individual and this monastery and therefore it has been assumed that it will inspire and mobilize them in the struggle for the defence of Mor Gabriel.

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the servants [of God]', a reference to the monastic life in this region in the early centuries of Christianity. See further about this character of *Tur 'Abdin*, Palmer 2010, 1999.

[3] Original in German: 'Ihr habt uns schon genug weggenommen!' and 'GESTERN Hagia Sophia, HEUTE Kloster Mor Gabriel! MORGEN Kölner Dom?'

[4] I was one of the people who could not make it to the demonstration because of other commitments abroad. Therefore I watched the demonstration on *Suroyo TV* and *Suryoyo SAT,* spoke with people who had participated in the demonstration, watched *Youtube* films of this event, examined uploaded picture galleries, and read articles which appeared on several websites. Perhaps more than 200 short videos of this event have been placed on the Internet website of *Youtube* by participants in the demonstration in the last few months, giving an overall idea of this mass gathering: the preparation for the demonstration, images of the demonstration and the reaction of people who were part of it.

Although the main task of this study is not to explore this demonstration in depth as such, a closer examination at this discursive struggle around Mor Gabriel Monastery reveals that this event does indeed incorporate the different elements of which this study is composed. What exactly is at stake here? Why have Assyrians/Syriacs worldwide shown their support for the demonstration? How is it that *Aktion Mor Gabriel*[5] managed to organize the biggest event in the history of Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe to fight for the survival of a fourth-century monastery with approximately seventy inhabitants in a remote region of Turkey? There are three main conspicuous points in the struggle for Mor Gabriel which are useful to provide a link with the presentation of my research problem for this study. These points are: the articulation of external threats engenders apprehension among the Assyrian/Syriac community and strengthens its internal ties; Mor Gabriel is an important *nodal point* for Assyrians/Syriacs as it plays a strong symbolic role in their collective identity. *Nodal points*, as will be discussed in the theoretical chapter, are the *signifiers* around which discourses are organized. The strong cohesion revealed in this demonstration contrasts with the situation prevalent during the last forty years of settlement in Europe when individuals and groups have been at loggerheads with each other competing for hegemony over the group. The discourse of the need for unity among Assyrians/Syriacs was indubitably one of the main driving forces behind the Berlin demonstration.

Commencing with the first point, in 2008 Mor Gabriel Monastery was confronted with two challenges to its position (Aktas 2008): the occupation of its land by neighbouring villagers and the act of the Turkish State in laying claim to and acquiring forest land from the monastery which it proceeded to register in the name of the Treasury.[6] Exacerbating the

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[5] *Aktion Mor Gabriel* was specifically founded for this aim on the initiative of the Syriac Orthodox diocese in Germany in co-operation with four secular Assyrian/Syriac organizations in Germany – symbolizing the inclusion of the broad and divergent ideas present in everyday life, but united in *Aktion Mor Gabriel*. This co-operation is the outcome of a gathering organized by Mor Julius Hanna Aydin, Archbishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Germany, 30 November 2008. It resulted in the foundation of *Aktion Mor Gabriel*; based on the co-operation between: the Archdiocese of the Syriac Orthodox Churches in Germany, *Dachverband der Entwicklungsvereine Tur 'Abdin* (DETA), *European Syriac Union* (ESU), *Föderation Suryoye Deutschland* (HSA) and *Zentralverband der Assyrischen Vereinigungen in Deutschland* (ZAVD).

[6] The report discusses how the legal proceedings of surrounding villages against the cadastral survey of Mor Gabriel Monastery has resulted in:

situation, several allegations[7] were imputed against the monastery, which led to court hearings. This external threat stirred up fear among the remaining Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin* (about 2500 individuals) and among those living in the diaspora. As a reaction to this the Archbishop of *Tur 'Abdin*, Timotheos Samuel Aktas in his alarming report indicates the fear of Assyrians/Syriacs around the world, that, in the long run, this first land occupation will end in the expropriation of the monastery from the Syriac Orthodox Community.[8] Highly conscious of the past, they base their fear on their historical experiences of similar cases. The deeper fear and distrust these allegations have aroused in the Archbishop are exuded by the language used throughout the report. In a nutshell, this external threat to the survival of Mor Gabriel Monastery has sent such shock waves through the community that the biggest event ever in the history of Assyrians/Syriacs in the last forty years in Europe was organized to catch the attention of an international audience and to attract attention to its plight.

The importance of Mor Gabriel is stressed by any Assyrian/Syriac who discusses the current threat with which it is faced. This raises the questions of why this monastery is considered to be so important and what meaning is attached to it. As a monastery replete with its own distinct history, Mor Gabriel is one of the last two main Syriac Orthodox monasteries which have continued to be inhabited in *Tur 'Abdin* up to the present-day. People who have migrated from *Tur 'Abdin* over the last few decades still think of Mor

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'...the grossly erroneous decision made by *Midyat Cadastre Directorate*, the legal real estate of Mor Gabriel Monastery shall now unjustifiably and unfairly be registered under Eğlence and Yayvantepe village names thereafter. Consequently, the villagers of the Eğlence and Yayvantepe shall enjoy the right to dispose of Mor Gabriel Monastery's real estate, which Mor Gabriel Monastery had legally and rightfully held for in excess of 1600 years. This illegal act blatantly violates the right to property of Mor Gabriel Monastery's Community Foundation secured under both national law and European Convention on Human Rights and its protocols...'

[7] Submitted on 20 and 27 August 2008 to the *Midyat Public Prosecution Office*, Mor Gabriel Monastery Community Foundation has been accused of: occupying forest land without having permission to do so; conducting missionary activities through children of unknown identity between the ages of 10-12; The Mor Gabriel Monastery building owned by the Community Foundation is a historical museum and therefore required to have permission for prayer; children enjoy a religious education in the Monastery and anti-Turkish activities are carried out; the Community Foundation acts in contravention to Unity of Education Law; Monks and Archbishop of the monastery are trying to destroy national unity and incite people to insurgency; The Community Foundation receives funds from dubious sources; The bank accounts of the Community Foundation should be confiscated.

[8] On 26 January 2011 they faced this fear when the Turkish Supreme Court expropriated 24 hectares of land from Mor Gabriel Monastery and appropriated it to the State.

Gabriel as one of their principal 'collective homes'. The strong relationship with this monastery is aptly summed up in the slogan devised for the support campaign launched by *Aktion Mor Gabriel*: 'I am a daughter/son of Mor Gabriel'. This link implies the closest link in a family relationship – the most central and important social network among Assyrians/Syriacs.



Illustration 1: A collage of images of the Berlin Demonstration (2009).
Source: Aktion Mor Gabriel.

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Gabriel'. This link implies the closest link in a family relationship – the most central and important social network among Assyrians/Syriacs.

What is feared if Mor Gabriel monastery were to be lost? Both in the memorandum of *Aktion Mor Gabriel* (which was presented at the demonstration) and in the speeches given by other people, a link was made between the disappearance of Mor Gabriel and the end of Christianity in Turkey. It stands to reason that Mor Gabriel is considered to represent an important symbolic centre for Christianity. At a different level, Mor Gabriel also embodies the roots of Assyrians/Syriacs in their homeland; the symbol of their rootedness. Among such groups of people as the Assyrians/Syriacs who have never ceased to express their wish to continue to survive as a people or to maintain their distinct collective identity – even in the diaspora – the connection to the homeland is of the utmost importance. Despite this, the older generation who grew up in *Tur 'Abdin*, refer commonly to their position in the homeland as that of *yasire* (hostages).

It is common among Assyrians/Syriacs to refer to the European diaspora as a sea into which they will eventually be absorbed and disappear as a people. Consequently, in the threat to the Mor Gabriel monastery, they foresee their existence as a people being menaced: they are afraid that the last remaining Assyrians/Syriacs lingering in the homeland will also be forced to flee and seek refuge in the diaspora. Their overriding fear is that it will be easier for people to assimilate if they are deprived of their relationship with their historical artefacts in the homeland. In other words, Mor Gabriel Monastery functions as a symbol in the conscious development of a *myth* of survival. As I shall discuss later, the older generation refer to their current position in the diaspora (far removed from their homeland) using the metaphor of *orphans* (*yatume*). If Mor Gabriel should be lost to the 'others', they fear they will be permanently cut off from *Tur 'Abdin* (which is considered as the very heart and hearth of their homeland) as one of their main community centres will have been swallowed up. When that day dawns, the *orphans* will no longer be able to say who their *parents* were and where their roots lie. To illustrate the significance of the monastery to Assyrians/Syriacs, in a letter by the *Solidarity Committee for Mor Gabriel* (Sweden) which was sent to the Turkish authorities and Swedish political parties, this committee compared the function of Mor Gabriel for Assyrians/Syriacs with that of Jerusalem for the Jews and Christians and that of Mecca for the Muslims. The loss of Mor Gabriel would mean a unequivocal amputation from what they perceive to be their ancestral

homeland. Bereft of this relationship, Assyrians/Syriacs would lose hope, as it would lead to yet another great *dislocation* in their lives, bringing them closer to what they refer to in terms of 'death throes' (*u nfoso da raghle*). At that moment, the hope of the continuation of their existence as a distinct people will have been irrevocably snatched from them. In short, to be cut off from the *athro* (homeland) both physically (because of living in the diaspora) and symbolically (by ceding their ancient monastery to the 'others') will place them in a situation in which they feel that they will be staring extinction as a people in the face.

In the struggle for the survival of Mor Gabriel their aim is twofold: they want to remedy their condition as *hostages* (*yasire*) in Turkey and heal their condition of being *orphans* (*yatume*) in the diaspora, through their survival as a distinct people. Consequently, the battle for the existence of Mor Gabriel is the outward and visible sign of their struggle for their very existence as a people, which has also been galvanized in the field of discursivity through the 'name debate' – the central topic of this thesis. This dual struggle for survival in *Tur 'Abdin* and in the diaspora culminated on 25 January 2009 in the attempt of Assyrians/Syriacs to organize a united event to combat the perceived threat to their existence. The Archbishop of Germany, Mor Julius Hanna Aydin, overwhelmed by the huge number of people who gathered in the *Pariser Platz*, said in his speech: 'Today marks the birthday of the *'amo Suryoyo* (Assyrian/Syriac people)' referring to and putting into words the strength of *unity* the audience felt that day. This drew loud cheers from the crowd. A commonly recurring word of appreciation for the unified organized event by *Aktion Mor Gabriel* has been continuously heard since that day in the Assyrian/Syriac media. Father Kenan who addresses people on *Youtube* is therefore by no means an exception:[9]

> …All our parties, for the first time ever in their history of Europe since we were scattered in the diaspora, have joined hands regardless of names and parties. They have demonstrated that the more we are torn by internal disagreements, the more the enemy lurking outside will deny us our rights and will have no pity on us. Therefore, I call once again on our people in these [various] parties: to unite the *Suryoyo* name and to reach an agreement to come together, to leave behind the names [name conflict], to leave behind the [personal] gains and chairs [positions]; to organize. This

[9] My translation of the original in *Suryoyo*, available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zD70bcA-oA.

> [disunity] will not lead us anywhere. For the sake of this people, for their rights, for the rights of Mor Gabriel monastery in *Tur 'Abdin*, for our brothers in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon and wherever they are oppressed in the world. Unite!

To summarize, beginning with the last point, the *unity* achieved in the Berlin demonstration has not been common during the last forty years of settlement in the European diaspora. Instead of *unity*, elite members with particularistic political discourses have vied to gain hegemony and by their actions they have caused a division within this diaspora community. This study will try to provide an answer to the question of why they have not managed to unify these dichotomous voices in the discursive field.

As the case of Mor Gabriel monastery has revealed, there are central *nodal points* in the identification of the people. Even people who have never seen this monastery can imagine, express and experience this link very strongly. Words matter. To say 'I am the daughter/son of Mor Gabriel' is without doubt a discursive practice in terms of identification, representation and taking a stand in order to defend the monastery, for example, by engaging in the activities described. This is why I have used the concept *nodal point* to stress the role of Mor Gabriel monastery in the field of discursivity. By and large, diverse, even opposing Assyrian/Syriac groups share the sentiment of the important role and significance of Mor Gabriel. In other words, there is no disagreement about this. Instead, it is indeed a common point of departure. This is the reason the case of Mor Gabriel has been so widely embraced and why it has become a common demand.

Last but not least, the external threat posed by 'others' is an essential dimension in the definition and identification of 'us'; when the *chain* of the 'others' is blurred, the identification of the *chain* of 'us' also becomes ambiguous. In the context of this study, the emigration of Assyrians/Syriacs to Western countries has resulted in a *split subject*, a crisis in their identification. Although Assyrians/Syriacs left their homeland and established themselves in Western countries several decades ago, they have continued to perceive the majority populations in the Middle East as their main external threat, as if they are still living in their (historical) homeland. Given this situation, the threat to Mor Gabriel has recalled a historical fear for the 'others'. Consequently, this perception of threat caused a stronger need of 'internal unity'.

Various central figures at the demonstration expressed their appreciation of the *unity* displayed in this discursive event in the Berlin demonstration. This raises the inevitable question of why there has been *disunity* and how this has emerged. These questions usher in the central topic of this study which will be elabourated below, after the research questions have been introduced. At the surface level, the identification crisis which Assyrians/Syriacs experienced after their emigration to Western countries has manifested itself in the 'correct' translation of their people's name (*Suryoye*) into Western languages. In the first instance, the level of discussion seems to have been limited to this naming issue. However, a more discriminating examination of the matter demonstrates that it touches on different aspects of social reality. The 'name debate' resembles an iceberg; on the surface it has been represented by a discussion about the 'correct name' of their people. Nevertheless, below sea-level lies the main body of the iceberg. Likewise, the 'name question' incorporates anything related to the historical and socio-cultural formation of Assyrians/Syriacs. In this study, my purpose is to plumb the lower levels of the iceberg by deconstructing the discourses employed at the surface level. As an analogy, the iceberg should not be understood as a structural base which determines everything. As a metaphor, the iceberg is *per definition* 'a large mass of ice *floating* in the sea'. It is not static; instead, it has a changeable and open character. In the same way, the deconstruction of identity discourses will provide a deeper understanding of their formation.

1.1 Aims and Research Questions

The purpose of this historical anthropological study has been to identify and analyse the present-day identity discourses among Assyrian/Syriac elites in the European diaspora in the hope of developing a deeper understanding of the 'name debate'. My purpose is not to justify the claims of competing elite members nor do I attempt to apply a normative set of criteria to this debate. Instead, I want to arrive at an understanding, in the sense of *verstehen*, of how these political discourses have been shaped, what their contingent relations are and hence to explain the extent of antagonism between the two main competing discourses by contextualizing them from a socio-historical perspective. In order to reach this stage I shall deconstruct and contextualize the pre-given and taken-for-granted knowledge, assumptions, terminology and argumentations used in these political discourses.

Identities are constituted in an antagonistic social field in which different discourses compete to fix meaning – and in doing this, they create space for changeable and negotiable identities to be. It is therefore important to illustrate the relationship between identity discourses and hegemony (see further the Chapters 2 and 7).

Theoretically, this study will supplement discourse theory with new understandings drawn from a strongly empirically based case study of an example of a minority and an immigrant group in a European context. Departing from the aforementioned aims of this study I have formulated the following inter-related questions:

1) *What are the discourses of identity among the Assyrian/Syriac elites in the diaspora?*

   In order to deconstruct these discourses, I shall identify the *logic of difference* and the *logic of equivalence, empty signifiers* and *nodal points* within the parameters of discourse theory. I shall discuss this terminology explicitly in the theoretical chapter.

2) *How can we contextualize these discourses historically? More specifically, what is the relationship between the emigration of Assyrians/Syriacs to Europe and the articulation of identity discourses?*

   Here, *dislocation* which occurred during the emigration and settlement process and the concept of the *split subject* will guide the answers to these questions. For an understanding of the articulation of discourses in the new diaspora context I shall make use of *thick description*.

3) *How can we explain the hegemonic struggle between Assyrian/Syriac elites? What are the discursive strategies which are used by elites? What are the roles of ideologies, myths and social imaginaries in the formation of identity discourses?*

   The antagonistic character of the discursive field and hegemony are two essential and interrelated elements required for achieving a comprehensive understanding of the identity formation process.

An analysis of the answers to the questions above shall provide further explanation to the interaction between political discourses, ideologies and discursive strategies – particularly in relation to the 'name debate'.

1.2 Naming and Terminology

It is perhaps no accident that the question of how to refer to my object of study has been among the most burning and difficult problems I have had to tackle, especially because I want to consider and remain close to the ideas of my research object in order to present *their* articulated discourses in my analysis. An inherent difficulty is that my presence as a researcher in this discursive field will always irrevocably influence the field whether I want to do so or not. Unfortunately, there seems to be no possibility of finding a neutral or fully detached position to write about my research object. Any name I choose to apply will inevitably be imbued with significance in this field.

Initially, when I began my research, I chose to use the *emic* term *Suryoye*, the name which Assyrians/Syriacs use in their mother tongue, *Suryoyo*, when they refer to themselves.[10] I assumed that the *emic* approach (the research object's point of view), instead of my point of view (*etic*), would allow me to distance myself more easily from the 'name debate' if I were to decide to do so. Moreover, methodologically the use of *Suryoye* would allow me to show that in their mother tongue my research object commonly uses one name. I have already mentioned above that disagreement and subsequently difficulties arise when a designation has to be used in Western languages.

As I shall discuss in Chapter 2, this specific preference for taking a distance in relation to the use of the name has proved to be impossible. Among both the *Assyriska* and the *Syrianska* elites in Sweden, there were individuals who have objected to my *emic* use of the term *Suryoye* for the English publication of my research. The main objection raised was that the term *Suryoye* (which they use when they communicate in their mother tongue) would be promoted to be used in the English language (and thus in the discursive field). They are convinced that it will only add more confusion

[10] I even considered using the name *Suroye* (instead of *Suryoye*) – the name used in the spoken language when referring to themselves in *Tur 'Abdin* – in order to depart from a time in which everybody agreed to the use of a certain name. In Europe the change from the use of *Suroye* to *Suryoye* in the spoken tongue has not raised any burning issues among the people. For the ordinary people, this process has even passed perhaps unconsciously. In the end I chose not to use *Suroye* because most of the people in the group I studied no longer use the name *Suroye* and those born in Europe have never ever begun to use it. Therefore I decided to use the designation most commonly used, *Suryoye*, when they talk in their mother tongue.

to the naming of their people. Instead of introducing a 'new term'[11] (as they see it) into English language, they opted for the compound name Assyrians/Syriacs (the equivalent of the Swedish version *Assyrier/Syrianer* which has become an acceptable term with a more neutral connotation in Swedish society since about the beginning of the 1980s).[12] It is worth mentioning that elite members who were involved in this specific discussion have been engaged as activists (among their other roles). They presented their reaction as an attempt to deal with the 'question of their people'. The fact that I experienced their very strong reaction to my use of the *emic* name *Suryoye* made me decide to use the name most acceptable to my research object as it covers both the *Assyriska* and the *Syrianska* activists. Hence, the compound designation 'Assyrians/Syriacs' has been introduced in this study as the common designation to refer to the people who refer to themselves as *Suryoye* in their mother tongue.

Although I find it problematic to apply this compound name retrospectively to the period before it was introduced and to areas in which it has never been used, as in the context of the Middle East where they emigrated from, I have nevertheless decided to do so for the reason that it makes my text accessible to the general reader. When I use the Swedish terms *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* separately, I employ them in terms of the ideologies of the social groups which adhere to the two different names. These social categories are both born of an ideology and express that ideology. Forty years ago these categories and ideologies did not exist in the Swedish context.[13] Each term stands for a certain ideology which does change over time but is consistent enough to be recognized as such. Each ideology stands for a set of ideas, especially when they talk about themselves as a people. It is a discourse, rather than an amorphous substance which hovers somewhere out there. It is about meaning-making while talking about

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[11] In reality, I have not been the first to use the name *Suryoye* in a Western language. In the Netherlands it has been used as a neutral terminology by Dutch journalists in, for example, Enschede and Hengelo, two towns in which many Assyrians/Syriacs live. It has also been used by the anthropologists Jan Schukkink (2003) and Ulf Björklund (1981).

[12] See further Section 7.1.5 about the introduction of the compound name.

[13] The term *Assyrier* existed in Swedish and has been used especially in reference to ancient Assyrians. However, the term *Syrianer* is a new term which has been added to the Swedish vocabulary since it was created in the context of the 'name debate' among Assyrians/Syriacs. Before, the term *Syrier* was used both to refer to an inhabitant of Syria and to a *Suryoyo* or Assyrian/Syriac.

the same group of people. Therefore, in this thesis, an *Assyrier*[14] in Sweden is a *Suryoyo* who assumes Assyrian ancestry or who chooses to use the designation *Assyrian* as a national name for his people. A *Syrian*[15] is a *Suryoyo* who first rejects the designation *Assyrier* and by doing so any links to an Assyrian past. Among the *Syrianer* in Sweden, especially people who are active in secular organizations and many of the clergymen state that the *'amo Suryoyo* has Aramean roots. However, not all *Syrianer* identify with an Aramean past. Even when they assume they are of Aramean descent, the majority object to the use of the designation 'Aramean' to refer to themselves today. Instead, they use the designation *Syrianer* in Swedish as a translation of *Suryoye* and as its synonym.

1.3 Emigration and the Identity Crisis

In order to answer the questions mentioned above, I shall have to discuss the process through which Assyrians/Syriacs passed after they emigrated to Europe and the consequences of this experience in relation to their collective identity and the naming of their people by themselves and by the new 'others'. As an introduction to all chapters it is essential to emphasize some important elements which reveal how Assyrians/Syriacs categorized themselves and how others categorized them in the geographical area from which they migrated. The Assyrians/Syriacs and their neighbours in the Middle East knew who they were. In their (spoken) modern Aramaic language *Surayt*[16] (hereafter I shall refer to this language as *Suryoyo*[17]), they

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[14] *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* are respectively the noun forms for 'Assyrian' and 'Syriac' in Swedish, *Assyrisk* and *Syriansk* are the singular adjective forms and *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* are the plural adjective forms. In Swedish language, adjectives are declined according to gender, number and definiteness of the noun. The use of *Assyrier*, *Assyrisk, Assyriska, Syrianer, Syriansk* and *Syrianska* in this thesis is according to the Swedish grammer rules.

[15] In Swedish, *Syrian* is the singular form of *Syrianer*. The Swedish *Syrian* is pronounced differently from the English word 'Syrian'. In Swedish, there is an emphasis on the 'a'.

[16] See further Tezel (2003: 24) for his ideas about the derivation of *Surayt*. See further Appendix 2 for the use of the terms *Surayt*, *Turoyo* and *Suryoyo* when referring to the spoken mother tongue.

[17] My choice to refer to the spoken mother tongue with *Suryoyo* is because hardly anybody in the context of the diaspora continues to refer to this language with *Surayt*. The majority have started to call it *Suryoyo*. Before this, *Suryoyo* was used to refer to their (written) language (*Kthobonoyo*), classical Syriac.

referred to themselves as *Suroye* and in classical Syriac as *Suryoye*.[18] In Arabic and Kurdish[19] they were referred to as *Suryani* and in Turkish as *Süryaniler*. What did these names mean in terms of a category of people? At the present-day, these names refer to those whom we know to be members of the Syriac Orthodox Church.[20] It is the same category which was known as the *Süryani Kadim*[21] *Millet* under the Ottoman Empire. *Millet* is the Ottoman Turkish term for a group of people defined by its confessional affiliation. Hence, under the Ottomans, the religious affiliation of the group was the basis on which it was categorized. This categorization was based on the Islamic concept of the *Ummah*, the Muslim community or nation (implying a definition transcending modern national boundaries). In the context of the modern Middle East, the former *Süryani Kadim Millet* continued to be organized along denominational lines (see further Chapter 3). Therefore, in practical terms the Assyrian/Syriac people (*'amo Suryoyo*) were a group of Christians among a majority of Muslims – from their own perspective and from the perspective of the Muslim majority.

At this juncture, it is important to clarify the concept of *'amo* as a collective category among the Assyrians/Syriacs in the Middle East: the term *'amo* in *Suryoyo* means 'a people'; as *u 'amaydan* means 'our people'.[22] In everyday life, it was not a category which was theoretically of any importance to the ordinary people among Assyrians/Syriacs. They did not pay much heed to it. There was an implicit notion of what 'our people' meant. Furthermore, the neighbouring 'others' knew who the *Süryani* or *Süryaniler* were in the geographies which formed their homes. What mattered more to all groups involved was that they were Christians, hence different from the majority population of Muslims. Their status and position in a Muslim

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[18] Sometimes, people in *Tur 'Abdin* would also refer to themselves as *Suryoye* when speaking in *Suryoyo* (*Surayt*). This is probably attributable to the influence of classical Syriac on *Surayt*. In Europe people have mainly referred to themselves as *Suryoye*. I shall dedicate a future publication to this shift in use.

[19] The Kurds in *Tur 'Abdin* also used *Fellahi* (in the sense of Christians) to refer to them, because they were the main group of Christians in the area. Consequently, *Fellahi* came to function as a synonym for *Suryani*.

[20] Depending on the context and discourse, these names may also refer to the Syriac Catholics and the Syriac Protestant churches.

[21] The Syriac Orthodox Church added *Kadim* (ancient, old) to its name in order to distinguish itself from those members who converted to the Catholic Church but who continued to use the name *Süryani* (Kiraz 2005: 2).

[22] *'Amo* can also be used with the meaning of 'people' or 'crowd' but here it is used with the meaning of 'a people'.

majority society has depended heavily on that category. From the perspective of Assyrians/Syriacs, the Christian element in the category of 'our people' was therefore of huge importance in creating 'us' and the 'others'. Nonetheless, at other, more specific levels, there was still a sense of being distinct from the other Christian groups.[23]

This traditional method of identification and categorization in the Middle East no longer seemed appropriate to their new context of settlement after their emigration to Western countries and, as a consequence, they have since then been confronted with conflicting concepts in their attempts to define themselves. In Western countries, for over a century people have usually been categorized according to their national citizenship. Conversely, national categories of peoples often seek their legitimacy in geographical states. It is important to note in this context that, before heading to Europe, Assyrians/Syriacs assumed that all Europeans were Christians and therefore already felt closeness with them. Implicitly they expected the same sense of closeness from Europeans, and therefore also a privileged treatment. For this reason, they thought it was even more important that they express and show that they were *not* Muslims. This was especially reinforced at times at which they discovered that the ordinary people in Europe had the idea that all people in the Middle East were Muslims. Nevertheless, since their settlement in Western countries, Assyrians/Syriacs have been categorized according to the national name of the state from which they migrated with the upshot that they were not recognized as a distinct ethno-national category, with the exception of being categorized as Christians within that same category (such as in 'Christian Turks').

In a nutshell, the way they were categorized in Europe did not set them apart from other national groups from the Middle East. Therefore, Assyrians/Syriacs regarded the names and categories applied to them by Westerners (the new 'others') as misnomers. Religion also lost its function as a boundary between the Assyrians/Syriacs and the new 'others' in the

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[23] To be *Suryoye* (here: Syriac Orthodox) also meant to be different from other Christians and had developed an unquestioned sense of collective identity and consciousness. For example, in *Tur 'Abdin*, Syriac Orthodox individuals who had converted from the Syriac Orthodox Church to Protestantism or Roman Catholicism in *Midyad* were no longer referred to by the ordinary people as *Suryoye* but as *Prut* and *Katholik* or *Kaldoye* respectively. The ordinary people no longer considered them *Suryoye* because of their new denominational affiliation. Therefore, to be *Suryoye* meant more than being Christian; it announced that they were adherents of a specific form of Christianity which had consequences for the social category in the daily life of *Tur 'Abdin*.

Western countries. To a certain extent, the 'others' have also become the Europeans whom they initially identified (from a traditional perspective) as Christians. The resultant paradox is that, if they were to include themselves in the same category as these Christians in Western countries, this step would mean their absorption into this group, with the consequence of the loss of their group distinctiveness, often expressed as a collective of ancient history, language and culture. On the horns of this dilemma, it was essential to find new ways of positioning or new ways of identification for Assyrians/Syriacs in their new host societies if they were to keep a distinct group identity.

At this juncture, an important characteristic of the new context in the host societies should be pointed out. Assyrians/Syriacs visibly began to enjoy the freedom to express their ideas about such topics as their collective identity and to negotiate this over time. They were no longer restricted to defining themselves within the narrow confines of the national ideology of the country in which they lived, as it had been the situation in the Middle East. This meant that they were no longer obliged to define themselves solely as a religious community. Besides the fact that emigration caused a change in identification among Assyrians/Syriacs, it also changed their internal subject positions. In this sense, the new context also allows space for the empowerment of secular elites, who are increasingly being well educated and who have gained access to new sources.[24] Formally acquired knowledge has increased their influence in relation to the clergy who once represented the educated group. These secular elites put topics on the agenda of their people which would not have been thought of previously in the homeland. In this new context, they have been the ones who have made the first statements about a distinct identity of their people (in modern concepts) and who have used their new position as European nationals to speak out about the national rights of the Assyrians/Syriacs as a people in both the homeland and in Europe.

It was in this context that Assyrians/Syriacs began to problematize their categorization by the new 'others'. In the beginning, among the ordinary people this categorization played a role only from a more traditional

[24] In the homeland, it is possible to say that the clergy were still far more influential than the secular elites. The central power was vested in the clergy who represented their church members formally. It was mainly they who made the major decisions affecting the Assyrians/Syriacs.

perspective. To give an example, as far as the Assyrians/Syriacs are concerned, the majority groups in the Middle East are Islamic and they are not. Expanding this problematization, educated elite members added the claim that they are also ethnically distinct from other national groups in the Middle East. The term *ethnicity* refers to relationships between groups whose members consider themselves distinctive (Eriksen 1993: 6). As a matter of course, there is discrepancy between their self-identification and the categorization by others. This touches on the political element of positioning oneself among other people. The initial problematization of the categorization by others provided the foundation for one of the central elements of this study: the 'name debate' among Assyrians/Syriacs, of which the central theme is the 'correct' terminology by which to name themselves in Western languages. Internally, there has always been a common understanding that they are a distinct people (*'amo*) and hence *not* of Turkish, Arab or Kurdish descent – the three main majority groups among whom they lived and whom they have continued to perceive as the 'others'. These three national categories are only included in the discussion when elites discuss the collective identity of their people with outsiders. Among themselves, a question or, more aptly a disagreement, has developed about the 'correct name' of this people in the new context of the Western diaspora. In order to solve this problem, they began to search for a designation which would continue to distinguish Assyrians/Syriacs from the 'others' in the Middle East.

Traditionally, the name *Suryoye* has been translated by Western scholars with the term *Syrians*. Assyrian/Syriac elites have raised objections to this term because it fails to distinguish them from the citizens of Syria, who are commonly identified as Arabs.[25] To avoid this confusion, a group of elites

[25] In America, until 2000 they had to classify themselves according to the countries they left in the Middle East (Syrian, Lebanese, Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi) or as Arabs or Turks, categories which they did not identify with. Individual activists (such as Abgar Malul, John Michael and Abdulmesih Saadi) among the members of the Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Church and the Syriac Orthodox Church took the initiative of protesting to the American census bureau that there was no distinct category for them to be classified as a distinct people. After a meeting with the census bureau it was agreed upon a new category with the compound name 'Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac' for the American census of the year 2000. In addition, – specifically in relation to the use of Syriac – Archbishop Clemis Eugene Kaplan and Archbishop Cyril Aphrem Karim directed a letter to their community members in the USA, informing them to spell the name of their people as *Syriac* and not as *Syrian* at the same American census of 2000, in order to make their distinct identity specific. This usage of *Syriac* in the name of the *Syriac Orthodox Church* in the English language has been taken over in Europe too.

sought the solution by using the designation Assyrians, a name which had already been suggested by Assyrian/Syriac elites in the context of the Ottoman Empire and in the American context at the turn of the twentieth century. Naum Faik (1916) in his article *Suryoye u Suroye* advised his Assyrian/Syriac readers of the magazine *Bethnahrin* in America to follow the same concept of national identity represented by the designation 'Assyrian' (see Appendix 3). It draws attention that, basing himself on the English use of the name of his people, he is saying that he favours[26] the use of *Suroye* over the use of *Suryoye*:[27]

> ...Because we are also part of this nation [*umtho*] of whom others are jealous, it is necessary that we search for a name which suits this time and more specifically the American context. And if we are going to use the designation *Suryoyo*, it will be confused with the inhabitants of Syria,... who are for a greater part Arabs and Muslims,... And if we are going to use the designation *Suroye*, our name will be confused with the inhabitants of the town Sur. And we, if we are called *Asuryoye*... it would be good for our nation. And this name is equivalent to the English designation 'Assyrians'. We think that this designation is more suitable than the designation *Suryoye* and *Suroye*. Or it is better if they [the people] use *Asuroye* (with one *yuth*) than *Asuryoye*...

The option of using the name 'Assyrian' in the European context – as Naum Faik suggests for the American context – would kill two birds with one stone. First and foremost, they would no longer be confused with citizens of Syria and, as an added advantage, they could also point to a distinct national identity among other national minorities or immigrant groups worldwide. The young elites who were involved in the secular organizations took the lead in informing the new societies in which they lived about their distinct identity. This identification has subsequently engendered a new appeal: to be recognized internationally as a people, and therefore to be entitled to cultural, linguistic and religious rights so that they can survive among other *emwotho* (nations).[28] Quite clearly, a distinct identity functions here as a *nodal point* and is linked to the survival as a people.

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[26] See for a possible explanation of this preference Section 8.1.1.

[27] My translation of the original in Syria.

[28] The Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) has been member to the UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and People Organization) since 1991.

It transpires that the relatively small number of members of the elite has managed to set out the path for a renewed national consciousness among Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe. Many of the discussions and activities which are organized by their secular organizations are related to the distinct collective identity of their people and its need for survival as a distinct group in a worldwide diaspora. The dispersion of families worldwide has functioned as a transnational network within which the name debate has taken place. The acceleration in the exchange of information (through the use of the latest communications technology and improved international transportation) used by elites has influenced the central position of the topic of 'identity' and the way it has been constructed discursively. Furthermore, the topic of identity has become the point of departure for explaining any crisis they happen to experience. Therefore, it can be said that the topic of identity constitutes a central role in the socio-cognitive sphere of Assyrians/Syriacs.

Since the mid-1970s in Europe this debate about what the 'correct name' for the Assyrian/Syriac people is, has grown to such a degree that we can now speak of different contingent ideologies and adherents who have become alienated from each other. In a triangle of which the sides are composed of relationships, one religious and two secular elite groups have been competing for hegemony on this matter, endeavouring to influence the community with their ideology. I use the term *ideology* from the perspective of discourse theory, namely ideology as the *objectivity* of the *social* (see further Chapter 2). In speaking about the Swedish context, one can identify the *Assyrier,* who support the designation *Assyrian* and imply Assyrian ancestry, while the *Syrianer* assume *Aramean* descent. Both secular groups have established their secular organizations which function as platforms for members and sympathizers who have espoused their chosen ideology. As members or sympathizers of these organizations they once again study, re-interpret and re-assess the history of the *'amo Suryoyo*. Depending on the judgments they reach, strategies are developed and propagated to preserve and develop the putative cultural and linguistic heritage of their people. The clergy as the third party in this triangle have had a central and ambiguous role in the discursive field. On the one hand they have struggled against the *Assyrier* and on the other hand, they have at times attempted to take a more neutral stand to calm down the 'crisis'.

Although earlier studies about this group have touched on the aspect of identity (see in more detail the next section), they have not examined the

opposing discourses between *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* elites from a discourse analytical approach. Discourse theory (henceforth DT) is essential to problematizing, capturing and understanding complex social phenomena by applying the concept of deconstruction. In my attempt to analyse the construction of these discourses, I shall resort to central concepts in DT. The goal of my analysis is to understand and explain social phenomena in their socio-historical context in which they emerge and take effect (see further, Torfing 2005: 19). In DT, designations and identities are considered to be constructed and hence changeable. This ontological standpoint allows the questioning of 'objective truth claims' in society and therefore it permits a search to be made beyond the constructed level at the surface of everyday life. In order to understand their discursive identity formation process in the post-emigration period, it is therefore valuable to study identity discourses current among Assyrians/Syriacs from this perspective in order to deconstruct the pre-given 'objective truth claims' about the designations they use, their ideologies and their identifications. In an endeavour to reach an understanding of how and why the topic of identity has assumed such a central place among Assyrians/Syriacs in the diaspora, I shall look at the role of emigration in relation to the dislocation of their collective identity. Moreover, I shall deal with the contingent means for healing this dislocated identity by elites in the antagonistic field. My principal aim will be to analyse the way in which the antagonistic discourses have emerged among Assyrians/Syriacs and what the consequences of these antagonistic discourses have been in terms of their subsequent unity and disunity.

1.4 Demarcation of This Study

The Assyrians/Syriacs in this book are the topic of research in the Leiden University based PIONIER project Syriac Christianity. As this project has focused on 'the formation of a communal identity among West Syrian (or Syrian Orthodox) Christians after the Council of Chalcedon in 451', my focus has also been on the members of this religiously defined community. The *Suryoye* as the group to be studied in this thesis are therefore religiously usually known as the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church (see for the historical background of this church Appendix 1). How many people are counted so? This is a rather difficult question to answer, for several reasons. One of the principal problems is their non-recognized status; hardly anywhere are they registered as a distinct group(s). Another aspect of this is

the question of identification; they may be formal members of this church (after having been baptized into it) but do they also identify themselves with it? This question is especially pertinent to the group I study, which is not bound to a specific territory. Another difficulty is that people have begun to stress the use of the term *Suryoye* as a cross-denominational name again, in contrast to limiting it to the Syriac Orthodox Church, something what was common among the ordinary member of this church in the decades before. Consequently, when they talk of 'our people' they may include different Syriac church communities, depending on how they define 'unity'. Therefore, the number of people whom they consider to belong to their people differs. Nevertheless, I shall attempt to estimate their numbers on the basis of the church registration and 'common knowledge'. At a rough estimate the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church (in all cases inclusive of the different branches) could be about 300,000 members in Europe and at about 3 million worldwide.[29]

Although the main aim is to present an analysis of present-day discourses, the historical element will be used at the contextual level (in time and space) so as to reach an understanding of the discourses in their relationship to socio-political aspects. Broadly speaking, the study concerns the time frame between 2003 and 2009. Although the main period of fieldwork was conducted in the years 2004 and 2005, I have kept in close touch with the field during the analysis and writing of the thesis.

For the purpose of selecting my respondents for the in-depth interviews, I have constructed the category *elite*. This means that individuals may themselves not know that I have categorized them as such and I must stress that it is not a common concept used in the field of the group under study. In the context of this study, those categorized as elite members are university graduates, clergy, activists (often people in key positions in secular and religious organizations) and I also have not overlooked the elderly who exert a certain influence on their people from a more traditional perspective.

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[29] Often, my respondents do not include the members of these churches in India when they talk about 'their people' (see further Chapter 9); therefore, I have not included them in the context of this study. Besides, there are the Maronites and the Melkites who are theoretically also considered part of their people, but whom they hesitate to calculate in the number of their members because of the lack of transparency or lack of information about how individual members of these groups identify themselves.

The last group may fill informal positions or roles and as a consequence their influence may be felt at the informal level but may nevertheless be strong. This might result in a situation in which different generations, different educational levels and religious and secular elite members compete for hegemony in the same antagonistic field. Generational differences between elite members certainly play a contextual role in explaining their discourses. Elite members who have managed to acquire positions in Assyrian/Syriac organizations, on the church boards or those who try to play a central role from a different position have often been those who were among the first settlers in Sweden. The majority of my respondents have been Assyrians/Syriacs from Turkey (and to a lesser extent from Syria and Lebanon) because the first group has been relatively more involved both in the civic and religious institutions of their people in Sweden and the percentage of Assyrians/Syriacs who emigrated from Turkey is by far larger than from other Middle Eastern countries. One question which might be raised at this juncture is: 'What about the role and discourses of the ordinary people in the name debate?' They enter at the contextual level; the playground which elites use when they want to develop a framework for their ideas among the ordinary people.

Although the starting point of my study has been the European diaspora, this broad research field has merely been used at the contextual level. I have, for example, specifically discussed the emigration to Germany in relation to the emigration to Sweden. Pertinently, this relationship illustrates the interactive and flexible relationship of the character of the emigration of Assyrians/Syriacs in the context of their settlement in Europe. I have not delved much into the emigration to other European countries for the reason that this would have otherwise diverted the focus to additional questions. Processes occurring among Assyrians/Syriacs at transnational level have been considered and used at the contextual level of this study. Therefore, the discourses of elites are embedded against this broader background of events.

Initially I aimed to make a comparative case study among Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. I based this selection on both the similarities and differences in these three countries. The research object in all three countries consists of Assyrians/Syriacs who had emigrated from the same geographical areas in the Middle East, during the same period, for similar reasons and who have family members in all these three countries – although some families may have a particular

concentration in one of these countries. Sweden and Germany are home to the biggest concentrations of Assyrians/Syriacs, each with about 100,000 immigrants. Turning to the differences, in contrast to Sweden and Germany the Assyrians/Syriacs in the Netherlands are far fewer with about 25,000 people. Another difference between the three countries has been the reception and accommodation policy of the authorities in the respective countries of the research object. One interesting question which has arisen in this respect is the relationship between this policy and the socio-political and economic development of the group under study in these countries. A third difference is the number of habitants in the three countries proportionate to their total populations.[30] Cognizance of this aspect is important when their potential visibility in the context of the broader society is considered.

The farther I advanced with my fieldwork, the more I realized that my ethnographically acquired empirical data exceeded my capacity to handle their quantity in one thesis. As this realization dawned, I decided not to analyse my data concerning the Netherlands and Germany very specifically.[31] For this same reason, I have decided to publish two chapters already written which are also central to the topic of this thesis in a future publication separately, namely an analysis of discourses about the *Seyfo* (genocide during the First World War in Ottoman Turkey) and discourses about the *athro* (homeland). For the moment, my fieldwork in the Netherlands and Germany has been used for contextualizing the Swedish based fieldwork in the antagonistic field in Europe. I am highly aware that the discourses in Sweden should also be studied in relation to discourses of Assyrians/Syriacs worldwide; they do not exist in isolation. The use of the Internet as instrument of information and communication has enabled me to keep myself informed of discourses and their discursive character outside Sweden.

Therefore, in the final version of this thesis, the main focus of my study has shifted to the case study in Sweden, but still remains strongly embedded in a European context. Besides the fact that at the present time Sweden is home to perhaps the biggest Assyrian/Syriac community in Europe, the main reason to opt for the case study in Sweden is that Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden have played a major initiating role in generating new questions and initiatives pertaining to the collective identity of their people and these have

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[30] The inhabitants of Sweden number 9,347,899, of Germany 82,757,595 and of the Netherlands 16,576,800 (Eurostat 2010).

[31] I shall publish these data in a future study.

come to dominate the discursive field at transnational level. As their role has grown, the activities between different elite groups in Sweden have become increasingly antagonistic. This characteristic has again stood out in comparison to other Assyrian/Syriac elite groups, especially in Europe but also on other continents. The fact that individuals who consider themselves to be members of the *'amo Suryoyo* live dispersed throughout different countries worldwide but who nevertheless feel the need to remain in contact makes it hard to study this subject in isolation and to limit it solely to the geography of Sweden or Europe. Consequently, the antagonistic field of this study assumes a transnational dimension; hence topics relating to the common past, present and future are discussed at this level.

1.5 Previous Research

Traditionally, Assyrians/Syriacs have been studied primarily from a theological, linguistic or historical perspective. The most recent socio-political changes relating to their new forms of identification have been approached by Western scholars as rather odd and exotic occurrences. They are often perceived as non-legitimate processes which take place within a group of people which is not well acquainted with its own history. Despite the lack of attention paid to them as a group, since Assyrians/Syriacs have settled in Western countries, studies of them from new perspectives have caught the interest of Western scholars and also of scholars who are members of this group and have been educated in Western countries. The participation of the latter has developed new approaches to studying this group, especially in the social sciences. The programmes of the latest conferences such as the *Symposium Syriacum* show a considerable increase in topics which are relevant to their current political situation in the Middle East, their emigration, settlement and accommodation of life in Western countries.

For comparative reasons, before I discuss studies about Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden, I shall introduce some studies about this group in the Netherlands and Germany. It is clear that the interest, especially from academia, in this research object in Sweden is much higher than in either of the other two countries, even though the number of the Assyrians/Syriacs in Germany is about the same as those in Sweden. An important reason for this difference may be their visibility as a group in society.

I shall commence with some studies published in the Netherlands. This reveals that the first two main publications about the Assyrians/Syriacs in the Netherlands were written by journalists. Albert Stol (1979) sums up the main line of his book *Turkse Christenen vervolgd, verdreven, verspreid: opkomst en ondergang van de Jacobieten* in his sub-title: 'The rise and fall of the Jacobites'. Indicating the threat of extinction looming over this group, Stol attempted to describe their precarious position. In the same year, Harry van Mierlo wrote a book (*Kerk-Turken zijn geen Turken*, 1979) about this group after the attention Assyrians/Syriacs had attracted by their occupation of the Cathedral of St John in Den Bosch. The purpose of their action had been to highlight their plight as a threatened people in Turkey. Another early study was that of the scholar in Church History, Hans Roldanus (1984), who wrote about the Assyrians/Syriacs in Istanbul: *De Syrisch Orthodoxen in Istanbul*. Bearing in mind the specific behest of the Dutch authorities, the study sought to discover whether, instead of fleeing to the Netherlands, Istanbul might function as an alternative place of settlement for Assyrians/Syriacs. Heleen Murre-van den Berg (2000) wrote an article discussing specifically the identity of Assyrians/Syriacs in the Netherlands: *Religieuze en etnische identiteit van Syrisch-Orthodoxen uit Turkije en Syrië in Nederland*. The most recent study to have been published in the Netherlands is that by the anthropologist Jan Schukkink (2003): *De Suryoye een verborgen gemeenschap: Een historisch-antropologische studie van een Enschedese vluchtelingen gemeenschap afkomstig uit het Midden-Oosten*. Employed by the municipality of Enschede (which is home to the biggest number of Assyrians/Syriacs in the Netherlands), he wrote a historical anthropological study of Assyrians/Syriacs who had settled in the city. Schukkink was seeking to understand the relationship between the changing conditions in society and the status of the *Suryoye*[32].

The main studies which have been published in the last few decades in relation to my research object in Germany are the following. As a consequence of personal contact with the group, the historian Gabriele Yonan was among the first to write about them. Three of her titles are: *Assyrer heute: Kultur, Sprache, Nationalbewegung der aramaisch sprechenden Christen im Nahen Osten: Verfolgung und Exil* (1978); *Journalismus bei den Assyrern: Ein Überblick von seinen Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (1985); and *Ein vergessener*

[32] The anthropologist Jan Schukkink uses the *emic* term *Suryoye* to refer to the group he studied. In the local media in the region of Twente in the province of Overijssel, the use of this term has been quite common, in the search to find an acceptable name for the different ideologies among Assyrians/Syriacs.

Holocaust: Die Vernichtung der christlichen Assyrer in der Türkei (1989). While the first two works focus on aspects of modernism, her latest work is among the first main Western publications to discuss the *Seyfo*. As its title indicates, the author attempts to bring the genocide perpetrated during the First World War to the attention of her readers in order to dispel ignorance about it. This work is a source for contextualizing people's stories of migration and their relation to the homeland – even though the *Seyfo* had taken place many years before they emigrated.

The historian Helga Anschütz (1985) focuses in her work, *Die Syrischen Christen vom Tur 'Abdin: Eine altchristliche Bevölkerungsgruppe zwischen Beharrung, Stagnation und Auflösung*, on the situation of Assyrians/Syriacs[33] in *Tur 'Abdin*, covering the period between 1965 and 1982. It is an important background study as it is leading to an understanding of their threatened situation in this specific geography, which they consider to be part of the very heart of their homeland. Besides this work, she has directed many documentaries about Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey and in Germany which will remain important historical sources for further research about the specific time period of emigration and the difficulties encountered by this group both in the homeland and upon arrival in Germany. For a further contextual understanding of the dangerous living conditions in *Tur 'Abdin* in the 1990s, the translation of the narrative related by Father Melke Tok about his kidnapping in *Tur 'Abdin* by the linguist Shabo Talay is also significant: *Lebendig begraben: die Entführung der syrisch-orthodoxen Priesters Melke Tok von Miden in der Südost Türkei.*

In his book *Die syrisch-orthodoxen Christen in der Türkei und in Deutschland: Untersuchungen zu einer Wanderungsbewegung*, Kai Merten (1997) describes the emigration process of Assyrians/Syriacs from the Middle East and especially from Turkey to Germany (1960-1996).

The activist Abboud Zeitoune has added to this list *Music Pearls of Beth-Nahrin: An Assyrian/Syriac Discography* (2007). It is a collection of mainly the secular music produced in the last century. It is important to note explicitly that this publication is a very clear discursive act. Moreover, it is the product of a process of modernization and change.

A quick search in the Swedish National Library database results in a list of more than 200 titles of books and reports about Assyrians/Syriacs which

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[33] Helga Anschütz refers to them with *syrischen Christen*.

have been published in the last forty years. Interestingly, a few titles in Swedish are translations of important studies in English. A search at the university library of Stockholm University yields a growing number of MA and BA theses about Assyrians/Syriacs, written both by members of this community and by outsiders. The topics of the publications range over such subjects as sports, law, language, culture, history and economics. They are all somehow related to the topic of identity. Below I shall mention the main studies conducted which relate somehow to my research topic.

The interest of Swedish scholars in modern-day Assyrians/Syriacs began in the second half of 1970s when the Swedish authorities needed to know more about this new group of immigrants who had unexpectedly (for the authorities) settled in Sweden in high numbers. Among these first studies were *North to Another Country*: *The Formation of a Suryoyo Community in Sweden* by the social anthropologist Ulf Björklund (1981) and *Möte med välfärdens byråkrater Svenska myndigheters mottagande av en Kristen minoritetsgrupp från Mellersta Östern* by the political scientist Birgitta Ornbrant. Both scholars executed their research on behalf of *Expertgrupp för invandrarforskning inom Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet* (EIFO, Swedish Expert Group on Immigration Research). In particular, Björklund's ethnographic historical study gives an insight into the migration and settlement process and the first phase of adaptation of this group to Swedish society. Ornbrant focuses more specifically on the reception of Assyrians/Syriacs as asylum seekers and the organization of their needs as new immigrants.

The linguist Ben Knutsson (1982) wrote his report *Assur eller Aram: språklig, religiös och nationell identifikation hos Sveriges assyrier och syrianer* on behalf of the Immigration Office (*Statens Invandrarverk*) and the National Cultural Council (*Statens Kulturråd*). The goal was to investigate questions related to the Assyrian/Syriac 'language and culture' and, as a linguist, to make suggestions about what the language of this group should be called in Swedish language. To put this into context, it should be explained that Assyrians/Syriacs used different names when referring to their language in Swedish. Assyrian/Syriac teachers, who taught the mother tongue in primary schools, especially caused confusion and disagreement about what the language they were teaching should be called in Swedish language. In his study Knutsson gives his recommendations about several alternatives but acknowledges that not any of these will win the support of all the different groups involved and admits therefore that he does not have a solution to the 'problem'. Eventually, Knutsson (1982: 29) suggested three names for

official use and for the different dialects and languages spoken: *Syriska* for referring to classical Syriac, *Turabdinska* to refer to the (spoken) *Suryoyo* and *Urmiska* for the dialect which is traditionally spoken in the Urmia region (Iran). Although he did not want to ignore the name *Assyriska* (used by the *Assyrier*), he ascribed the use of this name to the rise of national consciousness among the people. For this reason, as a linguist he did not advise it for official use. After its publication, Knutsson's report stirred up a polarized debate about the names he had suggested. This reveals the problematic nature of studies with an academic character attempting to find solutions to politically charged questions. Up to today, different versions have continued to be used to refer to the language.

The journalist Stefan Andersson (1983) offered a clear analysis of the socio-political developments among the Assyrian/Syriac settlers up to the publication of his book *Assyrierna: En bok om präster, om politik och diplomati kring den assyriska invandringen till Sverige*. Working for the local daily newspaper *Länstidningen*, it became one of his daily tasks to write about these people. In his work he gives a good illustration of the actors involved in the name debate and their 'political ambitions' (in terms of Andersson).

In her dissertation, *Identitet och kulturmöte – syrianska kvinnors exempel: En diskussion om grounded theory*, the sociologist M. Freyne-Lindhagen (1997) analyses the interviews she conducted with Assyrian/Syriac women from the perspective of grounded theory. Another interesting study is the dissertation of M. I. Parszyk (1999), *En skola för andra. Minoritetselevers upplevelser av arbets- och livsvillkor i grundskolan* (A school for others. Experiences of work and living conditions of minority pupils at primary school). Parszyk has also published several articles more specifically on Assyrian/Syriac pupils' school experiences from a pedagogical perspective.

In the 1990s, among the first main scholarly works about this group was one written by a member of the community who had arrived in Sweden as a young child. In his dissertation *En minoritets odyssé: Upprätthållande och transformation av etnisk identitet i förhållande till moderniseringsprocesser – det assyriska exemplet* (The odyssey of a minority: maintenance and transformation of ethnic identity in response to processes of modernization – the Assyrian case), the sociologist Fuat Deniz (1999) focused on the collective identity of Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden. In his study Deniz aims to construct a theoretical model containing internally related concepts brought together from different theoretical approaches about ethnic identity, and to apply this model to the study of the maintenance and transformation of ethnic identity

in the Assyrian[34] community as a consequence of the migration from South-East Turkey to Sweden. His main finding is that the ethno-religious identity in the original country was transformed to a more ethno-national based identity in Sweden.

The ethnologist Oscar Pripp (2001) wrote a dissertation: *Företagande minoritet: Om etnicitet, strategier och resurser bland assyrier och syrianer i Södertälje*, in which he focuses on the economic dimension among Assyrians/Syriacs.[35] He illustrates the strong dynamics in the entrepreneurial culture of this group in relation to their ethnic identity. Pripp has also produced similar studies based on field research among immigrant groups in Sweden.

Another work by a member of the community is that of the psychologist of religion Önver Cetrez (2005): *Meaning-Making Variations in Acculturation and Ritualization: A multi-generational study of Suroyo migrants in Sweden*. In his study he researched the affects of the acculturation process on meaning–making among Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden. From an inter-disciplinary perspective, Cetrez emphasizes that religious rituals and symbols play a central role in the culture of the research object. One important finding of this multi-generational study (particularly among the youth) is that the use of such various designations as Aramean, Assyrian, Suroyo, Syrian or Swedish is a strategic choice made for the purpose of differentiating themselves from others and to negotiate their identity.

In 2005 in a collection of articles edited by Göran Gunner and Sven Halvardsson, the identity of Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden was discussed by different scholars in the publication *Jag behöver rötter och vingar – om assyrisk/syriansk identitet i Sverige*.

In his dissertation, *Vems är historien? Historia som medvetande, kultur och handling i det mångkulturella Sverige*, Kenneth Nordgren (2006) explores how different contemporary agents formulate their history in the case of Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden. His principal finding is that recreating one's own past is a way of becoming part of society. In this context, storytelling functions as an essential instrument in the needs engendered by continuity and change in the inevitable process of identity formation and socialization.

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[34] Fuat Deniz used in this study the designation 'Assyrian' to refer to his research object.

[35] Pripp does not make use of the compound name. Instead, he uses *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* as two separate names.

In her forthcoming study *I förändringarnas spår: En studie av sociokulturell förändring och kontinuitet bland assyrier avseende synen på giftermål, släktskap och ungdom,* the anthropologist Maryam Garis Guttman focuses on Assyrian/Syriac youth and in particular on young single women. Garis Guttman has studied her topic in the context of the changes taking place in the community after its settlement in Europe. She explores how the understanding of marriage, kinship and youth has changed among the Assyrian/Syriac community in Sweden and how this change has affected their sense of belonging. Her study cogently illustrates how the identity perceptions of the Assyrian/Syriac youth have been affected by the different environments they have encountered in the diaspora.

Another topic which has attracted a great deal of interest in the study of present-day Assyrian/Syriac identity is the *Seyfo*. Father Bertil Bengtsson (2004) wrote *Svärdets år. Om folkmordet på de kristna i Turkiet 1894-1922*. The historian Zeki Yalcin (2005) has devoted an article to the specific relationship between identity and the *Seyfo*: *Folkmord och identitet – Assyrier/Syrianer och folkmordet under forsta världskriget*. The historian David Gaunt's (2006) *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during the First World War* is an important groundbreaking historical study in this field. The librarian and author Jan Beth Sawoce (2006) published his interviews with *Seyfo* survivors in *Suryoyo*: *Seyfo bTur Abdin 1914-1915*.[36]

In relation to the above mentioned studies, this research has contributed to the insights into the processes of emigration, settlement and identification of Assyrians/Syriacs in the European diaspora, specifically in Sweden. Making use of the concepts of Discourse Theory, I have made a thorough analysis of and provided an explanation for the *emergence* and *change* in the identity discourses. The discourse theoretical approach has allowed me to illustrate and explain the contextual, relational and processual character of identities. From this perspective, I have approached 'identity' as an open space which can be imbued with different meanings and interpretations. Accordingly, I have shown how this open character has functioned as a condition for the emergence of the 'name debate' among Assyrians/Syriacs.

[36] The language used is *Suryoyo* but written in Latin characters.

1.6 Outline of the Study

In Chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical and methodological foundation of this study. After a short introductory discussion of different approaches to the study of identities, I explain my choice to work with Post-structuralist discourse theory. As I mention in the methodological section at the end of this chapter, this study is predominantly empirically grounded and therefore, I limit myself to the main concepts which are of importance for the analyses and further understanding of this study.

Answers to the questions which I have posed in this thesis will be contextualized in the socio-historical situation of Assyrians/Syriacs. Had I not done this, I would run the risk of limiting the context of study which is needed in order to understand the broader antagonistic field. Therefore, the following three chapters – Chapter 3 (Position in the homeland), Chapter 4 (Emigration) and Chapter 5 (Settlement) – serve as a background to all discussions raised in the rest of this dissertation. As for the collected data, besides interviews with respondents, I have made use of secondary sources.

In Chapter 3, in order to explain the identity discourses of Assyrians/Syriacs today, both contextually and thus relationally, I discuss their position in the homeland from a historical perspective. How do they perceive their position in the homeland? What were the main reasons for their emigration from Turkey? I relate to the socio-political position of Assyrians/Syriacs as a minority group in a Muslim majority society in order to clarify the boundaries between inside (*the chain of difference*)[37] and outside (*the chain of equivalence*) in the homeland. I have illustrated how religion played a central *nodal point* in their identity discourses and how the boundaries of exclusion and inclusion were drawn along religious lines.

Firmly anchored in the stories of my interviewees, I have attempted to extrapolate and give an account of the emigration in Chapter 4. I have contextualized my respondents' accounts which I obtained through in-depth interviews and informal conversations with secondary data sources produced in the academic world. In the latter I have aimed especially at contextualizing the primary data sources in the broader context. These two sources have therefore functioned complementarily. I noticed that respondents were often only dimly aware of developments at national and international level in

[37] Discourse theoretical concepts such as chains of difference and equivalence, nodal points, floating signifiers and split subject will be explained in Chapter 2.

relation to the event discussed, apart from some details which had reached them and which they attempted to recount to me. Both the contents and the style in which their accounts are communicated illustrate this. In this chapter, I have shown how the *myth* of 'Sweden as heaven' played a role in the emigration process and the role which this *myth* played in their fast settlement in the new country. Here, emigration is analyzed as a dislocatory event which has caused the emergence of a *split subject* in the settlement of Assyrians/Syriacs in Western countries. This has resulted in different attempts by the *split subject* to heal itself during the settlement process (Chapter 5). For instance, by seeking new ways of identification in relation to the new others.

I then proceed in Chapter 5 – written in strong relation to the previous chapter – with discussing the settlement process in Sweden. It deals with how a first group of 205 people organized themselves in Swedish society more than forty years ago, how they have grown to be a group of about 100,000 within that period, and what challenges they have encountered during that time.

In Chapter 6 the discourses of *umthonoyutho* (patriotism) are dealt with from a historical perspective. I have looked into the emergence of discourses of *umthonoyutho* (which resulted from an ethnic awareness) in the homeland in order to understand their identity discourses in the present-day. Furthermore, I have analyzed how the logic of *umthonoyutho* transformed its character in the diaspora and how this has constituted a new antagonistic discursive space which gave rise to the 'name debate' between competing discourses.

In Chapter 7 I have discussed the emergence of the 'name debate' in relation to the process of institutionalization of identity discourses. In this chapter I attempt to clarify how identity discourses are shaped in the field of discursivity, how they form *chains of difference* (Us) and *equivalence* (Others), how they are articulated, what the hegemonic struggle between discourses is and what the moments of discontinuity as a result of dislocation are about.

For the latter three chapters mentioned above, I have used a combination of sources: secondary sources, primary documents, interviews and participant observations. They describe the process of the institutionalization of the discourses which evolved in the diaspora and which have gained hegemony among different social groups. The main focus

of these chapters will be on the element of historicity of discourses which will function as a background (context) to the chapters to follow.

In the chapters 8, 9 and 10 I analyze individual discourses of elite members about a) discourses contending the 'correct name' of their people; b) how they delineate the boundaries of the Assyrian/Syriac people; c) who they identify as the leader in charge of their people. These three chapters are based solely on in-depth interviews. Secondary sources and my general knowledge about the discursive field are used to contextualize what is being said in the interviews. My aim in this context has been to illustrate the discourses of individuals articulated in the context of an interview with me (as a member of the community but also as a researcher) at that moment, replete with all their diversities, contingent relations and contradictions – only to be understood in context. In Chapter 8 I have elabourated on the discursive arguments around the 'name debate' in the discourses of the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* elites. The study of elite discourses highlights the implicit internal diversity imbued in them. At the same time it illustrates the open, changeable and flexible character of *floating signifiers* in the competition for the hegemonization of discourses. Following this, Chapter 9 deals with discursive boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in the definition of the 'people' through the *chain of difference* and *equivalence*. Whether the *chain of difference* and *equivalence* are defined in a broad or narrow sense depends on the discourse in relation to the question of who is included and excluded. In the last empirical chapter (10), I have mainly focused on the relationship between identity discourses and the *myth* about the 'ideal leader' from whom it is expected to heal the *split subject*.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, I come back to my research questions and discuss the main findings of this study.

2 DISCOURSE THEORY & METHODOLOGY

In the first year of my research I explored the different social science approaches to questions pertinent to identity and ethnicity. I filled my shelves with publications from a collection of the principal authors in this field with the idea that I would steep myself well in them before beginning my fieldwork. Meanwhile, I began to prepare myself for fieldwork in three European countries; an ambitious challenge which pulled me fully into the field, or to put it differently, I valued what was happening in the field greatly, believing it would lead me to a deeper understanding of my research questions. As I describe in my methodology at the end of this chapter, although I did not appear in the field as a *tabula rasa* in relation to theoretical ideas about identity, I did not limit myself to a specific theoretical perspective. Nor did I impose any pre-formulated concepts of grand theories on the empirical field. My goal was concentrated on reaching a greater understanding of the social field, while interacting with it and analysing my empirical data both during and after the fieldwork. On the basis of my empirical findings (as can be seen further in this thesis), I developed such empirically shaped concepts as *athro* (homeland) and *'amo* (people), the logic of *umthonoyutho* (patriotism, see further Chapter 6), '*ashirto* (extended family) and so forth. During the fieldwork and in the process of my analysis, I have moved continuously between explanations (theories or conceptual categories) about the research object and the empirical data. Nevertheless, when reviewing the research process through which I passed, I found I had remained loyal to my empirical data and continued to challenge my understanding of it. After I finished my analysis, for a fleeting moment I concluded that I could dispense with many theoretical concepts in my search to explain it in more detail. Then I began to study the discourse analytical approach in general and more specifically Poststructuralist Discourse Theory more thoroughly. Based on my research questions and conclusions already drawn from my empirical analyses, I soon realized that discourse theoretical concepts could enable me to lift my empirical analysis to a more abstract level and that it could also explain the empirical data more satisfactorily. This is when DT assumed a considerable role in the study.

Before I continue with an introduction to DT and its key elements, it is necessary to explain why I have not chosen to work with other established theories. To explain their shortcomings for the study of the dynamics inherent in identities, I shall briefly discuss these theories in relation to an example from my case study below.

2.1 The Study of Ethnic Identities

Different classifications are used to distinguish between the approaches to the study of ethnic identities. Usually, these approaches are categorized as *primordialist* and *instrumentalist*. Others, such as Sokolovskii and Tishkov (1996), add to these classifications the constructivist approach. There are also approaches which do not fit entirely into these categories. Because it is not the aim of this section to provide an in-depth review of the academic debate of the different theories of identity, I shall limit myself to a short discussion of these three categories and to Smith's ethno-symbolism. It is perhaps not superfluous to remind ourselves that theories developed in relation to each other.

Primordialists approach ethnicity as the collective of primordial characteristics (such as culture, religion, language, bloodline and so forth) and their deep-rootedness in a given society. They reject the idea of the open character of identities and take them instead for granted. An example is Clifford Geertz' (1963: 109-110) definition of 'primordial attachment'. The starting point is that primordial ties and attachments are pre-given, ineffable and overpowering. Individuals who are born into such a group are assumed to be 'determined' by its characteristics. In present-day societies the ordinary people often assume primordialness as 'given' in group identities, as I have demonstrated in my case study (see further especially Chapter 8).[38] I criticize *primordialists* because they take a 'static' and 'naturalistic' view of ethnicity. In addition, they do not provide answers for overlapping identities, changes in identities and consequences of migration and globalization. Most importantly, the power aspect in the formation of identities is a 'black hole' in the primordial approach.

An example from my case study illustrates part of my criticism and indicates that there must be more at stake here than 'primordialness at work'.

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[38] See further for example Eller and Coughlan (1993), Robinson (1979), Brass (1991).

The debate among Assyrians/Syriacs about the 'correct name' of their people to be used in Western languages has resulted in different opinions even among family members. An example is that in Södertälje (Sweden) two brothers were each a board member of the two most antagonistic secular organizations of Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden: *Assyriska riksförbundet* and *Syrianska riksförbundet*. Today each of these institutions represents a distinct ideology and indubitably competes with the other. These brothers had been raised by the same parents, in the same community. Why did each of them begin to identify with a different name and consequently with a different ancestry? Although they have continued to state that they belong to the same people, they do blame each other for mistaken identification. This disagreement which developed between them has produced antagonistic discourses about their people's ancestry and ethnicity. At certain moments, representatives of both secular organizations present themselves as a different group because they reject the identification with the other group. In this study, I illustrate the way this debate has resulted in two social groups with no final answer to their antagonistic relationship yet. In the above-mentioned case the primordialist approach cannot explain why two brothers have chosen for ethnically different identities. This being so, is the *instrumentalist* approach any more effective?

Unlike the *primordial* approach, the *instrumentalist* approach deals with ethnicity as 'a social, cultural and political resource for different interest- and status groups'[39] (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 8-9). From this perspective, 'ethnicity' is seen as a resource that elites can compete for. The assumption is that in order to realize their political goals these elites can manipulate symbols (such as a flag, myths and heroes). Within the *instrumentalist* view, the Rational Choice approach[40] to identity studies 'elite strategies of maximizing preferences in terms of individual "rational choices" in given situations' (Ibid.). In this approach, elite groups are considered to be external to the structure. This is problematic, since they are part of the identity structure. Therefore it would be an oversimplification of the social reality to see 'ethnicity' as merely a resource in the hands of elites. For instance, the Assyrian/Syriac identity encompasses more than what the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* elites have on their political agenda. Identity can therefore not be explained as a matter of 'cost-benefit' calculations of individuals or

[39] See for example the studies by Cohen (1974), Brass (1991).

[40] See for example, Banton (1983), Hechter (1986).

institutions. Although in many cases identification with a certain identity is not immediately or necessarily beneficial (such as belonging to a minority or immigrant group), people still continue to embrace those identities. In short, the weakness of the *instrumentalist* approach is that it does not provide a satisfactory explanation for the formation of ethnic identities and their durability.

An early *constructivist*, the anthropologist Frederick Barth (1969) sees ethnic groups as 'categories of ascription and identification', and as 'a form of social organization' of cultural difference, where the social boundaries enable the formation of ethnicity. According to Barth, ethnic identities are not discontinuous cultural phenomena which are isolated from each other, and neither categories to which people naturally belong. Rather, ethnicity is continuously negotiated and renegotiated by both external ascription and internal self-identification. In this sense, Barth's approach differs radically from *primordialists'* content-based approach to ethnicity. The most important cultural elements are those which are used as boundaries *between* ethnies in their contact with each other. This is why he argues that the focus of the anthropological study of ethnicity should shift from 'internal constitution and history of separate groups to ethnic boundaries and boundary maintenance' (Barth 1969: 10). An ethnic group exists and presents itself in relation to or in opposition to another group. For example, if Assyrians/Syriacs were to continue to identify themselves as a religious group it would mean that they would lag behind as a subjugated Christian community among other ethno-national groups. In this sense, the present-day ethno-national discourses can be understood as an act of emancipation taken by Assyrians/Syriacs. In contrast to the situation in the Middle East, the 'others' in Europe have become European Christians. As I shall illustrate in this thesis, the identity discourses of the group have transformed from an ethno-religious to an ethno-national identification in the process of interaction with the new 'others'. In both cases, their relationship to these groups developed the need for their in-group definition. Depending on the characteristic in each 'multi-ethnic' or 'multi-cultural' society, different boundary markers might be considered most important. On the long term, the changing interrelationship between the different boundary markers in a certain society might explain a great deal about changes in ethnic identifications. The *relational* understanding of ethnicity undermines the approach to ethnicity as an essential entity (as postulated in *primordialist* approaches).

Smith's *ethno-symbolism* opposes to the premises of constructivist and instrumentalist approaches (which principally stress the constructed nature of ethnicity). Smith's main claim is that modernist theories fail 'to accord any weight to the pre-existing cultures and the ethnic ties of the nations that emerged in the modern epoch' (1999: 9). In contrast, he gives a vital role to myths and symbols in the unification of populations and in ensuring their continuity over many generations. Historically shaped traditions, symbols and myths are rediscovered and reinterpreted in each generation for the modern constitution of nations (Smith 1999: 9). And consequently, that nationalism draws on the 'pre-existing' history of the group and that 'political mobilization is based on this legacy' (Smith 1995: 71). For the study of identities, the role of the ethnic past(s) in shaping present cultural communities becomes therefore important (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 10). As this approach aims to bring the role of 'history' and 'ethnic pasts' back into play, Smith's definition of an *ethnie* (ethnic community), ascribes the durability of the *ethnie* to the forms and content of the *myth-symbol* complex. According to Smith (1986: 21-31) an *ethnie* exhibits six features: 1) a common proper name; 2) a myth of common ancestry; 3) shared historical memories or shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events and their commemoration; 4) one or more elements of common culture; 5) a link with a homeland; 6) a sense of solidarity on the part of at least some sections of the population of the *ethnie*.

Smith (2001: 77) argues that in the construction of identities, elites 'need to select from pre-existing repertoires of ethnic symbols, myths and memories if they are to mobilize "the people"'. He (Ibid: 97) furthermore states 'the source of national identities are to be sought in popular sentiments and culture, and not primarily in the imaginations and inventions of elites'. While ethno-symbolism does not deny change and transformation in identities, its main emphasis remains on the notion of *durability* and *continuity*. And although Smith's *ethno-symbolism* is not totally blind to the reification of the sources of ethnic identities in modern times, it gives these pre-existing repertoires a fundamental explanatory level. Smith has been criticized as being essentialist in terms of conceiving of ethnicity as an objective and substantial quality of ethnic identities (Norval 1996: 61-62, Hall 1998: 40), for overstressing the ethnic components of nations (Eriksen 2004) and for taking for granted the existence of 'the people', 'collective memories' and the 'resonance' which elites seek among the people for the mobilization of their ideas (Özkırımlı 2003: 348).

The PIONIER project Syriac Christianity – of which this study has been part of – developed an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the formation of the 'Syriac Orthodox identity' (Romeny et al. 2009). In order to come to a further understanding of various dimensions of the studied identity, the project team made mainly use of Anthony Smith's *ethno-symbolism* and the *ethnogenesis* theory of the Vienna School[41]. In addition, Gerd Baumann's (1999: 91-2) attention for the reification of social reality was used to explain why identity, though constructed, is often seen as primordial.

In my study, I have aimed at studying the discourses of Assyrian/Syriac elite members about the collective identity of 'their people'. With this aim in mind, I have chosen to work with Poststructuralist DT that offers more sophisticated concepts which are useful in reaching a deeper understanding of my case study. Although Post-structuralism and social constructivism have both similar epistemological assumptions (that reject concepts such as objectivity, reality and truth), DT has a more radical ontological orientation and a more comprehensive understanding of discourse. Central to my study is to analyze the antagonistic formation of the studied identity discourses. Discourse covers both the material and sentimental dimensions of identity. The understanding of *discourse* in the formation of identities transcends the dichotomized debate between the *primordialist* and *instrumentalist* approaches. As I shall discuss further in this chapter, Post-structuralist DT rejects the idea of pre-given structures for explaining the social reality and thus, the formation of identities. This is not the denial of the existence of material reality and thus history. But, DT focuses mainly on the construction of meaning and identities in and through the present-day discourses. Consequently, the focus of this study is on the reification, re-interpretation and the re-use of elements of identity.

It is important to elaborate in more detail on the relevance of DT as an analytical perspective for my study. First, through the deconstruction of unquestioned subject positions, identity ascriptions and argumentations – which are commonly taken as pre-given facts – discourse analysis has contributed to my understanding of the ongoing debate and antagonisms about the 'correct name' of the people, the antagonistic relationships among the people and their established institutions. Second, as a problem-driven approach DT provides an important way of looking at the construction of collective identities. Unlike the *primordial* (essentialist) approach to ethnicity,

[41] See for instance Wenskus (1961) and his followers Pohl (1994, 1998) and Geary (1983).

DT draws attention to the *relational* and *contingent formation* of social phenomena and consequently to their changeable, open and negotiable character. This analytical perspective grasps both the concept of 'continuity' and 'discontinuity' in the formation of identities. Whereas discontinuity is seen as a result of dislocations, continuity is the temporal fixation of meanings and identities in terms of gaining hegemony and creating sedimented forms of objectivity. Third, DT strongly emphasizes the role of 'power' and 'power relations' in the construction of identities. Understanding identity formations as an act of power and hegemony, it requires a focus on the role of politics and political discourses and the driving forces behind the formation and cohesion of political identities.

Before commencing, it is important to mention two additional points pertinent to this chapter. Unlike empiricist and positivist approaches, the goal of DT is not to provide a theoretical model or a ready made framework. Instead, the aim of discourse theorists is to 'articulate their concepts in each particular enactment of concrete research' (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 7). In line with this, my theoretical chapter will *not* function as a 'framework' or an 'operational tool' in the strict sense. Instead, I have developed the discussion below in order to form an analytical perspective for the empirical analysis. Secondly, the aim of the theoretical chapter is not to add something new to DT in the first place. This, it must be admitted, is one of the main limitations of the study. Nevertheless, the fruitful discussion of the concepts of DT in relation to the empirical concepts of the research will add new insights to the understanding of the 'identity formation' of a *diasporic* community. Furthermore, this study will become available for future theorization.

2.2 Discourse Theory[42]

Discourse analysis emerged during the 1960s as a critical theory to contest the way of understanding the *social* in mainstream theories and pushed critical philosophers to find an alternative to break down the dogmatic notions in the study of the *social*. Initially, discourse was defined in the narrow linguistic

[42] This chapter is based on my study of the seminal work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), Laclau's other works (1990, 1993, 1994, 1996 and 2005), and the works of other scholars of the Essex School of discourse theory (Torfing, Howarth, Stavrakakis and Norval).

sense of a textual unit with the focus on the semantic aspects of spoken or written text.[43] This narrow definition of discourse was later broadened to a set of social practices and to the field of the *social*, within Critical Discourse Analysis (Weiss and Wodak 2005: 3-7, 123-4). From this view, discourse is considered 'as part of social practice'. This point of departure has two implications. Whereas it recognizes the social constitutive character of discourse, it nevertheless builds a dialectical relationship between discourse and the *social* (Fairclough 2003: 124). A third approach, Poststructuralist DT can be considered as the most abstract and radical approach to discourse analysis. From this perspective, discourse covers all social phenomena; all social practices have a discursive character and their meaning depends on a decentred system of contingently constructed rules and differences. Hence, discourse is co-terminous with the *social*.

Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) represents one of the most innovative and influential books in contemporary philosophy, which has contributed to the 'discursive turn' in the social sciences. It has resulted in a new set of ontological and epistemological assumptions which are based on premises of anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism.[44] Ontologically, DT rejects the idea of pre-given structures. Its starting point is that there is no pre-given underlying essence which shapes the social world and social relations. Instead, the social world is constructed discursively. Epistemologically, DT rejects the idea of a fundamental principle as the basic foundation of inquiry and knowledge. It problematizes the positivist emphasis on 'Truth' and 'Knowledge'. Rather, 'truth' is seen as flexible and shaped through and in discourses. That is why discourse analysis does not take knowledge for granted (Burr [1995] 1996). As a problem-driven theory, it constantly questions the production of knowledge in relation to power and hegemony from a Foucauldian perspective.

The main concepts and logics of DT are built on its criticism of classical Marxism and structural linguistics.[45] Its criticism of Marxism is based on the

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[43] Examples of studies in this category are Downes (1984), Atkinson (1984) and Schegloff and Sacks (1993).

[44] See further Critchley and Marchart (2004: 4) for the impacts of this innovative approach on the studies of social identity.

[45] To support this criticism, Laclau and Mouffe have introduced a new set of concepts which are particularly important to the analysis of hegemony and political identity. In addition to the critical readings of Gramsci and Althusser, Laclau and Mouffe have aimed to employ the critiques of 'analytical philosophy' in Wittgenstein's later work, phenomenology in the

deconstruction of two core assumptions of Marxist ontology. DT rejects the idea of 'class reductionism' and 'economic determinism'. Social classes are not taken as pre-constituted groups with 'pre-given' interests. Rather, they are constituted through discourses and have a contingent character. And DT gives primacy to political discourses instead of economic determinism.

In relation to Ferdinand Saussure's (1960) structural linguistics,[46] DT has modified some of its concepts from a critical perspective. Although DT agrees with the idea that signs derive their meaning in relation to other signs, Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 113) criticize Sauserrian structuralism for forming a new kind of 'essentialism' and question two of its key assumptions.[47] Firstly, DT rejects Saussure's formulation of language as a stable, unchangeable and totalizing structure, because DT affirms that the structure is created, reproduced and changed in the process of actual language use. Hence, meaning can no longer be perceived as fixed (see further Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 112-3, Laclau 1996a: 37). Secondly, DT draws attention to the *polysemic* character of signs. Instead of a fixed relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified*, DT emphasizes 'the ambiguous character of the signifier' and 'its non-fixation to any signified'. Based on these critiques, DT draws three conclusions: a) the subject can no longer be conceived as the source of meaning; b) a 'totalizing centre' is absent; and c) the rejection of underlying closed totalities. These conclusions have resulted in the idea of *decentred*

existential analytic of Heidegger, and the writings of Derrida, Barthes, Kristeva and Lacan (see further Laclau 1993, 2001, Torfing 2005).

[46] Saussure's theory of linguistics is based on the distinction between *langue* (the underlying structure of language, a social system of rules) and *parole* (the practice of language used by people in a specific context). Saussure (1960: 15, 66-67) approached language as a static, closed system, arguing that language is 'a system of signs' in which signs (*signe*) constitute the basic unit which combines a concept (signified) and a sound-image (signifier). Furthermore, he emphasizes that the bond between the two is arbitrary and that the meaning of individual signs is constituted in relation to other signs. On the basis of the binary distinction between the signifier and the signified, the linguistic system is structured along differences. Hence, meaning is not an inherent characteristic of the words, but a result of 'both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions' (Saussure 1960: 9). This is one of the ideas which Post-Structuralism has borrowed from Structuralism.

[47] In their post-structuralist criticism of the *sign,* Barthes, Derrida and Lacan in particular have had a fundamental impact on the development of discourse theory. Laclau and Mouffe have built on their theories using the following: a) the concept of multiple meanings and readings of texts (Barthes 1967, Derrida 1966); b) the assumption that a *signifier* cannot be permanently attached to a particular *signified* (Lacan [1977] 2001); and c) the impossibility of a closed totality (Derrida 1966).

discourses in which social identities are no longer fixed once and for all (Torfing 2005: 8).

2.3 Key Concepts of Discourse Theory

Before commencing with the key concepts of DT, it is necessary to define some central terms such as *discourse*, *discursive* and *the field of discursivity*. The core idea of DT is that, unlike other discourse analytical approaches, discourse covers all social phenomena and practices; hence all objects and social practices are seen as objects of discourse. Consequently, they can only acquire meaning and identity through discursive totalities. This is why discourse cannot be understood as something which consists of purely linguistic phenomena only. Rather, a discourse covers the 'material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals and practices through which a discursive formation is structured' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 108-9). This means that there is no other source, no 'ground' or something 'beyond' this relational system, which gives meaning to social phenomena (Laclau 2005: 69). To clarify the comprehensive meaning of discourses, Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 108) write:

> The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has *nothing to do* with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition… What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence.

They give the example of an earthquake which is an event that certainly occurs 'independently of our will'. But whether its meaning as an object is constructed in terms of a 'natural phenomenon' or as an 'expression of the wrath of God' depends on the employed discourse. Since DT rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices, social reality is understood in terms of discursive meanings and forms. From this ontological perspective, discourse is *a relational ensemble of elements* that constitutes a partial fixation of meaning in the field of discursivity, which is characterised by a *surplus of meaning*. Laclau (2005: 68) gives a vital role to 'relations' in the definition of discourse:

> Discourse is the primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity as such. By discourse... I do not mean something that is essentially restricted to the areas of speech and writing, but any complex of elements in which *relations* play a constitutive role. This means that elements do not pre-exist the relational complex but are constituted through it. Thus 'relation' and 'objectivity' are synonymous.

While Laclau put forward the strongly relational aspect of discourse in the construction of the *social*, his two students Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000: 5) focus on the political aspect intrinsic to discourse:

> Discourses are concrete systems of social relations and practices that are intrinsically political, as their formation is an act of radical institution, which involves the construction of antagonisms and the drawing of political frontiers between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.

Having posited these two definitions, I shall proceed with a discussion of the *discursive* and the *field of discursivity*. Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000) define the *discursive* as a 'theoretical horizon in which the being of objects is constituted'. As an open-ended analytical horizon which differs radically from unified and totalized forms of foundations, the *field of discursivity* is a formation without foundation; it is an empty locus (Laclau 1993b, 2005). This is the field in which all objects and practices acquire their 'partial' meanings. Throughout this thesis, I give examples of how the various Assyrian/Syriac competing elites give meaning to their historical and present-day artefacts. The meaning they ascribe to them and the way they position them in their present-day lives depends on the discourses which confer meaning to it. For example, the *Assyriska* Movement made efforts to raise the consciousness of an Assyrian past among their people. On the other hand, the *Syrianska* Movement has focussed on an Aramean past. Consequently, based on two antagonistic ideologies the history of the same people has been imbued with different meanings. Both ideologies have introduced different national days, heroes, symbols and rituals to express the collective identity of their people.

2.3.1 The Logic of Articulation, Elements and Moments

The theoretical framework of DT covers a set of concepts and logics. In order to reach a deeper understanding of the formation of *discourse*, I shall discuss three central terms around which Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 105) have built up their line of argumentation: *articulation, elements and moments.*

> …we will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call *moments*. By contrast, we will call *element* any difference that is not discursively articulated.

The category of *articulation* can be seen as the driving force behind all discursive formations. In the process of articulation, elements gain meaning in relation to each other, transform into moments and constitute discourses (as meaningful ensembles) (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 96). In this sense, discourse is the 'structured totality' which is constituted through the transformation of elements into moments by reducing their multiple meanings to a *temporary* fixed and *partial* meaning. Elements can also be understood as *signs* (or objects) with a *polysemic* character. This *polysemic* aspect in the field of discursivity constitutes a *surplus of meaning* and functions as a constant threat to the destabilization of the achieved discursive *closure*. This is what makes all closures contingent and flexible. The partiality of meaning is based on the idea of 'the openness of the social', the incomplete character of every totality, and the 'partial' fixity of every identity (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 113). Understanding the *social* as 'impossible' indicates the constant *incompleteness* of any structure, which is always a subject of change and threatened by its constitutive outside. Consequently, meaning can never be permanently fixed.

If everything changes continuously, and if all discursive formations have a radical openness, the question is what is then stable? As an answer to this, Laclau (1990: 27) explains the *necessity* of *partial* fixations in the *field of discursivity*. The *objectivity*[48] is both partially constituted and partially threatened because of the constant change in the boundaries between the *contingent* and the *necessary* (Ibid.). The *impossibility* of a closed structure does not exclude the *necessary* and *possible* fixations. Instead, it shows how the discursive structures change over time and how they cannot *fix* the meaning once and for all. Therefore, while the final closure of a meaning is *impossible*, the partial fixation of meanings is possible and necessary. This ontological understanding provides a fruitful approach for studying 'change' in discursive structures, which is one of the aims in this thesis. I illustrate in

[48] Objectivity can also be seen as the reification of social reality. See further Berger and Luckmann ([1966] 1991).

Chapter 8 that primordial arguments among Assyrian/Syriac elites are commonly used to defend their ideas about their collective identity. Both *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* return to the pre-Christian period and relate to an ancient heritage on which they base the present-day collective identity of their people. *Primordialism* rejects the idea of the openness of identities, as it takes them as granted. In contrast to this approach, DT emphasizes the openness of discursive formations.

2.3.2 Nodal Points, Floating Signifiers and Empty Signifiers

Nodal points are defined as 'the privileged discursive points' around which a discourse is partially fixed to constitute a temporary centre (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 112). In the field of *discursivity*, articulated *signs* or *elements* acquire their meaning in relation to this privileged point around which they are organized and are transformed into *moments*. The main aim of hegemonic projects is to institute and stabilize *nodal points* (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 109, Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 22). The formation of *nodal points* can therefore be seen as the result of 'successful' hegemonic articulations. In discourses of nationalism, the 'nation' is an example of a *nodal point*. Through the hegemonic articulation of discourses of 'nationalism' the concept of the 'people' is transformed into the concept of the 'nation'. Therefore, in a successful nationalist project, the terms 'nation' and 'people' begin to be used interchangeably. Other elements such as 'culture', 'music', 'language' and others are organized around the *nodal point* 'nation' and acquire 'national' as a prefix – as in 'national music', 'national culture' and 'national language'. In the case of Assyrians/Syriacs, such a hegemonic articulation has not taken place yet and the concept of the 'people' has not turned into the *nodal point* of the 'nation'. Consequently, within the discourses of the Assyrian/Syriac elites the 'people' can be seen as a *floating signifier* (see further Chapter 9).

Nodal points have also a temporary character. As soon as the hegemonic articulation of *nodal points* weakens, a proliferation of meanings occurs in the *field of discursivity*. The *polysemic* character of the *field of discursivity* disarticulates a *discursive structure* and gives space to the over-determination of every social identity (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 113). This is the moment at which the concept of *floating signifiers* comes into the play. In *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (1990), Laclau introduced the concept of the *floating signifier* in order to radicalize the concept of hegemony. *Floating signifiers* are

those *elements* which are open simultaneously to different ascriptions of meaning (Laclau 1990: 28, 1993b: 287). Different discourses seek to charge *floating signifiers* with meaning in their own particular way. In this sense, *floating signifiers* have a key role in comprehending the struggle between different discourses and subject positions. For example, during the 1970s the *Assyriska* Movement in Sweden exercised a hegemonic discourse. Nevertheless, the proliferation of other *signifieds* disarticulated the discursive chain of the *Assyriska* Movement and resulted in an over-determination of the collective identity of Assyrians/Syriacs. This over-determination has been expressed in the use of different designations for the same people (see further especially Chapter 7).

Laclau (1996a) developed in his later works the concept of *empty signifiers* for a deeper understanding of hegemonic articulations in the field of discursivity. *Empty signifiers* are those signifiers 'without a particular signified' (Laclau 1996a: 36). They do not have any meaning by themselves, until they gain meaning in relation to other signs. '[T]he filling function requires an empty place' (Laclau and Zac 1994) and their *necessary emptiness* allows space for new hegemonic articulations (Laclau 2005: 105). For instance, – using Laclau's example – in a dislocated structure, 'order' as such has no content. In the situation of 'disorder', 'order' becomes an *empty signifier*, as the *signifier* of that absence. At this moment 'order' can be filled or interpreted differently by different political discourses. Hence, this emptiness is 'an essential quality of the *nodal point*, as an important condition of possibility for its hegemonic success' (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 13). Through discourses successful hegemonic articulations transform some of the *empty signifiers* into *nodal points*. This is what Laclau (1990) calls 'ideological totalization'. In the case of Assyrians/Syriacs, a central *empty signifier* is the *unity* of the *'amo Suryoyo*. Different political discourses try to hegemonize the meaning of *unity* by making statements about who should be included in order to realize the 'unity of the people' (*hdoyutho du 'amo*).

The above-discussed concepts have been criticized for being undertheorized (Critchley and Marchart 2004, Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, Howarth 2000b, 2004, Torfing 2005). As Howarth (2004) questions, it is not clear enough what the relationship is between *empty signifiers* and *nodal points*. In the same direction, Montessori (2009) criticizes the lack of a methodological tool and textual analysis in the definition of these concepts. She rightly asks: '... at what point does an "empty signifier" become a "nodal point"?' While acknowledging these difficulties, one should also consider the

complexity of the discursive field and the relationship between these concepts and the notion of *hegemony*.

The existence of *empty signifiers* and *floating signifiers* is both the indication of a weakening hegemony (the periods of 'organic crises') and the very condition of a new hegemony (Laclau 1990: 28, 43). This is usually the moment of dislocation, at which the hegemonic signification systems can no longer produce meaning. Consequently, many signifiers are released from their previous ties. For instance, during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, its hegemonic signification system ceased functioning as the cement of the Empire. As a result of this, the ideology of *Pan-Ottomanism* no longer functioned as a *nodal point*. Under these circumstances, disorder and dissolution led to different hegemonic attempts from a diversity of subject positions. The administration of the Ottoman Empire tried to regain *order* and *unity* through its attempt to fill the meaning of these *empty signifier*s. *Unity* as *empty signifier* was first hegemonically articulated by *Ittihat ve Terakki* (Committee for Union and Progress) in terms of *Pan-Turanism* – the idea of Turkish nationalism. Later, *Kemalism* limited the Pan-Turanist ideal to the boundaries of *Misak-i Milli* (the national borders of contemporary Turkey).

2.4 A Theory of Identity

In this section I shall introduce the central concepts and logics of DT which are useful to the study of identity specifically in relation to hegemony. They are of importance for deepening our understanding of this case study. I consider that the following logics and concepts play a crucial role in the study of identities:

- Social antagonism and the *logics of difference* and *equivalence*;
- Identity as an act of power;
- The *primacy of politics* and *sedimented discourses*;
- Historicity;
- The *subject* and *dislocation*;
- Myths and social imaginaries;
- Universal and particular.

2.4.1 Social Antagonism and the Relational Understanding of 'Identity'

DT understands *the social* as the relational system of signification. In the process of *discursive formations*, each element occupies a differential position in relation to another element and has therefore a relative value. Hence, the values of elements are the 'values of opposition' which are defined only by their difference. And a *discursive formation* is always threatened by the *discursive formations* which it excludes. To exemplify, as I illustrate in this thesis, Assyrians/Syriacs first made explicit that they are *not* Turks or Arabs, as they were categorized by Western authorities upon their settlement in Western countries (see further Chapters 1 and 5). Later, among themselves, the majority of Assyrians/Syriacs stated explicitly that they were *not Othuroye* (Assyrians) but *Suryoye*. Only later did this 'negative' relational identification as *not Othuroye* begin to be expressed in terms of *Syrianer* or Arameans as an alternative name for 'Assyrians'.[49] In the present-day this is used as a similar concept and in competition (therefore relational) to the designation Assyrian.

The *social* is inherently antagonistic. Social antagonisms express the boundaries of identity formations. To explain the discursive construction of antagonisms, Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 127-34) have introduced the twofold logic whereby meaning is constructed through and in discourses in terms either of *difference* or *equivalence*;[50] respectively through the boundaries of inclusion or exclusion. *The logic of equivalence* creates *equivalential* identities which constitute the 'others'. These identities are those which are excluded by the subject positions in the centre and are positioned in the *constitutive outside*. For instance, in the homeland Assyrians/Syriacs formed the *chain of equivalence* along religious boundaries. From their perspective as a non-Muslim group, any follower of Islam was at the constitutive outside. Hence, their Christian identity functioned as a *nodal point* around which other

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[49] Although the designation *Syrianer* has been used as a direct translation of and therefore synonymous with the *emic* name *Suryoye*, it must be noted that *Syrianer* is a new term introduced into Swedish language as an alternative name to the Swedish *Assyrier* (and the formerly commonly used term in Swedish – *Syrier* for *Suryoye*). I explain in Chapter 5 that they refrained from the use of *Syrier* (in Swedish) and Syrian (in English) because it did not distinguish them from the present day citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic.

[50] This specific terminology might be confusing for the readers who are not familiar with the terminology of discourse theory. It should be noted that the terms *equivalence* and *difference* are not used in a literal sense to express respectively 'sameness' and 'difference'. It is the other way around, namely the *logic of equivalence* can be understood as the chain of the 'others' and the *logic of difference* as the chain of 'Us'.

elements were organized. After their settlement in Western countries, the *nodal point* 'Christian identity' partially dissolved and assumed a more ethnic character. Hence, they began to base their *chain of equivalence* along ethno-national lines.

The existence of antagonisms imposes also an 'irreconcilable negativity' on social relations. Thus, the *constitutive outside* prevents the constitution of a 'full identity' and functions as 'the symbol of my non-being'. In the example of Assyrians/Syriacs, the existence of a *Syriansk* identity prevents the full constitution of an *Assyrisk* identity and vice-versa. This *outside* is not only posing a threat and blocking the identity of the 'inside', but at the same time is the prerequisite for the 'definition of inside' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Torfing 2005). Therefore, the *Syrianer* and the *Assyrier* have to be defined in relation to each other.

The logic of difference aims to lessen existing group differences and displace antagonistic polarities in order to broaden the *chain of difference* (and thus the inside group). In modern times, the *Assyriska* Movement has employed the *logic of difference* to unify the different Syriac churches under a national umbrella. Their historical theologically based differences are put aside. Instead, the focus has shifted to their similarities and their common destiny as a vulnerable minority which seeks to survive among other peoples or nations. A very recent attempt from the last ten years is from elite members (mainly *Assyrier*) who explicitly state that no matter by which name Assyrian/Syriac individuals choose to refer to themselves and no matter what ideology they adhere to, they can be included in the *chain of difference*, or to put it another way, in the definition of 'their people'. Through seeking 'unity', they aim to fix the meaning of a more broadly defined national identity and by doing so; they demand the recognition of their people. Because of the lack of hegemony, discourses of unity are still weak among Assyrians/Syriacs (see further Chapter 7).

After having illustrated how identity is constructed in the tension between the *differential* and the *equivalential* logics, I shall commence with a discussion about the construction of the 'people'.

2.4.2 The Construction of the 'People'

> ...the construction of the 'people' will be the attempt to give a name to that absent fullness.
>
> Laclau (2005: 85)

In one of his latest works, *On Populist Reason* (2005), Laclau devotes a specific chapter to the construction of the 'people' by introducing the concept of *demand*. Laclau defines *social demand* as the smallest unit required for the construction of an identity. Basically, the emergence of a demand first takes shape either in terms of a *request* or a *claim*. If the *demand* is satisfied, this will be the end of the process of articulation. But, if it is not, those who raise the demand will co-operate with other 'unsatisfied' demands. This is how the formation of an internal dichotomization occurs. The accumulation of 'unfulfilled demands' and the 'inability of the institutional system to absorb them' lead to the establishment of *equivalental* relations at the constitutive outside and hence to an internal frontier (Laclau 2005: 73-4). As discussed earlier, the formation of internal frontiers leads to the two modes of constructing the social: either through the assertion of a particularity of demands in terms of the *logic of difference* or through the *logic of equivalence*. These two logics require each other as necessary conditions for the construction of the *social*. Here, the identity of objects – as I discussed above – is constituted not through a separation, but rather within the tension between the two logics. As Laclau (2005: 80-81) puts it, all discursive identity is constituted at the meeting point of *difference* and *equivalence*. This is the moment at which an element (identity or demand) should assume the representation of the whole. Laclau mentions the case of *Solidarnosc* in which the demands of a group of workers in Gdansk came to signify a much wider popular camp against an oppressive regime. In order to embody the *equivalential chain* under a certain identity, a 'radical investment' which has a totalizing function (A=B=C > D) is necessary. 'D' represents the whole antagonistic camp of the 'others' through sharing the same purposes. For the construction of a 'populist identity', Laclau (2005: 110) emphasizes the importance of a *passage* and a *radical investment* in order to transform particular demands into a 'universal' one. This is compulsory if political frontiers are to be formed. By *radical investment*, he means something 'qualitatively new' which differs from the level of particular demands. An understanding of this concept clarifies why *no* political movement managed to emerge as a populist movement among Assyrian/Syriacs. First of all, a 'passage' as described

above was not formed in order to transform particularities into universal demands. Consequently, every particular demand (identity) remained as such. This is also what Laclau defines as 'self-defeating' pure-particularism. Secondly, a 'radical investment' which differs from the demands of the particularities did not emerge. Had this process been successful, it could have offered a possible 'solution' to the 'name question' among Assyrians/Syriacs.

2.4.3 Identity as an Act of Power

Laclau (1990) points out the role of power relations and hegemony in the constitution of identities as: 'the constitution of a social identity is an act of power and that identity as such is power'. The formation of any identity depends upon its ability to repress whatever threatens it. Therefore, the fixation of identity is considered as an act of power and is a result of power relations.

The power aspect of DT has developed through the radicalization of Gramsci's concept of hegemony and through a critical reading of Foucault's power approach in his archaeological writings. Gramsci's theory of hegemony broke down the dominant understanding of economic determinism inherent in classical Marxism. Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 65-71) point out two fundamental achievements of Gramsci's theory. In the first place, Gramsci formulates ideology not in terms of the *false consciousness* of social agents, but, as an organic and a relational whole embodied in institutions. Secondly, ideology does not have any necessary class belonging. The problem with Gramsci's approach is considered to be the understanding of social classes as objective groups or as ontological foundations. Laclau and Mouffe radicalize Gramsci's theory by discarding the essentialism which is attached to it. The importance of Foucault's concept of power is that he links power and discourse to each other. Foucault ([1976] 2002: 103-4) argues that power is not something which is basically outside us but is ubiquitous as the 'diversity of power relations'. Foucault (Ibid: 43, 54) postulates that those who are in power also control the discourses; they decide how topics can be spoken about and by whom. This is how they control the knowledge. From a discourse theoretical perspective, power and discourse constitute each other. Power is conceived in terms of hegemonic articulations of 'inclusion and exclusion that shape social meanings, identities and that condition the construction of social antagonisms and political frontiers' (Torfing 2005: 23). As noted in the previous section, the antagonistic relationship plays a fundamental role in the formation of

identities. It is the constitutive outside which makes the articulation of elements possible in order to give meaning and to form identities. To constitute an identity, it is necessary to exclude something and establish a power relationship between the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Therefore, power is a condition of any identity that gains its main features in relation to what it excludes, denies or represses. Eventually, the weakening of power in any identity formation will lead to 'the disintegration of the social fabric' (Laclau 1990: 33).

In order to understand the conditions of existence of a given social identity, it is essential to study the power mechanisms which make the construction of any identity possible (Laclau 1990: 31–2). Without studying the role of power in the relationship between the *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* and without looking at the role of the Syriac Orthodox Church in relation to these two competing groups, it is an impossible task to understand the main clue to the 'name debate' and the split among Assyrians/Syriacs. In my empirical chapters, I shall illustrate how power relations are intrinsically linked to discourses of identity.

2.4.4 The Primacy of Politics and Sedimented Discourses

Unlike the idea of economic determinism, DT gives a primacy role to politics in the construction of meanings and identities of objects. Laclau (1990: 35) defines the field of the *political* in relation to the field of the *social* as follows:

> The sedimented forms of 'objectivity' make up the field of what we call the 'social'. The moment of antagonism where the undecidable nature of the alternatives and their resolution through power relations becomes fully visible constitutes the field of the 'political'.

Three points in this definition require further discussion. First, the field of the *social* consists of sedimented forms of meanings and identities where antagonistic relations become provisionally invisible. This process can also be defined as the sedimentation of discourses. Secondly, through the exercise of political discourses the antagonistic character of relations again becomes visible. Politics involve 'the construction of antagonisms' and 'the drawing of political frontiers between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Howarth and Starvakakis 2000: 4, Torfing 2005: 22-4, Dyrberg 2004: 252). Hence, the field of the *political* is what threatens and changes the *sedimented forms* of meaning and

identities; it puts forward alternative meanings. Thirdly, the boundary between the 'social' and the 'political' is continuously dislocated.

The sedimentation of discourses is important to explaining how the process of discourses of identity among Assyrian/Syriac elites assumed institutional forms at an early stage of settlement, and how these discourses have become 'sedimented' – both secularly and religiously (see further Chapter 7). DT views institutions as 'sedimented discourses' or as 'institutionalized discourses'. The link between sedimented discourses and social practice is based on a two-way relationship and is mutually constitutive. Sedimentation of discourses is discussed in the literature in relation to the concept of hegemony. As soon as discourses are articulated and represented, they seek to gain hegemony and become sedimented after successful political struggles. As successful hegemonic articulations the institutionalized discourses impose their values, norms and rules as an 'objectivity' to live by. What is important is that this 'objectivity' is defined relationally and that its symbolic boundaries are of importance. For example, for a long period the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch – through its historically shaped discourses – has exercised hegemony over its members worldwide, framed their way of thinking and constituted norms and values by which to live. However, this has been only a temporary closure. There have been many dislocations both in the early centuries of the existence of the church and in the last century. In modern times, a very obvious example of this temporality was caused by secular movements which developed discourses of a cross denominational national identity for their people. The church has no longer remained the main hegemonic institution.

Turning to the question of when a discourse becomes *sedimented*, this is the moment when a 'forgetting of the origins' of the political struggles takes place (Laclau 1990: 34). And, hegemonic discourses and their political rhetoric appear as an 'uncontestable truth' (Torfing 1999). They become relatively permanent and durable as the universal form of the social reality. This explains the discussion between *primordialists* and *instrumentalists* about the concept of change in ethnic identities. Contrasting the idea of the 'ineffable' qualities inherent in essentialist approaches, DT sees 'contingency' as the main characteristic of all identity formations. At the same time it acknowledges the idea of continuity in terms of *objectivity* and *discourse sedimentation*. Identities can also be understood as the sedimentation of particular discourses. For instance, no one questions the Dutch or Swedish national identities, because they have already achieved sedimented forms and

gained 'objectivity'. Sedimentation of identity discourses means therefore a (temporary) stability and the forgetting of their origins.[51] When sedimented discourses are threatened by the constitutive outside, the survival of these hegemonic projects depends on their ability and flexibility to adjust to changing conditions. If they cannot, sedimented discourses will lose their hegemonic role as '*objectivity*' and will become contested. Hajer (2003) explains this situation in terms of 'institutional ambiguity'. I shall discuss this aspect further in the section about *dislocation*.

2.4.5 Historicity

DT approaches all identities as historically constructed systems of meaning. The historical dimension of the 'name debate' among Assyrians/Syriacs requests to look into the emergence of discursive formations from a historical perspective. Laclau (1990: 36) explains how the historical dimension of discursive formations can be studied:

> To understand something historically is to refer it back to its contingent conditions of emergence. Far from seeking an objective meaning in history, it is a question of deconstructing all meaning and tracing it back to its original facticity.

It is necessary to elabourate in more detail on two main aspects of this definition. First, from an ontological perspective history does not flow from an essence with a determinative centre which explains the flow of history as the realization of a *thelos*. DT sees history as the articulation of discourses through hegemonic struggles. From this perspective, all identity of objects and subjects is 'changeable'. Therefore, even if there might be claims which aim to restore a previous identity (such as an Assyrian or Aramean past), it is still necessary to 'reinvent' that identity. They cannot simply rely on something given entirely beforehand (Laclau 2005: 121). Second, methodologically, in order to study the historical dimension of discourses, it is necessary to deconstruct their contingent conditions of emergence. My aim has been to understand how and why antagonistic discourses emerged

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[51] Although from a different ontological perspective, Renan (1882) in his lecture at the Sorborne 'What is a Nation?' (see further in Eley and Suny 1996: 41-55) said something similar about nationhood, namely that it involves shared memories but also a great deal of shared forgetting.

around the 'correct name' of the people. That is why I have deconstructed the meaning charged in the names used (*Assyrier* and *Syrianer*) and by doing so I have deconstructed the political discourses which these names represent. Therefore, my focus has been on the contextual conditions of the emergence of the antagonistic discourses and not on the search for an 'objective meaning' in history.

History concerns both the field of continuity and discontinuity. While continuity is a matter of discursive *path-dependency*, discontinuity indicates formative moments which have a discursive *path-shaping* character.[52] DT approaches 'discontinuity' in terms of *dislocation* in history. The dialectical relationship between continuity and discontinuity explains the notion of change in identity formations. A 'new' identity does not necessarily mean a radical change or an entirely new formation. As Laclau (1996: 30) emphasizes, the 'new' identity cannot be the radical elimination of the other, 'but the constant renegotiation of the forms of his presence'. This is important to understanding and explaining the concept of continuity in identities. DT does not separate the past from the present. Identities are not taken as primordial, given entities, fixed once and for all. Instead, they are constantly subject to change. The idea of change does not mean that identities do not have some stability or temporary fixations. What it means is that identities are negotiated in relation to general contextual changes and in relation to particular dislocatory events. This approach transcends the primordial and instrumentalist approaches to ethnic identities.

2.4.6 The Subject and Dislocation

Subjects are seen as 'positions' in discourses (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 115).[53] Three points are central to this approach: a) subjects are seen as

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[52] Historical institutionalism explains institutional change in terms of *path-dependency* and unintended consequences (Aspinwall and Schneider 2000: 6-7). The concept of *path-dependency* explains the outcomes of policy shaping and decision-making in terms of the 'initial conditions' which become 'locked-in' and therefore establish a 'path' from which it becomes difficult or impossible to deviate. The concept provides a useful understanding of the impact of historically shaped institutions, formal and informal rules and norms. This can be seen as the historical element of a discourse (see further Pierson 2000, 2002; Aspinwall and Schneider 2000). However, the premises of historical institutionalism differ ontologically from discourse theory. Therefore, Torfing (2005: 22-4) translates two concepts of historical institutionalism' into DT: Discursive *path-shaping* and *path-dependency*.

[53] DT's approach to the *subject* has been shaped in several steps. In Laclau's (1979) early writings and Laclau and Mouffe (1985), his definition of 'subject positions' was influenced by the Althusserian ideological interpellation. Žižek (1990: 251) criticizes this approach saying it

internal to the structure; b) subjects enjoy a certain level of 'autonomy' and are therefore not the *slaves* of the structure; and c) subjects do not have a homogenous character with pre-given interests. Instead, the identity of subjects is fragmented, decentred, and cannot be reduced merely to one identity as it is in the concept of social classes or social groups; rather, they are over-determined. This approach differs from the classical Rational Choice theory of agents as autonomous subjects, and distances itself from class-based explanations of the Marxist theory which are rooted in economic determinism.

Laclau (1990: 30) builds his ideas about the dilemmatic relationship between *structure* and *social agent* on several assumptions. First of all, unlike the deterministic role given to structures in structuralism, DT understands 'structures' as open and contingent; *undecidability* is implicit in the structures. Therefore, decisions in the *field of discursivity* are not determined by a particular structure. Instead, decisions are seen as external to the structure and constitute a reduction of the condition of possibilities. Secondly, 'the *agent* [my emphasis] of that contingent decision must be considered, not as an entity *separate* from the structure, but constituted in relation to it' (Ibid.). On the basis of these arguments, Laclau states that agents have a space of autonomy in the sense of transforming and subverting the structure through new decisions. Therefore, while the *agent* is *not* external to the structure, it has begun to function to some extent autonomously from the structure.

For instance, the secularization of the *Syrianska* Movement results from the decisions taken in the process of competition on the one hand with clergymen (as representatives of a church based structure) and on the other hand with the *Assyriska* Movement (as an already existing movement). Despite the fact that the *Syrianska* Movement started off as an opposition to the *Assyriska* Movement with religiously based arguments and a denominational based identity discourse, in its formation process it grew slowly into a secularly based movement, offering an alternative and competing ideology to that of the *Assyrier*. The religiously based structure did thus not determine its whole formation process. This is related to the extent to which the agent constitutes the *locus* of a decision which is not determined by the structure. With this point of departure, Laclau (1990: 30) emphasizes

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was still being framed from an Althusserian perspective which sees subjects as *interpellated* by ideological practices. In Laclau's later writings under the influence of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the emphasis turned to the idea of the *split subject*.

that 'the subject is nothing but the distance between the *undecidable* structure and the decision'.[54]

In his later writings, Laclau formulated the *subject* in terms of a *split subject* in relation to the concept of *dislocation*. In the study of identities, the concepts *dislocation* and *split subject* assume central importance. Both concepts provide a comprehensive understanding of the flexible and multiple characters of social and ethnic identities. *Dislocation* explains discursive changes; the *inherent* existence of *dislocation* in any discursive structure is the main logic which makes identities changeable and negotiable. Laclau (1990: 40) defines *dislocation* as both the simultaneous condition of *possibility* and *impossibility* of a centre. While the notion of *impossibility* prevents the formation of a closed totality, the condition of *possibility* makes it possible for new identities to emerge. As an analytical concept with multiple meanings and functions, *dislocation* constitutes both the very form of *temporality* and of *possibility*, but also the very form of *freedom* (Laclau 1990: 41-3). To clarify this further, I shall answer two questions: where and when does *dislocation* take place? Spatially *dislocation* is an inherent concept in every identity constellation. Dislocation occurs when a hegemonic discourse is confronted by new events which it cannot explain, represent or in other ways domesticate (Torfing 2005: 16). And the *constitutive outside* is the place where the possibility of *dislocation* is formed.

In the long run, *dislocation* is an inevitable process with which all hegemonic discourses are confronted. In this sense, *dislocation* is the breaking point of the status quo which the established discourses enjoy. The rupture of the status quo opens up a new space in which discourses of previously excluded subjects as well as new subjects win space (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 20). In Laclau's (1990: 39) words, '…it will cause the accelerated tempo of social transformation and the continual rearticulatory interventions, through which new subjects or the re-definition of subject positions will occur.' In short, excluded identities, subject positions or a new discourse could begin to challenge the established positions through the 'proliferation of floating signifiers' with a new set of *nodal points*. The flexibility and integration capacity of the discourses which are threatened by the 'new' emerging (and competitive) discourses determine their hegemonic continuation and development. However, the inherent notion of dislocation

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[54] See further for a discussion about Laclau's explanation on the *subject* in relation to an 'undecidable structure' and 'the decision' in Norval (2004).

constantly diminishes the 'pillars' of hegemonic discourses. This leads to the increasing role of the *subject*.

Since the *subject* is 'the distance between the undecidable structure and the decision', dislocation leads to a situation in which more fields of decisions are *not* determined by the structure. Eventually in this situation, the distance will expand and this will allow the subject more space. In this sense, dislocation decentralizes the structure and the subject, which leads to 'a failed structural identity'. Per definition, as a consequence of the dislocation of the discursive structure: 'the subject always emerges as a *split subject* that might attempt to reconstruct a full identity through acts of identification' (Torfing 2005: 17). Through decisions in an undecidable terrain (structure), subjects identify themselves with hegemonic projects and reduce the condition of possibility in order to find a solution to their experienced crises (Laclau and Zac 1994). The acts of identifications (or decisions) entail 'an act of power' in order to hegemonize a particular meaning.

These explanations are essential to the study of identities and particularly to the concept of change in discursive structures. In my study, I define the emigration of Assyrian/Syriacs as a *dislocatory event* which resulted in both – *possibilities* and *impossibilities*. Because of the dislocatory structure in the new societies, they were no longer visible as a distinct group of people. *Dislocation* in terms of emigration also allowed space for new *conditions of possibility* and hence, 'freedom' for the expression of their 'national identity' project. In order to heal this *split subject*, they have made use of the *possibilities* they encountered by making (conscious and unconscious) *decisions* about their collective identity. My case study illustrates that by way of making use of their new *possibilities*, Assyrians/Syriacs have come to identify themselves in ethno-national terms, using a Western concept of identity definition. Identification with hegemonic projects in terms of *Assyrier* or *Syrianer* can therefore be understood as attempts to find a solution to the constantly experienced (identity) crises after their emigration. However, these acts of identification are *not* permanent and constitute a partial *closure*; they are changeable, negotiable and have multiple characters, as I shall illustrate in the following empirical chapters. Now I shall look at two other important concepts which complete the idea of the *subject*.

2.4.7 Myth and Social Imaginary

In order to explain new forms of identification after dislocation, Laclau introduced the concepts of *myth* and *social imaginary* in his theory. The emergence of *myths* is thus directly related to dislocatory events; *myths* emerge from the fundamental *impossibility* in society to fill the 'gap' or the 'lack' in the present such as in new socio-political demands for the creation of a 'promised land' or 'an ideal society' (Laclau 1990: 63). The aim of a *myth* is thus the representation of an 'alternative' space to the present *objectivity*. Whenever a *myth* gains 'acceptance', a wide range of social demands will be inscribed in it (Howarth 2004: 261). This is the moment at which *myths* transform into *social imaginaries* and become generally accepted as common demands, such as the case with the Christian millennium, the Enlightenment and the communist utopia. Collective imaginaries have the capacity to absorb different kinds of social demands. Hence, the dissolution of an imaginary mainly depends on losing this capacity of absorption (Laclau 1990: 63-65). A central *myth* in the discourse of Assyrian/Syriac elites is the need for a 'homeland' (*athro*). They perceive themselves as a stateless people (*'amo dlo athro*) whose survival in the Middle East is endangered and who live dispersed in a worldwide diaspora. In the *structural objectivity* there is no place for a country which they can call their own. Therefore, among some elite members the need for a country in the geography of the ancestral homeland has functioned as a *myth* – similar to the need felt by Jews at the beginning of the last century. However, this *myth* has not turned into a *social imaginary* because it has not been accepted broadly among Assyrians/Syriacs.

2.4.8 Universal and Particular

The last point that I will introduce here is the relationship between the *universal* and the *particular* which is essential for understanding the relational and contextual formation of identities. Laclau (1996b: 13) defines *particularism*[55] as a relational concept:

> ...something is particular in relation to other particularities and the ensemble of them presupposes a social totality within which they are constituted.

[55] See further Laclau (1996b). Butler (1992) has also contributed to this discussion.

Any *particularity* gains its meaning in relation to other particularities. Taken as a whole, these particularities constitute a *social totality* within which each of them assumes its meaning. For instance, without analysing the 'Swedish context', it is impossible to understand the particularities of the *Assyrier*, *Syrianer* and the Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden and their relationships. As Laclau (1996b: 30) writes, 'If the racial or cultural minority, for instance, has to assert its identity in new social surroundings, it will have to take into account new situations which will inevitably transform that identity.' To exemplify this statement further, both the 'name debate' among Assyrians/Syriacs and the institutional split resulting from the 'name debate' assume specific characteristics in different European countries. These differences can be best understood in relation to the context or *social totality* in which they developed. However, there are also some examples where the formation of identities does not follow the new contextual patterns. For instance, Assyrians/Syriacs in the diaspora have continued to define their identity to a large extent in relation to the Turkish, Arab and Kurdish identity although their emigration goes back more than forty years ago and their former relations (as neighbours) have been broken down to a great extent. Norval's (1990: 157) explanation of the post-apartheid society is useful in comprehending the *notion of continuity* when defining identities relationally. She emphasises that 'through a remembrance of apartheid as other', a post-apartheid society constituted itself. Similarly, in the Western diaspora, 'remembrance' of the oppression which Assyrians/Syriacs experienced in Turkey and other countries in the Middle East has been central to the way they have continued to define their collective identity; Turks, Kurds and Arabs have continued to function as the main 'others'.

In Laclau's (1996b: 28) reasoning, the *universal* is nothing external to the *particular*; it is defined explicitly in relation to the *particular*:

> …the universal is part of my identity as far as I am penetrated by a constitutive lack that is as far as my differential identity has failed in its process of constitution. The universal emerges out of the particular not as some principle underlying and explaining the particular, but as an incomplete horizon suturing a dislocated particular identity.

The *universal* is defined as an *empty signifier* which has *no* content of its own. It can only be understood in relation to the *particular*. In other words, the *universal* can only emerge out of the 'particular'. As Buttler (1992: 8-9) indicates, the *universal* represents an empty, contested space in which *subjects*

struggle for hegemony. Filling the empty space of the *universal* with meaning indicates gaining hegemony for a particular identity (Torfing 1999: 175). Discussing Benedict Anderson's (1983) seminal work, Laclau (2003: 25-28) analyzes the *imagined community* as an example for the concept of the *universal*. With the construction of nation-states, a new common space of political representation was created through bringing different *particularities* together in order to construct an 'imagined community'. By doing so, hegemonic discourses filled the meaning of the *universal* (here, the *imagined community*).

In this thesis, I illustrate the central claims of Assyrians/Syriacs about their ancestry and their assertions about the 'correct' naming of their people in the present-day. While making *universal* claims about the 'correct name' of the people, they have forced their particularistic identity on the outsiders. Laclau sees a pure particularistic stand[56] as 'self-defeating' and 'ultimately inconsistent', because the idea of pure particularism is based on 'the constitution of the differences as differences and such a ground can only be a new version of an essentialist universalism' (Laclau 1996: 26-27, 58). To exemplify this self-defeating *logic* of particularism, I should mention the example whereby Assyrians/Syriacs have begun to conclude that the struggle around their name in the diaspora has created a split in their socio-political life and that it is 'self-defeating'. Some have begun to compare this situation with the *Seyfo*, a reference to the destructive effect of the genocide perpetrated on their people during the First World War. The 'self-defeating' element is that of imposing a pure-particularistic discourse (non-flexible and non-negotiatable) on the whole group in order to realize hegemony. This has resulted in deeply rooted antagonisms within the community. In Chapter 7, I illustrate how this antagonistic relationship in terms of *difference as difference* is played out in order to strengthen the position of particular discourses in the *discursive field*.

In the following of this chapter I shall proceed with a discussion of the methodology employed in this study.

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[56] I understand 'pure particularism' as a political and ideological stand which is not open to negotiate with others; an example for an inflexible discourse.

2.5 Methodology

> …This is not to say that methods do not exist for the treatment of the material, which could be useful in some circumstances… But the important point is that these tools that the researcher can decide ad hoc to use in each case for pragmatic reasons, and that they are not unified in an established and orderly system of procedures called 'methodology'. A lot of time will be saved if the researcher knows from the beginning that nothing can substitute his/her personal intuition.
>
> Laclau (1991)

Today, one of the main challenges for DT (since the publication of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) has remained the methodological question. While recognizing the anti-essentialist and the anti-foundationalist assumptions of DT as a strength, this theory has also been criticized for its lack of methodological guidelines, for its high level of abstraction and for its undertheorized concepts such as *nodal point* and *empty signifiers* (see further Fairclough and Chouliaraki 1999, Critchley and Marchart (2004), Howarth 2000, 2004, Torfing 2005, Montessori 2009). My aim has not been to discuss these critiques in-depth. I have mainly limited myself to the discussion of the concepts of DT in relation to my case study. Nevertheless, I would like to note that DT is not easily accessible and that it requires an active, creative and experimental attitude from the researcher in order to analyse the *social* and to make this analysis accessible to the reader. I assume that this is related to the more philosophical orientation of DT. To meet this need, Torfing (2005) notes that an increase in empirical studies in this field of DT can be of great help. The value of this study should therefore also be sought in that direction.

The 'methodological deficit' (Howarth 2005: 317) can also be approached as a puzzle for researchers to be solved in each specific research. There are two elements which transform the methodology of DT into a puzzle: a) the high level of abstraction inherent in this theory; b) its radical ontological and epistemological assumptions. In each unique context, puzzles are to be solved by applying methodological 'tricks'. In this sense, tricks are heuristic tools or ways of understanding which assist in resolving these puzzles (Becker 1998). In a nutshell, the puzzle of methodology in DT is still open to solution with the assistance of additional empirical studies and new attempts to fill this gap. Consequently, the question is whether DT

needs a methodological guideline to fill the experienced gap in the methodology.[57] As I shall conclude, each new solution to the puzzle is but a temporary closure, because the ontological standpoint of DT is that truth is local and flexible.

As a starting point for this methodological discussion, in his above-mentioned citation, Laclau stresses the importance of the researcher's intuition when pursuing the research. What does he mean here by '…nothing can substitute his/her personal intuition?' I understand this as an appeal to the researcher's intuition to make use of the space allowed for creativity and flexibility by the open character in the use of methodology within discourse analysis. This approach opposes theory-bound and method-led research strategies. I understand this as the rejection of the researcher becoming the slave to a theory. Therefore it is essential that the researcher develops a strong reflexive attitude throughout the research process, as each research is unique in addressing its specific questions. Therefore, a ready-made methodological guideline or 'recipe' will not satisfy the requirements of any research question. In order to meet the challenges of complex societal puzzles, it is important that the researcher makes use of her well-honed intuition and develops a free, open and engaged attitude (see further 'the role of the researcher' in this chapter).

In the following, I shall begin by taking a closer look into the characteristics of the distinctive methodology of DT. Thereafter, I shall discuss 'the role of researcher', my 'methods of data collection' and conclude with a brief explanation of how I have made use of the concepts of DT in my empirical chapters.

2.5.1 The Logic of Methodology within Discourse Theory

DT is not considered as an empirical theory in the narrow sense of the term but is thought of as a research programme or paradigm (Howarth 2005: 318). Howarth views this research programme as a system of ontological assumptions, theoretical concepts and methodological precepts. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the central idea of this research programme

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[57] An interesting task for future research in relation to this is an analysis of the mainstream discourses of methodology. Conclusions can bring us further in detecting and identifying strengths and weaknesses. This may develop new openings to the understanding of methodology.

is based on the assumption that all objects and practices are meaningful and that social meanings are contextual, relational and contingent. Three characteristics are central to the logic of methodology within DT:

- DT has a problem-driven approach;
- DT is based on distinctive ontological and epistemological assumptions;
- Implicit to DT is that theory and methodology are intertwined.

In contrast to theory-driven studies, DT has a 'problem-driven' approach. Its starting point is the problematization of social phenomena complying with epistemological postulations which claim that knowledge should not be taken for granted (Howarth 2005, Torfing 2005). In accordance with interpretative methods of social inquiry, it puts the focus on a deep understanding and explanation of discourses by providing plausible and convincing explanations of carefully problematized phenomena (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 7). In this respect, Howarth (2005: 321) points out two dangers concerning the gap between the theory and what he calls the 'real-concrete'. The *first* danger is related to inductive methodology, which is based on the idea of *unmediated access* to the research object. DT opposes this positivistic and naturalistic conception of knowledge and method, which is based on empirical generalizations and testable predictions (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 7). In antithesis to this approach, DT argues that there can be no unmediated access to the 'real-concrete'. (In this context, the role of the researcher is vitally important. I shall discuss this aspect in the next section.) The *second* danger arises from applying a theoretical framework to the 'real-concrete' in order to test a theory. In contrast to this deductive approach, DT seeks to articulate each concept in its particular enactment of concrete research. In other words, the concepts and logics of the theoretical framework should be sufficiently 'open' and flexible to be adapted, de-formed and transformed in the process of application (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 7).

DT is based on an *anti-essentialist* ontology and an *anti-foundationalist* epistemology. It rejects both explanations related to an underlying essence or a transcendental centre and the idea (usually a starting point as pre-given analytical explanatory variable) of a fundamental belief or principle, which is

the basic ground or foundation of inquiry and knowledge.[58] The anti-foundationalist approach allows DT a more open methodological preference. Knowledge is not taken for granted. Truth is a local and flexible phenomenon (Torfing 2005: 27). Discourse theory rejects ideas of being able to access a final or absolute truth directly. People who espouse DT likewise distance themselves from truth as a kind of 'subjective imposition' in the sense of post-modern 'relativism' (Howarth 2005: 328-9).

The distinctive ontological and epistemological assumptions of DT locate this approach in the hermeneutical branch of the social sciences. Hermeneutics is understood to be the method of grasping and producing meaning relations (Wodak and Meyer 2009: 23). More specifically, one of the main tasks of DT is to provide second-order interpretations of social actors' own self-understandings and interpretations of their situations and practices (Howarth 2005). Discourse theorists are concerned not just with the way in which social actors understand their particular worlds. They tend to focus their attention on the creation, disruption and transformation of the structures which organize social life. One consequence of this hermeneutical orientation is that theory cannot be separated wholly and objectively from the reality it seeks to explain, as theoretical practices are themselves partly constitutive of (and shaped by) the social worlds in which the subjects and objects of research find themselves (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 8-9). In short, implicit in discourse analysis is the assumption that theory and methodology are intertwined. Therefore, throughout the research process, the constant interaction between theory and methodology pushes the researcher to consider both the ontological and the epistemological assumptions. This brings me back to the question of how to deal with the 'problem of application'.

Laclau (1991) points out that one of the most common mistakes occurs when the researcher fails to overcome the relationship between the theory and the empirical study. He argues that this failure often results in two rather disconnected parts. To counter this danger, Laclau advocates a highly developed theoretical and empirical analysis as a solution to the 'problem of application'. Referring to Wittgenstein's assertion, Laclau says that there is no

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[58] *Ontology* is understood as 'the science or study of being' (Blaikie [2000] 2008: 8). Its assumptions are concerned with what we believe constitutes social reality. An *epistemology* consists of ideas about what can count as knowledge, what can be known, and what criteria such knowledge must satisfy in order to be called knowledge rather than beliefs.

'application' of a rule because the instance of the application is internal to the rule itself. Therefore it transforms the latter. This is the main point which makes the methodology of DT distinctive: Instead of the 'passive' role ascribed to empirical data (which can also be understood in terms of a 'one-way-relation') in theory-driven deductive studies, DT advocates an 'active' two-way-relationship between theoretical concepts and the empirical reality. Hence, the researcher needs to shuttle back and forth between the theory and the empirical field in order to reach a better understanding and explanation of the latter. Consequently, in assuming this active role as a researcher I propose to refer to this in terms of 'interaction with the theory' instead of 'application of the theory'.

At this juncture, I shall discuss the role of the researcher which constitutes an essential point of the methodology in my research. This is because the bulk of my empirical material is based on field research, which includes in-depth interviews and participant observations. Therefore it is important to define my role.

2.5.2 The Role of the Researcher

I have been confronted with my role and position of researcher in relation to my research object in various ways, but specifically because I am identified as a member of the group which I am studying. I consider this confrontation something which can work out positively for *any* researcher in relation to the level of closeness and distance between the researcher and the study object, independent of the character of the relationship. This aspect has been touched on in the context of the question of 'objectivity' which a researcher is supposed to foster. Simultaneously, this question assumes the risk for 'subjectivity' and, consequently, this 'risk' assumes a negative influence of this subjectivity on the research results. At this point I would like to state that I share the anti-foundationalist epistemology of DT, which rejects the idea of a fundamental belief or principle.

As said before, from this perspective, knowledge is not taken as granted and 'truth' constitutes a local and flexible phenomenon (Torfing 2005). Social reality can therefore never be fully captured. This should not be confused with 'relativism'. 'Truth' in this sense is subject to a constant change and is a matter of temporary closure in the field of discursivity. The role of the researcher is another puzzle in DT methodology. Much of the 'subjectivity' in the social sciences is attributable to the specific interaction

between the researcher and the group under study. The heuristic ways of resolving this puzzle depend on how the researcher interacts with her research subject, how she gathers data, how she asks and what she does and how she interprets discursive and non-discursive material. The researcher is 'always located in a particular historical and political context with no neutral Archimedian point from which to describe, argue and evaluate' (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 7). Hence the researcher is also part of discursivity with contingent relationships in an antagonistic field. Therefore, it is impossible to achieve a *completely* objective and detached point of view. However, the researcher gives meaning to her empirical data and by doing so she makes temporary and partial truth claims. This is both 'possible' and 'necessary'.

In relation to the questions of closeness and distance between the researcher and the research object, both have advantages and disadvantages. Without dealing with them extensively, I do want to state that too much distance between the research object and the researcher can be problematic, because the researcher needs also a certain closeness to or affinity with the field in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the social in the field. As an outsider, there is a greater risk of misinterpretation or of generalizations as there is a danger of missing the subtle nuances in the meaning of words, incidents and gestures. To be part of the group under study, such as in my situation, can also be helpful in understanding the complexity inherent to the *social*. Therefore, the activity of conducting research is intrinsic to the role of researcher, hence to 'subjectivity'. In tackling this 'limitation' in the study, I have attempted to develop *transparency* in relation to the aim of this study and by explaining what I did and how I did it.

I shall first say something more specific about how I have related to my study object over a longer period – as I have done so often in my first meeting with people from outside 'the community' whom I expected to meet more than once. And this is definitely a different version from when I meet with 'my people'. For the latter group, it often suffices to say that *I am the daughter of Barsaumo dbe Atto from the village Mzizah*. If they do not know my father, mother or any other member of the family, they do know either someone from my village or someone who is somehow connected to this village. This is precisely what I experienced during my fieldwork. It enabled me to find easy access to sources. Undoubtedly, I was denied access to two

archives because of how people identified me in relation to their organization and socio-political sphere at that specific moment.[59]

Who am I for outsiders? Different versions of an answer to this exist, depending on the question to whom I speak. In the context of this study, it is worth mentioning that until the age of eight I grew up in the village *Mzizah*, born into a farmer's family with a total of eight siblings. In 1980 (the year we fled to the Netherlands), *Mzizah* consisted of about 150 families; half of them Assyrians/Syriacs and the other half Kurds.[60] *Mzizah* was also home to two Kurdish *aghas* who controlled the region under a feudal system of government (see further the Chapters 3 and 4). It is therefore not surprising that children growing up in *Mzizah* were well informed about the local politics. The situation required that their parents prepared them to develop a certain attitude and to behave in a certain way in order to maximize their safety; there were certain things which were done and could be said and others which could not. These instructions were imbued with discourses creating 'us' and 'them' categories among the local population.

I grew up speaking my mother tongue (which we at that time called) *Surayt* and in the present day *Suryoyo* and sometimes *Turoyo*. At the same time, from my interaction with the Kurdish population in the village, I also learned Kurdish (*Kurmanji*). I gained my first knowledge of the Turkish language during the year I attended the Turkish primary school (*ilkokul*) at the age of seven. Besides these languages, I had also begun to learn classical Syriac in the choir class. It had become like a second home in which Assyrian/Syriac children joined the Syriac classes in church in order to gain access to the liturgy. These lessons in the church were considered very important because, until 1953 (the year in which the first Turkish primary school was founded in *Mzizah*), this had been the only way for the Assyrian/Syriac villagers to gain access to education.[61] In practice, only those people who joined the choir learned Syriac. This also meant that most of the villagers, among them my parents, were illiterate. Nevertheless, at a tender age I somehow already sensed that my parents considered education very important.

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[59] For reasons of confidentiality I shall not discuss these institutions here, as it adds nothing to the already broadly discussed topic of discursivity in this study.

[60] At that time in *Tur 'Abdin*, Assyrians/Syriacs referred to themselves as *Suroye* and to the Kurds as *Taye*. *Suroye* and *Taye* were at that time used with the meaning of respectively 'Christians' and 'Muslims'.

[61] See for more about the position of this education in Chapter 3.

In October 1980 my family decided to flee the area after considering the latest political changes in the wake of a *coup d'état* and the consequences for the local politics in *Mzizah*.[62] The choice of the Netherlands was based on the fact that they knew relatives already living there. My father bought his children warm jackets (which I later called 'Eskimo jackets') ready to arrive in what we expected to be the chilly *Hollanda*. The city of Enschede in which we settled has now become the city with the highest number of Assyrians/Syriacs *per capita* in the Netherlands. During the asylum procedure which lasted two years, we were lucky that we could rent a small three-room apartment in which we lived with thirteen family members; many other community members remained in 'asylum camps'.

Turning to my connection with 'the community', I can mention that, until I was in my mid-twenties, I grew up in the heart of the community and participated in most of the secular and church activities organised. As a student I continued my active involvement; first through founding, with other Assyrian/Syriac students, the first student organization (*Suryoye Studenten Vereniging Edessa, SSV Edessa*[63]) in the Netherlands which aimed at students from 'the community' – as we used to refer to it. It is worth mentioning that at that time we chose the *emic* term *Suryoye* consciously in order to be inclusive of the different ideas about the 'correct name' for 'our people' in Dutch language. Indeed, we created a platform in which students could co-operate (independently of their ideas about their people's name). Its main aim was to stimulate the younger generations to pursue higher education. After I resigned from the board of *SSV Edessa*, I did not become a formal member of any other Assyrian/Syriac institution. Nevertheless, I have had contacts with most of the organizations, although with some more than with others; often depending on the individuals on the board in a certain period. I could therefore say that my contacts tended to depend on an individual basis.

The researcher is located in a specific historical and political context. As any other Assyrian/Syriac who grew up in a close relationship with her 'community members', I have also been part of this field – and still I am. No matter whether I want to be or not; it is unavoidable. Consequently, my familiarity with these discourses could indeed have loomed as an obstacle in this research. The fact that I have been confronted with the aforementioned

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[62] See further also Chapter 4.

[63] This student organization published the magazine *Infodessa*.

question about my specific relationship to the study object has prompted me reflect on this aspect more than I would otherwise have done (and reflect on my assumptions, relationship to the field, about my own stand in relation to the researched and so forth). In this respect, Mason (1996: 109) speaks of the 'reflexive reading of data', a role in which the researcher is located as part of the data generated, and in which he seeks to explore his role in the process of the generation and interpretation of data. Blaikie (2008: 54) refers to this position of researcher as that of *dialogic facilitator*, emphasising the dialogue between the researcher and the researched. Considering that this thesis is to a great extent built on empirical data which I actively collected in the research field, *reflexivity* has come in at *both* different levels *and* throughout the research process: from the research question to the final analysis and writing. As already assumed above, I follow Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 16) in their argumentation of reflexivity which implies that:

> The orientation of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interest that these locations confer upon them. What this represents is a rejection of the idea that social research is, or can be, carried out in some autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society and from the particular biography of the researcher, in such a way that its findings can be unaffected by social processes and personal characteristics.

I worked for a relatively long period on collecting, translating and analysing my data. This allowed me plenty of time to reflect on my own taken-for-granted understandings in relation to my data. As Philips and Jørgensen (2002) point out, it is important to focus on the study of common-sense understandings. Since I grew up within the community, I consciously had to question why certain ideas are accepted, naturalized and declared to be true and why others are rejected. To mention a few examples of commonly taken-for-granted terminologies are 'my people', 'foreigners' (*nukhroye*), *Seyfo* and *Suryoye*. How are these defined and why are they defined as they are? The fact that during the last three years I was also physically distanced from the field while writing this thesis helped me to reflect from a more 'distant' perspective. Nevertheless, I remained in contact through Internet, web-TV, radio and phone.

As an insider of the group, while growing up in one of the cities with the highest concentration of people who belong to my research object, I have been able to learn about cultural codes or norms and values. This

background knowledge has held me in good stead with my contacts in the field; it has also functioned as 'luggage' for the interpretation of answers in interviews. For example, it allowed me to sense intuitively that individuals were giving me *socially desirable responses*, whereupon I decided to interview more people in order to reach a more diverse representation of the group under study. Answers to questions in which, for instance, I touched on sexuality had to be paid particular attention to, because I was aware of certain norms and values in relation to this topic among the group under study.[64] An example of an area in which I very clearly noticed *socially desirable responses* was in the following. Usually I conducted my interviews with individuals, without the presence of other people. In two situations the wife of the interviewee sat in our presence for short periods during the interview. When I asked the question: 'What is it that you have achieved and are happiest about in your life?' – both persons said that it was the moment they met their current wife and started a family life. I was struck by the fact that only in these two interviews the wives were present when I asked this question and only these two informants mentioned their wives. Moreover, in both cases the wives gave a smile of satisfaction in reaction to this answer. This demonstrated to me the strong interactive influence of the context of research and simultaneously its importance. In this sense, the question is not: 'Does my informant speak the truth' but rather 'How can I interpret and understand what he says' in relation to the context in which he finds himself?

Especially when interviewing the clergy I conscientiously did my best to adhere to the socio-cultural norms in order not to offend them. When they tried to avoid answering a certain 'sensitive' question, I endeavoured to change tack in order to learn about their ideas through other questions relating to the subject. One method the clergy adopted to avoid answering questions or having to state certain facts about social life was to say something totally different. I have construed this behaviour as their way of developing space for themselves. They did not necessarily think that they had to give me subtle answers. This may have something to do with their position of authority. With the exception of a few cases, the clergy tended to answer my questions in a way quite close to what would have been expected to be the answer from someone in the position of clergyman. Moreover, the clergy have also been categorized in the groups of *Syrianer* and *Assyrier*; some

[64] I have not written about this topic in this study and shall therefore write about it in the future.

directly and others indirectly. The first group is so categorized because they express a specific stand and the others because they are organized hierarchically under the authority of an archbishop who is again categorized into the group of *Assyrier* or *Syrianer*. This categorization encompasses certain expectations. Not fulfilling them would endanger the clergy's position for any other clergyman. The answers of the clergy should therefore also be read against this background of what is expected from them by church members.[65]

It is also necessary to reflect on the way my research object has tried to understand my position in the field and to classify me into one of the 'political groups' which they identify. This classification was often based on where they saw me, what I did and with whom they saw me talking. Although I tried to work as an engaged, 'neutral' researcher and not to take sides, my experiences have shown that this is rather difficult. My personal stance in the field is only part of the 'final relationship'. The other part is decided by the people with whom I interact in the discursive field. I shall recount a few experiences to illustrate this. In the period of the establishment of the TV channel *Suroyo TV,* people had become used to seeing big cameras both at secular events and in the churches. They identified these as the cameras of *Suroyo TV*. Just because I used a relatively big photo camera and a camcorder during my fieldwork, I began to be seen as someone working for *Suroyo TV*. In that period, this automatically implied that I would also be a member of their political organization, which I was not. In fact, I was not a member of any of the active organizations at the time of my fieldwork. A denial of this assumption often did not help. Even before *Suroyo TV* was founded, I had been walking around in the field with cameras. Interestingly, after its foundation, 'suddenly' all 'people with big cameras' were assumed to be working for *Suroyo TV*. To be in such a position militated against my wish to develop a 'neutral' position in the field. This put me into unpleasant and sometimes difficult situations. At an important cultural event of one of the *Assyriska* organizations I was not allowed to film because of this ascribed relationship to *Suroyo TV*. To mention another example: in the eyes of *Assyriska* or *Syrianska* activists, to disagree with some of their ideas or to engage with either of them immediately caused me to be classified in the group of the 'others' and thus

[65] This was the case despite the fact I mentioned that their answers would be dealt with anonymously.

against their ideology. Being reflected upon in this way revealed that my position as a researcher was approached from the inside, as a member of the in-group who had to be identified among the identifiable sub-groups available.

2.5.3 Data Collection and Analysis

DT does not distinguish between the discursive and the non-discursive. It considers all data part of discourse. The problem-driven approach to the study of a phenomenon within a particular case study allows space for the collection and analysis of a variety of empirical data. What is significant is that this takes place in line with the philosophical assumptions of DT, which is therefore also referred to as an 'integrationist' approach (see further Van Leeuwen 2005, Phillips and Jørgensen 2002). Theories which may be based on different ontological assumptions should therefore be integrated or translated into the theoretical horizon and terminology of DT before they can be used in conjunction with DT.

I have opted for the method of *triangulation* (combining different methods of data collection and different sorts of data) in order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the social field. It has been of great importance to the interpretation of the data I acquired through the in-depth interviews, by contextualizing them in the data I gained from other sources in the field. In the position of an engaged researcher in the everyday life or 'natural setting' of my research object, I have experienced how people talk about themselves and the 'others', how ideas are judged or stimulated, and how people create 'similarities' and 'differences'. Consequently, this diversity of sources has complemented each other in drawing conclusions from new insights. Assumptions or what is 'unsaid' in one text may be 'said' in a different text. A combination of these texts allows a deeper understanding of the *social*. I have made use of the following methods of data-collection:

- In-depth interviews and informal conversations with Assyrian/Syriac elite members in different settings;
- Participant observations;
- Study of primary and secondary sources produced by the research object and by outsiders: published literature, governmental reports, newspapers and magazines, websites and TV and radio programmes.

Technology has become part of the discursive field. It is both a medium and a product of the *social*. My digital recorder has been very valuable for recording the interviews, with the permission of the interviewees of course. I also informed them that they could tell me to switch it off if they did not wish certain things to be recorded. This occurred a few times when the interviewee said something confidential or politically sensitive about the political situation in the Middle East. I also noticed that, when the recorder was on, some interviewees did not mention the term *agha*. Instead, they would say for example 'that oppressor' (*u dolumawo*) – assuming that I would know whom they meant. This was also the case with the reference to the Kurdish guerrilla movement PKK. Some referred to it as 'those who live outside' or 'those of the name with the three letters'. Therefore it seems to have been helpful that I could switch the recorder off if they thought this desirable.

In addition to the recorder, I used a camcorder for filming activities organized by the group. This material offered a way to look back and to capture visual aspects which would otherwise have been lost. This was also the case with the photo camera which I used. I noticed that while filming and taking pictures I began to see new things which I would have otherwise missed, as I was able to take a different focus. Certainly, it has also worked partly the other way round; the new focus has certainly resulted in situations where I missed other aspects of the *social*.

As mentioned in the introduction, I initially conducted the fieldwork for this study in three different countries (Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands), but with a greater focus on Sweden. In the end, I decided to base my chapters on the situation after the emigration principally on the data from Sweden. During my several periods of fieldwork, altogether I spent about six months in Sweden and two months in Germany. In both cases I stayed with members of the group under study. The main periods of the fieldwork were between 2004 and 2005. Since I lived in the Netherlands, I spent most of my weekends attending activities which the group I studied organized during the first year of the research (2003).

Interviews

The main data source for this study was in-depth semi-structured interviews. In these interviews my aim was to touch upon a broad range of aspects in relation to identity. Keeping the interviews semi-structured, I have tried to allow the interviewee space to elabourate on related elements which I would

otherwise have missed. As mentioned above, I have contextualized these data with informal conversations, participant observation, primary sources in any form (such as folders, magazines and information on websites, TV and radio) and secondary sources. As discussed in the introduction of this book, within the broader research object of Assyrians/Syriacs in the European diaspora, I have specifically focused on the discourses of elite members in Sweden. Although most of the fieldwork in Sweden was conducted in the province of Stockholm where the biggest concentration of Assyrians/Syriacs can be found, I also conducted fieldwork in Gothenburg, Jönköping and Örebro.

The people who have played a central and leading role in the debate about the collective identity of the Assyrians/Syriacs have been different elite groups. Therefore the focus of the interviews has been on their discourses. I have attempted to illustrate the contingency between the prevailing discourses which have come to dominate (to a certain extent) the discourses of the ordinary people. At the same time, as I shall discuss further in this study, inherent to these elite discourses is that they have been articulated within a certain sphere or at a certain level of society. Within the framework of this study, elite members are university graduates, clergy, activists (often people in key positions in secular and religious organizations) but they can also be members of the older generation who exert a certain influence among their people from a more traditional perspective.

Before I began with a longer period of fieldwork, I initially conducted three in-depth interviews with elite members in Sweden and at the same time orientated myself in the field. On the basis of these interviews, I worked on my interview questions, and decided not to use different semi-structured interview questions for the different elite groups (which I had initially planned). Comparison between individual discourses would otherwise have been more problematic. My first meeting with the interviewees was often in a (quiet) café and thereafter in their homes or in the associations they were active in. In the selection of my interviewees I aimed at a representative sample of the research object. A second aim was to select interviewees in order to include a 'maximum' of the diversity in discourses to illustrate the antagonistic field of study. Moreover, I also tried to capture the most dominant discursive discourses. The majority of my interviewees were male because positions in Assyrian/Syriac institutions are still strongly dominated by men. I have not attempted to 'manipulate' the social field in order to interview more women for the obvious reason that my starting point was the

antagonistic field of discourses as it is. Except for one interviewee, all others were born outside Sweden; the youngest was twenty-five and the oldest eighty-three[66]. In total I conducted 123 in-depth interviews, of which seventy-one in Sweden, thirty-six in Germany, eight in the Netherlands and eight in the Middle East. As mentioned before, I used the interviews with respondents outside Sweden only contextually. The duration of each interview was between three and twelve hours, with an average of about seven hours. For reasons of security and confidentiality, the names I have used are fictitious. Only in cases when I mention both the first and the second name does it concern the real name of the person.

I conducted the interviews predominantly in *Suryoyo* (the mother tongue of both the interviewees and me). In two cases I depended on English and Arabic. Later I translated these digitally recorded interviews into English. The analysis is based on the English version. I acknowledge that in the translation process information which is specific to a certain language may be lost to a certain extent. Especially so as *Suryoyo* uses different metaphors as it was developed in a context outside Europe. Therefore I have kept sayings, metaphors and certain phrases untranslated in order to analyse them at a different level and in order to keep their distinct meaning in the original language used.

I shall proceed with a discussion of how I tackled the process of analysis. During my fieldwork abroad, I spent all my time engaging in the field of study and completing my interviews. Although the translation process for producing the interview transcripts has been a very tiresome chore, I do value its importance for researchers because it is the first stage of the analysis, which actually already commences with conducting the interview. This meant that in the process of conducting the interviews and fieldwork I already started with the first rough analysis of the data. Based on this, I decided my next step in the fieldwork. For the further detailed analysis, I have made use of the qualitative data analysis programme *ATLAS.ti*. This has enabled me to categorize and analyze the enormous quantity of data which I gathered through interviews and the reports which I wrote on the basis of participant observations and informal conversations and reflections during the fieldwork. In the process of analysis, my first decision was to categorize data by more specific themes which I grouped into more abstract themes at a later stage. By taking this step, I have

[66] The oldest whom I interviewed in Germany was 106 at the time of the interview.

attempted to avoid running the risk of excluding data from analysis. This thematization has helped me in developing an initial overview of the answers of my interviewees and it has helped me in recognizing the differences and commonalities between the answers. This categorization has also been useful in noticing irregularities and contradictions in an interview; I have used such points as interesting cases to be looked into in more detail. Here again I have intended to include a diversity of discourses and the most dominant discourses.

The themes which I identified in the first stage were:

1. Middle East – What do people say about their position in the Middle East?
2. Emigration – Their stories in relation to emigration.
3. Name – Which name is perceived as the 'proper name' of the people and why?
4. History – What is the role of history in identity discourses and how it is used?
5. *'Amo* (people) or *umtho* (nation) – Which individuals and groups are included in these concepts and why?
6. *Athro* (homeland) – Which geographical area is perceived as the *athro* and why? What relation do people have with the *athro*?
7. *Seyfo* – What role does the *Seyfo* play in the identity discourses today?
8. Culture – How is 'culture' in a broad sense talked about and what importance is it given?
9. Language – What is perceived as their mother tongue, why and what role do they give to it?
10. Host society – What are the discourses from and about it?
11. Church – How is the church being talked about in a broad sense?
12. Secular organizations – What role have they gained and how are they being talked about?
13. Norms and values – How are traditionally central norms and values talked about in the present-day context?
14. Future – How is the future talked about in relation to both individual and Assyrian/Syriac position?

Furthermore, within these categories I have distinguished many more sub-categories in order to achieve an analysis at different levels.

Participant 'observations'

'Observations' have a connotation of distance. Researchers in the field may indeed take different roles or may differ from each other in the distance they take in relation to the object of study. I want to stress here that my role has been that of an engaged participant for two reasons. Firstly, as a researcher I believe strongly in the value of active participation in the field in order to come to an understanding of the *social* from the inside. My starting point is that the researcher already becomes an inherent part of the social field of study through her presence, quite independently of what she says and does. Secondly, as an insider to the field of study, if I were to take a more detached position, I would feel my position was rather uncomfortable. Moreover, this would perhaps also be perceived as something odd by the social field. In addition to this criticism, my position as an insider to the group has enabled me to participate intensely as an insider in approaching the *social* from its perspective in order to reach a better understanding of it. The fact that I have taken the time to reflect on my observations has even allowed me to dig deeper into the discursive field in all its complexity. I can therefore compare my position in the field of research with taking part in *bungee jumping*: well prepared with the necessary technology, mental and emotional luggage and dress codes, every time I take the leap, I pass through different levels of space and, depending on what I experience at that specific moment, each time I see other aspects of the world around me. It is merely my position as a researcher which pulls me back into the 'upper world' in order to reflect in more depth on what I have seen 'down there'. This whole process is always emotionally charged and fraught with anxieties which inevitably impinge on the future analysis.

Hence, in this role of active participant I have attended many activities which were relevant to my object of study: festivals, cultural and political meetings, soccer games, picnics, demonstrations, seminars, parties and religious ceremonies.[67] In a few cases I participated actively by presenting, for example, a paper at a seminar organized by the group under study or by being somehow involved in the organization of an activity. Most of the time participation in these events has been open. In one case I was not allowed to attend the annual general meeting of a secular organization because the board believed it should be open only to its members. I acquiesced even

[67] In total I have written forty-nine field reports of my observations: twenty-one related to activities in Sweden, eighteen in the Netherlands and ten in Germany.

though I did believe that they were in the position to make an exception. I accepted their standpoint as part of the antagonistic field of which I had become part. In such cases, when I did not manage to attend activities, I made sure that I read about them or that I informed myself by phone or in writing through people who had attended them. And, as also common in grounded theory with which the analysis does not commence after data collection but in which data collection and analysis continue while writing (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I have kept myself updated through following the latest developments in the social field with the available media and technology: websites, the Assyrian/Syriac radio programme *Radio Qolo* on the Swedish radio channel, the TV channels *Suroyo TV* and *Suryoyo Sat* and the TV programme *Qolo Hiro*. The fact that all these sources have been available through the Internet has been helpful.

Primary and secondary sources[68]

Primary sources produced by the group I study range from articles to folders, websites, paintings, national symbols, architecture, radio and TV programmes to even tattoos and so forth. My point of departure for the analysis concurs with the standpoint of DT which states that discourse includes both the discursive and the non-discursive fields. During my presence in the field, I have therefore been aware of the great diversity of sources and I have aimed to capture as much of this as possible, recorded on film, photo or in writing in the form of field notes. I have made use of secondary sources for the contextualization of my analysed data. And in some cases, because I did not have the chance to have access to the primary sources.

2.6 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, it is not superfluous to summarize a few points. In the discourse theoretical approach, theory and methodology are closely intertwined. The problem formulation, analysis and the methods employed in gathering empirical data are mutually inspiring. This is related to the ontological and epistemological assumptions of DT.

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[68] See further the outline in the introduction of this study for the way I have used these sources.

DT does not take identities as pre-given and natural objects but it focuses on the flexible formation of identities and their institutionalization through hegemonic projects. DT's *relational*, *contextual* and *processual* understanding of collective identities overcomes the weaknesses of the mainstream theories of identity. This theory analyzes the *social* as a field of antagonisms and all social formation as a matter of antagonistic social struggles; it gives essential importance to the role of power relations and hegemony in the formation of discursive identities. The concepts of DT are interlinked and should be used in relation to each other as I have attempted to do so in the following empirical chapters.

3 THE POSITION OF ASSYRIANS/SYRIACS IN THE 'HOMELAND'

In the next chapter I shall give an account of the emigration of Assyrians/Syriacs to Western countries over the last forty years. To put their emigration into context, it is imperative to pay attention to their position in the countries of origin. In this chapter I shall discuss the position of the Assyrians/Syriacs in the 'homeland'[69] – here limited to Turkey for two main reasons: the majority of my respondents emigrated from Turkey and the geography they were traditionally living in since time immemorial (*Tur 'Abdin*) almost emptied of this group due to the recent modern[70] emigration. Today, only 2500 Assyrians/Syriacs still continue to live in *Tur 'Abdin* and Mardin, south-eastern Turkey.[71] The group's position in Iraq and Syria shall be discussed briefly in relation to their emigration from these two countries in the Chapters 4 and 6.

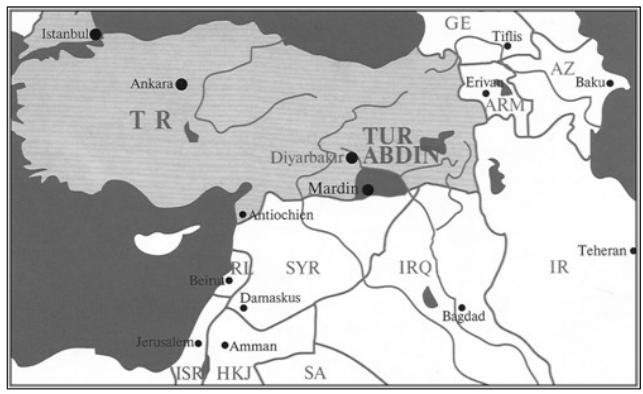

Illustration 2: *Tur 'Abdin*. Source: Hollerweger (1999).

[69] In a future publication I shall discuss the different notions of the homeland, which exist alongside each other among Assyrians/Syriacs.

[70] Other geographies in Turkey emptied of Assyrians/Syriacs earlier in the twentieth century or before the twentieth century. There is no in-depth study of this demographic aspect yet available.

[71] See for a recent study about the situation in which Assyrians/Syriacs find themselves in South-East Turkey, Oberkampf (2011).

Before commencing, it must be remembered that the *Seyfo* during the First World War had already had the horrendous effect of decimating the number of Assyrians/Syriacs[72] by two-thirds.[73] *Seyfo* is the Syriac word for 'sword' and a metaphor which encapsulates their killing by 'Muslims'[74] in the collective memory of Assyrian/Syriac. In the context of the First World War, the term *Seyfo* refers above all to the orchestrated killings of the Assyrians/Syriacs by the Young Turks regime in the Ottoman Empire in the period 1914–1918.[75] Assyrians/Syriacs perceive the *Seyfo* to be the latest overwhelmingly major incident of persecution in their history. Exemplifying the metaphorical strength of the term *seyfo* – today, the mass emigration from the homeland is compared to the effect that this event had on the existence of the Assyrians/Syriacs in the homeland.

In the new political constellation which evolved in the Turkish Republic after the First World War, the Assyrians/Syriacs once again found themselves staring at a long period of ordeals. In October 1918, the First World War ended in the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. The Turks started to rule the geographical area which is known today as Turkey, while the British and the French mandated (among other states) respectively what are now Iraq and Syria. The majority of Assyrians/Syriacs who survived the *Seyfo* continued to live in these newly founded nation states.

A thorough analysis of the position of Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey is necessary in order to illustrate the relation between their formal position and historical processes leading to their marginalization in society. I argue that the mass emigration from Turkey is related both to their position in Turkish society and to their positive future expectations in Western countries or their *myth* about these countries. Ideas of dis-identification and identification – in relation to the place of departure and arrival – are also at stake here. The

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[72] Here, Assyrians/Syriacs is used across denominational boundaries and refers to the members of the different Syriac churches who lived in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War.

[73] See for a more detailed analysis of the number of *Seyfo* victims in Gaunt (2006: 300-303) and on the number of the Assyrian/Syriac population (Ibid. 405-432).

[74] Commonly, when they use the category 'Muslims,' they generalize their ideas about it distilled from their own experiences or the collective memories that passed down to them about the Muslim Turks, Kurds and Arabs among whom they have lived. When I use the category 'Muslims' in this chapter, it is from their perspective.

[75] Other people who have been victims of genocides also use specific terms when referring to them. Examples are the terms *ha-Shoa* for the Jewish holocaust, *Aghed* for the Armenian genocide and *Porrajmos* for the Roma genocide.

function of religion in the Middle East has created the 'others' along religious boundaries. In other words, the ethnic relations between different groups have been based on religious boundaries. Although during some periods the role of Islam was downplayed by the top-down state centric modernization discourses, such as the Kemalist regime in Turkey and the Baath Regimes in Syria and Iraq, religion has remained to be the focal point for determining the relations in daily life. At the same time, this mechanism functioned as a discursive foundation for their basic orientation towards identification with Western countries. Nevertheless, this discursive explanation does not suffice in the study of their migration, as I shall elabourate on in the next chapter. This chapter functions as background in several respects to the chapters to follow in this thesis; it contextualizes:

- their narratives about their emigration and their ideas that their settlement in Europe is legitimate;
- the process of the changes in their identification; both – processes of dis-identification and identification. This functions as a filter or a foundation for their future orientation.

3.1 The Position of Assyrians/Syriacs in the Turkish Republic

In this section, I shall discuss the formation of the minority policy and the subsequent position of Assyrians/Syriacs in the Turkish Republic.[76] During the Ottoman Empire (after the occupation of Constantinople in 1453), minorities were defined within the framework of what has been referred to as the *millet* system, under which non-Muslims were considered subjects of the Empire and accorded *dhimmi* status, but were not subject to the Sharia law. Their contractual relationship with the State conferred certain obligations on them such as paying specific taxes in return for the right of residence. *Millet*[77] is inherently a religious concept. According to this concept, all Muslims in the Ottoman Empire were defined as the *Millet-i Hakime* (the Dominant *Millet*) and all non-Muslims were defined as *Millet-i*

[76] See for an article discussing the history of the different Catholic churches in Turkey after the Second World War, Teule (2010: 35-52).

[77] In Turkish 'nation', group of co-religionists from Arabic *milla(t)*.

Mahkûme (the Dominated *Millets*) (Oran 2007a, Soykan 2000: 227).[78] Considered second-class subjects, the latter group was organized into religious communities (*millets*). Until 1882 the Syriac Orthodox Church was represented at the Sublime Porte of the Ottoman Empire by the Armenian Patriarch. In 1882 it became an independent *millet* – the *Süryani Kadim Millet* (Ancient *Suryoye Millet*). Under the Turkish Republic the religiously based definition of 'minority' and 'majority' identities has continued to be usedas the main classification; members of minority groups are defined as 'non-Muslim citizens of Turkey' and hence as the 'internal others'.[79]

The period between 1918 (the end of the First World War) and 1923 (official proclamation of the Turkish Republic, October 29)[80] was the transitional phase in which a whole series of negotiations was carried out between the Entente, Turkey and the different minority groups living in Turkey. Struggling to obtain a political foothold in the aftermath of the First World War, Assyrian/Syriac leaders negotiated their position and rights. At the Paris Peace Conference (1919), representatives of different groups were given the chance to submit their requests to the representatives of the Great Powers involved in the war. Among them were representatives of Assyrians/Syriacs (cross-denominational) who presented several petitions with their requests.[81] The Syriac Orthodox Patriarch, Ignatios Elias III Shakir (1867-1932), deputized a delegation led by Archbishop Ephrem Barsaum[82] to attend the Paris Peace Conference. In his petition (see Appendix 4), the Archbishop presented six requests on behalf of his people whom he introduced as '…our Syrian[83] nation, descendents of the ancient Assyrian

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[78] In modern Turkish, *Mahkûm* means the 'imprisoned, prisoner, inmate, convict'.

[79] For instance, one example of this can be found in the Turkish legislation for 'protection against sabotages' (Article 5/j) which was passed in 1988 and abrogated in 1991. In this Article, non-Muslims are defined as 'domestic foreigners' (*yerli yabancılar*) and consequently as a 'potential threat'.

[80] This period can be extended to 1926 when the Mosul Question between Turkey and Great Britain was resolved.

[81] See further De Courtois (2004: 201-223) for a discussion specifically of the Syriac Catholic and Syriac Orthodox delegations and their demands. See Yacoub (1993) for the Assyro-Chaldean delegations specifically. See Aprim (2006) for a discussion of the above-mentioned delegations.

[82] The successor of Patriarch Elias III.

[83] Here, 'Syrian' is used as the translation of *Suryoye;* it does not refer to the modern Syrian nation of Syria. In the same petition, he uses the compound designation 'Assyro-Chaldean' to refer to the people whom he represents. The latter designation was also used in the petition of

race.' Among his arguments, he put a case for their autonomy[84] in Turkey, asked recognition of the losses suffered by Assyrians/Syriacs in a broad sense and requested compensation. Under the prevailing circumstances, it is feasible to link the request for autonomy to a feeling of no longer being safe under Muslim rule.[85] The dislocation which occured in the context of the First World War, more specifically by the appalling aftermath of the genocide, caused a *split subject* among Assyrians/Syriacs. Their search for autonomy can be interpreted as a way to heal this *split subject* and as a glimmer of hope for his people to be able to pick up the thread of their lives again.

The requests of the Syriac Orthodox church leadership were made only a few years after two-thirds of their population in the Ottoman Empire had been massacred but none was met. Reflecting on the process of the negotiations years later, Archbishop Ephrem Barsaum (1996)[86] expressed his disappointment in the way Western Powers had dealt with his requests:[87]

> There [the Paris Peace Conference, my addition] I revealed all the catastrophes which had befallen my people. I explained all the suppression and the grisliness in detail. Even though I particularly emphasized how our casualties were both bloodthirstily massacred and perished from hunger and cold during the war, when I saw that not one of the

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the Assyro-Chaldean delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, which encompassed all the different Syriac churches (see further De Courtois 2004: 217-223).

[84] The requested autonomous area is shown on the map *Carte Ethnographique et Politique de la Nation Assyro-Chadéenne* (see Appendix 5). The geography stretched from Urmia (in the east), Tikrit (in the south), Bitlis (in the north) to Adıyaman (in the west). See for further attempts to negotiate the rights of Assyrians/Syriacs with Western countries, the letter (February 16, 1921) from the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch, Ignatios Elias III, addressed to the British Foreign Minister, Marquis Curzon of Kedleston (Appendix 6).

[85] At the time of writing (2009), for the same reason as that which prevailed in the aftermath of the First World War several groups among Assyrians/Syriacs are lobbying for an autonomous area in Iraq. They consider that the Iraqi authorities cannot provide them with the essential protection which will safeguard them against attacks occasioned by their adherence to Christianity and for having a different identification to the majority groups. They have become the victims of the competition for political hegemony between the dominant groups followed by a subsequent policy of assimilation, which can be observed both in the Arab-dominated area of Iraq and in the Kurdish autonomous area in the north of Iraq. See for further reading the latest report by Human Rights Watch about Iraq (2009).

[86] In this publication, the name of the author is spelled 'Mar Iğnatiyos I. Afrem Bet-Barşawmo'.

[87] My translation from the Turkish translation of the original in Syriac.

> Conference participants shed a tear and felt no compassion for us, I felt as if I had delivered my speech to statues carved from stone.

At this point, it is important to touch, albeit briefly, on how the Syriac Orthodox Church leadership, more specifically Patriarch Elias III, changed their standpoint in the negotiations in the period between the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and the Treaty of Lausanne (24 July 1923), in the hope that this diversion might provide some answers to the question of why the Syriac Orthodox community has not been recognized as a non-Muslim minority group in the Turkish Republic. As mentioned above, at the Paris Peace Conference Archbishop Ephrem Barsaum presented a list of requests on behalf of Patriarch Elias III, among which autonomy for his people was very important. Three years later, in the period of the Lausanne Peace Conference (1922-1923) when Turkish minority policy was being shaped, the Patriarch no longer talked about these earlier requests and adopted a more explicitly pro-Turkish stand.

Patriarch Elias III assumed the throne in 1917. In 1908,[88] he had been consecrated Archbishop in Diyarbakır,[89] taking the name Mor Iwanasius, and he continued to serve there until his appointment as Archbishop in Mosul (1912-1917) (Zakaria Shakir[90] 1972).[91] As the Patriarch responsible for his community, he found himself in a difficult political situation, in which a whole series of negotiations about the future of Turkey, its geographical borders and the status of minorities was taking place between different powers. Although the base of the Patriarchal See was in the Zafaran[92] Monastery in Mardin, the Patriarch had lived in Istanbul for more than three

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[88] Syriac Orthodox Resources: http://sor.cua.edu/Personage/PElias3/

[89] In Diyarbakır, Naum Faik was the Diocesan Secretary and he taught Patriarch Elias Turkish language classes when he served there as Archbishop. Zakaria Shakir (1972) says that the Archbishop and Naum Faik had talks about religious and secular matters, about national identity and identification. According to him, Archbishop Elias thought that clergymen ought to deal with religious matters and that laymen should confine themselves to secular issues, which concurred with the ideas of Patriarch 'Abded-Aloho II Sattuf (1833-1915), who had visited Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1913 to submit a request for the establishment of local lay councils in accordance with the law which had been passed to allow all Christians in the Ottoman Empire this right.

[90] Zakaria Shakir is the nephew of Patriarch Elias (son of his brother Yausef).

[91] The interview which Abrohom Nuro conducted with Zakaria Shakir in Arabic in Lebanon in 1972 was translated for me into English by Salim Abraham.

[92] Earlier Syriac names of this monastery were *Dayro d-Kurkmo* and *Dayro d-Mor Hananyo*.

years,[93] presumably feeling he could use his influence in the political arena more effectively there. He was in contact with both Western diplomats (especially with the British and French) and with Turkish political elites (Zakaria Shakir 1972).

On September 26 1919, Patriarch Elias III had an audience with the Ottoman Sultan, Muhammad Rashid, in Istanbul in order to receive an official *firman* (decree) confirming his appointment as Patriarch.[94] This audience with the Sultan draws attention to the fact that just one year after the First World War ended, the Patriarch submitted a long list of requests to the Sultan and that these were discussed by the Cabinet (*Meclis-i Vükelâ*) on 22 November 1919 (Oral 2007, Hür 2007).[95] Among these requests were that those people who had been deported during the *Seyfo* should be allowed back to their homes and have their property restituted and that kidnapped children and women and all those who had been forcibly converted to Islam should be allowed to return to their own religion.

Although the Patriarch also made these and other requests at the Paris Peace Conference (as mentioned above), throughout his career he had punctiliously demonstrated his loyalty[96] to the Ottoman authorities and later to the Turkish authorities.[97] Several sources[98] indicate that after the war, the Patriarch told his community members to obey Turkish policy and rule and

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[93] Zakaria Shakir (1972) mentions that he remained in Istanbul for three and a half years. The Patriarch mentioned 3 years in the interview *Süryani Kadim Patrikine göre Anadolu*. In Ikdam 9076, 23 June 1922, p. 1.

[94] During this audience, Sultan Muhammad Rashid conferred the Ismania Medal on Patriarch Elias III. See further McCallum (2010) for a study about the Christian Leadership in the Middle East.

[95] See for the official decision about the Patriarch's requests, Başbakanlik Osmanlı Arşivi Meclis-i Vükelâ Mazbataları (217), No. 553, 22 November 1919.

[96] This reveals that even during the dreadful year (1915) of the *Seyfo*, Archbishop Elias had been contacted by the Ottoman authorities who had requested him to use his influence to stop the 'revolts' by his community members in *Midyad*, Cizre and Diyarbakır (Kurtcephe 1993). In this context, 'revolts' should be understood as attempts to defend themselves against those who attacked them. It is not known how the Archbishop reacted to this request.

[97] Outsiders have criticized him for this strong loyalty to the Turkish state. For example, Israel Audo (2004) refers to his attitude in terms of 'voluntary slavery' (see further Kurt 2010a, 2010b). See for this sort of criticism also Holmes (1923) who was the principal of the American Orphanage for Armenian children in Urfa at the time of the Patriarch's visit to Urfa in 1919.

[98] See for the directive of the Patriarch to the Adana congregation: *Süryani Kadim Patriki'nin Bir Tebliği*. In Ikdam, 8921, 15 January 1922, p. 3. See for the Patriarch's decree to the Urhoy congregation in Akyüz (2005: 445) Zakaria Shakir (1972).

to refrain from any co-operation with the Armenians. During his visit to Urfa in 1919, he was criticized by some community members on account of his plan to visit the Turkish governor first and only after that the British governor. According to Abrohom Nuro (who is originally from Urfa) and confirmed by Zakaria Shakir (1972), the Patriarch reacted to this criticism with the comment: 'My Son, let me do my job. I know what I am doing. The English are guests, whereas the Turks are here to stay.' Especially after he had realized that the Western countries were not going to display much interest in Assyrians/Syriacs did he lean more towards the Turkish side and subsequently expressed his loyalty more explicitly to the members of the Turkish elite whom he met (among them Rauf Bey, İsmet İnönü and Fevzi Çakmak), as his secretary Zakaria Shakir (1972) confirms:

> …So when the Patriarch visits Turkish statesmen for the first time …he speaks about and explicates his Turkish policy… "We, the Syriac denomination, are loyal to the administration to which we are subject."…"We don't have any links with Western nations."…He [the Patriarch] repeats this formula [to everyone he visits]. Rauf Bey [Prime Minister] thought it an overstatement.

The Patriarch's careful political approach was firmly rooted in a survival strategy and should be understood in the context of his own time. An excerpt from the interview of Abrohom Nuro with the Patriarch's secretary, Zakaria Shakir (1972), clearly reveals that the Patriarch's intention was to deal with issues within the accepted political boundaries of the Ottoman and Turkish rulers. At the same time, as their supreme leader responsible for his people, he negotiated political matters with Assyrian/Syriac lay elites:

Nuro:	At the time, Naum Faik expressed his preparedness to serve the cause of the Assyrian Movement. Did Patriarch Elias not implicitly object to the idea? What is your honest opinion about this?
Shakir:	During his time in Diyarbakır, Naum Faik performed a national service by forming a nationalist association.
Nuro:	The 'Irutho [Renaissance] Association, perhaps!
Shakir:	The Association of Awareness.
Nuro:	[Correcting him] Renaissance.
Shakir:	Patriarch Elias did not oppose them [Naum Faik and his friends]. Indeed, he supported them. But he warned them: "Keep out of movements which trespass on Ottoman sensitivities, matters such as composing music... Movements like those which imitate the

> Armenians, who demand independence." …He told them, "My Sons, we have not yet reached… the point in politics the Armenians have. Be careful." …"Be careful of movements which impinge on the sensitivities of the Turkish State." …"I see the Turkish State through the officials with whom I am in contact. They regard the Armenians with extremely caution and through a finely focused microscope." …"So, do not bring this tight scrutiny to bear on us," …"Let us [proceed] step by step..." …"You delight me when you raise awareness of the denomination and when you make progress," …"and are aware that you are a *millet* [people]," …"and to know that you have an entity and that you have a nation" ..."and you have an ancient history which you have to reinvigorate. Do your best, but the movements with which the State works are still those of the old tradition; the denominations haven't yet turned to music, therefore if you were to use music [this is as if you are imitating the Armenians] because the Armenian political party the Tashnaq[99] [Party], has been the first [to use music]." …When the Armenians came, they composed music… This was before the war, 1910 and 1912. …He [the Patriarch] was pleased with them [Naum Faik and his friends]. And...
>
> Nuro: Yet he used to give them fatherly advice. Yea, as a father; that is, a father who knows his duties and commitments.
>
> Shakir: [Interrupting to begin a new subject] Yea! There was both friction and a dialogue between him and Naum Faik.

In this context, it is also important to mention that as a young monk Patriarch Elias had already been witness to the massacres of the Christians in the period 1894-1896, during the rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Hence, he had already experienced the terrors a ruler could unleash on his subjects. Against this background, it is perhaps easier to understand the Patriarch's attempts to negotiate between different powers and to meet – what he experienced as – the most urgent need of his community, namely, to save their lives. In the interview with Abrohom Nuro, Zakaria Shakir (1972) mentions that the Patriarch used to say:

> "We have to safeguard [the lives of] the living because the dead are not going to come back [to life]."…"We want to ensure that the swords are at rest." This was the term he used.

[99] Founded in Tbilisi (Georgia) in 1890.

Consonant with his careful and obedient attitude, Patriarch Elias III maintained good relations with Turkish political elites. His secretary Zakaria Shakir (1972) says that he had three meetings[100] in Ankara with Mustafa Kemal. On 9 February 1923 – prior to his meeting with Mustafa Kemal – Patriarch Elias III was interviewed by Celal Nuri, the owner of the newspaper *İleri* and an MP who was very close to Mustafa Kemal. In this interview, the Patriarch made a statement about his stand on the future position of Assyrians/Syriacs in the Turkish Republic: [101]

> So far, the issue of minority rights has entered neither the minds nor the dreams of the community I represent. We shall protest this very vigorously. I, on behalf of my community, did not make any such demand, nor do I make it now, nor shall I in the future. *Süryaniler* are the minority of the people who live within the boundaries of the *Misak-i Milli* [National Oath]. They merely wish to live together with the majority [Turks] in good times and in bad and to enjoy the benefits of this...

It is remarkable that the Patriarch had already said so much in the interview before he met Kemal. His expression of loyalty says something about the insecurity and fear which he felt; his cupboard was bare, he had absolutely nothing with which to negotiate the future of his people with Mustafa Kemal. The first time the Patriarch met Mustafa Kemal (20 February 1923) was at Ankara railway station where Kemal was being received by different people.[102] A second meeting took place on 3 March 1923 (Oral 2007: 288) when, according to Zakaria Shakir (1972), Ismet Inönü (Minister of Foreign Affairs) also attended to the meeting. During this meeting the Patriarch informed Mustafa Kemal (Zakaria Shakir 1972): 'I have people in Mardin, Diyarbakır and the other regions of Turkey.' Subsequently, Mustafa Kemal

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[100] An article detailing the Patriarch's gratitude for the reception he had received appeared in the newspaper: *Süryani Patriki'nin Şükranı*. In Ikdam, 9332, 9 March 1923: 1.

[101] Ileri, 9 February 1923. In some sources, the name of the newspaper is said to be *Yenigün*. This interview was re-published in a press release sent by the President of the Syriac Orthodox Church Board in Istanbul, Ferit Özcan, to the Turkish daily newspaper *Milliyet* (19 November 1977) in reaction to a previously published secret US document about Turkey during the Independence War period. See for similar statements of Patriarch Elias III in Turkish newspapers: *Süryani-yi Kadim ve Türkiye Patriki Ilyas Efendi Ankara'da*. In Ikdam 9299, 4 February 1923: 2; See *Süryani Patriki'nin Beyanatı*. In Akşam, 1572, 6 February 1923: 1. See also *Süryani Kadim Patriki tarafından Süryani cemaatinin sadakatini teyiden arz ve iblağ ediliyor*. In Ikdam, 9422, 10 June 1923: 2.

[102] A picture of this event still hangs in one of the public rooms in which guests of the Zafaran Monastery (Mardin) are received.

replied: 'I congratulate you on this policy of yours'. …'I put at your disposal …excellent means of transportation from Beirut… from here to Beirut and from Beirut to Aleppo.' Zakaria Shakir says that a final meeting between the Patriarch (whom he had accompanied) and Mustafa Kemal was held in order to say farewell and 'to be punctiliously and painstakingly provided with due orders to take to Mardin, ...as the professional and respected leader of a *millet* in Turkey.'[103] Zakaria Shakir also mentions that in the same meeting the Patriarch was told by a representative of Mardin '...you have gained the trust of young and old in Ankara.' The yearbook of Mardin (Mardin İl Yıllığı 1967: 87 in Dolapönü [Dolabani] 1972: 102) mentions the approving words Mustafa Kemal had to say about Patriarch Elias:

> During the Independence War, as a true son of this country, the *Süryani* Patriarch Ilyas III, has shown that he is one of its heroes by having taken a combatant stand against the aggressors.

With the exception of not requesting to be recognized as a non-Muslim community, what the Patriarch did or promised to be rewarded with so much trust by the Turkish political elites in Ankara and to be referred to as one of the heroes of the Independence War is no longer known. To what extent the attitude and policy of the Syriac Orthodox Church leadership effected the non-recognition of Assyrians/Syriacs in the Treaty of Lausanne is discussible. Even before the Patriarch gave an interview to *Ileri* and had met Mustafa Kemal, the minority question had been abandoned by the Western powers. An analysis of the documents of the Lausanne Conference clearly indicates that Western powers did not expend much time and effort on the 'Assyro-Chaldean Question' and certainly did not prioritize the topic.[104] Therefore, to construct any formulation of the outcomes of the Treaty of Lausanne as these touched upon minorities, it is important to stress both the hats-off role of the Western powers in relation to Turkey and the rigid policy of the Turkish Republic in the wake of the success of the

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[103] There is no record of what orders Mustafa Kemal had given to the Patriarch.

[104] To exemplify this, prior to the Minorities Sub-commission meeting on 9 January 1923, the Western delegates came to an agreement with the Turkish delegation (led by İsmet İnönü) which specified that the minority requests would not be acceded. In order to convince outsiders that the Western delegates had indeed expended some energy in this matter, they agreed that they would deliver short speeches on the subject of homes for the Armenians, Assyrians and Chaldeans, and that the matter would be closed if Ismet Pasha peremptorily rejected these demands (Lozan Telgrafları, V. I, pp. 360-361).

Turkish Independence War. In view of the strong position the Turkish State could assume at the Lausanne Peace Conference, it requires no great stretch of the imagination to see how the Turkish delegation managed to prevent the participation of the delegations from minority groups.[105] In the discussion of the position it took in the 'Assyro-Chaldean Question', the Turkish delegation was very assured. When this matter was tabled by Western diplomats, the head of the Turkish delegation, İsmet İnönü, stated that Chaldeans, particularly the Assyrians in Diyarbakır, had no truck with external provocations and lived peaceably side by side with Turkish citizens (Meray 1993: 347). And thus, under these circumstances, they had no need to be recognized as a minority. During the meeting of the Minority Sub-commission on 6 January 1923, Rıza Nur Bey (member of the Turkish delegation) reacted vehemently to the submissions[106] which Western diplomats made on behalf of 'Assyro-Chaldeans' and walked out of the meeting (Meray 1993: 183-347).

The eventual upshot of the post-First World War negotiations was that, as a group of people, the Assyrians/Syriacs were no longer protected by any treaty. In contrast to the position they had enjoyed in the preceding era before the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the Assyrians/Syriacs had now lost their formal status as a self-contained community (*millet*). Evidence of the weakened position of the Assyrians/Syriacs in the Turkish Republic is also to be found in modern, twentieth-century literature about Turkey. They are hardly mentioned and, if so, only marginally.[107]

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[105] Agha Petros (as representative of the Assyrian delegation) participated in the opening ceremony of the Lausanne Peace Conference in November 1922 (Nirari 1989: 191).

[106] These requests were discussed in conjunction with the quest for an 'Armenian homeland' undertaken by the same Western delegations.

[107] One example is Zürcher (2003), who mentions the Assyrians/Syriacs only in the context that after the First World War they were among the half-dozen linguistically smaller groups. He refers to them as 'Syriac-speaking Christians' (Ibid. 172). When he mentions the 'delegates representing the different ethnic groups in the Near East: Greeks, Armenians, Turks, Kurds, Arabs and Jews, all pressing their conflicting claims' (Ibid. 151), he fails to mention that the Assyrians/Syriacs were also represented at the Peace Conference in Paris. Moreover, when he mentions the figures of the victims of the First World War, he says nothing about the Assyrian/Syriac victims, but only the 'Anatolian Muslims, the Armenians and the Greeks' (Ibid. 171). Lewis (1994: 19) also fails to mention that their Aramaic dialect survived linguistic assimilation into Turkish. He restricts himself to the Greek- and Armenian-speaking Christians and Spanish (Ladino)-speaking Jews. These are only a few examples in the modern literature which provide indirect evidence that the position of the Assyrians/Syriacs has become negligible in the Middle East. It is only possible to learn more about them if something is written about them specifically as a group.

The 'official' Turkish minority policy was outlined in the Lausanne Treaty (24 July 1923), where it was agreed that non-Muslims would be allowed to enjoy certain rights. Later, in 1932, Turkey inserted a clause which narrowed the definition of non-Muslim minorities to the Armenians, Greeks and the Jews only.[108] The new clause made it officially possible for only the recognized non-Muslim minorities to establish their own schools, social organizations and magazines, which meant that the Assyrians/Syriacs were denied any access to these rights (Oran 2007b: 38-9).[109] It is important to mention that even the recognized minorities did not fully enjoy the rights agreed on in the Treaty of Lausanne. Their 'minority' label gave them a status which was both feared and undesired as its automatic consequence was that its members were treated as second-class citizens by the rest of society, non-Muslims found themselves the victims of legal and social discrimination (Oran 2004: 48-49). Also Kurban and Hatemi (2009: 7) are critical of the extent to which minorities have been able to live by these rights:

> Upon the enactment of the Civil Code in 1926, the rights arising from the Treaty of Lausanne were pruned off with various exceptions, restrictions and conditions imposed through a series of laws, acts and practices. Finally, it became almost impossible in practice to benefit from most of these rights… In the 1930s, it became evident that pushing or directly forcing the few non-Muslims left in Turkey to abandon the country was an explicit state policy. The aim of the several discriminatory laws and practices, including the 1934 Western Thrace Incidents to the 1942 Wealth Tax, the 6-7 September 1955 Incidents and the 1964 extradition of Greeks with Greek passports, was to clear the country of non-Muslims.

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[108] See for further reading about this limitation also Cengiz (2003).

[109] An example which shows how difficult it had become for the Syriac Orthodox Church to educate its members in the liturgy and the Syriac language which will give access to it dates from 19 October 1949. Archbishop Dolabani applied to the Turkish authorities (via the Governor of Mardin) to obtain permission to start a Bible course in the Zafaran Monastery. The correspondence between the Archbishop and the Turkish authorities illustrates the almost insurmountable difficulties which Dolabani encountered when he made this application and how he eventually had had to give up because he failed to make any progress. This correspondence underlines the fact that the Turkish Ministry of Education set the condition that a compulsory Turkish language class, a history class and a geography class be included in the curriculum of the Syriac Bible course. See further for this correspondence, Akyüz (2005: 450-453).

As the authors indicate, the main logic of the Turkish minority policy was based on the exclusion and direct or indirect expulsion of non-Muslim populations from Turkey. The Turkish Republic was founded in 1923 on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, at which point it shifted from being a multi-ethnic empire to being a nation-state in which the 'Muslim Turkish' identity began to function as its core. The Turkish nation-building project was founded on assimilationist politics devised eventually to form a homogeneous population from a heterogeneous demography. As in the pre-Republic period, the mentality, as Baskin Oran (2007c) points out, has remained unchanged[110]: non-Muslims have continued to be seen as 'second-class' citizens and, adding insult to injury, have been charged in a negative discourse with being the 'tools of foreigners'.

To return to the Assyrians/Syriacs, as they feared stigmatization and had lost hope of being able to effect any real change in their status, the representatives of the Assyrians/Syriacs never lodged any appeal against their status in the decades which followed the *Seyfo*. Therefore they were left with little hope of being granted any formal status at a later date.[111] Their strategy has necessarily been to develop tactics to accommodate to their new position in Turkish society, hence it was characterized by obedience to a succession of Turkish governments. Characteristic for the discourses of loyalty of clergymen to the governments under which they live has been the depoliticization of their community. The present Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, Zakka I Iwas, expressed such a discourse of obedience when he spoke to his community members in the Zafaran Monastery (Mardin) in 2004:[112] 'In order to be a true believer in God, in the first place a believer should be a good citizen. If a believer is not loyal to his country then it is not possible to be a true believer in God' (Quoted from Akyüz 2005:

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110 See further for the ideological and organic continuity of the Turkish political elite in the era 1908-1950, Zürcher (1984). See also Zürcher (2010) for further elaboration on his earlier study.

111 On 30 March 1995, representatives of the Mor Gabriel Monastery in *Tur 'Abdin* and the Syriac Orthodox Bishopric in Istanbul requested the then incumbent Turkish President S. Demirel and Prime Minister T. Ciller to recognize Assyrians/Syriacs as a non-Muslim minority and to grant them the rights inherent in this status. A respondent who was involved in writing this application informed me that they never received an answer to this request. Assyrian/Syriac activists in the diaspora have also run up against this wall of silence from Turkey in response to their requests, an indication that their requests have not been taken seriously.

112 Patriarch Zakka I Iwas was officially invited by the governor of Mardin to attend the meeting 'Kültürler Arası Diyalog Platformu' which was held in Mardin (13 May 2004).

457). The Patriarch's correlation between a 'believer' and a 'loyal citizen' provides a cogent illustration of how the clergy in particular have made use of loyalty discourses based on religious arguments to encourage the members of their community to become loyal and obedient citizens, a role which will ensure that they will be tolerated in the countries in the Middle East in which they live. This religious discourse shows no deviation from the tradition of Assyrian/Syriac clergymen which has been to convince the faithful to accept any hardship and persecution which happens to have to be endured in society. This strong discourse of 'loyalty' explains the fear they have experienced and should be seen in the light of a survival strategy.[113]

3.1.1 The Removal of the Patriarchate from Turkey

Despite the Patriarch's policy of loyalty and obedience as an instrument for safeguarding the life of his community in Turkey, his purpose has failed. Most of the Assyrians/Syriacs have been forced to settle outside Turkey and the Patriarchate has also moved outside the borders of Turkey. The fact that the Syriac Orthodox community was not recognized as a non-Muslim community in the Treaty of Lausanne was the crucial step in clearing the path for the removal of the Patriarchate. If this is to be contextualized in more detail, the post-Lausanne developments have to be examined. Relations of the community with the Turkish State worsened after what was known as the 'Nestorian revolt' in the Hakkari Mountains in 1924 and again one year later after it emerged that some members of the Assyrian/Syriac community had supported the Sheikh Said Revolt[114] in 1925. The Kemalist regime made use of these revolts to eliminate all oppositional power, even to weed out potential threats to the regime in good time. To support the effectuation of this policy, Independence Tribunals (*İstiklal Mahkemeleri*) were used.[115] After the failure of the Sheikh Said Revolt, the State launched a comprehensive elimination and disarmament programme in 1926[116] whose purpose was to achieve stability within the *Misak-i Milli* borders. Many people were arrested and brought for trial before these Independence

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[113] To give an example, many books written by Syriac Orthodox clergymen in Turkey have a frontispiece showing a picture of Mustafa Kemal.

[114] See for an early source, Sykes (1924: 473-74).

[115] See further about the Independence Tribunals, Zürcher (2003: 179-180).

[116] In June 15 1926 there was a suicide assassination attempt against Mustafa Kemal in Izmir.

Tribunals. A letter in the Secret Archive of the Vatican[117] supplies the information that 150 Assyrians/Syriacs (both Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholics) were deported from *Midyad*, *'Iwardo*, *Anhel*, *Mzizah* and *Midin*. Another hundred persons were deported from *Hazakh*. The lawyer Malak Barsaumo (a member of the family Hanne Safar in *Midyad*) was hanged in Elazığ in 1926 (Beth Sawoce 2009: 259-270).

Oral (2007: 294-5) explains the removal of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate in the context of the Kemalist secularization policy which was adopted in 1923 and is indeed a central element in developing an understanding of the conditions in that period. For instance, in his speech of May 1924 Mustafa Kemal said that religious institutions constituted a discrepancy within a state which functioned on the basis of a single jurisprudence.[118] He declared in no uncertain terms that: 'The Orthodox and Armenian churches and Jewish synagogues which are based in Turkey should have been abolished together with the Caliphate'.

In the political context of the mid-1920s, Patriarch Elias III 'escaped' (used in source) Turkey in late 1925.[119] Oral and written sources indicate that his flight was the outcome of State policy. Despite its averred loyalty, the Kemalist regime perceived the Syriac Orthodox church leadership as a potential threat, which had to be eliminated. In 1924, an official decree issued by the authorities deprived Patriarch Elias III of his right to use his official title in his communications with the authorities (Srayel [Israel Audo] 2004 in Beth Sawoce and BarAbraham 2009). An oral account given by Chorbishop Gabriel Aydin (Bar Yawno), who was a pupil at the Zafaran Monastery (Mardin) when the Patriarch received the message to leave Turkey, says:[120]

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117 Secret Archive of the Vatican (Archivi Nunziature Partigi). Busta 392. See also Luke (1925: 113) who mentions that the Patriarch was expelled (Spring 1924) from the Zafaran Monastery.

118 *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*. Volume III, Ankara, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1997, pp 102-103.

119 Secret Archive of the Vatican (Archivi Nunziature Parigi). Busta 392. Letter from Hazakh, 4 January 1926.

120 My translation of the original in Turkish (Beth Sawoce and BarAbraham 2009). This oral account is problematic because Chorbishop Gabriel was born is 1926. According to other sources which I mention, the Patriarch left Turkey at the end of 1925. Therefore, either Chorbishop Gabriel's date of birth is incorrect or he might have heard this quotation from others at a later period after he had commenced his studies in the Monastery. At the time of

> …one day the governor[121] of Mardin came to the Monastery to deliver a telegram from Atatürk [Mustafa Kemal] which had been sent to him [the governor]. The telegram read: "The clerical leader in the black cassock [the Patriarch] should leave Turkey immediately and should never ever return!"

Following this decree, Patriarch Elias III left Turkey and, with the removal of his physical presence, the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate moved too.[122] The Patriarch travelled to Jerusalem[123] where he lived for three years (Zakaria Shakir 1972). On February 16 1931[124], he journeyed on to his church community in India, where he died in 1932. By an official directive[125] (July 7th 1931), Patriarch Elias III was deprived of his Turkish citizenship on the grounds that he had acquired Iraqi citizenship without seeking permission from the Turkish authorities and that, as a consequence, he no longer had any relations with Turkey. In 1933, the official Patriarchal See of the Syriac Orthodox Church was established in Homs and since 1959 it has been based in Damascus.[126]

After the Patriarchate was removed from Turkey, the Turkish authorities prohibited Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum to re-enter Turkey because in the post-war negotiations he had argued the case for the rights of Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey. A governmental decree (7 June 1937), which

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writing, the Chorbishop Gabriel's frail health prevented him from talking about this matter so it was impossible to discuss it with him personally.

121 Other oral information which is commonly heard among Assyrians/Syriacs says that the governor of Mardin, Abdülfattah Baykurt Bey (1923-1925), had a very good relationship with the Patriarch and therefore informed the Patriarch that it would be better for him to leave the country if he were not to forfeit his life. If he did not take this advice and leave, when the governor received the telegram from Ankara it would be too late to save his life. It is said that when he heard this news, the Patriarch decided to flee the country.

122 It draws attention to the fact that Dolapönü [Dolabani] (1972: 165) mentions the necessity for Patriarch Elias III to leave the country in more general terms, namely: that, after the death of Patriarch Elias III in India, it was absolutely necessary that the Patriarchate be moved to Homs in Syria during the Patriarchate of Ephrem Barsaum in 1933. And that later, during the reign of Patriarch Yacob III, it was moved temporarily to Damascus in 1960 (1959). To believe that this was a temporary decision assumes the hope that it will return to the Zafaran Monastery in Mardin.

123 Dolabani (1972) mentions that he travelled (first) to Aleppo to consecrate a church.

124 Zakaria Shakir (1972) mentions that they went at the end of 1930 to India.

125 This document was signed by the President of Turkey (Mustafa Kemal), Prime Minister Ismet Inönü and other cabinet members. See for this document: T.C. Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, BCA- Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi, Başvekalet, 036/16/01/02, 17-1-18.

126 Patriarch Elias' initial attempt to establish the Patriarchate in Mosul was prohibited by King Faisal.

was signed by Mustafa Kemal, Ismet Inönü and other cabinet members, banned the bringing into Turkey of publications by Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum (*Süryani kadim patriği Efrim*) 'because of their dangerous content'.[127]

3.1.2 The Era of Turkification and Eradication of Non-Muslim Minorities

Following the extermination of Armenians and Assyrians/Syriacs and the forced mass-population exchange between Greece and Turkey, in concerted efforts to create a homogenous Turkish nation the policy of Turkification has been strongly directed towards Muslim groups.[128] As Zeydanlıoğlu (2008: 7) notes, this 'civilisational necessity' was intensified once homogenization in terms of getting rid of the non-Muslim minorities had been accomplished. In the concept of *Turkishness* the latter have been included either as Turks or 'Turks-to-be' (Hamren 2009). Interestingly, despite the secular nationalist project pursued by the Turkish Republic, paradoxically the Muslim religion has become a central element in the discourses on *Turkishness*. Poulton (1997: 97-100) notes that Mustafa Kemal saw Christians as inappropriate candidates to become 'Turkish'. The founder of the Turkish State ideology, Ziya Gökalp, also accords religion a central role: 'religious identity is a key element in nation-building even in a secular republic.' As far as their position in daily life is concerned, this ambiguous attitude has meant that both the recognized and unrecognized non-Muslim minorities have been excluded from access to State institutions.[129] As compensation, in the public sphere they have therefore devoted themselves to becoming strong achievers in the economic field. Nevertheless, despite their commercial success, throughout the period of the Turkish Republic, the attitude towards them has been to regard them as *gavur* or the 'others', who sooner or later should be expelled from the national territory.

Legally speaking, the difference in religion has meant that the Assyrians/Syriacs have been excluded from the newly emerging Turkish

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[127] T.C. Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, BCA- Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi, Başvekalet, 030/18/01/02, 75-50-1.

[128] See for the demographic engineering policy and the construction of the Turkish nation-state, Üngör (2010).

[129] From 1926 to 1965, Law 788 regulated the employment of civil servants (*Memurin Kanunu*). One of the conditions for employment as official in the Turkish Republic was to be a 'Turk' (Çağaptay 2003: 603). In 1965 this law was superseded by Law 657 which requires Turkish citizenship as a prerequisite to being eligible to become a State official.

national identity. Only a few Assyrians/Syriacs might have been aware of the full extent of what the new State ideology would mean to their formal position in the Turkish Republic, even though they have experienced the direct everyday consequences of that policy. Assyrians/Syriacs have found themselves confronted with an ambiguous policy regarding the role of religion in Turkish society. In a broad sense the Turkish Constitution excludes the background and affiliation of the Assyrians/Syriacs from the definition of a Turkish identity which represents the Turkish Republic. The foundation of the ambiguity of the role of religion is rooted in the definition of a national Turkish identity which focuses on the unity of different elements. Article 81,[130] regulating the platform of political parties, reveals how the central government has been trying to develop its nation-building programme by setting its sights on the homogenization of society, which has included attempts to intervene in the field of religion. After a survey of the situation in Turkey Francesco Capotorti, who was appointed by the United Nations to oversee the prevention of discrimination and assure the security of minorities, concluded (Atto 2000): '…the available information indicates that the government is making a continuous effort to achieve cultural homogeneity, as evidenced by the education system, which is designed to channel the minorities into a uniform stream of Turkish culture. This obviously tends to reduce the prospects of preserving the cultural identity of minority groups.'

This is why it did not take long for people to realize that the ideology (discourses) of the Turkish Republic did not offer much scope for a community life to such groups as Assyrians/Syriacs. The basic principles of Kemalist ideology (the 'six arrows') were laid down in the 1931 programme of the Republican People Party (CHP) and incorporated into the Turkish Constitution six years later in 1937 (Zürcher 2003: 189). These principles

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130 'Political parties may not claim that there are minorities on the basis of religion, culture, sect, race or language in the Turkish Republic. Political parties may not engage in activities to promote languages or cultures other than Turkish, thereby seeking to create minorities which threaten the unity of the nation' and 'Political parties may not use any other language than Turkish in their statutes, programmes, congresses or rallies. They may not distribute posters, records, cassettes, videos, brochures or statements in any other language than Turkish...' In the same way, the Turkish Act of Association Nr. 2908 limits the freedom of associations to the norms laid down in Article 5: 'Associations may not be established if their aim is to destroy the 'territorial national identity of the state', or if they seek to claim that minorities of different races, religions, sects, cultures or languages exist within the Turkish Republic, or if through the promotion of other languages and cultures other than Turkish they seek for one religion, race, class or group to win privileges over another group of a certain religion or sect.'

formed the basis for indoctrination in schools, the media and the army. Secularism and nationalism were the most prominent elements in the policy of Turkification in the 1930s. Minorities were forced to change their surnames to Turkish ones,[131] just one consequence of the Surname Law of 1934.[132] Similarly, the names of Assyrian/Syriac villages were changed to Turkish names at the beginning of the 1940s.[133]

Secularism was interpreted as the removal of religion from public life and the establishment of complete State control over any remaining religious institutions. The Turkish concept of secularism was heavily geared to serve the concept of Turkish nationalism. This nationalism can be seen as the development on an earlier foundation of pan-Turkism, laid by European Turcologists in the second part of the nineteenth century. They helped the Turks to restore their pre-Islamic past which had been eclipsed by Islam (Lewis 1994: 83). In such a climate, the focus shifted to extolling the unity of the Turkic-speaking peoples said to stretch from the Aegean across Asia to the Pacific. The new Turco-centric focus totally ignored the past of other peoples in the territory of Turkey as its chief concern was with Turkic-speaking groups –the majority of whom resided outside this territory (Lewis 1994: 84). Making good use of history and archaeology, the nationalism propagated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk after the First World War embraced the idea of a Trojan and Hittite past and was devised to make the Turks in Turkey identify with the geographical area which they inhabited (Ibid. 93). By its very nature, it was also a way to repudiate Greek claims to land in Asia Minor. In the early Republican era, it was in fact conceived as an instrument to encourage the idea of a great Turkish civilization which had reached its apogee, epitomized by the 'Turkish History Thesis' (Özkırımlı and Sofos 2008: 91). The Turkish Historical Society (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*)[134] was

[131] Upon arrival in Europe, many Assyrians/Syriacs changed the Turkish family names thrust upon them back to their former family names. In Germany, and also in the Netherlands, this has been much harder. Nevertheless, some families have managed to change their surnames after a great deal of effort.

[132] This law prohibits the use of surnames which are related to 'races and nations other than Turkish' (Güven 2006: 115). It also forbids the use of certain suffixes in surnames, such as –yan, -of, -ef, -vic, -ic, is, -idis, -pulos, -aki, -zade, and -bin.

[133] According to studies which have been conducted, the names of approximately 28,000 places have been changed into Turkish names since the 1940s, when the Expert Commission for the Modification of Names (*Ad Değiştirme Ihtisas Komisyonu*) was established. See further Tuncel (2000) for the 1949 legislation pertaining to the administration of cities (*Il Idaresi Kanunu*).

[134] See further the website of *Türk Tarih Kurumu*: http://www.ttk.org.tr/

founded as a result of this nationalist discursive formation, and the famous 'Turkish History Thesis' (*Türk Tarih Tezi*) and the 'Sun Language Theory' (*Günes Dil Teorisi*) were formulated in the 1930s to support it. After this period, a line of assimilation policy emerges quite clearly. As a means to support this racist assimilation policy, several studies which strove to demonstrate the role of 'Turks' in the development of civilization were conducted. Almost all minorities living in Turkey were defined as 'Turks'. The *Sun Language Theory* asserted that all the major languages in the world are derived from Turkish. In this period, the policy was to purify the Turkish language and to turkify society (Çağaptay 2004: 86-91).

3.1.3 Attempts to Weaken Non-Muslims Economically

The Turkish authorities have made use of political means to undermine and to weaken the economic strength of non-Muslims. It is even not wrong to say that the Turkish bourgeoisie and the Turkish national economy have been created through the elimination[135] of non-Muslims from the economic field and the confiscation of their financial capital. For example, in the first years of the Turkish Republic the economic field was still dominated by non-Muslims.[136] However, due to the implemented of a strong Turkification policy in the economic field, non-Muslims lost their dominant position and the majority of them left the country.

During and after the Second World War, the nationalization (Turkification) of the economy intensified. With the implementation of the *ihtiyat* policy which involved imposing a capital levy (*Varlık Vergisi*)[137] and

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[135] Already in 1923, the non-Muslim merchants were no longer allowed to be a member of the Istanbul Merchant Association (Aktoprak 2010).

[136] According to a survey which was conducted in 1922 and which aimed to map the composition of the bourgeoisie in Istanbul, the number of Muslim merchants who were working with export-import was no more than four percent (Alexandris 1992: 110-111).

[137] The imposition of the *varlık vergisi* bears some resemblance with the *jizya* tax system in the Ottoman Empire. In both cases, non-Muslims had to pay taxes in order to protect their property and safety. The *jizya* tax system, was part of the *dhimmi* (an Arabic word meaning 'protected') legislation, which was included in the *sharia* law that encompasses the relationship of Muslims and non-Muslims at the theological, social, political and economical levels. According to this system, non-Muslims had to pay *jizya* taxes and show loyalty in return for protection of their individual life, property, and religious praxis. Under the Ottoman rule, non-Muslims were also considered as *raya(h)* or *reaya* ('cattle' or 'flock') which means in Ottoman Turkish a member of the tax-paying lower class of Ottoman society, in contrast to the elite class (*askeri*). Although the term originally included Muslim taxpayers as well, it was, in its later use, reduced to Non-Muslim taxpayers.

the mob against the non-Muslim entrepreneurs (at that time mainly Greeks, Armenians, but also some Jews), the nationalization of the economic policy reached its peak. The main logic behind this praxis was (in line with the discourses of *Turkification*) to create a 'Muslim Turkish bourgeoisie', and by doing so, to transfer the capital from the non-Muslim to the Muslim entrepreneurs (Oran 2007a). In 1942[138] the Şükrü Saraçoğlu government imposed a capital levy on big property owners (Donef 1998: 64). During the drafting process of the *Varlık Vergisi,* the Turkish Prime Minister Saraçoğlu, in his speech at the parliament, defined the 'Wealth tax' as a revolutionary law which will give the Turkish market to Turks (Aktar 1996: 148). Commissions, which dealt with this matter, were formed entirely of Muslim Turkish businessmen, bureaucrats and politicians and were authoritized to determine the amount of taxes to be paid within a period of fifteen days (Cengiz 2003).[139] As a result of this discriminatory praxis, members of the minority groups were forced to either sell their property or to join the labourer battalions (*Amele Taburu*). Sotiriyu (1970: 63) notes that it would be more correct to call these 'death battalions'. Among the great number of non-Muslims who left Turkey due to this policy[140] were also Assyrians/Syriacs who settled in Syria and Lebanon.

In the area of *Tur 'Abdin*, Assyrians/Syriacs discovered that the policy went much further than big property owners. People owning property, which gave them just enough to live, also had to pay a disproportionately high amount of taxes. In fact many were forced to close down their businesses.[141] Non-Muslim citizens of Turkey had to pay as much as any non-Turkish citizen: ten times the amount paid by the Muslims. This indicates that non-Muslims in Turkey were practically classified as foreigners.[142] Those who could not pay the amount requested, were sent to labour camps which were originally organized to employ the non-Muslim

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138 The Turkish National Assembly passed the Law on November 11, 1942 (Law 4305/12.11.1942). The implementation of this law continued until 1944 and was abolished with Law 4530 (March 15, 1944).

139 According to Ökte (1951: 48) in the implementation of the Wealth Tax, non-Muslims became the subject of official police records through information provided by MIT (Turkish Intelligence Service) and CHP (Republican People Party).

140 For further reading see Cengiz (2003).

141 See further about the implementation of the Wealth Tax in *Tur Abdin*, Beth Sawoce (1995) for interviews with eye-witnesses. See also Gabriyel (2008).

142 Until the 1940s, non-Muslims in Turkey were registered in the section of 'foreigners' (*ecanip*) in the population registers. See further Çetin (2002:73-75).

reserve forces. Therefore Assyrians/Syriacs refer to them by the term *ihtiyat* ('reserve forces' in Ottoman Turkish). Assyrian/Syriac respondents who had been sent to these labour camps spoke of very bad treatment and hard work.

In 1946, the CHP published a report announcing that by the 1950s the geographical area of Anatolia should be purged of Christians and Jews. Istanbul would follow.[143] On 6 and 7 September 1955 systematic attacks were organized against the shops, houses and institutions of these groups.[144] This can be interpreted as a physically violent continuation of the imposition of the *varlık vergisi* in 1942. Zürcher (1996: 241-2) discusses the political situation at that time and notes that the riots (which started after a demonstration) were most probably mobilized by the Prime Minister Menderes and the foreign minister, Zorlu, in order to give vent to their ideas on the Cyprus issue. Apparently the authorities had also planned an attack on *Midyad* in 1955. In a meeting with the authorities, the Kurdish agha Nuri Dbe Azizke showed his unwillingness to co-operate in this attack. He argued that the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Midyad* would be able to defend themselves and that the authorities may not win the attack quite easily. Whether this was the reason for not continuing the planned attack on *Midyad* or not, is unclear. This information reached the Assyrian/Syriac leaders (Chorbishop Brahim Dbe Hajjo, Gabro Isa Zatte, Shabe Dbe Brahim) through a servant of Nuri Dbe Azizke who had attended this meeting. According to sources of Jan Beth Sawoce, the places Diyarbakır, Mardin and some of the villages in *Tur 'Abdin* had also been in danger at this period.[145]

3.1.4 The Role of Religion in Social Organisation

As indicated before, Assyrians/Syriacs have had an ambiguous position in society. In the discourses of Turkish nationalism, being Turkish means to be 'racially/ethnically' Turkish, religiously a Muslim, that one adopts Turkish language as one's mother tongue and shares a Turkish nationalist ideology. Although Assyrians/Syriacs living in the cities managed to adopt some of

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[143] See further about this report and the 6-7 September pogroms, Güven (2005).

[144] About 4214 houses were attacked, 1004 shops, 73 churches, 1 synagogue and 2 monasteries. Many non-Muslims left Istanbul leaving yawning gaps in the market. Ironically, as I point out in my next chapter, Assyrians/Syriacs who settled in Istanbul in the second part of the 1950s profited from the new market opportunities which became available.

[145] See further Beth Sawoce's (unpublished) interviews with Gawriye Beth-Mas'ud (2007), with Jozef Diyarbekirli (1994) and with Ilyas Tamraz (1985). These are available at the Mesopotamian Library, Södertörn University.

these requirements (especially by speaking Turkish instead of *Suryoyo*), in the agricultural Assyrian/Syriac heartland of *Tur 'Abdin*, these Turkish discourses remained at distance. Society continued to be organized along religious lines, Kurdish *aghas* continued to exercise their power over peasants within a structure which was inherently undemocratic. The Kemalist reforms designed to create a national Turkish identity only reached the Assyrians/Syriacs (mostly)[146] in the second half of the twentieth century.[147] Usually their relationship with the Turks operated mainly at an administrative level; their direct daily contact with outsiders was mainly with the Kurdish, the *Mhalmoye*[148] and the Yezidi population.[149]Another element adding to the ambiguity of the policy regarding non-Muslims began with the recognition of non-Muslims as enshrined in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, even though the official national policy was focussed on the denial of minorities. Non-Muslims have continued to be suspected of threatening Turkey's national unity. Therefore, security surveillance has loomed very large over 'minorities' in Turkey. One of the measures taken to assist this was the establishment of the *Secondary Committee for Minorities* (by secret decree in 1962) in order to carry out security surveillance on minorities (Report of the European Commission about religious freedom in Turkey, 2004)

Despite the proclaimed secularism, religion continued to play a considerable role in Turkish society and this had consequences for the political, social, and economic life of Assyrians/Syriacs. First, in view of their religious affiliation, they have continued to be seen as foreigners, outsiders; a threat to the national unity. Quite apart from the changes stemming from the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Turkish Republic at national level, this collapse and rebuilt also heralded a change at local political level for the Assyrians/Syriacs. Under the Ottoman Empire, the Christians were permitted to play a considerable role in the administration and to hold public offices. Under the new regime, they were banned from

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146 I mentioned already that the names of their villages and their family names were changed into Turkish names in the 1930s and 1940s.

147 See further also Zürcher (2003) and Lewis (1994: 56, 62) on the implementation of Kemalist principles.

148 Although the Kurds consider the *Mhalmoye* to be Kurds, not all *Mhalmoye* identify as such. See further about the *Mhalmoye* Chapter 9.

149 For this reason, besides their mother tongue *Suryoyo*, Assyrians/Syriacs often knew, *Kurmanji*, the language of the Kurds and the Yezidis. Only those who had the chance to go to Turkish schools or had served in the military had learned some Turkish, which they would use in their contact with the Turkish authorities.

being public servants. Complaining about their position in Turkey, Assyrian/Syriac men still lament 'I could not even become a garbage collector!' as a metaphorical reference to their position.[150] Although the job of garbage collector is the lowest level of public servant, they were still excluded from it. There is the implicit idea that their position in society has been marginalized, especially socially and politically. Economically, they have managed to develop a niche as farmers and merchants. Secondly, the religious affiliation of Assyrians/Syriacs has had consequences for their social relationships in society. Although Muslims and non-Muslims have continued to live discretely together in the same geography, their religious affiliation has determined their specific relationship. This is illustrated by the *de facto* position of non-Muslims in court. Christian testimonies have not been given the same credence as those of Muslims. Consequently, Muslims had an advantage of being backed up by a juridical system. The major consequence at social economic level has been that non-Muslims have developed survival strategies. Assyrian/Syriac respondents mentioned, for example, that they bribed Muslims to testify for them.

Also during the military service Assyrian/Syriac men were confronted with the fact that fundamentally Turkish society did not function on a secular basis.[151] It was not possible for them to pursue a professional army career or to be promoted in rank position during military service. Even in the 1980s, my respondent Jesu' said he had a class at the *Lise* (high school) in which pupils were taught about Mustafa Kemal's ideas regarding modernization and the possibilities to pursue a military career. Since this appealed to him he applied to the military academy. His application was rejected on the basis that he was informed he was not eligible to apply because he was a Christian.[152] It is probable that collective discrimination in Turkish law was enforced through by-laws. It is public knowledge that Christians were assigned special ID numbers to become visible to the authorities.[153] Assyrian/Syriac soldiers serving in Turkish military service also endured individual discrimination and were assaulted by Muslim comrades-

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[150] This is a reference to law 788, regulating the employment of officials (*Memurin Kanunu*), which was applied between 1926 and 1965.

[151] This information is based on the individual experiences of Assyrian/Syriac men who had served in the military.

[152] In order to be admitted to the military schools in Turkey one has to be 'Turk' or of the 'Turkish race' (Yildiz 2001).

[153] For further reading see Oran (2004).

in-arms who forcibly tried to convert them to Islam.[154] At times when religious oppression and discrimination have been experienced, as in military service, the Assyrian/Syriac men used the principle of secularism, as one of the ideals of Mustafa Kemal, in order to protect themselves. Examples were given by respondents who had done their military service and who had been mistreated (by their Muslim colleagues) in efforts to convert to Islam. Conscious that the symbolic stature of Mustafa Kemal was enormous in the army, in their argument for rejecting conversion to 'the religion of Muhammed' (*u dino de Mhammad*, as my respondents referred to it), they stated that they followed Mustafa Kemal's ideals of secularism. This argument often seemed to be helpful.

The experiences of Assyrian/Syriac men who had died because of ill-treatment during their military service or returned home with a life-long disability sowed enormous fear among future generations; an important reason why Assyrian/Syriac men were not looking forward commencing military service. My respondent Ilyas was witness to the mounted troopers (*rumoye*) who came to the village of *Mẕizah* with lists of names of men who had not responded to the call-up for the military service. Those who had taken their courage in their two hands and did report were prepared for their ideal by the village priest Sleman. He gathered them and informed them to keep strong in the face of the humiliation and the pressure to convert to Islam which they were going to experience. Father Sleman prepared them psychologically to remain true to their Christian religion, even if they were threatened with death. Parents of male children started to give their boys Turkish names in effort to keep their Christianity hidden.[155] Though their religion was registered in their passport, they wanted to avoid their sons being confronted with it at any time of the day. Another ruse parents used was registering their sons as being a couple of years younger than they really were so that they would be more robust if labouring they were hurt

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[154] In Turkish this process of conversion is called *şehadet* ('to be witness to something'. Ritually to repeat *şehadet* makes someone convert to Islam). An individual has to recite (supposed to be with conviction) that there is one God and that Muhammed is His Prophet. My respondents said that whether or not an officer or general tolerated discrimination and oppression of the Christians could make a huge difference.

[155] They often chose secular Turkish names or a Turkish version of a name which was not directly identified as a Christian name. For example, instead of *Jesu'* they would call their son *'Isa* – the Turkish equivalent of *Jesu'*.

physically during the military service.[156] In military service, besides labouring under the aversion to Christianity they were also seen as exotic because of the myth about the *gavur* (infidels), which had been put into circulation.

The concept of *gavur* is central to Turkish discourses about Christians in Turkey. Lexically, the Turkish word *gavur* means unbeliever. Within the discourses of Islam, any non-Muslim is accounted as *gavur* and with that as the 'other'. Muslims, who had never before seen *gavur*, and had only heard of them, had developed the idea that *gavur* could be identified by animal characteristics: big ears, different kind of eyes and a tail.[157] Therefore, at first meetings, they were surprised when they learned that the *gavur* looked physically just as they did. And among themselves those Muslims who were acquainted with the *gavur*, referred to them as such in daily life. Moreover, Muslims commonly to use terms like '*gavur* apartment', '*gavur* shop', '*gavur* quarter' or even '*gavur cami*' (mosque).[158] The use of *gavur* in daily life did not only mean humiliation to those who were its object but it has had also practical consequences. A central idea in *gavur* discourses is that all non-Muslims are rich, that they hide their property well, that they steal Muslims' properties and so forth. Based on this discourse it is considered to be legitimate (*helal*) to covet the property of non-Muslims. Therefore, *gavur* have been seen as an object or target to be exploited or eliminated.

3.1.5 Between the State and the Tribal: Political Constellation in Tur 'Abdin

In *Tur 'Abdin*, the political interaction consisted of two inescapable relationships: to the Turkish State and to the Kurds. In the 1960s and the 1970s with the exception of Istanbul, the most substantial Christian population lived in the area of *Tur 'Abdin* and Mardin.[159] In these

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[156] When asking for the date of birth, respondents often mentioned two different versions: a later year which was mentioned in the passport and an earlier year in which they were actually born.

[157] This myth seems to have had an effect on the presentation of the two characters representing the only two Assyrians/Syriacs in the Turkish series *Sıla* broadcasted on Turkish TV Channel *ATV* (2006/7): the character representing the boy has been given jug ears and his sister walks with a limp.

[158] An example of the last is the mosque of Assyrians/Syriacs who converted to Islam in the period of the *Seyfo* in the First World War in Adıyaman (south-eastern Turkey).

[159] According to Anschütz (1985: 30), Father Bedros Ögünc (Dbe Shushe) completed a list of the Syriac Orthodox families living in *Tur 'Abdin* and Mardin for the year 1978, which numbered 2577 families. He based it on information from the Mor Gabriel Monastery and

geographies, the local administration and a great many officials were 'ethnic' Turks mainly. The latter group represented the central government at local level and attempted to supervise the 'correct attitude' of Turkish citizens. Until roughly the beginning of the 1980s, Assyrians/Syriacs referred to the Kurds by the term *Taye* (here with the meaning of 'Muslims'). This changed after this group had developed a strong national political identity as Kurds towards the end of the 1970s. Since then, depending on the context, Assyrians/Syriacs have referred to them by the terms *Kurd* and *Taye* interchangeably. It is necessary to explain the political relations and the specific dynamics of interactions between Assyrians/Syriacs, Kurdish and Turkish populations in the area. I shall therefore look at the local politics in the rural area of *Tur 'Abdin* in which traditional Kurdish tribalism has played a central role.

The embryo Turkish State was not omnipotent and had to co-operate with local power structures to make its presence felt. Despite the fact that one of Mustafa Kemal's aims was to modernize the country, and although he terminated the rule of many *aghas* who had rebelled against the authorities (belonging mainly to the Heverkan Confederation[160]) – he never abolished the tribal *agha* system completely. In the area of Mardin and in *Tur 'Abdin*, the society was still mainly rural and social organization continued to be based on tribalism. In order to effectuate State policy, in time-honoured fashion, the representatives of the State made use of the local social political organization. Since the socio-cultural differences between the Turkish administrators and the Kurdish population were conspicuous, Kurdish middlemen (*aghas*) were essential to the effective execution of Turkish government as they linked this to the Kurdish population. Van Bruinessen (1992) shows that the competition for political power waged by the *aghas* must be understood in the context of their relationship to the State. The *aghas* represented each a different political party. As intermediaries between the Turkish administration and the local population, and combined with elements of their tribalism, they achieved enormous power over the local population. This socio-political structure virtually precluded permeation of State influence without the involvement of this entrenched power group.

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information collected among the members of this group. He did not mention the number of members per family. Father Bedros mentioned to me that he had considered the parents and children as one family, no matter whether the children were married and had their own families.

160 See further on the Heverkan Confederation, Van Bruinessen (1992: 101, 103, 307).

The population was used to alternate threats and protection from the *agha* to whom they allied.

As the main Christian minority in the area, Assyrians/Syriacs had a specific role in the local socio-political life of *Tur 'Abdin*. Especially in villages which were inhabited by both Assyrians/Syriacs and Kurds they had been forced into the Kurdish political organization which was ruled by Kurdish *aghas*. Van Bruinessen defines 'tribe' in this context as follows: 'The Kurdish tribe is a socio-political and generally also territorial (and therefore economic) unit based on descent and kinship, real or putative, with a characteristic internal structure…' It is important to note that tribes in the context of my writing had become political units, although the background to the sense of tribe could have a more primordial notion as the definition by Van Bruinessen suggests. The village in which I was born, *Mzizah* (in *Tur 'Abdin*), had become a base for the main Kurdish tribes of *Tur 'Abdin*. I remember the older people talking about the *band dbe Çalabiyo* and the *band dbe Batte*. Here, the term *band* is used in the sense of a party in a local political context. In fact, they were speaking about the tribes as defined by Van Bruinessen. As Christians living among a Muslim majority population, Assyrians/Syriacs were forced into these local political constellations because the *aghas*, as leaders of these tribes, dominated that geographical area. Since Christians in *Tur 'Abdin* could not become *aghas* over Muslims,[161] they had to align to one of the tribes in order to 'protect' themselves against other tribes. As such, people were more or less compelled to loyalty to one of the *aghas* present in the area. Choosing independence also meant that a person was liable to become the victim of the power of all the *aghas*. Loyalty to an *agha* also implied that he could be expected to extend protection in the event of threat from other tribes. In short, much of the local power was channelled through these *aghas*.[162]

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161 In other geographies, especially in large cities, some Christians were able to accumulate wealth and hold the title of *agha*. Information on Assyrian/Syriac *aghas* is particularly rare to come by. One Assyrian/Syriac *agha* family was the Fathi Zadeh mercantile family of Diyarbakır in the 18th and 19th centuries. Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum, in his posthumously-published manuscript catalogues (Barsoum 2008: III, 150) mentions a *Beth Gazo* (liturgical melody book of the Syriac Orthodox Church) from the 1500's repaired for 'Naum agha son of Khawaja Elias agha Fathi Zadeh in 1221H [1806]'. See further the article on Elias Fathallah (Fathi 2011) for an interesting biography of a member of this family in the 18th century.

162 In the mid 19th century, for example, Kurdish *aghas* seemed to enjoy so much power that they were able to buy both the land and its Christian owners, and then to employ them (Van Bruinessen 1992: 66). Because of this, *aghas* referred to Christians as *zerkerri* (bought with gold) or as *filehe min* (my Christians) (Taylor 1865: 51 in Van Bruinessen 1992: 66). 'High value'

The status and position of the Assyrians/Syriacs in this local politics was again determined by their Christian background; however, not always and not necessarily in a negative sense. *Aghas* considered their alliance important since they did seem to derive more income from the land of Christians, whom they found also more loyal and trustworthier than the Muslim or Yezidi[163] members of the tribe. Loyalty should perhaps not be understood as a result of integrity but rather as a survival strategy adopted to avoid worse. The Assyrians/Syriacs were in the worst position when *aghas* did not see the advantage of having Christian members. And, because they had no recourse to protection at court, they were more vulnerable than their Muslim neighbours.[164]

The commonality of religion between the Kurdish *agha* and the Turkish officials formed the main basis in their relationship. Under such circumstances, it was impossible for Assyrians/Syriacs to be appointed an *agha* and function as a middleman between the Turkish administration and the local population. This dependence on the Kurdish *agha*, who functioned as an intermediary between the State and the people allied to him grew. An *agha* is strong only as long as he has good relationships with the Turkish administration. Therefore, one of his great services to other people was that he had access to the central government. The necessity of having a Muslim *agha* to obtain access to the Turkish administration inevitably weakened the position of the Assyrians/Syriacs. Consequently, the position of Assyrians/Syriacs was invariably especially weak at the times that the Turkish administration and the Kurdish population choose to focus on a collective self-identification as Muslims in relation to the Assyrians/Syriacs as a Christian minority. At such times, oppression, discrimination and unequal access to public services always increase.

The introduction of the multi-party system in the rural tribal areas of *Tur 'Abdin* in the 1950s indirectly meant a deterioration of the position of the

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Christians also became their curse in their competition with other *aghas*. One of the methods used by an *agha* to hurt another *agha*, was by killing 'his Christians', as the most valuable possession he 'owned'.

163 The Yezidi population had a socially and politically weaker position than Christians. The *aghas* used often Yezidi men for 'dirty jobs'.

164 A Muslim could easily accuse a Christian of having killed someone whom he had actually killed himself. A court hearing would often be decided in favour of the Muslim. Therefore, in such situations, an *agha* could present a solution. Thus, if he valued his Christian tribe member he could use his power to get him free.

Assyrians/Syriacs.[165] This ushered in the first important change in local political relations since the foundation of the Turkish Republic. Democratic elections mixed with tribalism resulted in the growth of political clientalism. Tribal leaders espoused a new role as representatives of the various political parties and continued to pursue their tribal competition through these parties with unabated fervour. This was exacerbated as they developed a middleman and broker position between the Turkish administration and the local population (who were allied to these tribal leaders). Demographic clientalism – created by giving each individual the same weight in elections – placed greater importance on the demographic balance between Kurds and Assyrians/Syriacs. Considering the relatively low number of Assyrians/Syriacs in the area, *aghas* were less in need of support from the Assyrians/Syriacs to win votes in local elections. Moreover, in the 1960s and 1970s the perception of a Muslim identity began to reinforce the unity of the various Muslim populations in *Tur 'Abdin* (Arabic- and Kurdish-speaking) and the Turkish administration. The mounting antagonism against Assyrians/Syriacs as Christians built up tension between the two religious groups. The dynamics of this social organization developed structural disadvantages for the position of the Assyrians/Syriacs; they saw their position within the local socio-political system in *Tur 'Abdin* ebb away.

An examination of the socio-political changes in the area of *Tur 'Abdin* shows that the dynamics in the relationship between the Assyrians/Syriacs and the Muslim population are an important component. Because it is human to tend to remember the negative experiences in a person's life or history, some expressions (in both Kurdish and in *Suryoyo*) speak volumes about the relationship between these two people who have been coexisting in the same geographical area for hundreds of years. A prime example is the Kurdish expression: '*Na b-barfa sebbaha u na b-koma Fellaha*' – ('[We (Muslims) are] neither [afraid] of the heavy morning snow, nor of a group of Christians who gird themselves up for a fight'). Heavy snow in the morning soon stopped and did not continue all day. Metaphorically it implies that Christians (in *Tur 'Abdin*) are boasting when they claim that they will retaliate against the Muslims if they have to engage in a struggle with them, but in the end this is all sound and fury, signifying nothing! Therefore, Muslims did not need to fear them and sensed they have a stronger position. The imbalance

[165] Before the 1950s, only the CHP, the party which was founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was allowed to exist.

in power between the Kurds and the Assyrians/Syriacs allowed the misuse of power and made it relatively easy. Assyrians/Syriacs use several versions of the saying: '*U Tayo d-howe habusho ste, lo mahtatle b-kisukh; u hakka mahatlukh, sem naqwo u tray d-nofel.*' (Even if a Muslim were an apple, do not put him in your pocket; and if you were to put him in your pocket, make sure you make a hole in your pocket so it falls out). This expression is used among the older generation Assyrians/Syriacs in situations when they want to warn each other when entering into relationships with Muslims. They refer obliquely to historically bad experiences with Muslims; situations in which Muslims had abused the trust between them. They keep this memory alive to ensure certain social boundaries with the Muslims are maintained. One of my respondents referred to an example from the period of the *Seyfo* to explain to me how Muslims abused the trust of the Assyrians/Syriacs after they had vowed not to do so. A Kurdish *agha* had sworn to protect Christian families from being massacred, saying he would make love to Fatima (the daughter of the Muslim Prophet Muhammed) on the back of a pig if he were not to keep his promise. Despite this vow, the *agha* killed the Assyrian/Syriac families. My respondent argued that it is legitimate for Muslims to misuse non-Muslim trust since it is legitimate to fail to keep a vow made to Christians and still retain one's honour.

This subordinate position is often strongly expressed in the stories of emigration. The elderly woman from *Mzizah*, Shmuni, reflected on the time she lived in *Tur 'Abdin* and the position of Assyrians/Syriacs in relation to that of the Muslims:

> Let me tell you that our parents survived the *Seyfo*. When *Suryoye* allied with an *agha* in order to survive and the other *agha* retaliated, the Muslims [as allies] of that *agha* would plunder them [Assyrians/Syriacs] as much as they could. This is how they [Assyrians/Syriacs] lived.[166] …[After the *Seyfo*] we lived without land. I assure you that the Muslims had taken all our land after the *Seyfo*. We were already happy enough that they allowed us to go back to our village [Mzizah] after having spent seven years in other places. We were seven years in exile [*guini*] [167] in the village *Kafro*… We went back, but we did not get enough of our land back. The *agha* did

[166] See also Van Bruinessen (1992: 66, 106) on the relationship between *agha*, Muslim and Christian allies and their positions.

[167] *Guini* is a Kurdish term for exile.

> not help us to get all our land back.[168] We were constantly plundered. They would plunder us at every opportunity; even the doors of the houses! The *Suryoye* of *Mzizah* were in a terrible state. And we worked hard [*khiwaylan britho muklo*[169]]. I remember that one of the Muslims in the village said in Kurdish *Fellah denya qebbala gert*, meaning, the Christians want to till all the land on earth. He said this because we worked so hard in the years after the *Seyfo*. Each family member did their bit; we started to build up a new life. He laughed at us and could not understand us, since we worked so much. I can tell you that after so much work, we reached the level of the Muslims in the village again. This was in about the 1960s. With the fruits of our labour, we bought ourselves new land from the Muslims. And after that, when the road to Europe had opened [*bether me du darbo l-Aurupa de ftih*], we abandoned all our possessions [*maal*] and left for Europe… We fled [*mahzamlan*] and left everything behind. We put our house in order and left! We already had a house, but since it was small and had a small courtyard, we rebuilt it and made it bigger. It had become very nice… After we finished the house, we did not live in it for as long as one decade. First we left for *Midyad* because of the *barbariye* [local village politics] in the village. We spent nine years in *Midyad*. Then we came here [Sweden].

The subordinate position of the Assyrians/Syriacs was institutionalized in daily life; for instance, it was also reflected in the ritual of slaughtering the animals. When I went back to *Tur 'Abdin* for the first time in 2004 (twenty-four years after my parents had fled their village *Mzizah*), I encountered the same ritual in one of the villages.[170] The family who were my hosts wanted to slaughter a kid in my honour. It was a way to show how happy they were to see me again. Besides that, they knew that back home in the Netherlands I would tell how lovingly I had been received and how tenderly they took care of me. Soon the twelve-year old Abrohom jumped among the very young kids and came back with one in his arms (similar to the way Jesus is portrayed with a lamb).

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168 During the *Seyfo*, Çalabiyo *agha* was imprisoned. The Batte *agha* tribe opposed to the return of the Assyrians/Syriacs to their village *Mzizah*. About seven years after the *Seyfo,* after Çalabiyo *agha* was released from prison, he negotiated with the Muslims in the village to allow the Assyrians/Syriacs to return.

169 Literally this means: 'We ate the world'.

170 For safety reasons I cannot mention the name of the village.

> I said to *Holo* Makko: "I am really not a meat-eater, and I would prefer you not to slaughter the kid for me." But, *Holo* Makko insisted. I did not want to reject his offer, since otherwise he may have been offended. *Holo* Makko shouted in an excited voice and a proud smile on his face to his son Abrohom: "Go and ask the neighbour to come and slaughter it, before it gets dark!" I did not understand why the neighbour had to slaughter the kid. "Why do you want the neighbour to slaughter it?" I asked him. He said: "It is a *'ade* [tradition] that a Muslim should slaughter the animals of the non-Muslims. It is a way of showing respect to the Muslims – otherwise they are offended." After ejaculating an automatic "Aha" I began to analyse this 'tradition' in order to understand its context. "Is it because if you slaughter the kid, it will be perceived as *haram* [unclean, forbidden]?" I asked. *Holo* Makko said: "Yes." "Will you give him a portion to take back home too?" I continued. "No, not necessarily; today, we will not give him a portion, but it is just a tradition [*'ade*] that we have to ask the Muslims to slaughter it," *holo* Makko said.[171] He could not tell me more than this.

Back in Europe, I heard of more examples of this *'ade* from my respondents. My respondent Simon was a young boy when his parents migrated to Sweden in 1978. He remembered well how his father experienced this *'ade*:

> When we came to Europe in 1978, we had a calf left to slaughter. After it was slaughtered, I remember that my father said: "When we go to Sweden we shall no longer have the problem of asking these 'dogs' to slaughter our animals" [*dezzano l-Aurupa gkhulsina mi menna da kalbani*].

By 'inviting' a Muslim to slaughter their animals, the meat became accessible to Muslims for consumption whenever they wanted.[172] This gesture affirms that non-Muslims obey the Muslims; thereby acknowledging their power and that they allow them to share in the possessions of the Christians. This Islamic ritual of purity (*halal*) in food consumption symbolically gives Muslims who lived by this ritual a sense of superiority. The ritual also

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171 From another source I heard that Christians gave at least the liver to the Muslim who slaughtered the animal.

172 Interestingly, in *Midyad*, where the majority of the population by far was Christian, the Christian butchers had developed an alternative to inviting a Muslim to slaughter the animals. On the knife which was used to slaughter the animals they wrote the Koranic text**:** *la ilaha ill Allah* (There is no God but Allah). This replaced the role of the Muslim believer in the ritual of slaughtering animals while the meat sold by the Christian butchers was considered to be *halal* by the Muslim customers.

functioned as compensation for the often economically better position of Christians to Muslims. In short, Christians became the scapegoat of their position. In the 1960s and 1970s, this element played an important role in the relations between Muslims and Christians in *Tur 'Abdin*. Today, only in cases where Assyrians/Syriacs think that the Muslims would not learn about the slaughtering they decide not to ask them to slaughter the animal, for example when the animal to be killed is a chicken. It is less important whether a Muslim neighbour could eat from it or not.

In the Middle East, the 'acceptance' of this specific relationship with their Muslim neighbours can be seen as a survival mechanism, because they were not in the position to discuss or change their subjugated position. *Holo* Makko who continued to live in his village in *Tur 'Abdin* did not question the tradition of slaughtering his animals. In contrast to his acceptance, Simon's father, who had decided to leave *Tur 'Abdin*, did reflect negatively on this tradition just before his departure. He felt that now on the point of leaving he was in a position to express himself differently from before, since he knew that his position was going to change in Europe. What is more important is that this is a symbol of obeying, of putting oneself at a lower level than the Muslims. When I asked an older lady for her experiences regarding the position of Assyrians/Syriacs in relation to that of Muslims in *Tur 'Abdin*, she gave me a concise answer, using an expression in a combination of Arabic and Kurdish language '*ben hashek*'[173] ('sons of the stick'): '*Ben hashek wayna*' ('We were the sons of the stick').[174] My respondent assumed that I knew what she meant by this. I said to her that I had never heard it before.[175] She then explained that it is a reference to their subjugated and defenceless position in relation to the Muslims. The expression assumes that the Muslims held the stick and hit whenever they wanted, or deconstructively: they subjected the non-Muslims, as they wanted. Two more commonly heard expressions for expressing this same idea are: *qar'ayna kifowa alle* ('our head was bowed to them') and *i hatro de Mhammad 'al rishan wa*

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[173] *Ben hashek* is also used when referring to a situation where a husband is dominated by his wife.

[174] 'Ben' is probably a short form of the Arabic noun 'Ibin'. And *hashek* is Kurdish for Stick. The verb that is used in this expression – *wayna* ('we were') – is used in *Suryoyo*. I have no knowledge about the use of this expression in Kurdish or Arabic language context.

[175] I may have heard it before in gatherings with older people when I was younger but I am not conscious of it. I only started to pay attention to the metaphorical language after I started writing this thesis.

('[We lived with] the stick of Muhammed above our head')[176]. All three expressions reveal metaphorically how Assyrians/Syriacs experienced their position in Turkish society.

Political alliance to a certain *agha* – or between Assyrians/Syriacs and Kurds generally –was only possible through breaking the religious boundaries. Some religious rituals were sometimes forgone by Muslims in order to be able to develop a closer relationship with the Christians, as the example of the *Mhalmoyo* Sheikh Fathullah shows. Another example is the '*kriv*[177] relationship' between Christians and Muslims (although not very common but an exception). During the circumcision ceremony of Muslim boys, it might happen that the parents of the boy decided to have a Christian man as the *kriv* of their son instead of a Muslim man (as was the custom).[178] Therefore, it was a way to honour the Christian as a very close and dear friend of the Muslim family. The expectations from this relationship were that both families would protect each other during times of trouble. In daily life, they would continue to call each other by the term *kriv* instead of using the name of the person.

3.2 Effects of Turkey's Crises on Assyrians/Syriacs

Although Turkey is formally a secular State, especially at times of internal and external crisis the Assyrians/Syriacs may be excused for thinking otherwise. Whenever Turkey was in conflict with Western States (which are identified as Christian) – the Assyrians/Syriacs living in Turkey suffered repercussions. As Christians in the Turkish Republic, they were perceived to be the allies of the Christian West and therefore internal enemies or foreigners.[179] In their invidious position they became the reachable

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[176] Literally, the expression means 'The stick of Muhammed was above our head'.

[177] The social concept of *kriv* (in Kurdish) dates back to the Middle Ages in the Middle East. It was one of the forms of contracts between people to formalize social relationships.

[178] The man would hold the boy in his lap during the circumcision. This ceremony is comparable to the godparent-relationship which is an intrinsic part of the sacrament of baptism in the Christian tradition.

[179] The caricatures representing the Muslim Prophet Muhammed in the *Jyllands-Posten* had a similar effect. Various attacks were made on Christian churches in Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey. The priest in the Syriac Orthodox church in Adana had requested police guards because it was attacked by people throwing stones. In Mardin and in *Midyad* the Muslims had also organized demonstrations in 2006. One of my informants living in Sweden mentioned to me that when

scapegoats who were within grasping distance. To illustrate this I shall explore the ripple effect of two conflicts: the Cyprus crisis and the PKK conflict.

3.2.1 The Cyprus Crises

The influence of external crises on the relationship between Assyrians/Syriacs and Turkey was unequivocally revealed by the political crisis which erupted over Cyprus. In 1960 a military *coup d'état* took place in Turkey. On 16 August of the same year, the independence of Cyprus became a fact and Archbishop Makarios became the first president after its independence. The conflicts between Cyprus and Turkey (in 1964[180] and in 1974) twice resulted in reprisals against the Christian population in Turkey including Assyrians/Syriacs. The Muslim population was mobilized to agitate against the Christians in the area. This intensified polarization between them increased the strong sense of insecurity among the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin*. Inevitably, the local repercussions of national political events amplified the structural weakness of the Assyrians/Syriacs in local politics. Among the Assyrians/Syriacs these events roused fears of the spectre of the *Seyfo* during the First World War. Internally, the Cyprus crisis encouraged the politicizing of Islam, leading to antagonism against Christians in Turkey. Another element which exacerbated the tensions between Christians and Muslims was the manipulation of politicized Islam in the politics pursued by Prime Minister Demirel from the mid-1960s. Assyrian/Syriac respondents who had experienced the crisis in *Midyad* – following the Cyprus crisis in 1964 – felt danger had virtually come knocking on their door. They talked about the planned demonstration of 1964[181] (known as the *Miting*[182] in *Midyad*) by armed Muslims from the neighbouring villages, as if they had just escaped the conflict by the skin of their teeth. A respondent in his fifties recounted what he experienced back then in *Midyad*:

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he visited Mor Gabriel Monastery in 2006, a soldier came to warn the people residing in the monastery to be careful.

180 When president Makarios and his government made plans to limit the rights of the Turkish minority in Cyprus by changing the Constitution in 1964, this resulted in a civil war in which both Turkey and Greece were involved.

181 See further Beth Sawoce and BarAbraham (2009).

182 *Miting* is the Turkish word for 'demonstration'.

> In 1964, Turkey was again embroiled in a conflict with Cyprus. I heard that the Muslims from *Karshaf*, the *Mhalmoye*, *Dalaniye* and 'the whole world of the Islam' [*I Tayutho kula*][183] had organized an attack on *Midyad*. It was a very dangerous situation! If Dr Ref'at had not been there, the *Suryoye* would have been slaughtered again, just as in the *Seyfo*. Dr Ref'at went to the *vali*[184] [governor] and the *kaymakam* [deputy-governor] and told them: "If even as much as a chicken is killed in *Midyad*, the two of you will be held responsible." He [Dr Ref'at] was a Muslim, the son of Merado Dbe Chalef [Kurdish clan in *Midyad*]… This is what we heard when we were in *Midyad*. Dr. Ref'at had saved the *Suryoye*… At that time there were strong *Suryoye* men in *Midyad*! There was Biro Dbe Murekke, Silo Dbe Yoken… Makko Dbe Habsuno, Hanna Dbe Hendwoko Kfarzoyo, and others... They had ordered the *Suryoye* in *Midyad* to defend themselves if they [Muslims] launched an attack on the *Suryoye*… Finally, the *vali* and the *kaymakam* did not permit the Muslims to hurt the Christians. Had they not done so, the Muslims had decided to finish off the Christians in twenty-four hours[185]… At that time the people [Assyrians/Syriacs] were ready to defend themselves, since they were threatened with eminent death. The survivors of the *Seyfo* were still alive; they still bore the scars of the pain and the hardships from the time of the *Seyfo*. What else could they do but defend? They said: "A new *Seyfo* has begun!" They could finish us in two hours if they wanted... My uncles were also in Germany. We feared that something similar to what happened at the time of the *Seyfo* would take place in *Midyad*. The *Suryoye* in *Midyad* were terrified and were once again seized by a sense of insecurity. When people started migrating, my mother left first to go to Germany where her brother was already living.

In internal politics, Islam also started playing a larger role as it was also seen as an instrument to oppose the influence of leftist ideology. In the 1970s, several events took place in Turkey which led to instability and aroused fear

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183 *I Tayutho kula* (literally: The whole world of the Islam) is an expression which Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin* often used to express that many Muslims had collected somewhere. This expression has a negative connotation and shows the fear Assyrians/Syriacs have of Muslims whenever they assembled to hurt them.

184 A *vali* is the governor of a bigger city like Mardin. My respondent may have been wrong that the *Suryoye* had informed the *vali* too. Midyad had the status of a *qaza* (a smaller city) and had therefore a *kaymakam* (deputy-governor). The *müdür nahiye* ruled in a place which had the status of *nahiye* (smaller than a *qaza* but bigger than a village), such as Kerboran. In the village the *mukhtar* was in charge.

185 The use of 24 hours or 2 hours is a metaphorical for saying that the Muslims could kill the Christians very easily and that the latter were defenceless. It also expresses how they sensed the power difference between them and the Muslims.

among the population. The first event, which affected all of Turkey, was the military coup on 12 March 1971. The atmosphere in Turkey heavily permeated by the struggle between the State and its organized nationalist followers on the one hand and the leftist movements on the other hand. In 1970, influential academics, politicians and businessmen founded the extreme nationalist organization *Ülkü Ocakları* (The Hearths of Idealism). Its goal was to break the monopoly of the left-wing intellectuals on the social, political and cultural debate in Turkey (Zürcher 1996: 303). Influential Turkish politicians were attracted to the 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' (*Türk İslam Sentezi)*. Its principle was that the Islam exerted a special attraction on the Turks because of a number of (supposedly) striking similarities between their pre-Islamic culture and Islamic civilization (Ibid.).[186] The idea was that Turkish culture was built on two pillars: a 2500-year-old Turkish element and a 1000-year-old Islamic element. Hence, the destiny of the Turks was to be the 'soldiers of Islam'. In the late 1970s, the National Salvation Party (MSP) and the Nationalist Action Party of Turkey (MHP) were ardent adherents of this ideology. In a later period, this ideological constellation also appealed after the military coup of 12 September 1980. The military employed this ideology as an instrument to combat communist and socialist ideologies in Turkey.

In 1974, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*,[187] CHP) came to power again. In this political atmosphere the second Cyprus crisis of 1974 erupted, resulting in the invasion of Cyprus by Turkey on 20 July 1974.[188] The platform for a link between national identity and Islam was not limited to one political party. During the years 1975-1977, the government was based on a coalition between the National Salvation Party and the fascist Pan-Turkish Nationalist Action Party. The polarization of religious and ethnic differences became the focus of their propaganda. The nationalist newspaper *Hürriyet* (27 September 1978) for example discussed the alleged secret education in the Syriac Orthodox Zafaran Monastery thought to be

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[186] For further reading about *Türk-İslam Sentezi* see also Güvenç et al. (1994); Bora and Can (1999).

[187] The founder of this party was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938).

[188] The Greek Cypriots had already been encouraged by the Greek junta to achieve unity (*enosis*) with Greece in 1967. In 1974 the Greek junta organized a military *coup d'état* against Makarios in Cyprus, using the Cypriot National Guard which proclaimed unity with Greece (Zürcher 1996: 289). Fearing this unity, Ecevit decided to intervene with the idea of stopping this *enosis*: The Turkish armed forces occupied about 40% of Cyprus on 20 July 1974.

intended to send the pupils to higher education in Armenian schools in Istanbul in order to transform these Syriac Orthodox children into Armenian nationalists (Andersson 1983: 130). The Governor of Mardin, Fahri Öztürk confirmed this in an article in the same newspaper two days later, writing that the order to close down this educational activity was about to be executed. On 25 May 1979 this stream of education indeed stopped.[189]

Alienating Christians

The Turkish invasion of Cyprus provided a further platform to alienate Christians as a foreign element. During and after the days of the invasion, religious nationalism (*Türk-Islam sentezi*) grew in Turkey. Christians began to be referred to as *Rum* (Greek) or sometimes as *Makarios* (after the President of Cyprus). The Assyrians/Syriacs, who were perceived as allies of the Greeks because of their common faith, found themselves the focal of Turkish anger. Repercussions of such allegations on the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin* and Mardin were followed by attacks from neighbouring Muslims.[190] All respondents who talked about this period mentioned the sense of threat they experienced emanating from neighbouring Muslims in their villages. In *Mzizah*, the Assyrian/Syriac men stood on guard the village at night for about two weeks. One example of this threat was the violent demonstration in *Midyad* by the Muslims from the surrounding villages. The woman Nisane explained how she experienced the threat of this demonstration (which took place after the Cyprus crisis) in *Midyad* in 1975:

> When the conflict between Cyprus and Turkey broke out, the Muslims started to threaten the Christians in *Midyad*. They hung a cross around the neck of a dog [representing Archbishop and President Makarios] and they chased it with a stick through the streets in the centre of *Midyad,* past our churches. Parents barricaded their windows from the inside. My family put all of the young children, including me, food and water in our new well which was not yet used and therefore still dry. In *Midyad* we also had a network of subterranean canals. Some *Suryoye* hid themselves in these canals. They were very afraid for the young girls… We wept buckets of tears and our mothers even more than we did; *hawar u hawar dithe* [they screamed for help]. If this happened to us; what had happened to those in the *Seyfo*? My grandmother went crazy after the *Seyfo*!.. After about a week,

[189] Until 1979 teaching had been tolerated, despite the fact that it was formally not allowed.

[190] See for oral accounts about the Cyprus crisis in Beth Sawoce and BarAbraham (2009).

> the military came down and told us: "We had seen you armed in the churches." But that was a lie! We were not armed [before the attack]. But the *Suryoye* men had also prepared themselves for defence against any attack… I was about six or seven years old, but I remember everything! A child does not forget something like that! The voice over the loudspeaker promised that we were free again… We endured this situation for about ten days. And when I listen to the Turkish channel saying "We did not do anything to the Christians," I am furious! And this took place after the *Seyfo*. Before these events we had not yet planned to leave for Europe. But after this, we tried to get our papers ready to leave for Europe fast… We handed the keys over to them and left! 'Dogs' that they are!

Metaphorically speaking, 'to leave someone the keys' means to leave everything behind and flee. Assyrians/Syriacs used to resort to this in times of crisis. Another version is 'We closed the door behind us and gave them the keys' (*skhirlan u tar'o bethrayna u hulanne a qlide*).[191] When I asked another respondent in what context this had been used, she referred to the recent example of refugees fleeing their houses in post-war Iraq (2003).

There are many examples showing that this change in tone towards the Assyrians/Syriacs trickled down to daily life. For instance, on one occasion Shushan told how Assyrians/Syriacs in the villages around *Midyad* experienced this threat from their Muslim neighbours (after the Cyprus crisis in 1974). Shushan was twelve when she experienced what happened in the village *Bote*[192] in 1975:

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[191] In the context of the genocide in the First World War and the period thereafter, one such case resulted in the enrichment of one of the wealthiest families in Turkey, the *Sabancı ailesi*. Jan Beth Sawoce interviewed two elderly Assyrian/Syriac men about what happened: Chorbishop Brahim Hajjo and Iso' Dbe Qasho Malke. It is said that an Assyrian/Syriac man Garabet, who was originally from the village Saleh in *Tur 'Abdin*, had settled in Adana where he established seven factories manufacturing cotton thread (Beth Sawoce mentioned four factories; a great grand daughter of Garabeth in Sweden mentioned seven factories in a private correspondence). After the French informed the remaining Christians in Adana that their mandate would come to an end in 1922, he decided to join his co-religionists in their flight because they feared the consequences of the withdrawal of French protection. Apparently he had just left the keys behind and departed. Later, one of his Turkish employees who used to serve Garabet and his guests drinks, took over the factories as his property and developed the enterprises into the *Sabancı Holding*; in the present-day this family is counted among the richest in Turkey. Garabet settled in Lebanon. Malke Asaad married his daughter Ghazme, whose daughter and chandchildren live in Sweden. There are many similar stories about this period. This topic has become the main theme in the latest works of the famous novelist Yaşar Kemal (1997, 2002a, 2002b).

[192] The distance between *Midyad* and *Bote* was about ten kilometres.

I lived in *Bote* until the age of thirteen. I have found memories of the fruit, vegetation and the nice and the pleasant simple life. The unpleasant recollections I have are related to persecution by Muslims. After I grew a bit older I noticed that [persecution] very clearly. When I was younger I did not understand why my family always said: "Take this buttermilk to those dogs" when they meant the Muslims. Many times I asked myself "Why do they give them something if they do not like them?" Later I understood that they gave the Muslims something to keep them satisfied and to develop a friendly relationship with them.

What I remember very clearly from the *athro* [homeland] in the year [1975] before we came to Europe is that the Muslims started behaving very badly towards us; it became almost a trauma with me. There was a Muslim man who shouted from one of the roofs in the village and threatened us saying that they [Muslims] would kill all the Christians – again. I froze to my very marrow [*jamedli*] when I heard this. The older people started crying. I heard that the Greeks and Turkey were at war. Therefore, the Muslims in our neighbourhood wanted to take revenge on the Christians, by killing us. They assumed that we were allies of the Greeks who were at war with Turkey. This made me very afraid… In the past, when my grandfather and other elderly people used to talk about the *Seyfo*, I always thought those stories had taken place in the distant past, something that could not happen again. Besides, the stories about the *Seyfo* sounded to me like myths and beyond my comprehension [*lo 'obar wa l-mehi*]. But, when the elderly people began to weep about the children who would be slaughtered, I started to think of myself as being one of those children. I was twelve at that time. I froze [*jamedli*] and asked myself "how could the Muslims ever slaughter us!?" Until then I assumed that people slaughtered only animals and not children like me who had not done anything wrong. I began to feel very sad and angry with the older *Suryoye* people. Until then I had assumed that they would be able to protect me from anything which could harm me. But at that moment I saw that they were very weak and that they could not protect me against the Muslims. I started to feel weak and unprotected against what others could do to me...

In 1976 I came to Sweden… I did understand why I fled to Sweden, but I did not have any idea about when I would go back. As a child I did not understand these things; why I had to leave my parents to go to a place which I do not know about. It was not a nice experience. We came to Sweden as orphans, since families were not allowed into Sweden at that time.[193] Therefore our families sent us first. Besides the general dangers in

[193] It would have been much harder to be accepted as a family. The parents wanted probably to make sure that at least the children were safe and sound.

> the area, we [the girls] had reached the age [13] that we might be kidnapped by the Muslims. Therefore my parents preferred us to be safe. In Sweden we asked for asylum as orphans.

In 1975, the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Midyad* were shaken by another violent event. A Muslim girl fell in love with an Assyrian/Syriac boy from *Midyad* and eloped with him.[194] Such event was unusual and unacceptable for the Muslims. The Muslims in Estel (twin town of *Midyad* with Muslim inhabitants) and in the villages around *Midyad* organized an attack on the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Midyad*. The Assyrians/Syriacs managed to defend themselves effectively because they had been warned by a Muslim woman[195] from *Midyad's* twin town Estel who had heard about the preparations for the attack. Despite the fact that the violent attack was halted after some days through the intervention of the military, the event prompted many Assyrians/Syriacs to have their passports ready to leave for one of the European countries.

As indicated before, the Assyrians/Syriacs were not in a good position to defend themselves, and the authorities did not offer them any protection. In 1976 the instability and chaos deepened as many Kurds who worked illegally in Lebanon returned to *Tur 'Abdin*. Upon arrival, the latter began to take revenge[196] on their Christian neighbours by killing, stealing and kidnapping (Anschütz 1985: 59, Roldanus 1984). It is a general grievance of Assyrians/Syriacs that they are vulnerable in a Muslim society because the authorities do not offer the protection needed. Considering that Assyrians/Syriacs already felt defenceless (*twiroye*) even in situations which are not major crises, conflicts as that described above were like pouring oil on fire –resulting in another situation fraught with fear. This sense of being

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194 In the few cases in which *Muslim* girls eloped with *Suryoye* men with whom they fell in love, these couples were forced to move to another area to continue their lives secretly. An example is the *kalo* (bride) of Dbe Denjeke in *Midyad*. The Muslims from the surroundings villages attacked *Midyad*. The bride and groom eloped to Germany. In 2005/2006, a series appeared on Turkish TV which was based on this story which had taken place in *Midyad*. Some of the episodes were also filmed in *Midyad*. See also Miroğlu (2009) for an account of this story.

195 She is said to be the daughter of an Assyrian/Syriac woman (from the Dbe Dehabe family in *Midyad*) who was abducted by the Muslims of Estel during the *Seyfo*. She apparently found it intolerable that Assyrians/Syriacs would be endangered in such an attack and informed Chorbishop Abdallah about this plan.

196 The Kurds working in Lebanon considered themselves to be on the side of the Muslims who were fighting the Christians during the Lebanese Civil War. Resettling in *Tur 'Abdin*, they continued to perceive Christians as those with whom they were at war.

defenceless has become almost all pervading since the 1960s, because Christians were deprived of the ability to protect themselves in the new social political arena. The case of a priest in one of the villages of *Turo d-Izlo* in *Tur 'Abdin* at the end of the 1970s, who found himself thrust into a dilemma provides an apt illustration: He sat about renovating the church in which he had been inducted as priest that year and the work was not finished yet. While thus engaged, he was sorely troubled by unprovoked attacks by Kurdish Muslims in the region. He had endured various attacks on his village and on himself personally. Since many of the younger people had already left the village, he felt that he could no longer defend the remaining Assyrian/Syriac villagers. After the priest had gone to the local *yüzbaşı*[197] to report this on numerous occasions, the *yüzbaşı* advised the priest:

> Father, listen to me, I must tell you that you cannot live in this land. The people in this land are simply like this. If you stay here, this will be your life. Nothing will be solved when you report the various attacks on your life and on that of your villages to the authorities.

For the priest this was a sign that the authorities could not or did not want to expend any energy to protect them either. This realization prompted him to begin discussing the situation with his villagers:

> In a gathering with the villagers I explained to them: "The situation in the village is as you can observe it. Nevertheless, if you promise me that you will not leave, I shall stay with you. I have put enormous effort into rebuilding the church and it is not finished yet.[198] I don't want to abandon it and just leave." But each of them told me: "As soon as we get the passports we applied for, we shall leave and we advise you to do the same." This is how I left for Germany in 1978.

As I discuss in the next chapter, this is the period in which the mass emigration to Europe started. Experiencing threats and danger particularly after the Cyprus crises and Turkey's political conjuncture, they turned their face to the 'open road to Europe'.

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[197] Equal to Captain's rank in military.

[198] He renovated the church illegally. At that time the Turkish authorities had not given yet permission for Assyrians/Syriacs to renovate churches.

3.2.2 The Armed Struggle between the Turkish Army and the PKK (1975-99)

In the 1970s, the Turkish authorities made attempts to break down the power of the leftist movement. This plunged Turkish society into extreme disorder. The actions taken by the authorities to control this situation had far-reaching consequences for everybody in society – whether they wanted to be involved in the conflict or not. One group in this Turkish leftist movement would later focus on specifically Kurdish rights in Turkey.[199] In the provinces of Mardin and Diyarbakır, the first Kurdish activists who espoused the struggle and mobilized the movement, were known as the *talaba* (students); a reference to the high rate of sympathizers and activists for their ideology among this group. Since the 1970s, the *talaba* (later to be organized as the PKK), have been the main power challenging that of the Kurdish *aghas* in the area of *Tur 'Abdin*. In 1978 Abdullah Öcalan founded the PKK (*Partiya Karkeran Kurdistan*, Workers Party of Kurdistan), a Kurdish guerrilla organization.[200]

Leftist Movements and Assyrians/Syriacs

The leftist[201] movement in Turkey also left its mark on the Assyrian/Syriac students – although they could be counted on the fingers of one hand – in cities like Istanbul and Ankara and on pupils at secondary schools in *Tur 'Abdin,* Mardin and Diyarbakır. Specifically during the 1970s the activities of the Assyrian/Syriac cultural association *MED Kültür Derneği* in Istanbul were stimulated by Assyrian/Syriac students who had grown up in an environment dominated by the leftist Turkish movement.[202] Nevertheless, only a few of these students actually joined the Turkish leftist movements in

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[199] See Van Bruinessen (1992: 275) about the first Kurdish political organizations, such as the *Kurd Teavun ve Teraqqi Jamiyati* (Kurdish Society for Mutual Aid and progress) which was founded in 1908, following the Young Turk revolution.

[200] Both the *talaba* and the *Apocu* came to be known as the PKK. Its goal was to found a socialist independent Kurdish state in the Middle East. Later, with the capture of the leader of the movement, A. Öcalan in 1999, the movement has started to change its program and some of its aims, particularly the claim for an independent Kurdish state.

[201] See for a study of the Socialist Movement in Turkey, Lipovsky (1992).

[202] MED derived its name from Mardin, El 'Aziz and Diyarbakır – names of the towns from which the founders originally came. The founders (about ten academics) got a formal permission to establish the MED Cultural Association in 1960. It functioned as a meeting point for Assyrians/Syriacs in Istanbul. See further Oussi (1998: 13, 14) and Akdemir (2009: 150, 151).

the big cities in which they studied.[203] Other Assyrian/Syriac youngsters did seem to have been influenced by these ideas but with the exception of one or two they were not active.[204] Like other leftists in Turkey, Assyrian/Syriac students with leftist ideas ran into difficulties. As they sensed the danger of being caught, they mobilized the family contacts they had in Europe and fled the country. Some of them were imprisoned for a short period before they fled the country.

The presumable reason why not many Assyrian/Syriac youngsters joined the leftist movement is because of the historical non-active political involvement of their group in Turkish politics. Firmly on the outside, no culture of political involvement in the Turkish political system developed among them. The root cause can be inexorably traced to their historical position in a Muslim society, first as *millet* in the Ottoman Empire, and later as a non-recognized Christian minority. Any deviation from the norm could be perceived by the authorities as a threat to Turkish unity. Assyrians/Syriacs refer to this attitude of the Turkish authorities by saying 'they kept a close watch on us' (*lasyewayne a'layna*). Another reason for the low involvement of Assyrians/Syriacs in even the Turkish leftist movement can be pointed out as the chauvinistic approach of this movement and the exclusion of minority problems. In addition, members of the leftist movement did not recognize a separate ethnic minority identity than the 'Turkish national identity'. In this sense, also the leftist Turkish movement can be seen as a nationalist movement.

Roldanus (1985: 83) discusses the very careful attitude of the Syriac Orthodox church board in Istanbul and its attempts to meet the norm set by

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[203] This conscious attitude towards socio-political issues can be observed among the Assyrians/Syriacs generally and especially among the older generation. Assyrian/Syriac parents were usually very careful and did not allow their children to mix easily with the masses. They were not only afraid of the leftist ideas with which their children might come into contact, they were also plagued by a fear that the children might be harmed by the Muslims in some general way. This is often expressed with the statement *twiroyena baynothayye* (among them we are defenceless). Usually they did not feel secure enough to send their children to higher education schools which were based in cities – where the majority was Muslim. Respondents give a historical explanation for this fear. They remember cases of Assyrian/Syriac pupils and students who were killed by Muslim students simply because of their Christian background.

[204] An example is Ibrahim Seven who had the leadership in the Communist Party of Turkey Unity (*Türkiye Kommünist Partisi/Birlik*, TKP/B) and in the later founded Revolutionary Communist Party (*Devrimci Komünist Partisi,* DKP).

the authorities regarding politically correct attitude of 'Turkish citizens'.[205] The church board was palpably aware that the authorities kept a constant check on them.[206] This confirms and explains the stories of my respondents who were active in the cultural association *MED Kültür Derneği* during the 1970s.[207] Their efforts were constantly hindered by the Syriac Orthodox church board, which they perceived as the extended arm[208] of the Turkish authorities in the latter's attempt to control cultural activities[209] they organized for the Assyrian/Syriac youth in Istanbul. Respondents who lived in this city in the second part of the 1990s complained about the controlling attitude of the church board whom were believed to make use of the position of the local Syriac Orthodox archbishop.[210] Initially the church board agreed to the initiative launched by a group of students from the congregation who wanted to publish the informative magazine *Sheblo* – discussing both social cultural and religious topics. The church board censored all contributions before publication and changed some articles without the consent of the authors, because they did not find them acceptable in the light of Turkish public opinion. This is one of the reasons

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[205] See for the careful attitude of Assyrian/Syriac leaders also Roldanus (1985: 93), who mentions that in the beginning of the 1980s, some priests of the Syriac Orthodox Church wished to open a church school (*madrashto*) to teach Bible classes and church hymns to Assyrian/Syriac children in Istanbul. But this idea was blocked by the local church board, a result of its very careful attitude. Roldanus concludes therefore that the church board made enormous efforts not to experiment with new developments but instead preserved the status quo for the safety of the Assyrians/Syriacs.

[206] Roldanus (1985: 82) writes that during the time of his research in 1982, the authorities had checked the names of the candidates for the church board. They had the right to remove names from the list if they were not satisfied about their attitude. The authorities in Ankara give their authorization to the list of candidates through the governor in Istanbul. During formal church meetings, a representative of the authorities had to be present.

[207] The *coup d'état* in 1980 with a strong focus on uniformity in culture led to the disbandment of the association MED (Roldanus 1985: 84), Akdemir (2009: 151).

[208] According to several of my respondents who had been active in the *MED Kutur Derneği* in Istanbul, the Turkish nationalist author Mithat Sertoğlu published a book in which he claimed that Assyrians/Syriacs (*Süryani*) are of the Turan race. This was made possible with the financial help of individuals in the church board. When the church board tried to distribute this book among the church members, the MED activists protested and hindered its distribution in the church.

[209] They organized youth social outings, theatre plays, Syriac language classes and folkloristic dance evenings.

[210] Interview (2007) with one of the initiators of the magazine *Sheblo* and their radio programme. An informant mentioned to to me that in Damacus, the church board has a similar attitude, prohibiting all activities taking place outside the church, such as cultural activities, language schools and parties.

many works about cultural aspects, including the Syriac language, were not to be published. Anything written which touched on the theme of human rights in Turkey had to be withdrawn as well. The publication was produced from 1995 to 1998; a period of continuous tensions between the students and the church board. In 1998 the church board stopped the publication.[211] In the same period, similar incidents occurred after the identical group of students had arranged with a leftist Turkish radio station to broadcast one hour per week to discuss cultural and political subjects. After a few broadcasts, the church board requested the students to stop the broadcasts by order of the authorities. The church board in Istanbul has also opposed to the activities of the first civic Assyrian/Syriac association after the military coup of 1980, MEZO-DER (Mesopotamia Solidarity Association, 2004). According to my respondents, as soon as it was established the archbishop sent a letter to all his congregations in Istanbul to be read at the sermon of the Sunday mass, emphasizing that the diocese did not have any relationship with the mentioned association and that the church members were not supposed to get in close contact with this organization. This can be seen as a symbolic gesture towards the authorities, showing disapproval to this organization's establishment.

Caught Between the 'Horse Shoe and the Nail'

In the second half of the 1970s, the conflict between the *talaba* and the authorities upset the provoking situation of the people in *Tur 'Abdin*. The villagers were aware that the *talaba* were fighting the authorities and their institutions, including the police and the military.[212] At that time, the Assyrians/Syriacs, particularly those in *Tur 'Abdin,* were caught in the middle of the struggle between the Kurdish activists and the Turkish authorities.

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211 After publication of the magazine *Sheblo* was stopped, the Archbishop launched a new magazine, this time with the Turkish name *Yeni Gün Işığı* (Light of the New Day). The articles published dealt with internal church affairs. A few selected deacons were involved in the publication, which continued for only a few months.

212 As a young child growing up in *Mzizah*, this part of political society touched my life too. Not because I watched television or listened to the radio. It was because some of the young Kurdish men in *Mzizah* were active in or had sympathies for the *talaba.* I remember that a young man in my village had written the name of the People's Party in Turkey, CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) on the wall of the village school in big letters around 1980. As soon as the soldiers came into the village and saw it, they went to the house closest to the school and beat the owner badly. At that time CHP was perceived to be more leftist. Moreover, often with the military coup, only military hegemony was accepted.

Respondents who lived in *Midyad* in this period remembered that the chaos there worsened and there were many nocturnal raids.

The end of the 1970s was marked by mounting problems of law and order: Kurdish separatism had gained ground, politicians reached a political impasse, the economy was collapsing and many sensed the threat of Islamic fundamentalism which was fed by the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran (Zürcher 1996: 282). The military intervened by staging a *coup d'état* on 12 September 1980. The armed forces took over the whole political system and declared a state of emergency throughout the country (Zürcher 1996: 292-3). General Kenan Evren was officially declared head of State on 14 September. By June 1981, there was a ban on political debates in public. In 1983 the first Prime Minister after the *coup d'état* was Turgut Özal of the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*). Many members of the Motherland Party, including Özal, had been influenced by the 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' (Zürcher 1996: 303). The orientation of the Republic deviated visibly to a Turkish-Islamic channel against perceived 'ethnic separatism' (emphasis on Turkishness against ethnic claims) and 'communism' (Islam against leftist movements).

After the military coup of 1980, the renewed focus on intertwining Turkish nationalism and Islamism infiltrated into various areas, as some of my respondents experienced during that period:

- Religious education in Sunni Islam were made obligatory for all pupils[213] from 1982 (independent of their religious belief);
- A class on 'national security' (*Milli Güvenlik*) was introduced into high schools. Army officers taught about the role of the military in Turkish history and the army system;
- Many churches were converted into mosques and the construction of new mosques was stimulated as a counterweight to communist leftist ideas.

Turkish chauvinism swelled as a reaction to the attacks on Turkish embassies by the Armenian ASALA[214]. Attempting to avoid the stigma of disloyalty,

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213 See more on religious education (Roldanus 1985: 79).

214 ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) operated from 1975 to 1986. The intention of the ASALA was 'to compel the Turkish Government to acknowledge publicly its responsibility for the Armenian genocide during the First World War, pay reparations, and cede territory for an Armenian homeland' (U.S. Department of State, 'Appendix B', Patterns of Global Terrorism Report, 1996).

Christian minorities adopted certain strategies: those living in the cities gave their children Turkish names, and tried not to be recognized as non-Turkish in public life. Before the 1980s, Christian minorities which had been perceived to be the disloyal 'internal enemy' were referred to as *Rum*. This reference changed to 'Armenians' or 'members of the ASALA' after the 1980s.

In the 1980s and 1990s religious fanaticism also assumed a political character and started organizing itself. Especially in the bigger cities, the influence of the Islamists increased (Zürcher 1996: 310). In 1994 the Islamist *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party) seized power. The Turkish Hezbullah, an Islamist Turkish terrorist group, was founded in the 1980s with the goal of fighting the PKK.[215] Although allegations that the Hezbullah had been founded with the help of and with the collabouration of Turkish security forces, the Turkish military denied this sharply (Human Rights Watch World Report 2000).[216] Assyrian/Syriac respondents recounted that in about 1988 the people in *Tur 'Abdin* grew aware of the existence of the Hezbullah: its male members started to wear full beards and even the attitude of women and children towards Christians assumed fanatical character.

My respondent Shabo explained how waxing religious fanaticism left its mark on the economic relations between Muslims and Christians:

> …Mullah Jubbair preached in the mosque that the Muslims should not buy from the Christians because their products were *haram*. He spread extreme and negative ideas about the Christians which led to a worsened relationship with the *Suryoye*. Consequently, the *Suryoye* sold fewer of their products in *Midyad*. Therefore, the *Suryoye* developed a new strategy to sell their food: they asked Muslims in the village to sell their products. In return, these Muslims shared in the profits. In this respect, they started to depend more on the Muslims in the village.

The mounting social and political influence of *mullahs* in *Tur 'Abdin* can be seen as an indication of the more rampant religious fundamentalism. On January 5th 1990, the Assyrian/Syriac mayor (*mukhtar*) of the village *Anhel*, Gevriye Bulut and his son Sami were killed by the Hezbullah and the *mullah*

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215 For a background on Turkish Hezbullah see:
http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hizbullah-t.htm

216 See the report about the Turkish Hezbullah by Human Rights Watch online:
http://www.hrw.org/press/2000/02/tur0216.htm

(Muslim religious leader) of *Anhel*. After the involvement of the *mullah* had become public, *Mullah* Zubair assembled the *mullahs* of the villages in the area to meet with the remaining Assyrian/Syriac men in *Anhel*. At that meeting, the *mullahs* requested from the Assyrian/Syriac men in the village not to request the authorities to punish the *mullah*, if they did so they threatened to unleash a second *Seyfo* (here: genocide) on the Assyrians/Syriacs and exterminate them. After this threat, the Assyrians/Syriacs kept quiet and many decided to leave *Anhel* for Europe.[217] Around 1991, the remaining Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin* began receiving letters from the Hezbullah in which their lives were threatened (Araz 2001: 132). In the 1990s the Hezbullah kidnapped *Assyrians/Syriacs* with a central position in the community.[218] The teacher Lahdo Barinç was kidnapped in 1993. In 1994 the same happened to Father Melke Tok, priest of the village *Midin*. Both of them were released after negotiations and influence of European politicians and Assyrian/Syriac activists in the diaspora.[219] A few days after Father Melke Tok was set free, the Assyrian/Syriac mayor of *Midyad*, Yacob Matte (who was involved in the negotiations) was killed by the Hezbullah (Araz 2001: 145/6).

Daily Life and the PKK Conflict

Towards the mid-1980s, Turkish fear of Kurdish separatism had grown, fanned by the intensified guerrilla war waged by the PKK in south-eastern Turkey since 1984. The new rhetoric of accusation alleged that the goal of the Kurdish PKK was separatism in south-eastern Turkey; the Armenian ASALA strove for a similar prize in the northeast and the east; and the Assyrians/Syriacs were allied to both of these 'separatist' groups. In the climate created by this false accusation, the position of the Assyrians/Syriacs

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217 From an interview (2005) with a respondent who was among the last remaining Assyrians/Syriacs in Anhel.

218 See forthcoming report by Abrohom Mirza.

219 Lahdo Barinç was set free after the payment of two billion Turkish Lira (Araz 2001: 146). In that same year father Melke Tok narrated the story of his kidnapping on a cassette which was copied by the Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe. It was a sign that the situation in *Tur 'Abdin* was very dangerous and that the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin* were helpless. Talay (2004) published the story of Father Melke Tok with a German translation. The latest victim of such kidnappings was the Syriac Orthodox monk Daniel Savci (residing at the St Jacob Monastery in the village of *Salah*), on 28 November 2007. One of his kidnappers was a 'village guard' from the town *Hazakh* (Turkish: Idil).

became unbearable – a sentiment reiterated by all respondents who lived there during that time. In his account my respondent Shabo (at that time he was about 19 years old and living in *Tur 'Abdin*) gives an idea of his perception about the conflict in the area and the groups concerned:

> Around the mid-1980s there were a couple of *Suryoye* youngsters who expressed sympathy for the ideas of the PKK, because it also fought their oppressor. Moreover, the PKK convinced these youngsters that if the Kurds were to realize a free Kurdistan then the *Suryoye* and all the other people in their territory would be allowed to enjoy much more freedom than they did under Turkish rule: "Then you will be able to enjoy the freedom that you need, to open your shops whenever you want it, to have your own flag, to have your own schools and so forth." These *Suryoye* youngsters were not involved in the armed struggle, but they showed their sympathy for their ideology. Usually, the *Suryoye* people in the village were not aware of this. It was all secret… I was not convinced by this PKK ideology. It was the stuff which dreams are made of and not realistic. If the Yezidi, the Muslim and I were to decide to have a country together, then we should enjoy the same rights if we had fought alongside each other. First, I should be sure that this would be the case. And if this were not to be, I had little appetite for becoming involved in their business. They said that we would be able to live peacefully with them under their leadership. But history has taught us otherwise; from what we heard from our ancestors this is not possible. There is even a saying which goes "Even if a Muslim is an apple, do not put him in your pocket. And if you put him in your pocket then make a hole so it falls out." The implication is that Muslims cannot be trusted. This has been our experience in this country. I could be free with my people and under the leadership of our people we could communicate with them, but I did not want to co-operate with them under their leadership, as I do not trust them. We would respect them and they should respect us. But each with their own rights. It was clear to me that if they were to achieve power in the future, they would not have granted us our rights. Therefore I did not want to get involved in their business. For example, the older generation [*Suryoye*] eschewed involvement with the Kurds, especially because they had still harboured memories of the time of the *Seyfo*. All they wanted was to live in freedom and peace – enjoying their rights… There is no certainty that they could enjoy a better position with more rights under Kurdish rule.

As a reaction to the increased guerrilla activities of the PKK, the authorities developed the system of 'village guards' as part of their strategy to break down the power of the PKK on two fronts.[220] The idea was to prevent the PKK from infiltrating the villages and influencing the population with its ideology, and it was also a means to stop the villagers from providing them with food or any other assistance – in case requested (under threat) by the PKK. The military and the 'village guards' on their part did not hesitate to punish the villagers were they to have any 'friendly' contact with the PKK (whether out of sympathy or necessity driven by the fear of reprisals). Since these 'guards' were armed and allied to both the local *agha* and the authorities, they acquired power and dominance over the common villagers. Often they had no compunction about abusing their power for personal gain, getting away with the scot-free. Among the ordinary villagers, this increased the sense of becoming even more defenceless than they had been. A relatively high number of attacks against Assyrians/Syriacs are still reported to have been perpetrated by these 'village guards'.[221] People fear them since they are backed up by both the Turkish authorities and the local Kurdish *agha*.

Besides the high number of Assyrian/Syriac victims of murder by either one of the armed groups cooperating with the authorities (village guards, Hezbullah, Kurdish aghas, and the army) or by the PKK, Assyrians/Syriacs had foremost to endure the enormous pressure and danger they experienced from all these groups. It was clear that they themselves could not decide to stay out of the conflict between these groups. Several Assyrian/Syriac youngsters experienced imprisonment upon alleged connections with the PKK. It is remarkable that also in this political situation between the army and the PKK, Assyrian/Syriac victims were besides these baseless accusations, confronted with their religious affiliation to divert from that of the majority. Shabo, who had been confronted three times with such accusation during the 1980s, recounts that during the interrogation sessions

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[220] In *Tur 'Abdin*, the *agha* Seyhmus Çelebi is in charge of all the village guards in the region (*Koruçubaşı).*The authorities delegate the responsibility for the financial payment of the village guards to this *agha*. Offering salaries higher than for example that of schoolteachers, the authorities have attracted many Kurds for these positions in order to fight the PKK.

[221] The UNHCR mentions a list of killed Assyrians/Syriacs between 1990 and 1994 in its report:
http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/2848af408d01ec0ac1256609004e770b/40c70ad8bef592c18025671a00592cab?OpenDocument

the people in charge of the interrogation and torture questioned his Christian affiliation:

> …When it was my turn to be interrogated, they first took my picture. Then I had to sign a document stating that I was connected to the PKK. I said that I did not want to sign it, but else they would hurt me. Therefore, I signed. But first they had to prove that. Then the soldier asked me: "Where are you from?" "From *Midyad*," I said. He looked at my identity pass [*nüfus*] and read that I was Christian. He asked me "Why are you Christian?" I said: "That is none of your business. There are many Christians. I am not the only one. There are many *Süryani* in *Midyad*, Mardin, Istanbul and Europe." He said: "Why don't you become Muslim?" I said: "I am happy with my religion, thank God." Every time that it was my turn he shouted to me in Turkish: "*Gel ulan Christo*"[222] [Come here you Christ!]

As were other Assyrian/Syriac victims of this situation, Shabo was released. One individual who was confronted with this politicized situation and had to endure political imprisonment of twelve and a half years on the basis of false allegations, was Soner Önder. His case is interesting for several reasons in relation to the position of the Christians during the civil war in Turkey in the 1990s. Soner,[223] then a seventeen-year-old university student, was arrested and taken into police custody in Istanbul on the 25 December 1991. According to the official statements, he was one of twenty-eight suspects charged following an arson attack on a department store in the Bakırköy district of Istanbul on Christmas Day. The firebombing of the premises was carried out by the youth organization of PKK. Soner was charged with aiding and abetting an illegal armed organization and with attending the demonstration held on that day. On 12 January 1996, Soner was sentenced

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222 In this context, the term *ulan* is used with the meaning of 'Hey you'. *Christo* is a derogatory reference to the Christians generally, but its use started with a specific reference to the Greek Orthodox during the New Turkish Republic. *Christo* could be perceived as another version of *gavur* (infidel). The Turkish film industry Yeşilcam especially mobilized its use through the image it showed of a typical Greek (*Christo*) in Istanbul, which had become the symbol for the historical struggle for power between the Turks and the Greeks. A *Christo* in those movies was presented as someone devilish, dark-looking with a long dark beard. The dark colour is presumably a reference to the black cloth worn by Christian clergy and to the dark image of the devil. The use of the term *Christo* was widely current after the first Cyprus conflict in 1955.

223 Soner was studying at university in Istanbul when he was arrested at the age of seventeen. In international writings, he was identified as a member of the Chaldean Church, or Assyrian in Turkey.

to death. Nine years after this decision in 2005, when Soner was released after twelve-and-a-half years imprisonment, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg condemned Turkey for violating Articles 3 and 6[224] of the European Convention on Human Rights.[225]

On the basis of Soner's own bibliographical writing, on 25 December 1991 he was on his way to his sister's house after Christmas Mass, which he attended at the Syriac Orthodox Church in Bakirköy, the quarter where the said demonstration took place in the morning of the same day. The police stopped the bus and checked the identity cards of all the passengers. Upon reading Soner's Christian affiliation and Diyarbakır (known as the centre of Kurdish Separatist Movement) as his birth of place on his identity pass, the policeman shouted out at him *Aşağı in, gavur!* ('Get off the minibus, *gavur*!'). This is how his twelve-and-a-half year history of political imprisonment and torture commenced. During periods of interrogation and torture, he was blindfolded and told to sign a document in which it was stated that he was involved in the PKK attack in Istanbul – if he refused to comply they would continue with the torture. Being accused of PKK connections was not the only or even the main aspect of the way he was treated during the period in which he was imprisoned. To a very great extent, his Christian identity seemed to assume a more central role in the way his accusation was handled by the authorities. In his unpublished biographical writings, Soner states that the policemen in charge intensified the torture as soon as they discovered that he was not circumcised. The police introduced electric shocks through cables attached to Soner's nipples, toes, ears and penis and added to this: 'Now we shall make sure that you will not be able to become a father'. In the torture sessions which followed, his sexual organ became the focal point of the treatment. Moreover, the policemen forced him to discuss his Christian belief and he was confronted with such exclamations as 'You Christians, do you believe in destiny? You will see what your destiny will be!' When Soner – upon being asked who he was - defined himself as *Süryani* (Turkish for Assyrian/Syriac), the reaction of the police chief was: 'You also want an independent state, *Asuristan*! (Assyria)... You, the Armenian sperm! (*Ermeni*

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[224] Article 3 prohibits torture, and 'inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'. Article 6 provides a detailed right to a fair trial.

[225] Application No. 39813/98, European Court of Human Rights. Press release issued by the Registrar. Chamber judgement concerning Turkey (12 July 2005).

dölü!)[226]… You are all the same!' Similarly, in the national Turkish newspapers, Soner was portrayed as 'an Armenian Terrorist'. This again indicates that all Christians in Turkey were lumped together in the constitutive outside as the 'others' and the internal enemy. In Turkish nationalist discourse, 'Armenian terrorist' invariably works because of its historically constructed meaning. Religious discourses also assumed a central place during the court sessions. To mention the dimension of the witnesses, the Archbishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Istanbul submitted an affidavit to the Court in which he stated that Soner had been in church at the time of the attack. The court did not take this evidence into consideration and afterwards the Turkish media portrayed the archbishop as the defender of 'terrorists'. Instead, the judge based his verdict of a life sentence[227] mainly on the evidence of a Muslim fanatic who attacked Soner's family during the court hearing and testified against Soner. Even though his testimony was completely inconsistent and obviously fabricated, the court regarded him as a reliable key witness and reached its verdict on the basis of his testimonies. The same man later also identified Soner as one of the persons who murdered a police chief; a month after he had actually been taken into custody, and was consequently behind bars.

It is also remarkable that the 'deep state' hung Soner's picture on the wall of the visitors' room as a poster with a text which was addressed to the families of the other prisoners: *Soner Önder, Christian Chaldean. This is the terrorist leader who misleads your children!* Here again, Soner is not presented as an individual for what he was accused for years before but as what he was alleged to be: the Christian enemy who fools the Muslim 'children', apparently into acting against the State. The victim is transformed into the focal point of the anger of the 'deep state' and used in its strategies to handle their internal 'political problems'. The fact that Soner's death was twice announced in the Turkish national media during his imprisonment also indicates that the 'deep state' wanted him to disappear. After having been released from prison at the age of thirty, Soner analysed the acts of the Turkish authorities as follows in his bibliographical writings:

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[226] In the 1990s, the reference *Ermeni dölü!* was also used by the Interior Minister of Turkey, Meral Akşener, about anyone whom she considered to be the internal enemy of the state.

[227] Later the verdict of a life sentence was changed into a sentence of 16 years and 8 months because Soner was underage.

> I was a scapegoat just because I was a Christian Assyrian. It is no secret that for a long time the Turkish authorities have tried to involve Christians in PKK separatist war in order to cleanse Turkey of any Christian presence.

Assyrians/Syriacs became also victim to another strategy which the Turkish military used in order to weaken the PKK; the destruction of entire villages.[228] This policy was decided on by the Turkish State of Emergency Co-ordination Council in February 1993. Eventually, this would have to be implemented in broad terms. Indeed, in the course of the 1990s many villages were destroyed and the inhabitants were forced to settle elsewhere. Little to no attention was paid to the villagers themselves. Among these villages there were some where the entire population consisted of Assyrians/Syriacs.[229] The authorities requested them to sign a report that the PKK instead of the authorities forced them to leave their village. This betrays the pursuit of a conscious policy. An Assyrian/Syriac respondent of the sociologist Araz (2001: 143) talked about the evacuation of his village *Hassana*[230] in the Sirnak region, south-eastern Turkey, illustrating that they had been left to their own fate, since they were not offered an alternative place to move to:

> In the '*agha* conference'[231] in Ankara it was decided that our village was to be among the other villages to be evacuated. They [authorities] accused us of serving two flags, namely that of the Armenians and the PKK, and rejecting the Turkish flag. This was shown on the National TV the same day and the next day in the newspapers. We did not have a clue what they were talking about! Consequently the village of Hassana was evacuated by the Turkish army on 20 November 1993… The villagers had to find themselves a new temporary home. Some families went to the village *Miden*, others to *Hazakh*, some to *Bnebil*, and a few found shelter in the Zafaran Monastery. After some time the provincial governor in *Hazakh* invited the representatives of Hassana to meet him. He offered us

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228 About 3000 villages had been evacuated by 1996 (Zürcher 1996: 327).

229 Within a period of about ten years the residents of around twenty Assyrian/Syriac villages were evacuated (Araz 2001: 139-143). Among them were *Hassana*, *Miden*, *Dayro du Slibo* and *Dayro d-Qubo* (also known as *Dayr Qube*).

230 Hassana was inhabited by members of the Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Church and the Syriac Orthodox Church.

231 The *agha conference* in the 1990s is a reference to the meeting of the Minister of Interior with the head of 'village guards' who belonged to the big tribes.

> compensation for the loss of our houses, land and anything else we had had to leave behind because we could not take it all with us: …each family would be paid about 500.000 TL, [31 Euros[232]]. We did not accept this ridiculous offer and told the governor that the State needed this money more than we did. "We can feed ourselves with shovels and axes," I told him… Furthermore, the governor asked us to sign a document stating that the village was evacuated because of the PKK. I told him: "The State evacuated our village – why should we accuse the PKK of this?" Then he told me: "You are just as the *gavur* [infidels] once were!" [233]

Dislocated as they have been they have brought their stories with them to urban and often Western areas where they have newly established themselves.[234]

European Accession Process

A relatively important change occurred in 1999 when the Helsinki European Council granted Turkey the status of candidate country for membership of the EU. Since then, Turkey has indeed initiated several reform packages in order to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria; one of the main conditions for EU membership. In this EU accession process, some changes (regarding freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of religion, thought and conscience, place and personal names and others)[235]

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[232] Interview held in 2005. In 1993 this would be about 31 Euros.

[233] The governor was presumably referring to the perception the Turkish authorities have had of Assyrians/Syriacs as Christians and therefore as *khayin*, betrayers of the state.

[234] Many people from Hassana have today settled in Mechelen (Belgium) also referred to as 'New Hassana' (see further www.shlama.be).

[235] Some of the problems and achievements related to minority rights in Turkey are summarized in the report of Minority Rights Group International (2007): "There are constitutional restrictions on the use of minority languages in education. Article 42 of the Constitution declares Turkish the 'mother tongue' of Turkish citizens and prohibits public education in any other language, reserving the terms of Lausanne..." (p. 15) "The Provincial Administrative Law of 1949 allows the Ministry of Interior to change 'village names that are not Turkish and may give rise to confusion'. As part of the reform package of 15 July 2003, an amendment to the Civil Registry Law removed the restriction on parents' freedom to name their children with names deemed 'offensive to the national culture', which in practice was used to ban non-Turkish names, but kept the requirement that the names should comply with 'moral values' and should not be offensive to the public..." (p. 18) "There is no legal framework enabling minorities to use their mother tongue in their relations with public authorities..." (p. 19) "The October 2001 constitutional amendments achieved considerable progress in the protection of free speech through removing from Articles 26 and 28 the restriction on the use of any 'language prohibited by law' in the expression and dissemination of thought and in broadcasting, respectively. However, the amendments left untouched the restrictions attached

have been applied to conform to the requisite of the EU reform packages. One of the latest reports[236] about minorities in Turkey, – apart from the problems they still face in Turkey – mentions a positive trend in the atmosphere which the EU accession process has introduced:

> Arguably, the most significant achievement of the EU process has been the way in which it has created space for various minority groups to demand recognition of their distinct identities, the reformulation of the exclusive Turkish citizenship and the removal of barriers to the free exercise of their religious, political and cultural rights.

Nevertheless, big problems still loom large at the level of implementation. Most importantly, minorities whose rights had not been implemented after the Lausanne Treaty, among them the Assyrians/Syriacs, are still stuck with their non-recognized minority status. In the Turkish Constitution, which is mainly a product of the military coup of September 1980, there is still no space for minorities and their issues. In 2009, one of the still functioning Assyrian/Syriac monasteries, Mor Gabriel, was faced with several juridical processes devised to facilitate the confiscation of its property rights.[237] Despite these setbacks, there have been new developments within Turkey which have given Assyrians/Syriacs in the diaspora more space to visit their villages. Some individuals have even resettled there and rebuilt their homes and churches. This process began when the Turkish Prime Minister, Bülent Ecevit, made an official statement on June 31 2001 in which he called upon Assyrians/Syriacs to return to their villages. Another example of positive change has been the election of the first Assyrian/Syriac individual to Turkish Parliament on 12 June 2011.[238]

Baskin Oran (2007) analyses the 'changing' atmosphere in terms of a historical transformation of the 'paradigms' which the Turkish Republic has established. However, as I indicated, the public and official discourses towards minorities have remained largely unchanged. Non-Muslim minorities especially have continued to be seen through the discourses of

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to the exercise of these rights for the purposes of, *inter alia*, safeguarding the indivisible integrity of the State with its territory and nation' (pp. 22-3).

236 Minority Rights Group International (2007: 32).

237 See further also the introduction to this thesis.

238 In the 2011 elections, Erol Dora was elected from the province of Mardin as the candidate of the Platform Barış, Demokrasi ve Özgürlük (Peace, Democracy and Freedom).

gavur as the 'others' and dealt with as an internal tool for external powers. In the same line, Turkish identity has continued to be based on an exclusive approach. Besides 'ethnic' origins, Islam constitutes one of the main nodal points in Turkish identity discourses. In the long term, the exclusive and particularistic character of Turkish identity discourses has led to the virtual disappearance of non-Muslims in Turkey.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, my purpose has been to discuss the position of Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey. Characteristic of the position of the survivors of the *Seyfo* in this country has been their continued subordinated position as a non-recognized minority. Subsequently, they have not been protected either by any international treaty or by the Turkish Constitutions of 1923, 1961 or 1980. In comparison to what their position had been under the Ottoman Empire, it can be said that it has worsened. This is expressed most cogently in their virtual disappearance from their historical *habitat*. In the official and public discourses, they have continued to be categorized as *gavur* and regarded as a potential 'internal enemy'. The response of Assyrians/Syriacs to this discriminatory politics has been to seek practical 'solutions' in order to survive. Their emigration to Western countries is one example of their survival strategies. Therefore, this chapter should be read in relation to the following chapter about emigration.

4 THEY HAVE GONE TO FOREIGN LANDS: THE EXODUS FROM THE HOMELAND

How can the sons of the nation be sent into exile?
How can they accept any form of oppression?
As if they were sons of foreigners.[239]

Archbishop Yuhanon Dolabani

Emigration is certainly not a new experience for the Assyrians/Syriacs. Throughout the ages, the Syro-Mesopotamian area has been the stage for a long series of dominant powers under which Assyrians/Syriacs have lived as a subordinated group of people and have often been excluded from access to the dominant power structure of the region.[240] Persecutions, but also economical difficulties often compelled them to migrate to other areas in Syro-Mesopotamia.[241] Thus, depending on the circumstances and the exigencies people decided to move to places which offered a better life. Emigration within the Syro-Mesopotamian area continued until new opportunities for settlement or means of escape appeared (starting in about mid-nineteenth century) to areas farther away – the area of the modern diaspora in Western countries.

What meaning do they give to their emigration and how do they explain and contextualize it? I shall look into their migration process in order to understand the *logic of emigration* among Assyrians/Syriacs and the choices made in the *field of discursivity*. Furthermore, I shall explain how their emigration discourses relate to the formation of new diasporic communities

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[239] A few lines from Dolabani's poem *Ulitho d-Motho u samo d-Haye* (Lamentation about the nation and medicine of life) (Dere and Isik 2007: 309). My translation of the original in Syriac.

[240] Any book of their authors dealing with the history of their people or church touches somehow on persecutions which they endured under foreign rule, starting under Byzantine and Persian rule and continuing through centuries of the Islamic Caliphate, the Ottoman Empire and in the modern nation-states in the Middle East.

[241] Most of my respondents have had a background in the area of *Tur 'Abdin* before migrating to other parts of the Middle East along the last century. The oral family histories that reached them (and sometimes they base their information on colophons in manuscripts) show that they had roots in other areas, outside of *Tur 'Abdin* (for example Urmia, *Urhoy* or Mosul). Sometimes respondents could rely on a family history of 1000 years.

in Europe. On the receiving side, I shall illustrate how Sweden and Germany as receiving countries have handled the immigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs and how this has influenced the process of emigration.

As mentioned above, the history of Assyrians/Syriacs can be seen as a sequence of *dislocatory moments* (such as massacres and emigration). In modern times, their distinctive ethno-religious based identity in a Muslim majority society has turned them into a vulnerable group. They have had two main alternatives: either to use their local survival strategy which means the acceptance of the subordinated status, or to emigrate to relatively more safe places. While their local survival strategies have been based on the acceptance of the status quo, emigration has become a necessity at moments where alternative chances to continue to live in the homeland were not available. Emigration became a new opportunity at moments they no longer accepted the status quo and functioned thus as a (temporary) 'solution'. In discourse analytical terms, emigration can also result from the creation of a *myth* about the place of destination. Laclau (1996c: 63) explains the emergence of a *myth* in terms of filling the gap or the lack in the present objectivity, which is needed for the creation of a 'promised land' or an 'ideal society'. The articulation of the *myth* has always manifested itself as an alternative space and as a new discursive opportunity for the current situation or *objectivity* (see further Chapter 2). Therefore, often immigrants have had a positive image – a *myth* – about the country they have planned to emigrate to, as in the case of Assyrians/Syriacs.[242] I have distinguished three main migration periods in the last forty years to Europe:

1. 1965-1975
2. 1975-1984
3. 1984-2009

They are based primarily on the scale of emigration, but the type of emigration (labour migrants, refugees or family reunion) is also taken into account. The distinction between labour migrants and refugees is essential for making sense of the numbers of migrants in a certain period. I refer to

[242] As I shall discuss in the Chapter 5, they develop also a negative image of the new countries they settled in when they start experiencing problems in the new context (such as, the disobedience of young generations to the older people, and other newly introduced problems such as drugs, alcohol and a high percentage of divorces).

'labour migrants' when individuals have settled in a country for the formal reason of seeking employment. Asylum seekers are individuals who settle in a country for reasons of seeking refuge and to be recognized as such.[243] Nevertheless, in time the first group may coalesce with the second group, as is the case of some Assyrians/Syriacs, especially in Germany. Moreover, refugees may also choose to settle in another country as labour migrants; labour migration becomes only an instrument for finding a new home for the long term.

One can distinguish eight paths of migration between the area of departure and the area of arrival (I shall not discuss them specifically in this order):

1. From *Tur 'Abdin* to Syria and Lebanon
2. From *Hakkari* and *Tur 'Abdin* to Iraq
3. From Syria to Lebanon
4. From *Tur 'Abdin* to Istanbul
5. From *Tur 'Abdin* directly to Europe
6. From *Tur 'Abdin* to Istanbul and then to Europe
7. From *Gozarto* (northern Syria) to Europe
8. From *Gozarto* to Damascus, Aleppo or Beirut and then to Europe

The consideration of their broad dispersion is important for understanding the new encounters of the people and their discourses in Europe. The waves of emigration should not be seen as independent from each other. Unquestionably, each new emigration wave had a nourishing influence on the following. Therefore, neither religious and secular elites in the countries of origin nor Assyrian/Syriac institutions and authorities of receiving countries have been successful in keeping the migration under control, let alone being able to halt it. When Assyrians/Syriacs in the diaspora discuss the emigration (*golutho*)[244] retrospectively, a frequently heard lament is that

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[243] According to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country. This definition was expanded by the 1967 Protocol of the Convention and by regional conventions in Africa and Latin America to include persons who had fled war or other violence in their home country.

[244] The Syriac term *golutho* does not mean in the first place migration. As discussed in Chapter 5 it designates also the condition and sense of a 'forced exile' and dispersion culminating in a

they did not take steps to organize the emigration process collectively, ignoring the circumstance that they had no organizations to undertake such a huge task. And even their institutions – both the church and the Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO, at that time their main secular organization) – took commonly a stand against the emigration. This regretful hindsight is generated by the assumption that a collectively co-ordinated emigration could have avoided the present-day dispersion in the diaspora. A closer look at the emigration stories reveals that individuals joined other relatives or friends who had settled in the diaspora (chain migration) and hence the dispersion was still relative.

The material in this chapter is based mainly on interviews I had with the elite members who migrated from Turkey, Syria and some from Lebanon (those who had settled there after their emigration from Syria). While not discounting the importance of the other two groups, I still concentrate more on the emigration from Turkey, since that is where most of my respondents were living before settling in Europe. To such an extent indeed, that *Tur 'Abdin* in south-eastern Turkey which they consider their home, has virtually emptied of this group.

Before discussing the emigration to Europe, it is essential to sketch a picture of the migration within the Middle East. It provides a background to the later pattern of emigration to Europe and the family relationships and networks between people. The importance of this chapter should be considered in the study of emigration processes over a relatively longer period and in different continents.

4.1 Migration within the Middle East

During and after the First World War many Assyrians/Syriacs from Turkey found refuge in today's neighbouring countries such as present day Iraq, Syria[245] and Lebanon.[246] The post-First World War situation looked much

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state of diaspora. It has in this regard a similar meaning to the Hebrew term *galut* that expresses the worldwide dispersion of Jews. Another term that is used besides *golutho* (for emigration) is *'roqo*, meaning 'flight' or 'to flee'.

[245] See for an article about the flight of the Assyrians/Syriacs from *Urhoy* to Syria in the years after the *Seyfo,* Sato (2003).

[246] The migration from the more agrarian society in *Tur 'Abdin* in Turkey to the more urbanized areas in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, led to the adoption of a more urban life-style by the Assyrians/Syriacs. Although the *Gozarto* region in Syria can be perceived as an agricultural

more positive in these countries since they were under respectively British and French mandate. The mass of the Assyrians/Syriacs interpreted the presence of Christian powers in the Middle East to be positive.[247] An important reason for this was that during The First World War more than half of their population in the Ottoman Empire was massacred under the Young Turks regime.[248] European powers were regarded as sufficiently powerful to spare them from another horrible experience and were expected to take up a paternalistic approach towards them. From their perspective these Christian powers could also offer them stability (including economic prosperity) and more freedom.[249] This is how the French and the British mandates in Syria and Iraq became temporary shelters for the survivors of the *Seyfo*.

4.1.1 The Simele Massacre and Settlement on the Banks of the Khabur River

During the British mandate of Iraq (1920-1932), many Assyrians/Syriacs from Iran and from the Ottoman Empire, mainly present-day Turkey, settled in Iraq. The British raised an army regiment from this group known as the *Assyrian Levies*.[250] During their settlement in British- mandated Iraq, the representatives of members of the Assyrian Church of the East (Mar Eshai Shimun) especially negotiated for an 'Assyrian enclave' in their historical homeland. Nevertheless, none of their requests were met. After the

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region, the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Qamishlo* and *Hasake* had built up cities with an urban character. Those who left Adana in December 1921 (during the fasting period before Christmas), settled in Trablus (Lebanon), Homs and Damascus in Syria and others left for Marsaille in Fance and Agos in Greece. The Dbe Zerekke family (Dbe Urhawi) living in Stockholm have relatives among those who settled in Greece. When a family member from Stockholm visited them in the 1990's in Greece, an elderly lady among them still spoke *Suryoyo* (*Surayt*) but the younger people knew only Greek.

247 During the Second World War Great Britain, which supported King Faisal of Iraq, had recruited also among Assyrians/Syriacs, who served in the British army until a couple of years after the war.

248 This genocide is known among Assyrians/Syriacs as the *Seyfo*. See for further readings from a historical perspective, Gaunt (2006), De Courtois (2004) and Yonan ([1989] 2006).

249 One consequence of the French mandate was that the conflicts between the Assyrians/Syriacs and the Kurds increased. According to Van Bruinessen (1992: 98), the Christians felt protected by the French and no longer resigned themselves silently to exploitation and humiliation by the Kurds. The administration and courts developed by the French had decreased to a great extent the political power of the Kurdish *agha*.

250 See further Solomon (1996).

resolution of the Mosul question in 1926, the Assyrian question was more or less abandoned and it was mainly defined around the 'settlement of Assyrians'. In the situation after the First World War, they were not wanted in any of the countries in the Middle East; they had become homeless in their homeland.

The wish of the Assyrian leaders to be resettled in their former mountainous home of Hakkari,[251] now on the Turkish side of the border with Iraq, could not be met. Turkey had no intentions at all to allow any Assyrian who had fled Turkey to return. Already on June 25, 1928 the Turkish consul general at Baghdad declared:[252] 'The Turkish amnesty law does not cover the Assyrians who would not be allowed under any circumstances to reenter Turkey; that any Assyrian who attempts to enter Turkey would be punished.' In search of a new home, Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun and other *malik* (Assyrian tribe leaders) sent (23 October 1931) a letter to the Chairman of the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations after having taken a unanimous conference decision:[253]

> ...WE ARE POSITIVELY SURE THAT IF WE REMAIN IN IRAQ, we shall be exterminated in the course of few years.
> WE THEREFORE IMPLORE YOUR MERCY TO TAKE CARE OF US, and arrange our emigration to one of the countries under the rule of one of the Western Nations whom you may deem fit. And should this be impossible, we beg you to request the French Government to accept us in Syria and give us shelter under her responsibility FOR WE CAN NO LONGER LIVE IN IRAQ and WE SHALL LEAVE.

Another initiative to find a new home in Syria, taken in the summer of 1933 by such lay people as *Malik* Yaqu and *Malik* Loko, did not succeed. The Iraqi Army which took over the power from the British mandate rule in 1932 seemed extremely agitated by the attention which the *Assyrian Levies* had attracted during the mandated period and by their continued good relations with the British. When an opportunity arose to weaken the Assyrians, they seized upon it. A little later the same year, the 800 men who had crossed the

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[251] This was also one of the demands raised by the Assyro-Chaldean delegation in the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

[252] League of Nations: The Settlement of the Assyrians, a Work of Humanity and Appeasement, Geneva, 1935, Information Section, 12.

[253] Malik (1935), Appendix-A. Original letter was in Syriac. The English translation is taken from Malik.

border with *Malik* Yaqu and *Malik* Loko to negotiate with the French to allow them[254] to settle in French-mandated Syria came back because this permission had been refused. As they crossed the river back into Iraq, the Iraqi Army opened the fire on them, triggering an armed conflict between the two groups. In the wake of this, the Iraqi Army killed a great number[255] of Assyrians (mostly in the village *Simele*[256] and its surroundings) and looted about sixty Assyrian villages[257] in the Nuhadra (Dohuk) and Mosul areas of Iraq in August 1933.[258] In this campaign, the army used the local Arab Bedouin and the Kurdish population. This event was later to be known as the Simele Massacre.[259]

Although the British had attempted to deal with the Assyrian question before they left Iraq (the Assyrian question was discussed several times in the League of Nations), they did not take any decisive action.[260] They did search for alternative solutions outside the Middle East because the Assyrians made it abundantly clear that they no longer wanted to live under the rule of a Muslim majority whom they felt they could not trust. Stafford (2006: 207) ends his book with:

> ... the lot of the Assyrians is indeed a tragedy. They feel, and they have long felt, that no one wants them, and such a feeling does not make them easy to deal with. The last twenty years of their life have been a nightmare. It is not pleasant to hear people say, "Oh, we are accustomed to being massacred!"

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254 According to Jacoub ([1986] 1993: 123) the migration movement involved nearly three hundred families which were to be followed by 5000 other people.

255 Sources give different numbers. Annemasse (1934: 55) mentions that the massacres during August 1933 were three thousand, including those of the Simele massacre.

256 Simele is sometimes also spelled as Simmel. See Annemasse (1934) for a reflection about the settlement in Iraq, the Simele massacre and the resettlement in Syria. It is assumed that this anonymous author is Mar Eshai Shimun, Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East. See for a broad account of this process, the British Administrative Inspector who served in Iraq for six years, Stafford (2006). See also Aprim (2006: 155-183).

257 Jan Beth Sawoce mentioned to me that the priest Abdulmesih Qarabashi (not to be confused with the author) who was born in this area informed him in an interview which he held in Sweden, that among the victims there were also Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholics.

258 See for a list of the damages Annemasse (1934: 64-68).

259 Raphael Lemkin coined the term 'genocide' when he heard of the Simele Massacre and the eradication of the Christians in Ottoman Turkey during the First World War.

260 See further Malik (1935).

Eventually, in the aftermath of the Simele Massacre the French allowed the Assyrian refugees to settle at the *Khabur* River in Syria, 40 kilometres from the Iraqi border. Approximately 15,000 Assyrians emigrated to this area where they founded thirty-five new villages (Al-Jeloo, Awde and Lamassu 2007: 11). It hardly needs to be said that for those Assyrians/Syriacs who continued to live in Iraq, the Simele Massacre and the subsequent looting of the villages must have played an essential role in shaping their future political attitude towards obedience to the regime in Iraq. The message was unequivocal: deviation from the main political line was not appreciated and would be punished severely. Patriarch Mar Shimun was sent into exile to Cyprus by the British on 18 August 1933.[261] Murre-van den Berg (2011) illustrates in her article 'Light from the East (1948-1954) and the de-territorialization of the Assyrian Church of the East' that eventually, the Patrirach of the Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Shimun, changed his ideas about a homeland for the Assyrian people and that he relinquished his responsibilities in the secular domain to the governments in which Assyrians lived at the end of the 1940s.[262]

Different from the Assyrian Church of the East leadership, the leadership of the Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic and Chaldean churches did not request temporal power and proclaimed their unity and loyalty with the Iraqi government. They even refused representation as non-Muslim minorities in the Chamber of Deputees, claiming that they sought no special rights (Coke 1924: 243 in Joseph 1983: 115). One of their magazines from the 1930s reminded its readers 'not to forget the fate of the Armenians and Assyrians, who put their trust in the Christian powers of Europe and were practically exterminated in consequence.' (Quoted from Joseph 1983: 115). Their stand is similar to that which the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Elias III took during the Lausanne Peace negotiations and that of Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum in Syria. The latter insisted on the leave of the French from Syria and hand over power to the Syrian Arab rulers to whose later governments he had shown great loyalty during his life-time.

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[261] On 15th August 1933 an emergency law for the deportation of the Patriarch passed and his Iraqi nationality was annulled with the approval of the British Embassy (Annemasse 1934: 63).

[262] She bases her conclusion on the analysis of the magazine *Light form the East* (1948-1954), published by Mar Eshai Shimun in Chicago.

4.1.2 They Have Gone *Taht u Khat* (Down the Border)

In the post-*Seyfo* period Turkey, many Assyrians/Syriacs had been left behind with hardly anything. The land of many Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey was confiscated and people had lost a great number of their family members in the *Seyfo* and at the same time an extreme famine (*kafno* or *ghala*) scourged in the region. French mandated Syria offered them new economic opportunities, besides their idea to be living under Christian rule. First, many Assyrian/Syriac men crossed the border into Syria (*taht u khat*) to sign on as a soldier in the French Army (*'askar de Fransa*). This had become a relatively good option for employment in the chaos of the post-war situation. A second reason for the settlement of the Assyrians/Syriacs (especially from *Tur 'Abdin*) in Syria was the opportunity to work as agricultural labourers for Assyrian/Syriac large landowners.[263] At that time it is said that there were about twenty Assyrian/Syriac families in the *Gozarto* of Syria who owned large agricultural properties.[264] They had a significant impact on the agricultural development, because they had developed and introduced mechanized agriculture in Syria. Besides being innovators they employed many people which helped the economy of the area to flourish. The increasing Arabization of Syria incurred a change in the position of Assyrians/Syriacs. In 1958 (the year in which the President Nasser of Egypt and the Syrian authorities started to co-operate in the United Arab Republic), the first step in the nationalization of large property was taken: the authorities terminated large property and large landownership.[265] The policy

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[263]During the French mandate of Syria, the French authorities had appropriated land and assigned it to certain people in Syria. The French used the social structure of the Arab Bedouins and the Kurds as a point of reference in distributing agricultural land to families: respectively through the Bedouin sheikhs and through the Kurdish clan leaders (Interview with Assyrian/Syriac respondents from the *Gozarto*, 2007). This was apparently also a means to keep them satisfied and disposed to function as a means of co-operation with the French presence in the area. The Assyrians/Syriacs missed the power through such a structure. Some families who had some good understanding of agriculture started to farm land which was not assigned to them but which did not yet belong to anybody.

[264] Among them were for example: Çarmukli (from the village Çarmukli near *Omid*), Gallo Shabo (from *'Iwardo*), Dbe Hadaya and Terzi Bashi (from *Mardin*), Dbe Najjar, Dbe Majid Asfar (from *Omid*) and Dbe Baho. The family of Dbe Asfar was the wealthiest among Assyrians/Syriacs in the area. At that time they grew 40,000 sacks (*çawalat*) of grain and 20,000 sacks of rice. The majority of these families had settled in Syria after the First World War.

[265] In order not to hand over all their property to the authorities, such families as Dbe Najjar and Dbe Asfar who were large landowners and owned agricultural machines, donated their agricultural machinery to their Assyrian/Syriac employees. The latter continued as mechanized agriculturalists for Bedouin sheiks and others (interview with a respondent who grew up in

of further nationalization of property continued with the takeover of the rule by the Baath regime in 1963.[266] Consequently, Assyrian/Syriac families with a large amount of landed property left the country: after a brief settlement in Lebanon they continued their journey to America.[267]

4.1.3 They Have Gone to Lebanon

During and after the Second World War – but prior to the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 – Assyrians/Syriacs from Syria and Turkey, seeking a safe haven or in search of better opportunities in life often migrated to Lebanon. Once again they were poised on the brink of another dispersion – also at family level. The following example also shows that families kept in touch and that these relations had influence on the future emigration. The academic activist Denho who lives in Germany explains why he met his brother again only after forty years in Sweden:

> My brother fled [from Turkey] to Syria in 1942… because of what they called the *ihtiyat* [mobilization]. What the Germans had done to the Jews in Germany, the Turks did the same with the Christians in Turkey. At that time they imposed a capital tax law [*varlık vergisi*].[268] And they were all called up for the *ihtiyat.*[269] The *Suroyo mukhtar* [mayor] in *Midyad* advised the young men in the family to flee the country into Syria.[270] There, my brother served in the French army until France left Syria. After that he decided to leave to Lebanon… My parents died but he [my brother] never

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Qamishlo, 2007). See further about the role of Assyrian/Syriac families in the modern history of agriculture in the *Gozarto*, Abdalla (2005).

[266] Part of the nationalized land in the *Gozarto* was divided among landless, mainly Arab Bedouins, who were living in south-eastern Syria and Raqqa. These people were offered land in the northeast of Syria, present-day *Gozarto*. Assyrians/Syriacs and Kurds from the northeast were given some unfruitful land in the South-East of Syria. The Assyrians/Syriacs did not move to the South-East of Syria from the *Gozarto* area, although some of them were now landless (interview with a respondent who grew up in *Qamishlo*, 2007).

[267] Yacob Najjar went to Saudi Arabia and developed irrigation systems there, which resulted in the production and selling of corn. In the early 1990s, he was invited to return to Syria by the Syrian authorities and developed agriculture (without owning it) on part of the land which he had once owned (about 500 hectares).

[268] In 1942 the Turkish Prime Minister Mehmet Şükrü Saracoğlu imposed a capital levy (*varlık vergisi*) on property owners. The law was enforced on non-Muslim minorities (see further Chapter 3).

[269] Non-Muslims who belonged to the reserve troops were organized in working camps. Men who came back from the *ihtiyat* told horrific stories about the circumstances and the way they were treated. See Chapter 3 for more about the *ihtiyat*.

[270] The *mukhtar* was probably aware of the hardships they had had to endure during the *ihtiyat*.

> saw them again after he had escaped Turkey. Today he lives in Sweden. After forty years [of separation], I met him again.

With the end of the French mandate in Syria, a considerable number of Assyrians/Syriacs who lived there moved to Lebanon. Lebanon was perceived to be a country with relatively more freedom, which was especially important to political activists and intellectuals. At the practical level, Lebanon offered more work opportunities. Many respondents said that Lebanon was thought of as a Christian society in which they felt more at ease than in Syria – where Arabization was more stringently enforced than in Lebanon. In 2006, I met a member of the Syriac Orthodox Church attending Mass at the Syriac Catholic Church in Paris. When I asked him how he ended up in Paris, he said that his grandparents were originally from *Tur 'Abdin*. In the aftermath of the *Seyfo* they had moved to Syria. After the active Arabization politics in Syria had started, he decided to move to Lebanon. He stayed there until the civil war. After that he migrated to Canada. Because he was not granted a permit to stay in Canada, he migrated to France where he had settled since then.

The first obvious cause for the emigration to Lebanon was Syria's new co-operation with President Nasser of Egypt in 1958. Its repercussions had an extensive influence on the political, social and cultural life in Syria. Measures were taken to limit the freedom of particular groups and individuals through, for example, banning them from membership of certain political parties. This erupted into a more public political conflict, in which the authorities adopted a very hard line. They were feverishly resolved to uncover whatever they considered being kept secret. No one dared to criticize the authorities. People identified each other as belonging to different political ideologies; the most dominant groups were the Baathists, the *Suri Qawmi*[271] and the Communists.

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[271] When Assyrians/Syriacs mention this party, they refr to it with *Qawmi Suri*. This party had a pan-Syrian nationalist approach with an orientation towards a Greater Syria. Its full name is *al-Hizb al-Suri al-Qawmi al-Ijtimaa'i* (The Syrian Social Nationalist Party or SSNP). Antoun Saadeh, its founder, initially believed that Syrians are not Arabs. Saadeh defined a Syrian nation in the Fertile Crescent consisting of a mixture of Canaanites, Akkadians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Arameans, Hittites, and Metanni. As it recognized the pre-Arab past of the people of Syria and preached total separation of religion and state, this party attracted some Assyrians/Syriacs and other minorities. See further about the pan-Syrian nationalist approach, Pipes (1990).

The take-over of the rule by the Baath party in 1963 inevitably had new consequences. Arabism[272] emerged as the new political discourse in Syria. The fact that Baathists belonging to the Alawi minority later took over political power from the Sunni majority allowed for a state policy in which religious minorities were less discriminated against. Assyrians/Syriacs have been allowed to occupy official positions in Syria as long as they stand behind the ruling government.[273] In Syria, religious affiliation played a different role than in Turkish society. Therefore, Assyrians/Syriacs in Syria have enjoyed more religious and cultural freedom than in Turkey, but politically they were still obstructed.

Another reason for the emigration from Syria to Lebanon especially during the 1960s, according to my respondents, was the increased number of Kurds who had begun to settle in the area and who endangered their life, since raids were organized on rich Assyrians/Syriacs. Adding to the turmoil, since the beginning of the 1970s, the officials of the Syrian *mukhabarat* (intelligence police) blackmailed Assyrian/Syriac entrepreneurs. For those who found such practices as blackmailing intolerable, this weighed heavily in their decision to leave the country. Respondents explain that Assyrian/Syriac entrepreneurs had no means to protect themselves against this pressure and were dismayed by their vulnerability.

As a place of refuge Lebanon was not sought on at an individual level only. Even before the mass emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs to Europe in the 1970s began, the Assyrian/Syriac activists discussed the idea of relocating Assyrians/Syriacs in southern Lebanon with President Chamoun.[274]

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272 Two articles from the Baath's Constitution which back up the Arabization politics are: Article (8) The official language of the country and the officially recognized language in writing and education of the citizens is Arabic. Article (10): An Arab is everyone whose language is Arabic and lived in the Arab land or was born in it and believed in his affiliation to the Arab Nation. In contrast to the Baath in Syria, President Nasser recognized anyone speaking the Arabic language as an Arab.

273 For example, the mayor in *Qamishlo* has often been an Assyrian/Syriac. There were also some Assyrians/Syriacs in the Syrian Parliament.

274 The idea was the result of a critical analysis of their position in Middle Eastern society. In the beginning of the 1970s, before the war broke out, representatives of (ADO) and the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) discussed the situation of the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin* in several meetings with Kamil Chamoun (at that time General Secretary of the Lebanese Liberal Party) (Unpublished information from two former ADO activists in Sweden and in America). Chamoun encouraged them to resettle all in the empty villages in Southern Lebanon. Partly it was because the Christians in Lebanon seemed to be interested in increasing their numbers of co-religionist inhabitants. The crisis in Lebanon resulting from the conflict between President Chamoun (1952 – 1958) who adopted a more pro-Western policy

Assessing the situation, the Assyrian/Syriac activists in ADO and AUA (Assyrian Universal Alliance) considered the collective emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs an ambitious plan which they found too big a responsibility to shoulder.[275] Despite the difficulties (resulting from their illegal status in Lebanon), the Assyrians/Syriacs continued their emigration to Lebanon on an individual basis until the civil war broke out in 1975. After the war began, the people who planned to migrate to Lebanon cancelled their plans. Europe became a new alternative destination. The escape to Lebanon offered a solution for Shabo's family when they found themselves embroiled in *berberiye* (local traditional politics) with the rest of the village. Their punishment was to be forced to leave the village:

> The people in the village who used to ally themselves with our *gabo* [party] no longer supported my family. We had no allies left in the village. Therefore they forced[276] us to leave the village, despite the fact that we probably owned most of the agricultural land in the village. I remember that there was an old man in the village who said: "I cannot understand how they can leave all this land behind and depart." But we had no other option. In an armed conflict my grandfather was hit by a bullet which he carried until we arrived in Sweden. We had come up with two alternatives: moving to Istanbul or to Lebanon. But, we had heard about Istanbul and its difficulties… Therefore, we planned to go to Lebanon. Some relatives had gone there already to get things prepared for our big family. But when my father went to the Mor Gabriel monastery [in *Tur 'Abdin*], he met the present Archbishop George Saliba, who was a monk then and living in Lebanon. When Brother George heard about our plans he said to my father: "How could you contemplate moving to Lebanon at this moment? There is a war now." This is the reason how we changed our minds and

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and the Muslim part of the population attracted by a Pan-Arab and pro-Nasser ideology had an indelible effect on the policy regarding granting immigrants Lebanese citizenship. After 1958 it had become barely possible for Assyrian/Syriac migrants to acquire Lebanese citizenship (Björklund 1981: 29). If the Christian Assyrians/Syriacs were granted citizenship then the same right had to be extended to Muslim immigrants. This would be a risk to the balance between the about 50-50 balance in the Muslim and Christian population.

275 One of the ADO members who was involved at that time says: 'We have kept this fear with us and lack sufficient courage to take on responsibility for big matters; otherwise or else we would have organized ourselves now in one place instead of being dispersed all over the world.' By 'fear' he refers to the historically developed chronic anxiety among the Assyrians/Syriacs living in the Middle East. Generally this is often expressed in talks about the attitude of the Assyrians/Syriacs in relation to the other populations in the Middle East.

276 Traditionally, forcing people to leave the village was used as a punishment. It was similar to sending someone into exile by the dominant or ruling group.

> found departure to Sweden as a solution. We knew a *Suryoyo* living in Gothenburg.

The collective emigration plan to Lebanon was also discussed among the Assyrian/Syriac elite in Europe: how should they pick up the thread from here? The fact that some Assyrians/Syriacs labour migrants living in Germany had ideas to move further to Lebanon instead of going back to *Tur ʿAbdin* in Turkey indicates that the pre-civil war Lebanon was a country which interested them. After the war started, they decided to join their relatives in Sweden.

4.1.4 They Have Gone to Istanbul

Several factors have played a role in the settlement of the Assyrians/Syriacs from *Tur ʿAbdin* in Istanbul.[277] Firstly, Assyrians/Syriacs from Mardin and Diyarbakır – already living in urban centres – took the initial step of migrating to Istanbul at the beginning of the 1950s.[278] As businessmen, they were more mobile than the farmers from the villages in *Tur ʿAbdin*.[279]

At the end of the 1950s the Armenians and the Greeks had left Istanbul in the wake of the pogrom, which was unleashed on 6 and 7 September 1955. The Assyrians/Syriacs newly settled in Istanbul, to a great extent, took over the market that the Armenians and the Greeks had had to leave behind

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[277] The first Assyrians/Syriacs who settled in Istanbul emigrated from Bitlis, Varto and Simhor (present-day south-eastern Turkey) in the 1840s (Akdemir 2009: 92-94). The decision to consecrate a church in Istanbul was made by Patriarch Elias II Hindi in 1841. His representative, Archbishop Qurillos Yacob (the later Patriarch Yacob II), bought a house in Beyoğlu Tarlabaşı in Karnavula Street (today known as Karakurum Street). After it burnt down, he rebuilt it and opened a church (dedicated to the Virgin Mary) built of wood in 1844; see for an image of this building, Illustration 3. The name of the church in Syriac '… 'Ito Qadishto d-Yoldath Aloho Maryam b-Byzantia d-Suryoye Qaqme…' has been translated into English as follows: 'The Pera Assyrian Church of the Holy Virgin'. 'Pera' refers to what is now the Beyoğlu area in Istanbul. The use of the designation 'Assyrian' in the name of the Syriac Orthodox church in that context is remarkable. In 1870 the church again burnt down and was rebuilt in stone. It was re-consecrated in 1880. This church is the See of the Bishopric of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Istanbul.

[278] The history of Kent Gıda A.Ş. dates back to 1927, when the Tahincioğlu Family first started to produce *tahin*, (a sweet from sesame seed oil). In 1946, they enlarged the business with the production of *halvah* and hard candy in Diyarbakır. In the early 1950s, the Tahincioğlu Family moved to Istanbul where in 1956, *Kent Gıda* was established which would later become the largest confectionery company in Turkey. See further Akdemir (2009: 162, 265-266).

[279] According to the Vice-Governor of Istanbul, about 500 Syriac Orthodox families (about 2000 people) were living in Istanbul in 1959 (Akdemir 2009: 123).

and continued their entrepreneurial work as goldsmiths in *Kapalı Çarşı* (The Grand Bazaar) in Istanbul. Roldanus (1985: 109) adds to this that Assyrians/Syriacs were also needed as employees for the Greek churches. It is important to note that besides the area of *Tur 'Abdin*, Istanbul was the main centre in Turkey where some elements of Christianity continued to exist. Working for Christian employers encouraged their sense of safety.

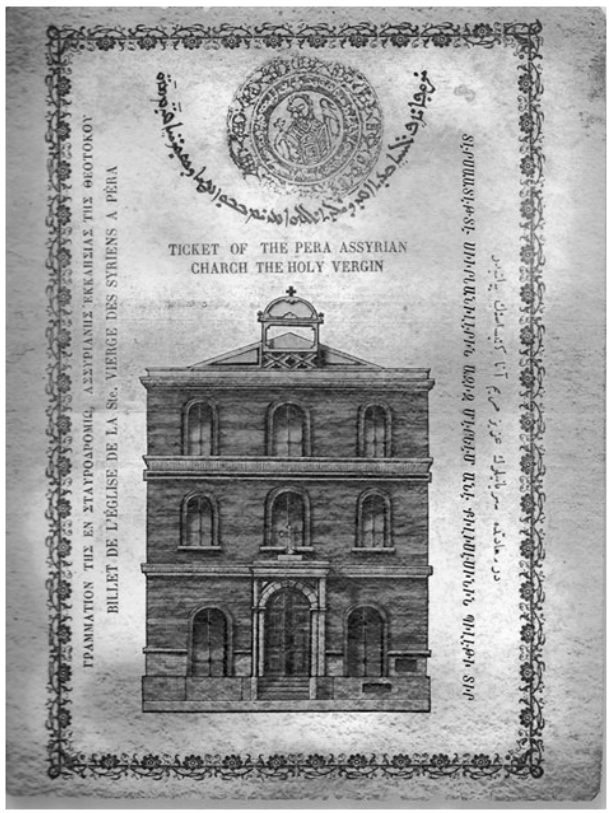

Illustration 3: Syriac Orthodox Church in Tarlabaşı, Istanbul in the mid 1840s. Source: Akdemir (2010: 97).

Secondly, in the 1960s the mobility of people improved because of modern forms of transportation, and this led to a fast urbanization process. Thirdly, modernization had also permeated to the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin*. The technology made its mark on agricultural production: not all the family members were now needed on the land; they could offer their labour

somewhere else. [280] Therefore, already by the 1960s, Assyrian/Syriac men could be found working in the construction business in Keban (*Al 'Aziz*, Turkish: Elazığ), İzmir and İskenderun. They went there to work for a certain period of time later to return to their families in the villages.[281] Towards the mid-1960s, Assyrian/Syriac 'farmers' from *Tur 'Abdin,* also found their way to Istanbul. In 1967, only few families from *Tur 'Abdin* were living in this city.[282] The first to venture to Istanbul to seek jobs were the young single men; presaging the labour migrants who went to Germany. Their plan was to spend a couple of years working in Istanbul and then return home. After the young men had set off for Istanbul, some parents joined them with the idea of taking care of their children. Single men who started working in Istanbul often built up a family there. Their numbers increased from 2000 in 1963 to 14,000 in 1984. Most of them lived there only for a couple of years.[283]

The first young men from *Tur 'Abdin* who settled in Istanbul found work mainly in the field of handicrafts, trade and some in industry. Many found a job in Greek and Armenian hospitals, or as an apprentice in goldsmith businesses or sewing ateliers. An important intermediary between the new arrivals and the employers was Father David, who originated from Mardin. He had good contacts both among the Christian employers in Istanbul and with the Assyrians/Syriacs who had just arrived from *Tur 'Abdin* and were seeking employment. There has been a prevailing idea among Assyrian/Syriac employees that Christian employers preferred employing them to Muslim employees, as they believed 'one cannot trust a

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[280] The introduction of fertilizers on the market increased the crop. A village like *Marbobo* made good profits from the cotton industry. A similar development was the recent availability of pesticides. And instead of working solely with cattle in the production process, farmers could start to make use of the tractors which had become available, and the *derraaza* (harvest machine). For example, these machines reached my village *Mzizah* in the 1970s. Before that they used the *jarjar* (threshing sledge), which required the participation of many more manual labourers. Both *derraaza* and *jarjar* are of Arabic origin (see further Lane ([1863] 1992). Maclean (2003: 55b, 56a) gives a clarifying description of the *jarjar* as 'threshing-machine': 'a sort of sledge drawn by horses, buffaloes, or oxen, round and round the pile of corn-sheaves, and fitted with knives which cut up the straw'. The Syriac word for *jarjar* is *gargro* but it was not used by all Assyrians/Syriacs in the spoken *Suryoyo* in the everyday life of *Tur 'Abdin*.

[281] Only few had settled with their families in these cities.

[282] According to one of my respondents who settled there in 1967.

[283] When meeting them in Europe, it is often obvious that they have lived some time in Istanbul as they use more Turkish loanwords than do Assyrians/Syriacs who have not lived in Istanbul.

Muslim' (*layt amniye bu Tayo*).[284] Roldanus (1985: 65) observed that Assyrians/Syriacs who worked for an Assyrian/Syriac industrial employer were organized in a different department of the factory, kept apart from the Muslim employees.

Of all of those who went to Istanbul, those that established themselves as goldsmiths became probably the most successful. Sometime in the period around 1972, the (often) single men who had learned the business from Armenian and Assyrian/Syriac goldsmiths (from Mardin and Diyarbakır)[285] opened their own businesses and achieved success. Presumably they belong to the first group of Assyrians/Syriacs the majority of whom settled there in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s about 20 per cent of the businesses in *Kapalı Çarşı* were owned by Assyrians/Syriacs. At times of socio-political crisis, they have fallen prey to criminals or Muslim fanatics who have taken advantage of the situation to attack them with impunity. Many of these people migrated to America instead of to Europe.

Istanbul fulfilled different functions for the Assyrians/Syriacs. In the first place – certainly in the beginning – Assyrians/Syriacs from *Tur 'Abdin* saw Istanbul as a place offering an alternative career choice besides farming. Gradually, for some it became a new place of permanent settlement; besides work opportunities it was believed to be safer than *Tur 'Abdin* with all its complicated local politics, *berberiye*.[286] Although the power of the local Kurdish *agha* could also stretch to Istanbul, the instruments he could use to interfere in their life were less effective. The city was no longer the local village where every individual knew each other and where they were encompassed within a power network. Therefore, people who had lived in fear had found a relatively safer alternative in moving to Istanbul, not considering yet new or other unpleasant aspects of living in the heart and most modern part of society. For individuals it was much easier to live in anonymity. Engulfed in the urban mass, at a collective level they were also

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[284] Roldanus (1985: 65) mentions that after he had observed the relatively high number of Christian employees in the factory of an Assyrian/Syriac and asked him if he had a selective policy, but the employer denied this. He then concludes that working for a Christian employer could have been the choice of Assyrians/Syriacs themselves. Without going further into this answer, I doubt whether this is the whole story to the motivation of the employer.

[285] Cetrez (1998: 106) also mentions that the background of the 2 per cent very rich Assyrians/Syriacs in Istanbul lie in Mardin and Diyarbakır.

[286] Van Bruinessen (1992) discusses the social and political structures of the area. Although the focus is on the Kurds, much can be learned about the position of the Assyrians/Syriacs and other non-Muslim groups in relation to the Kurds.

less visible[287] as a group (which they were in *Tur 'Abdin*). Within a few years, the number of Assyrians/Syriacs in some of the villages in *Tur 'Abdin* decreased, namely: *Harbtho* (also known as *Kharabe Mishka), Sederi, Badibbe, Arbo, Besorino* and *Midin*. The position of Istanbul was also transformed from a (temporary) place of refuge to a jumping off place 'to the four corners of the world.' Saro was a young girl when her father decided to leave the village of *Kerboran* in 1978:

> In that year the *Suryoyo Mukhtar* [mayor] Endrawos Demir was killed by the Muslims. Before we and all the other *Suryoye* left Kerboran we sold the land we owned at a negligible price to the Muslims in the village. The Muslims knew that we would be leaving anyway and therefore they bid a very low price for it, which we had to accept. We left Kerboran and moved first to the village *Qritho di 'Ito*, a Christian village near *Nsibin*. Since my father was an architect, he had to be often underway between villages. Because of his frequent absences, he found his village Kerboran to be at a too dangerous location. My father… felt much safer in the *Qritho di 'Ito*. But after about four years we moved on farther to Istanbul.

Another example rereading the role of Istanbul at that time is that of the parents of Mushe:

> The situation in *Kharput* deteriorated badly after the fascist regime became powerful in the 1970s. The authorities had already closed down my father's business in *Kharput* a couple of times. Besides that, the fascists had beaten up my brother and me a couple of times because we had leftist ideas. The fear of my parents of losing their children combined with the fact that they did not get the chance to re-open their business, made them decide to move to Istanbul in 1977.

Upon arrival in Istanbul, the first priority of Assyrians/Syriacs was to master the Turkish language quickly. This was among other things an attempt to diminish the chance that they could be picked out as being different from the Muslim majority population and an important precaution against discrimination. Another motivation for learning Turkish was that they associated it with being modern and related to an urban life-style. Those who returned to their village from Istanbul liked to show off their knowledge of the Turkish; displaying their contact with the modern world. In Istanbul,

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[287] This is a stark contrast to their attitude in Europe, where they have wanted to be visible and recognized as a group of people.

Arabic-speaking Assyrians/Syriacs from Mardin stopped speaking Arabic. Only the older generation continued to speak it (alongside Turkish) in the private sphere. Turkish became their first language. The Assyrians/Syriacs from Mardin probably attached less symbolic value to Arabic than the Assyrians/Syriacs (from *Tur 'Abdin*) who spoke *Suryoyo* and who nurtured it as their mother tongue.

Assyrians/Syriacs newly arrived from *Tur 'Abdin* lived in poor neighbourhoods such as Beyazit, Tarlabaşı[288] and Beyoğlu.[289] The mostly timber houses were very old, shabby and therefore affordable. Mirza, at that time a teenager, experienced this and reflects on that situation:

> The living conditions in the village were much better than in Istanbul, but in Istanbul you could see something that you did not see in the village: there were cars, lights, fashion, electronics, cinema's, and so forth. Therefore life in Istanbul was tolerable. With six *Suryoye* teenager friends we found a small room to live in. It was windowless and it had only a door. And we also cooked in this room. We did our best to receive and help any new *Suryoyo* arriving in Istanbul and in need of help. We did not care about luxury. It was all excitement to us.

In Istanbul, they showed a marked tendency to live in the vicinity of other Assyrian/Syriac families, which meant that they did not need much contact with their Muslim neighbours (Roldanus 1985: 86). In their spare time they mainly socialized with Christians. Their life-style disguised their Christian identity from the bigger Muslim audience. Realizing that visibility would harm them, for many Assyrians/Syriacs in Istanbul it had become 'normal' to hide their identity to the broader public. Formally this was expected from them too.

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288 See further about the history of this church, Akdemir (2009: 93-94, 122)

289 As Roldanus (1985: 64) observes, as soon as they could afford to move to better neighbourhoods, they did so. At the time of writing (2009), mostly, they are gathered in three luxurious and upper middle class areas, Yeşilköy, Göztepe, Bakırköy and Şişli. See further about the church in Yeşilköy, Akdemir (2009: 251-255). They are also to be found in two middle class areas, Samatya and Kurtuluş. Only few families live in poor areas, except for the Assyrian/Syriac refugees from Iraq who have settled in Istanbul on their way to find a better place to live in Western countries. These refugees are to be found in old small houses, basements and shelters, surviving under difficult circumstances. The See of the Archbishopric of the Syriac Orthodox Church is based in Tarlabaşı, although no church members are living there (see also Section 4.1.4).

Bestowing Turkish first names on their children who were born in Istanbul had become normal to many. Some, often Assyrians/Syriacs from Mardin, began to identify as Turks or and if not to at least express such identification in public in order to cover up their identity. Many of the Assyrians/Syriacs in cities like Mardin and Diyarbakır were already familiar with this attitude and they simply continued this life-style in Istanbul.[290] Assyrians/Syriacs from the villages in *Tur 'Abdin,* also assumed this protective mantle of accommodation to Turkish society. Invisibility assumed the forestalling or circumvention of problems – which otherwise may have arisen. Nevertheless, as any other minority group has discovered, it is impossible to remain totally invisible to outsiders.

Two important aspects may help to account for this attitude. First and foremost, the Assyrians/Syriacs who had already settled in Istanbul were looked up to as modern people. In *Tur 'Abdin*, the people from the cities like *Midyad*, Mardin and Diyarbakır were referred to as *bajariye*,[291] with the meaning urban people and hence modern. Then, leaving aside this sense of superiority, they may have believed this approach was the best survival strategy for them as a community: they made it their accommodating strategy to adjust to the socio-political requirements in Turkish society. In this process of accommodation, those Assyrians/Syriacs who had already established themselves in Istanbul used their influence to make sure that the newly arrived Assyrians/Syriacs from *Tur 'Abdin* would cultivate the politically 'correct attitude' (see further Chapter 3).

4.2 Emigration to Western Countries

There is no comprehensive study about the migration of the Assyrians/Syriacs worldwide.[292] The biggest gap is to be found in early studies on the emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs to North and South

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[290] Assyrians/Syriacs who chose to express their Assyrian/Syriac identity criticize this group for hiding and giving up their 'ethnic identity', purely to meet the requirements of the Turkish authorities. See also Chapter 9.

[291] *Bajari* is Kurdish for 'urban'.

[292] Björklund (1981) and Deniz (1999) have written about the emigration to Sweden, Merten (1997) and Araz (2001) about the emigration to Germany, Roldanus (1984), Van Mierlo (1979) and Schukkink (2003) about the emigration to the Netherlands.

America and to Australia.[293] Their emigration to North[294] and South[295] America is often hidden in the study of migrants from the Middle East generally. They have been included in the category registered as Turks (*El-Turco*) and Arabs since around the mid-nineteenth century onwards.[296] For this reason it has become difficult to identify them retrospectively. Even if their emigration is identified, as the emigration to Brazil,[297] the information available is often limited to the years and places of departure.[298] The majority of those who migrated in the first half of the twentieth century to America

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[293] Modern studies on the emigration and settlement of Assyrians to North America are works by Ishaya (1977); Donabed (2003, 2006).

[294] Philip and Joseph Kayal (1975: 19) point out that statistics of the Christian migration from the Middle East to the United States is missing because they identified themselves by their *millet* upon arrival. These authors mean perhaps that they identified with the church of which they were member. The reasons for migrations from the Ottoman Empire were a mixture of religious, political and economic (Kayal 1975: 66). In the peak years of 1913 and 1914 the number of Syriac immigrants exceeded 9,000 (Kayal 1975: 67). The war years saw a steady drop. In 1918 only 210 Syriacs entered the United States. Note that by Syriac Orthodox Church in this work the authors mean the Byzantine Orthodox Church (Ibid. 53). They use the Jacobite Church and the Nestorian Church respectively for the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and the Assyrian Church of the East.

[295] See on the emigration to Argentina, Civantos (2001). She mentions that the migration from the Middle East to Argentina started somewhere mid-nineteenth century. Furthermore, she states this immigration peaked between 1904 and 1913, and between 1931 and 1950s. The Assyrians/Syriacs in Argentina are mainly based in Cordoba, La Plata and Buenos Aires. The Archbishop's seat is based in La Plata.

[296] McGuire (1974: 3) writes that immigration accelerated until the outbreak of the First World War. The 1920 census revealed that there were approximately 3,400 persons of Lebanese or Syrian origin living in Texas. In the state of Texas, they seemed to be called 'Syrians' (after the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire), until the emergence of the modern national states of Lebanon and Syria. From then on, they began to make a distinction between their lands of origin and national identities.

[297] The first wave of Assyrian/Syriac immigration to Brazil took place in 1905: 101 people from *Homs* in Syria (unpublished fieldwork by Marta Wozniak). From *Tur 'Abdin* (*Midyad*, Mardin and *Hazakh*), the migration took place before and after the *Seyfo*: in 1914 and 1925. After the Second World War, Assyrians/Syriacs living in Israel and Palestine immigrated to Brazil.

[298] Lesser (1999: 8) notes that the peak period of migration from the Middle East in the last century to Brazil was in the period 1900-1929. This may have been affected by the immigration statistics taken afterwards, such as the case of the collective resettlement of Assyrian refugees from Iraq, which was prevented by the Brazilian authorities at the beginning of the 1930s. Lesser (1999) notes that the Brazilians had developed a negative image of the people from the Middle East. When the League of Nations, in conjunction with the International Office for Refugees attempted to resettle 20,000 Assyrian refugees from Iraq in Brazil in 1932, this was heavily thwarted by Vargas, the president of Brazil at that time. Finally, the project of the League of Nations failed. This plan to resettle Assyrian refugees was related to the political unrest at the beginning of the 1930s (See for a broader context Malik (1935).

have apparently assimilated; they are no longer visible as a group distinct from the majority.[299] In some cases, their institutions and churches have continued to exist and have been used by new settlers of the same community.

Two important factors which may have played a role in the emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs to North and South America are the fact that, in the 1880s, American missionaries sent young Assyrian men to the United States with the idea of training them to do future missionary work in their homeland (Naby and Ishaya 1980: 161-2, Ishaya 2003).[300] In the 'Diamond Jubilee' publication (1899-1999) of the 'Assyrian[301] Orphanage and School Association of America'[302] the author mentions the second factor for the emigration to America in the second half of the nineteenth century.[303] He cites deteriorating social, economic and political situation in the Ottoman Empire, culminating in the massacres of Armenians and Assyrians/Syriacs in 1895. From this perspective, the emigration to America can be perceived as

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[299] See more on the assimilation of different Christian groups from the Middle East in Kayal (1975).

[300] This first settlement led to a chain migration, which still continues until today. The reasons for the emigration differ, depending on time and place.

[301] 'Assyrian' here is probably used cross-denominationally. This school association was an initiative of the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

[302] A document, dated 8 October 1899, mentions the charter members of the Assyrian Orphanage and School Association in the Ottoman Turkish language: Hanna Bahoosh, Saliba Bahoosh, Hadji Hannosh Basmajy, Said Basmajy, Hadji Hannoosh Betterbed, Said Choolceh, Thomas Dartley, Said Najar Esia, Beshar Mardenly, Ibrahim Mardenly and Ermoosh Mazejy. Their family names indicate that they were not from the villages of *Tur 'Abdin* but from the town: family names such as *Mardenly* and *Basmajy* are known to be from Mardin. A check in the baptism registers of the cities where Assyrians/Syriacs were living at that time may lead us to the city from which they migrated.

[303] The quote is taken from from Kass-Elias and Safar (Commemorative Eds. 1999):

'As the Nineteenth Century came to a close the once mighty Ottoman Empire was fighting for its survival. Internal corruption and uprisings by the mistreated and agitated subjects of the empire, as well as external pressures, signalled the beginning of the end of the empire. This, in addition to worsening economic conditions, created a ripe environment for yet another Christian massacre in 1895. Being law abiding and loyal subjects did not spare our people from such massacres and maltreatment. Atrocities and discriminatory government policies under more than five centuries of Ottoman rule had already reduced our community to a few tens of thousands. Most of them lived in *Tur 'Abdin* and in cities and villages scattered around the northern edges of the Fertile Crescent. Diyarbakır was one of these cities where we had a dedicated and vibrant community, which revolved around the church of the Virgin Mary. During the 1895 massacres many Assyrians fled Diyarbakır and sought refuge and freedom in the United States of America. Most of these new emigrants settled in the New York – New Jersey area and began the process of building and adjusting to life in the new country.'

an escape to a more stable and secure area with much more opportunities.[304] The people who left were principally from such cities as *Urhoy* (Urfa), *Omid* (Diyarbakır) and *Kharput*. In the years after the *Seyfo*, Westerners (both American and European) who were in the area, took pity on the *Seyfo* orphans and organized them in orphanages in the area. There was even such an orphanage in *Midyad*. Some of them were taken to Western countries.[305] One of my respondents mentioned the American Ms. Franka who drove a horse and who took the orphans under her patronage to America. During the course of the last century, the emigration to the non-European Western countries continued but in smaller groups. A new wave of emigration to the United States started from Istanbul in the 1970s. Among them were many *nouveau riche* who had developed their goldsmith businesses in *Kapalı Çarşı*. People from Mardin, Diyarbakır and *Iwardo* had proven to be successful in business and now took it a step farther. Many of them settled in the area of New Jersey and in recent years they moved to Los Angeles. During the same period (1960s and 1970s), about 2000 Assyrians/Syriacs who did not have Lebanese citizenship migrated to the United States with the help of the World Church Council (Björklund 1981: 32).

In the mid 1960s, the emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs changed direction and veared mainly towards Europe. This has resulted in an Assyrian/Syriac diaspora community numbering over 300.000 in Europe nowadays. In this section, I will explain the emigration process to Europe by contextualizing the reasons my respondents mentioned for emigration. Both in Germany and in Sweden reports by the authorities show that asylum seekers were not very specific in the motives for their emigration, apart from

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304 See on the massacre in 1895, Gaunt (2006: 41-43); De Courtois (2004: 38); Anschütz (1989: 50-51); Qarabashi (2002: 39-44), Baum (2006: 53-66) and Yonan (2006).

One of my respondents (Sweden) mentioned in an interview in 2004 that his uncles, Georgo and Stayfo, plus a member of his godfather's family from *Midyad* went to America in around 1895. Although they lived in *Midyad*, Uncle Georgo had been working in Adana before he left. It is possible that they came in touch with people in Adana who were informed about the opportunities to travel to America. The initial idea was to return. But, only Uncle Georgo came back a few years after he had heard that the *Seyfo* had taken place in the area. Upon arrival, he learned that only his brothers Hobil and Simon, and his sister Saro had survived. Their wives had been killed.

305 Father Bedros Dbe Shushe said that in Munich, in the end of the 1970s, a shop-owner approached him when she heard him talking in *Suryoyo* with the two men who accompanied him. She said to him: 'This is the language my parents spoke. And I know that some crisis had taken place in the place where I am from.' Father Bedros mentioned she managed to tell them in a combination of German and *Suryoyo* that she had been born in the village *Miden*. She was brought to Germany and was possibly one of the *Seyfo* orphans.

the general reasons of persecution and oppression, expressed in the question 'Don't you know they killed us' (*ma lo kud'itu de qtellalan*)? This question indicates that Assyrians/Syriacs did not have any idea about the isolation in which they had been living in; cut off from the outside world.[306] Moreover, they assumed that 'the world' had been informed of their situation and therefore they were expecting from other Christians – farther away but brothers in faith – to help them.

4.3 1965–1975: Labour Migrants, Stateless Assyrians and Others

In the 1960s Assyrians/Syriacs migrated from three different countries to Europe: Turkey Lebanon and Syria. In the first instance it concerns active labour emigration; people applied[307] to become *Gastarbeiter* in Germany for a short period. The emigration from Lebanon concerned 'quota refugees' – people who were invited by the authorities to settle in Sweden under the auspices of a quota policy regulating the permanent resettlement of refugees. In the case of the first emigration from Syria to Germany, these concerned often students who initially wanted to return to Syria after they completed their studies. I shall elabourate further on these groups below.

4.3.1 Europe has Appeared: Assyrian/Syriac Labour Migrants to Germany

Aurupa nafiqo ('Europe has appeared') is a literal phrase which assumes a new opportunity became available. The first emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs from Turkey to Germany was organized under the Turkish-German *Gastarbeiter* system; an outcome of a bilateral treaty (1961) to regulate the recruiting of Turkish citizens for German industry.[308] The new Turkish

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306 This was also confirmed to me by Abdulmesih BarAbraham, the first Assyrian/Syriac official interpreter at the Central Asylum Center (*Bundesamt für die Anerkennung ausländischer Flüchtlinge*) in Zirndorf, Germany during 1979-1983.

307 Applications were submitted to the *İşçi Bulma Kurumları* in Mardin, Diyarbakır and in other big cities.

308 These bilateral agreements stipulated that recruitment would be carried out exclusively by government bodies. In Turkey all recruiting was in the hands of *İş ve işçi bulma kurumu* (the National Employment Agency) and the German corresponding organization *Bundesanstalt für Arbeit*.

constitution (after the military coup of 1960) guaranteed citizens the right to leave the country, partly to decrease the problem of the high rate of unemployment (Björklund 1981: 50). It was also advantageous to Germany, which needed labour workers to keep pace with the expansion of its industry. From 1963, among the many Turkish citizens who applied to be put on the list for *Gastarbeiter*, there were also Assyrians/Syriacs. Many of them settled in the cities Duisburg, Hamburg and Augsburg (Gallio 1992).

The first Assyrians/Syriacs to apply as *Gastarbeiter* were from such cities as *Midyad*, Mardin and Diyarbakır. These were often people who were craftsmen (besides the agriculture and the crops from which they lived). Since they lived in cities, they heard about the *Gastarbeiter* system earlier than the Assyrians/Syriacs in the villages. Moreover, they had mastered the Turkish language better than those in the villages – an acquisition important in developing external contacts to prepare the travel abroad. They also depended less on their land and were therefore more flexible about undertaking a move. Besides, as small entrepreneurs they had been used to travelling for their business or to moving to other cities in Turkey temporarily for seasonal work or projects. They could be classified as the middle class of the Assyrians/Syriacs in the area. They wanted to increase their capital fast and one way to do this was by going to Germany to work for a certain period, with the idea to return to their families – just as any other of their contemporary labour migrants.[309] Another factor which prompted people to join the *Gastarbeiter* in Germany was that Assyrian/Syriac labour migrants who came back on their visits brought information about the world outside the village.

Those Assyrians/Syriacs who were already in Germany helped those who wanted to join them with acquiring a visa (since 1980 obligatory), housing and a job (repeating a process which had already taken place with the settlement in Istanbul). In their mother tongue *Suryoyo*, Assyrians/Syriacs refer to this process using the verb *grosho* (literally 'to pull'). The family or friends *greshshe* (have pulled) those living in the homeland.[310] This already gives a hint that the Assyrians/Syriacs in Germany were not thinking of going back to the homeland in the near future, since they had started to

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[309] Although in fewer numbers, Assyrian/Syriac labour migrants also settled in other Western European countries.

[310] See Björklund (1981: 80-93) for a full description of how relatives helped one another in the migration to Europe.

establish themselves. A strong chain which was reinforced by the strong dispersal and concomitant interconnectedness of the Assyrians/Syriacs worldwide. This is how Assyrians/Syriacs in the homeland came to hear about this new 'opportunity' very fast: 'Europe has appeared.'

The dimension that the first Assyrian/Syriac *Gastarbeiter* went to Europe (especially Germany) and wanted to develop their economic position by working for some years abroad, does not necessarily bear any close relationship to the way they perceived their position and situation in Turkey. Their discourses display a marginalized and weak position in their homeland. The wish to develop their economic situation should primarily be seen in terms of their work ethic. Already in the homeland, Assyrians/Syriacs had been hard at work striving to improve their living conditions and they found with living at a minimum standard unsatisfactory. This makes it possible to deduce that the first labour migrants both to Turkish cities in more central and western areas of the country as to Europe belonged to the middle class of the Assyrians/Syriacs. Moreover, in Turkey, as Christians, Assyrians/Syriacs had to produce and earn more than they needed for their household, if they were to sustain themselves in a Muslim society in which they had to purchase their safety. Although the formal taxes (*jizya*) which non-Muslims had to pay during the Ottoman Period had been formally abolished, there was still an informal system which was intertwined with the local power structure.[311]

The preparations of the *Gastarbeiter* for their travels to Germany were not cheap. Often people had to pay a bribe to the administrators to obtain the passports needed to leave for Germany, up to 20,000 Turkish Lira at that time. There was a possibility to change one's name and date of birth – as long as officials were venal. Moreover, the people in charge of the medical testing of the future *Gastarbeiter* sometimes needed to be bribed. The ban on immigration within the framework of the *Gastarbeiter* system in Germany was introduced in 1972. Assyrian/Syriac *Gastarbeiter* who had become unemployed in Germany in the 1970s were supposed to return to Turkey, but they did not. Some managed to find a new job. Others applied for asylum in Germany after they had learned about this new opportunity from the Assyrians/Syriacs who had arrived from Turkey in the 1970s and applied for asylum in Germany. Others managed to apply for asylum in other European countries, often Sweden. Some of those who had migrated from

311 See further Van Bruinessen (1992).

Turkey even had ideas of migrating to Lebanon, but the outbreak of the civil war there spelled the end of this. Before continuing with the emigration from Turkey, I will discuss the character of the first emigration from Lebanon.

4.3.2 'Stateless Assyrians': Emigration from Lebanon to Sweden

> …Finally, I would like to submit to you a new problem which has been brought to our attention by the UNHCR Representative in the Middle East. There are approximately 350 families comprising 1500 persons of stateless Assyrians in the Lebanon… However, it appears that increasing labour restrictions upon aliens now make it extremely difficult for the young men in the community to find work. This has produced a spontaneous desire for emigration and some 48 cases of 123 persons would like to emigrate to Sweden… While we realise that the transplantation of this group of refugees may present some special settlement problems, we note that those of them who have already emigrated to the United States are reported to have adapted themselves well. We would, therefore, greatly appreciate favourable consideration being given to the admission of some of these refugees to Sweden...[312]

The World Council of Churches initiated the invitation of Assyrian/Syriac refugees from Lebanon through the UN High Commissioner. They made up part of the refugee quota which Sweden invited in that year. In the months of March and April 1967 two groups of Assyrians/Syriacs from Lebanon arrived in Sweden. Altogether the invited number amounted to 205 people[313] who lived in Lebanon illegally. They were denied citizenship and the Lebanese authorities had issued them with a document of statelessness (Björklund 1981: 57). Hence, in the emigration process, the World Council of Churches presented them as a people without a country – 'stateless Assyrians'.[314]

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312 Excerpt from a letter by S.J. Sims (Acting Chief of the Resettlement Section, UNHCR) to Mr. B. Olsson of the National Labour Market Board in Sweden, 18 July 1966. See Appendix 7 for a copy of this letter.

313 As Björklund (1981: 57/58) specifies, the majority of these Christians belonged to the Syriac Orthodox Church (*Suryoye Ma'erboye*). Among them were smaller numbers of *Suryoye Madenhoye* (members of the Assyrian Church of the East), *Suryoye* Catholics and *Suryoye Protestants*. My respondents mentioned that there were a few Muslims too who had registered themselves as Assyrians, purely to obtain access to Sweden.

314 See for example the letter by the World Council of Churches, Appendix 7.

In 1974 another group of refugees was invited (Björklund 1981: 63) but many others left Lebanon on their own initiative. The civil war which had started in 1975 was an overriding factor in the emigration from Lebanon at that time. The knowledge that Assyrian/Syriac communities were present in Europe inspired many to decide to join relatives or friends. This ushered in a more or less permanent change of direction of the Assyrian/Syriac emigration from Syria and Lebanon. Before the 1970s the emigration was mainly directed towards North and South America, following the pattern of other Christian groups in Lebanon. After this period, the main destination changed to Europe (especially Sweden). The reason Assyrians/Syriacs from Lebanon and Syria tended to settle in Sweden rather than in continental Europe is that they had closer family relations with the Assyrians/Syriacs who were already living there. Only after the 1990s did the number of Assyrians/Syriacs from Syria increase in continental Europe. The example of Mushe shows how he used his network of acquaintances to flee the war in Lebanon:

> In 1969 I migrated from Syria to Lebanon. I lived there eight years… My brother, who was fifteen years old, was killed by a bomb which hit our house during the war. Then I decided that I did not want to stay there any longer. I wanted to leave; it could be anywhere: Australia, Canada, America, anywhere! After I received the passport I had applied for, I left for Greece. From there I contacted my friends worldwide to help me to get to one of these countries. Finally the friends in Sweden assisted me going there, since this was the easiest option at the time.

The emigration after the civil war continued mainly as chain migration – in which the use of family relations has been essential. Within a period of forty years, the 205 'stateless Assyrians' –who were invited to settle in Sweden in 1967 – had become more than 100,000; a compilation of Assyrians/Syriacs from different countries in the Middle East.[315] It was a consequence the Swedish authorities could not have thought of beforehand.

4.3.3 Emigration from Syria

The first Assyrians/Syriacs who went to Germany from Syria in the 1960s were students who travelled to Germany on the basis of a student visa. Their

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[315] This number is spread across denominational and does not contain only the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church, although they are the biggest group.

idea was to graduate and to go back to the *Gozarto*, the northeast region with the biggest concentration of Assyrians/Syriacs. Many of them were members of the (underground) ADO and aimed at enhancing the opportunities of the Assyrian/Syriac population in Syria with the education they had gained. Their hope was that they could raise awareness about specific rights regarding their mother tongue and to be able to live their culture, rather than to be arabized by the politics of the Baath party. Some[316] of them did return to Syria but others remained. By and large, this first group did not have strong ties[317] with the first waves of emigration to Germany (labour migrants) or the Assyrian refugees invited from Lebanon to Sweden.

A second group consisted of political activists and intellectuals, mostly active in ADO, who wished to live in a more open society. An example of the oppression of free spirits is that of the artist Simon who left for Sweden in 1976:

> I started publishing an art magazine myself. I also wrote for a Baathist art magazine, and broadcasted radio programmes… But I was not happy with the situation. The brother of the president [of Syria] was the editor-in-chief of the magazine I worked for. I was uncomfortable working so closely with the authorities. In our family we were raised with democratic principles. Therefore I wanted to escape the situation I was in… When one feels a stranger in one's homeland, this is much harder than feeling a stranger in a foreign land. I felt this!.. Inside I felt a stranger in my own homeland… I did not feel a first-class citizen and therefore I could not obtain positions that I should have been able to. The reason was because my name was Simon. I could not become a minister, only the assistant to the minister. When I left, I did not plan to go to Sweden. I applied for visas to different countries. Finally, I chose for Sweden.

Generally, fleeing to Europe could have been the consequence of a direct or indirect threat, prompted by fear. The flight to Europe offered a good alternative, one in which people found a safe 'haven' and where they could continue their political activism without any danger. In contrast to the first

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316 Upon arrival in *Qamishlo*, the physicians Dr Yacob Jallo and the late Dr Sanharib Hanna founded their private hospitals.

317 Exceptions exist of course; especially the ADO activists, headed by the late Dr Sanharib Hanna in Germany, deliberately sought them out after establishing contacts; these were indeed far-reaching relationships which educated the *Gastarbeiter* or their children to bring about an awareness of a cross-denominational Assyrian/Syriac identity.

group, this second group used their family relations with those who had already arrived in Europe from Turkey and Lebanon.

Some of them utilized the strategies of Assyrians/Syriacs from Turkey, like the family of Saro, who has become a successful professional in Sweden. Saro's father had escaped Turkish military service in the 1940s.[318] He could no longer tolerate the way the Christian soldiers were treated. He escaped to Syria and stayed there until the 1970s. Saro's brother left Syria to study in Germany. The terrorist attack of Palestinian activists on the Israeli team at the Olympic games of 1972 created a climate in which the German authorities decided to request all students from Arab countries living in Germany to leave. Saro's brother resolved not to go back but to continue to live in Germany illegally. When Saro's family heard about the *Gastarbeiter* system which was open to people in Turkey, the family decided to obtain Turkish passports, so that Saro's mother could sign in.[319] Since Saro's father had escaped the Turkish military service, he could no longer enter into Turkey. He stayed behind but Saro's mother took her children with her and went to Germany as a labour migrant. After a couple of years, Saro's mother lost her job because of the economic recession; they had to leave Germany. By then, they had learned from family members in Sweden that this country accepted asylum seekers. The whole family decided to apply for asylum in Sweden. Saro's father found an illegal way to travel from Syria to Sweden. After five years of separation, they started a new family life in Sweden in the second half of the 1970s.

4.3.4 The Role of Family Networks in the Mass Emigration

The emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs to Europe was not planned at the collective level – except for the first group of invited 'stateless Assyrians' from Lebanon in 1967 (which was organized by the UNHCR). Within a period of ten years after the first wave of migration, the Assyrians became national news and visible in Sweden. How was it that so many Assyrians/Syriacs have left the homeland, despite the fact that their emigration was not organized at the collective level? Before answering this question, it is essential to realize that the daily mobility of the

[318] See for the military service during this period Section 3.1.2.

[319] As she managed to sign it, it can be expected that recruitment still continued, although with reduced numbers.

Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin* was very limited. Many had never seen any villages or cities except their own. Historically they had a very strong connection to their native land and to their *qadishe* (patron saints). They left the land, on which they worked daily, including the family house which they had often built themselves, behind. Leaving everything behind, pulling up their roots (*waride*) and heading 'to foreign lands' (*li nukhrayto*) must have been an enormous strain.[320] One way to explain the pace of the mass emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs is to investigate their interconnectedness and the chain mechanism in the emigration process, as I have explained earlier. Their emigration can be characterized as a chain migration where the network of the extended family, the collective, made the pace and mass migration possible.[321] Later, the family was also essential during their settlement and the process of adapting to the new society. Björklund studied this logic of their emigration process along family lines in more detail.

Björklund (1981: 64-101) has used the case of the Dbe Urhawi[322] lineage to illustrate how the family structure and lineage of the Assyrians/Syriacs played a great role in the power of the chain migration from the homeland to Europe. He concludes: 'The members of the lineage, setting off from their many different points of departure in Turkey, Syria and Lebanon in a partly coordinated movement, made their way to Sweden and re-formed themselves there.' Furthermore, Björklund (Ibid.) illustrates how the interconnectedness of the families (through the extended family structure), made it possible to find help in the emigration process. Historically, the family structure and relationships have been used as a socio-political structure for survival and, as they have proven their worth, they have continued to use them up to today in Europe. With the example of the Dbe Urhawi lineage Björklund refutes the notion fostered by the Swedish authorities about the emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs to Sweden, namely that the refugee wave from Lebanon in 1967 and thereafter and the sudden

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320 Physicians noted psychosomatic illnesses among the first generation Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe. The first generation had never heard of psychosomatic illnesses and concluded that the physicians in Europe must be less good than the physicians in their own countries, since 'When we tell them that our back or head hurts, they tell us that it is because we miss and long for the village.' They expected instead to get heavy medication to heal their aching 'backs and heads'.

321 Chain migration is not unique to Assyrians/Syriacs; it is common among refugees. The case of the group I study differs in the extent and the pace of the emigration, causing a demographic change in former areas they inhabited.

322 Björklund uses the name *biBurhawi*.

'spontaneous' emigration of those from Turkey were unrelated. This misconception reveals that the authorities knew little about this group. Many entered the country despite the measures taken by the authorities; this would not have been possible without help from relatives and friends. And not, as the Swedish authorities suspected that this emigration was organized by an institution of this people, the ADO. This initial accusation was investigated by the authorities but no relationship between the two could be found (see further Nilsson 1981).

4.4 *U Darbo l-Aurupa Ftih* or the Road to Europe has Opened (1975–1984)

4.4.1 Finding the Road to Europe

In the political state of affairs prevailing after the military coup of 1980, many obstructions were put in the way of Turkish citizens who wished to leave the country. It was precisely at this point that many Assyrians/Syriacs started to leave Turkey – tellingly without experiencing any obstacles from the authorities to leave the country. Some villages and cities in Turkey were already empty of Assyrians/Syriacs.[323]

Until the mid-1970s, the opportunity of 'Europe has appeared' loomed large in the horizons of Assyrians/Syriacs. In that period many seized this chance and 'the road to Europe had opened' (*u darbo l-Aurupa ftih*). Germany's decision to close its borders to the labour migrants in 1972 and since 1980[324] to migrants without a travel visa, did not seem to present much of a hurdle to the Assyrians/Syriacs who had found a way out of the Middle East, especially Turkey. For them, not only 'Europe had appeared' (which is a passive observation as a new opportunity), but 'the road to Europe had opened' – an opportunity at close distance. Instead of approaching Europe as an area with closed doors it now offered a new opportunity to find a new

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[323] In 1979/80 the first Assyrian/Syriac villages were already empty: *'Arbaye*, *Binkelbe* and Kerboran (Merten 1997: 101). In 1987/88 also all the Assyrian/Syriac families had left the villages *Bote* and *Badibbe*. And in 1989 the same happened for the village *Kefferbe* and the towns *Gerçus*, *Nsibin*, *Omerli* and *Sawro*.

[324] In 1980, Turkey was among the countries whose inhabitants had to have a visa before travelling to Germany. Airline companies were requested to transport refugees without a visa back to their country of origin. The airport transit visa was established for the first time in 1981, and extended to Turkey in 1989.

home. Soon they learned about the possibility to apply for asylum in Germany too, as did one of my respondents in 1976, as the first Assyrian/Syriac asylum seeker who applied to settle in Delmenhorst. Although he and others did not yet understand the concept of 'seeking asylum,' they understood that if a person wanting to settle in Germany could.[325] They also learned about the process through which they had to go. A common discourse was that they mentioned their general defenceless and oppressed position as Christians in a Muslim society.

Two factors may have caused the high number of Assyrian/Syriac asylum seekers in Germany in 1980. Firstly, the consequences resulting from the military *coup d'état* on 12 September 1980. The struggle between the leftist and the rightist groups resulted in anarchy in which violence and robbery became part of the daily experience. When people had a choice in the matter, this may have been a strong impulse for the Assyrians/Syriacs to leave. Barse, an Assyrian/Syriac wholesaler in jewellery in Istanbul, made the decision to flee to Germany after word of the many attacks by robbers on Assyrian/Syriac goldsmiths had reached his ears.[326] Barse believes that attacks on Christians tended to occur precisely in the chaos after a military coup or similar happening, since 'it was legitimate for Muslims to kill us' (*u admaydan halal wa la Taye*). 'Perpetrators knew they would not be punished and therefore it was easier to kill us than to kill Muslims.'

The German lawyer who was sent by the German authorities to report about the situation of the Assyrians/Syriacs claimed that the military coup had had positive consequences for the Assyrians/Syriacs (Merten 1997). The

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[325] My respondent in Delmenhorst said that he learned that the first step in such a procedure was to apply in Berlin. This was because Assyrians/Syriacs had learned that many Kurds had applied for asylum and were granted a permission to stay in Berlin. Therefore Assyrians/Syriacs assumed that applying for asylum was only possible in Berlin. When my respondent arrived in Berlin, after he had travelled already to Munich and Stuttgart, he learned from the Assyrians/Syriacs there that he could apply in the city he wanted to settle in, which was Delmenhorst. He chose for Delmenhorst because his brother had settled there as a *Gastarbeiter*. When he told his family that he wanted to apply for asylum in Germany, they told him that it was not possible, since they did not know about that possibility. As a new arrival he informed them that it was possible. After his first interview he was sent to a *Lager* in Nurnberg, a former military camp, where he waited for 2,5 months before he was sent to Hannover, where a couple of other Assyrians/Syriacs lived.

[326] One of his friends, the newly married Fehmi Dbe Qasho George, was killed in Rize (Turkey). He had seen Fehmi earlier that day during one of his business trips in Rize. Fehmi had told him that he had a passport ready to leave for France, but before that he wanted to request the 300 grams of gold, which he owned from a Muslim shopkeeper in Rize. After this entrepreneur had given him back his gold, he killed Fehmi to take the returned gold back.

reason for his rather surprising pronouncement is probably because he had been accompanied by Turkish officials while talking to people about this subject in Turkey. The Syriac Orthodox Chorbishop in Istanbul, Aziz Günel, reported similarly positively about the consequences of the military coup for his people to Roldanus (1985: 75-76). If this had been the case, how can one explain the high number of Assyrians/Syriacs leaving the country just at a time where it had become generally more difficult for Turkish citizens to leave Turkey (as a commonly well known fact among the people). My respondents did not experience any obstacle in obtaining a passport and other procedural legal formalities. They have understood this as a way of 'getting rid of the non-Muslims'. The second reason for the high numbers of asylum seekers during this period is that it was no longer possible to travel without a visa to Germany, Belgium or the Netherlands after 1980. Assyrians/Syriacs referred to this situation with the phrase *u darbo gedmiskhir* 'the road is going to be closed.' Alerted by this, many people who were thinking of leaving Turkey took the bull by the horns in 1980. A combination of these two factors could explain the high number of Assyrians/Syriacs who applied for asylum in Germany but also elsewhere in 1980.[327]

After Germany did not need labour migrants anymore and requested the unemployed *Gastarbeiter* to leave, some Assyrians/Syriacs who were in this position applied for asylum in Germany and others travelled farther to family (or extended family) members or acquaintances in Sweden and applied for asylum there.[328] This begs the essential question of why they did not return to the countries from which they had migrated? I will discuss this from the perspective of my respondents, by contextualizing it in the socio-political situation in the countries from which they migrated and those they settled in.

Allied to this, the freedom they enjoyed in Europe offered them many opportunities both at an individual and at a collective level. They were very aware that politically, as I discussed in Chapter 3, the situation in Turkey in the 1970s did not seem to improve. They were also highly conscious of the

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[327] The same conclusion can be drawn for Sweden and the Netherlands.

[328] In 1993 the fundamental right for asylum was curtailed severely. According to the German Basic Law (GG), art. 16a GG, refugees who enter Germany over land do not have the right for asylum (so called 'third state rule' 'Drittstaatenregelung', http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drittstaatenregelung).

fact that many of the family members had already left the *athro* to go to Sweden or to another European country. Returning to Turkey did not necessarily promise a reunion with the whole family as 'in the old days'. A typical question often raised among the older generation was[329]: 'What is there to go back to?' They combine this question with the statement: 'The homeland should be farther removed from there' (*U athro trezze me tamo u lugab*!). They were saying that they wanted to create even more geographical distance between themselves in Europe and the *athro* they left behind in distant lands. It is a strongly warded statement about how they relate to the *athro*. It is a rejection expressing that they do not want to have anything to do with the *athro* and that they have had enough of the way of life there. It encapsulates painful recollections of problems which had beset them in the *athro* and that they did not want to find themselves in that situation again – a non-geographical conception of the *athro*. This statement is permeated with great anger and bitterness. The anger is there because they are stripped of the hope that they can ever go back to settle and as a consequence of this pain people should not even mention the *athro*, since it is a closed episode.[330] When the younger generation activists say that, if possible, the ideal situation is to resettle in the *athro*, the elderly tell them cynically: 'Oh yeah, the *athro* is there waiting for you; go and get it!' It seems that it is easier for them to forget the *athro* than to be reminded of it without the hope of being able to go back and live there.

In contrast to those in the diaspora, some people who were still in the *athro* judged the emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs negatively as soon as they understood that it would be permanent and *en mass*: 'How could one leave one's *athro* for a foreign country?' The emigration to Europe was perceived as different to the migration within the region of the Middle East. It was seen in the light of disconnecting from the historical homeland (*athro*), letting go. Later, from about the beginning of the 1980s, attitudes altered and

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329 After 2000 this attitude changed more positively, but the individuals concerned were still few. See also BarAbraham (2004).

330 In the documentary film *Kein Platz Dazwischen* (Yanik, 2009), the grandmother of Daniel Yanik (director of documentary) expresses a similar feeling when she returns to her village *Harbto* (also known as *Harabe Mishka*) in *Tur 'Abdin* for a short visit after having lived in Germany for thirty years. During her visit, when she experienced the burning of their land in the surroundings by the military, she was again overwhelmed by feelings of overpowering fear. Daniel's grandmother expressed with a bitter looking face that she would never ever come back to *Tur 'Abdin* again.

leaving the *athro* began to be perceived more as a bitter necessity by those who saw themselves condemned to live in the *athro*.

4.4.2 The Choice for Sweden

Why did many of these Assyrian/Syriac labour migrants from Germany 'choose' to settle in Sweden instead of one of the other European countries? The answer should be sought in the connectedness of Assyrians/Syriacs and in the less restrictive Swedish asylum policy. A considerable majority of the labour migrants in Germany were *Midyoye* (people from the town *Midyad* in *Tur 'Abdin*). In the meantime, it transpired that many of the Assyrian/Syriac refugees from Lebanon in Sweden were also *Midyoye*. Being related and consequently in close contact, the message was passed on to the Assyrian/Syriac labour migrants in Germany about the possibility to apply for asylum in Sweden. It was not necessary to be from the same place in *Tur 'Abdin*. Often, Assyrians/Syriacs from different places in the Middle East were acquainted with each other in some way or other through the extended family. This family network is how they kept well informed about the new dangers facing them ,or opportunities, which they could take. Right from the outset people learned about the different opportunities in both countries, as I explained above. Nahir, who was a teenager when his family migrated from Germany to Sweden, says:

> We lived in Germany for ten years and we were still not granted a passport. But in Sweden we were already given a Swedish passport after five years… Moreover, after you have been granted a residence permit, the authorities could no longer send you back… In Sweden you had a secure life.

Until the mid-1970s, the character of settlement of the Assyrians/Syriacs differed between that in Sweden and in the other European countries. Their settlement in Sweden assumed from the beginning a more permanent character; eclipsing Germany which had become the symbol for *Gastarbeit* or temporary work initially. At this turning point, Assyrians/Syriacs migrated to and settled in Sweden. *Midyoye* both in the *athro* and in the *nukhrayto* (foreign lands) expressed their awareness of what was happening by saying: 'Germany built up *Midyad* and Sweden destroyed *Midyad*' (*Almanya ma'marla Midyad w u Eswed mahrawla Midyad*). From the perspective of the Assyrians/Syriacs generally, but especially from that of the *Midyoye* natives of *Midyad*, this city

was the pride of *Tur 'Abdin*.[331] It functioned as the symbol for the *Suryoyutho* (Assyrian/Syriac way of life) in the area, especially since people who had still some influence in the area were living in *Midyad*. Even more so, because the majority of the inhabitants were Assyrians/Syriacs and only a small minority of residents were Kurdish or *Mhalmoye* Muslims. *Midyad* was far more than the economic centre of the area; it was also the centre of the handicrafts, most visibly expressed in the stone cutting[332] of the *Midyoye* mansions and churches. Until they migrated to Sweden or until they were granted asylum in Germany the labour migrants in Germany used the money they earned to invest in *Midyad*. People who settled later in Sweden chose a different path and sold some of their land and some even let their house go.[333] Having metaphorically burned their bridges, they began to invest in Sweden.

'Germany built up *Midyad*' (*Almanya ma'marla Midyad*) referred very literally to the money streaming in for the development of *Midyad* and to the presumption that one-day all the people who had left it would return and preserve its character.[334] But those who went to Sweden no longer envisaged returning to *Midyad* again and therefore it was said that Sweden destroyed (*mahraula*) *Midyad*; or in a less literal sense that Sweden had led to its abandonment. The adage encapsulates how they relate to *Midyad*, and it offers a clue to the future orientation of the Assyrians/Syriacs in Germany and Sweden. On another level it sums up their idea of how they thought about their position in these two countries succinctly. In Germany both the labour migrants and the asylum-seekers felt much more insecure than did the Assyrians/Syriacs who migrated to Sweden. In Germany, the residence permits were often not for an unlimited period of time. Only people who were granted refugee status received a permit to stay for an unlimited period of time.

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331 See for the history of *Midyad*, Palmer (1990).

332 *Midyoye* stonecutters had become famous both in the area itself and even outside Turkey. They were also asked to build mosques in northern Iraq and Syria. After settlement in Europe, the craftsmen used their skills to build the altars for several churches in Europe. Among them is the altar of the *Mor Ephrem* Church in Södertälje (Sweden) carved by Shabe BarAbraham.

333 The 'selling' (negligible price was paid) of houses was often because they had already been occupied and disseized by the Kurdish population.

334 When people visit *Midyad* today, they often lament that *Midyad* has not remained the *Midyad* they knew, that it is now inhabited by foreign people and has become 'dirty' (*'jiqo* or *msammo*). In this situation, some mention that *Midyad* had been proclaimed the cleanest city in all of Turkey somewhere in the 1950s – the time when it was dominantly populated by Assyrians/Syriacs.

In this period, most of the Assyrians/Syriacs migrating from the Middle East also changed the direction of emigration and opted for Sweden. An important reason was that it was relatively easier to get access to Sweden than to other European countries. Although both Germany and Sweden (apparently still less restrictive than Germany) had made it difficult for immigrants to enter the country, the emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs to Europe had increased enormously after 1974-1975 (Björklund 1981: 96). Because of the change of the direction towards Sweden, the immigration of Assyrians/Syriacs increased substantially in the course of the years 1975-1976, rising from about 1000 to possibly nearly 7000 (Björklund 1981: 96). Also Kai Merten (1995: 108-9) made this clear in his statistics about the number of Assyrian/Syriac asylum-seekers who were clients of the lawyer König[335] between 1971 and 1992 in Germany.[336] In the statistics there were three years in which the percentage of Assyrians/Syriacs who migrated to Germany was much higher than other years: 1976, 1980 and 1984. There are some well-founded explanations for these surges. Most prominent was the Cyprus crisis with Turkey in 1974. This revealed that the situation of Christians in Turkey, including the Assyrians/Syriacs, was neither stable nor secure. They no longer had to endure their invidious position as they had learned about new opportunities in the West. The new asylum-seekers from Turkey and the labour migrants who did not want to return to Turkey and who applied for asylum in Germany and Sweden explain the high numbers leaving for Germany in 1976 and the increase in their number to Sweden in 1974-1975. The fear engendered during the Cyprus crisis had even reached Assyrians/Syriacs who were in Europe. Even if there were people who wanted to go back, this threat created another reason (besides certain advantages) for them to stay in the safety of Europe. Zakay, who was a young child back then and who had just migrated from Germany to Sweden, says:

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335 König was probably the lawyer who acted for the highest number of Assyrian/Syriac asylum-seekers in Germany. Merten (1997: 108) estimates that the Assyrian/Syriac asylum-seekers as registered in the archive of König make up about 4% of the Assyrian/Syriac asylum-seekers to Germany, if this number is estimated at about 35,000. Presumably the number of asylum-seekers could be estimated at a higher number. In 2009 the number of Assyrians/Syriacs (cross-denominational) in Germany was estimated at over 100,000.

336 Merten could not make use of national registration offices or local administration offices because Assyrians/Syriacs were not registered as a distinct group of people, separate from other Turkish citizens. Immigrants were registered in Germany, as in other European countries, according to the state from which they migrated. In Germany, neither the religious denomination nor the ethnic group to which one belongs was registered.

> When we came to Sweden from Germany, in 1974 we heard about the Cyprus crisis. My parents and others feared that another *Seyfo* was imminent. Wherever they met they cried out: "*Hawaryo, hawaryo!*" [337] They tried to have as many people as possible to come to Sweden. At that time there were still plenty of opportunities to come to Sweden. People came in groups. I remember that – my two cousins are blond – my sister and I woke up at five in the morning – and we did not know that we had new relatives over from *Midyad*. We woke up and saw seven children in our room and shouted: "Mother, mother, there are Swedish children sleeping in our room!" She said: "Quiet! They are not Swedish, they are your cousins from *Midyad*." My youngest brother was born in the 1980s and we called him Marcus after Makarios [Cyprus Archbishop and President]. I am curious if Makarios really knows who we are and that we were plunged into problems because of his crisis with Turkey.

4.4.3 Letters from the Diaspora

In this context it is important to say something about the communication between those settled in the 'foreign lands' (*nukhrayto)* and those who had remained in the *athro*. In the beginning, their communication was mainly through cassettes and letters.[338] These means of communication had different functions. Paramount was the emotional need to express the longing for those who had remained behind, the need to express their first impressions and astonishment about the new countries in which they had settled. A year after we settled in the Netherlands, I remember that I sat in a circle of family members around a tape recorder at the age of nine when my father spoke into the machine expressing his astonishment and rejection about 'how men and women walked hand in hand and kissed on the street without any shame'. In these cassettes and letters the future prospects were also communicated. The teenager Yacob read and wrote the letters for the people in one of the quarters in *Midyad*, since most of the people were illiterate:

> The general perception I had after reading their letters about Sweden was: "It is like heaven here."… They wrote about being left alone and about the freedom they enjoyed. "No one dares to say anything to us about

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[337] This is something like 'a cry for help' in situations where people find themselves in emergency situations at times of experiencing a disaster.

[338] The villages in *Tur 'Abdin* had telephone connections around the beginning of the 1980s.

> being Christian, as in the *athro*," they wrote. And they wrote about the beautiful nature and water… They did not write negatively about the dark evenings. Some also wrote about the many churches, and the humane character of the Swedish people. Something else I learned was that they wrote there were no Muslims in Sweden and that you can wear your crucifix openly around your neck. And I learned that there was an abundance of everything; people had cars, people are rich, and so forth.

Matay, who was a child of about ten years when information from these letters and cassettes reached him, remembers that Assyrians/Syriacs in *Midyad* were saying:

> Sweden is a Christian country, the symbol of the cross is its flag, it is a very sympathetic country, it helps oppressed Christians and gives financial aid to people in need… In *Tur 'Abdin*, my father spoke to a *Qusnoyo*[339] who was sent back from Sweden and asked him: "How is Sweden?" The Qusnoyo answered him in a very sad voice: "I wanted to have died in a Swedish toilet and not to be sent back to here again [*Khuzi moyaswayno*[340] *bi twale du Swed u lo do'arwayno larke*]!"

The wish expressed by this man should be understood in relation to the life of the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin*. Sweden was defined by the Assyrians/Syriacs as a charitable and faithful (Christian) country (*athro mrahmono u mhaymno*). The element of 'charity' was probably important to them, because in the beginning many had to rely on social aid. The fact that the social system in Sweden was referred to as 'charity,' is an indication that they had not understood its concept. It also shows that they approached the Swedish system from their 'Christian perspective' when defining Sweden as a Christian country. Presumably, because Assyrians/Syriacs perceive charity as a Christian characteristic. They assumed that Sweden helped the Assyrians/Syriacs since they shared the same Christian religion with the Swedes. Only later did they learn that this policy touched not only

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339 A *Qusnoyo* is an inhabitant of the village *Bequsyone* in *Tur 'Abdin*.

340 The people in the village of *Bequsyone* pronounce the sound 'th' as an 's'. Therefore this man pronounces the term *moyathwayno* as *moyaswayno*. Today, this pronunciation is considered incorrect by the ordinary people. Linguistically one can consider it as a regional dialectical difference. The pronunciation of a 'th' as an 's' has also been common in the villages (in Turkey) *Dayro du Sliwo* (also spelled as *Slibo*), *Mlahso* (near Lice) and in Assyrian/Syriac villages around Diyarbakır, such as in *Ansha*.

Assyrians/Syriacs but also extended to other refugee groups adhering to different religions. Initially, it was something they could not understand. Their point of departure was still the religiously based organization of people, rooted in the *millet* system in the Ottoman Empire. As I argued in the introduction of this chapter, they constructed the image of 'Sweden' as a place where their future expectations could be fulfilled. At the height of the mass emigration, the journalist Lars Welss, working for the Swedish daily newspaper *Aftonbladet* interviewed Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin* and wrote on the 'dream about Sweden' (26 June 1977). The first asylum hearings of the new asylum seekers in this period confirm the extent to which the *myth* about Sweden existed: 'Everyone wants to come to Sweden' (Fimmerson 1976). Sweden had become a *social imaginary*.

4.4.4 'General Amnesty' in Sweden and its Consequences

The continuous and increasing number of Assyrian/Syriac asylum seekers was something the Swedish authorities had not expected and were not prepared for. Moreover, also the profile of the asylum seekers (illiterate farmers) did not fit the market needs of the Swedish economy. The Swedish Migration Board wished to grant asylum to academics (Gardell 1986: 79). Between 1975 and 1977 about 6000 Assyrians applied for asylum (Ornbrant 1981: 8). This relatively high number is reason for Ornbrant to refer to this immigration as 'unique' in Swedish immigration history.[341] Ornbrant notes that the high numbers of Assyrian/Syriac refugees kindled the renewed discussion about Swedish immigration policy and the immigration regulations as set down in 1968. Assyrians/Syriacs found all kinds of legal and illegal ways to travel to Sweden and other European countries.[342] In

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[341] This is certainly not unique in the emigration history of Europe. One example is the settlement of the Tamils in the Netherlands in 1985.

[342] They managed to get false passports or to travel with passports of family members, hid themselves in trains and they made use of people smugglers to whom a relative big sum of money was paid. It grew into a well-paid business. In the second half of the 1990s a respondent of Araz (2001: 148) paid 7000 DM for a fake visa which he obtained through the smugglers. Merten (1997: 105) mentions the different routes which Assyrians/Syriacs took to reach Germany: a) through Brussels; people without a visa were not sent back directly as was the case in Germany. From Brussels their relatives or friends drove them through the Netherlands to Germany; b) some flew to Zürich. From there they drove farther by car or they took the train to Germany. There were even people who crossed the *grüne Grenze* on foot; c) some first flew to Vienna and from there they continued by car, taxi, bus or train to Germany; d) others flew directly to a German airport. This was possible because they had a ticket with destination London. Therefore they did not experience any difficulties when

Sweden, the so-called Eslöv-case received much attention. In March 1980, the border police made a body-visitation to a person travelling from Turkey and found a passport which was sticked to his body (Nilsson 1981: 58). After investigations, it was concluded that the same passport had been used for more than 50 trips within the period of one year. This led to a juridical process against the owner of the passport that was discussed as an example of human trafficking and illegal emigration at the Eslöv Court. By far, this case was not unique. They headed off to Europe via a multitude of paths. Were they denied access in one country, they tried another one. Faulus, whom it took a couple of years to be granted asylum and who thereafter managed to set up a successful life in Sweden, says:

> From *Tur 'Abdin* I first went to Switzerland. From there I went to Sweden. I was sent back to Switzerland. I decided to go to relatives who lived in Germany and I remained there for three and a half years. Thereafter I managed to get back to Sweden again and was granted asylum.

Seeking a solution for this 'problem' of immigration, the Swedish Parliament passed two resolutions in February and November 1976: granting all the Assyrians/Syriacs who had applied for asylum in Sweden a permit to stay, on humanitarian grounds.[343] The names of the prime minister at that time, Olof Palme, and that of 'their lawyer', Kjell Jöhnson, assumed a positive connotation among Assyrians/Syriacs. The singer Hanna Shabo dedicated one of his songs to them and distributed the cassettes all over the world. Consequently, Assyrians/Syriacs 'in the four corners of the world' knew who Olof Palme and Kjell Jöhnson were. The 'general amnesty' granted to the Assyrian/Syriac asylum-seekers attracted many other Assyrians/Syriacs from

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departing from Istanbul – the intermediate landing became their final destination instead; e) some flew into East Berlin and from there they crossed the border to West Berlin; f) there were also people who travelled overland through Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Austria. And especially later they travelled trough Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary, or through Italy and Switzerland, or through France or Belgium to Germany, g) some first flew to Lebanon and from there they set off for a Western country; h) a few took the ship or bus to Greece – from Athens they flew to a Western country; i) there were even people who flew through Arab countries, such as Iraq, Egypt or Tunisia. See also Araz (2001: 187-201) and Björklund (1981) for more about the routes to their destinations in Europe.

343 The resolution in February was passed by the Social Democrats and granted 1200 Assyrians asylum (Ornbrant 1981: 11). That of November was passed by the coalition of the ruling rightist parties and granted 2000 Assyrians asylum. Initially they received collectively the refugee A-status. Later, the authorities changed this in a B-status, which was granted on humanitarian grounds, as stipulated in the International Conventions. Those who were granted an A- status after 1976 received the refugee status on an individual basis.

other parts of the world to seek asylum in Sweden. The family relationships between those who had already settled and the new migrants played an important role in this process. As mentioned before, Assyrian/Syriac labour migrants in Germany who had become jobless and were therefore obliged to leave, or those who were rejected asylum in Germany, applied for asylum in Sweden. Despite attempts by the Swedish authorities to limit immigration by introducing a severer selection procedure, it remained relatively easier to be granted asylum in Sweden than in the other European countries.[344] After asylum seekers set foot on Swedish soil, the policy to send them away was again less severe than in other European countries, at least from the perspective of the asylum-seekers.[345]

4.4.5 Attempts to Stop the Emigration

In February 1976 visas to Sweden were made compulsory. To travel to Sweden on a legal basis became suddenly much more difficult. In the meantime, the Swedish authorities had sharpened the selection procedure for asylum-seekers. Many Assyrians/Syriacs were forced to live illegally and underground with other family members for years. The situation in Germany was the same, especially after 1980, when a travel visa was made mandatory. By then, about fifteen years after the first Assyrians/Syriacs settled in Sweden and Germany, the authorities seemed to have developed more knowledge and insight into their migration case. Nevertheless, they still did not understand the Assyrian/Syriac metaphorical use of the phrase 'they killed us' (*qtelallan*). The Swedish National Police Report (1981) notes that many Assyrians/Syriacs refer to the oppression by the Muslims, but that they fail to mention any specific examples regarding themselves, but referring generally to the *Seyfo*.[346] Apparently the – mostly illiterate[347] – asylum seekers

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[344] An Assyrian/Syriac man who had swum from one of the other Scandinavian coasts to Sweden was not sent back but granted asylum, since the authorities were said to have been impressed by his dedication to reaching Sweden. This example indicates that the authorities were not strictly unrelenting in their policy.

[345] Although already from the beginning Assyrian/Syriac asylum-seekers in the Netherlands had to go through a more severe procedure, in the end, no considerable numbers were sent back.

[346] This is also true of asylum-seekers in Germany, the majority of whom referred to the *Seyfo*. See further BarAbraham (2006).

[347] The majority of the Assyrian/Syriac asylum seekers from *Tur 'Abdin* were illiterate or had just a primary school diploma. The first public schools in the area of *Tur 'Abdin* were established in the beginning of the 1950s.

were unable to convince the authorities that they were persecuted and singled out (two requirements in Refugee Law) in their hometowns and villages by members of the Muslim majority. *Qtellalan* (they killed us) had become a metaphorical term for their subordinated position in Turkish society. It is a reference to their increasingly weakened position in which they found themselves in the decades in the aftermath of the *Seyfo*. The question of why Assyrians/Syriacs did not mention very specific reasons to explain their personal state may have been attributable to the fact that their framework of reflection on themselves and their predicament in relation to the others in society differed from that of Europeans. They had been used to thinking in terms of us (*Suroye,* used in the sense of 'Christians')[348] and them (*Taye,* Muslims) and the historical traditional position and relationship of these two groups. Since they characterized the position of 'us' (Christians among Muslim majority) as that of being oppressed (*dishe*), subordinated and defenceless (*twiroye*), they assumed that the Europeans as *Christians* knew about this position and that a brief reference to their 'defenceless position' would suffice to have the European authorities understand why they applied for asylum in Europe.



Illustration 4: An asylum-seeking family that lived underground in Sweden. Source: *Länstidningen* 1976.

[348] In *Tur 'Abdin*, Assyrians/Syriacs more often used the designation *Suroye* than *Suryoye* when speaking in *Suryoyo*. The latter term has been commonly used in the diaspora in the spoken tongue.

In the meantime, the authorities in Sweden and Germany made several official investigating visits to Turkey in order to learn more about the reasons for their emigration. In the end, they did not seem to get much further. The general conclusion drawn from these conversations was that the Turkish officials and Assyrian/Syriac clergy and laymen (on the church board in Istanbul), declared that Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey did not suffer from religious persecution (Nilsson 1981). This stand had already been stated by the Turkish ambassador, Mehmet Baydur, in an interview with Finn Norgren (1978). It is highly problematic that during these visits, the official delegations discussed the reasons for emigration mainly with the Turkish officials and with religious leaders of the Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey, while being accompanied by Turkish Intelligence Officials. A formal visit of Patriarch Zakka I Iwas in May 1982 to Turkey in which he expressed himself about the emigration of his community members from this country illustrates the politicized context of such statements.[349] Before visiting his community in Mardin and *Tur 'Abdin*, he visited the President of the Turkish Republic, Kenan Evren, who was the mastermind and leader of the military coup of 1980. In an interview with the Turkish newspaper Hürriyet (*Türkiye'deki Süryanilerin bir derdi yok*,[350] 30 May 1982) the Patriarch made the statement that Turkey shows great respect to the human rights and that 'Those who say "we are persecuted in Turkey" use this just to get residence permission in European countries. They are not part of us.' With this, he distanced himself from his whole community in the diaspora, today numbering more than those in the homeland. The Chorbishop Aziz Günel[351]

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[349] See further about the political role of the Patriarch in the Contemporary Middle East, McCallum (2010).

[350] Translation of Turkish: 'Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey do not have any problems'.

[351] Beth Sawoce (2001) published a long interview with Chorbishop Aziz Günel and many of his private letters as well as newspaper articles. From these writings, it appears that as a clergyman he was involved in the Turkish political system to a greater extent than was usual; he had very regular, close contacts with high-ranking Turkish officials, including members of the police and the military. In his letters and articles in Turkish, he defines Assyrians/Syriacs as Turks and displays a discourse of strong loyalty to Turkey. As a high-ranking cleric, he goes as far as to write: 'I would deny even Jesus Christ if He were against the Turkish Republic' (Ibid: 20). During the Cyprus Crisis of 1964, Chorbishop Aziz also adopted an active position on the Turkish side and tried to stimulate other Syriac Orthodox clergy to support his stand and distance themselves from the Greeks. See further his letter (1964, January 22) to Abdunnur Aydiner (Ibid: Turkish section, p. 19-20). Among Assyrians/Syriacs the general idea prevails that Chorbishop Aziz Günel was a Turkish agent. According to Chorbishop Aziz, this accusation had also reached Patriarch Jacob III (Ibid: 29-30). He discusses this

(based in Istanbul) made a similar statement when he visited the Turkish ambassador in Berlin in 1982 (Tercüman, *Türkiye'de huzur içinde yaşıyoruz*[352], 13 November 1982):[353]

> We are sad about the news about our people in the European newspapers. We, who live in Turkey as the citizens of the Turkish Republic and as the Turkish *Süryani Kadim* Community, have never been persecuted in Turkey. Some people use this argument when they apply for asylum. But, this is not true. We are Turks. Throughout the history we have never been oppressed. We have always enjoyed the freedom to live our religious activities.

In the Swedish National Police Report of 1981, the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Damascus made a similar statement and explained the emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs as a wish to improve their already good economic position in Syria.[354]

Andersson (1983: 129, 132, 140) criticizes the non-critical approach taken by the Swedish officials to arguments adduced by the Turkish officials. Namely, that these arguments were used instrumentally by the Swedish authorities in order to justify the ban on the admission of the Assyrian/Syriac asylum-seekers. The German authorities also sent officials to Turkey and drew more or less the same conclusion as the Swedish authorities. They do not place the emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs in the context of the life in which this group lived in the Turkish society. Nevertheless, when Assyrians/Syriacs discuss their general life in the Turkish society informally and off-the-record, it is not uncommon to hear complaints similar to that of the Assyrians/Syriacs who have settled in Europe when recalling their reasons for emigration. In contrast to the people who have migrated, religious leaders in the different countries of the Middle East often acquiesce in their position. This can be seen as the continuation of a

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accusation for instance in his letter (1973, April 26) to I. Tahincioğlu (member of an influential Assyrian/Syriac family in Istanbul).

352 Translation of Turkish: 'We live peacefully in Turkey'.

353 My translation of the original in Turkish.

354 Such statements may have been one of the reasons Assyrians/Syriacs from Syria were often refused asylum. This may also explain to a great deal why many of the Assyrians/Syriacs who emigrated from Syria informed the Swedish authorities that they were from Turkey or Lebanon (see further Nilsson 1981). Had they not done so, they knew they would have been sent back to Syria.

tradition. In the literature of the Assyrians/Syriacs, authors reiterate that a good Christian should accept punishment in the name of Christ, since that is what Christ himself had predicted to be the fate of his followers.[355]

Given their compliance, both the German and the Swedish authorities found discrepancies between what the Assyrian/Syriac asylum-seekers reported as the reasons for emigration to Sweden or Germany and what their religious leaders in the Middle East reported to the European authorities. This discrepancy and the stand of the religious leaders can be understood in the light of the responsibilities and tasks the religious leaders had to shoulder in the history of the Ottoman Empire and later in Turkish and Arab societies. As religious leaders, their authority extended beyond the religious matters in their millet; they were accountable for the inculcation of the correct socio-political attitudes of their flock. When rulers encountered difficulties with the members of the *Süryani Kadim Millet* or the Syriac Orthodox Church, they held the religious leaders accountable and expected them to influence their flock in adopting the 'correct attitude.'

At a more fundamental level, the stand of the Assyrian/Syriac religious leaders – stating that they are not endangered as a group of people in the countries of the Middle East – may be interpreted as a means of survival. Any reporting that they endured difficulties as a group of people could serve the Turkish authorities as ammunition to accuse the Assyrians/Syriacs of being betrayers of Turkey and therefore legitimating reprisals against them. This idea was also expressed by one of the archbishops in Sweden when explaining the opinion of the Syriac Orthodox Clergy in Turkey:

> Here [in Sweden] we have the opportunity to talk more openly. Here, we are invited to express our thoughts and to claim our rights. There – if we talk – this will lead to oppression, our relationships deteriorate and they [authorities] will look upon us as betrayers and troublemakers.

Historically, official punishment meted out by the authorities or actions launched against them had been legitimized with this discursive argument.[356]

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[355] See for example Gallo Shabo's discourse about the suffering during the *Seyfo* (Atto 2008). See also Merten (1997: 117) who writes that especially among Assyrian/Syriac Protestant opponents of migration, the discourse that Christ never promised a life without suffering and persecution is prevalent. Roldanus (1985: 106) noted the same discourse among the Assyrians/Syriacs in Istanbul in the beginning of the 1980s.

[356] The Turkish national thesis about the genocide on the Christians in Turkey also commences with this argument. See further Gaunt (2006).

In fact, the Assyrian/Syriac religious leaders in Turkey did mention to the Swedish officials that they feared the consequences of what the Assyrian/Syriac asylum-seekers in Europe report about the Turkish authorities. Roldanus (1985: 84) confirms this in his research conducted in 1982 and 1984. He mentions that Assyrian/Syriac laymen in Turkey likewise complain about the repercussions of open conversation of Assyrians/Syriacs in the West who live in a safe society and are unheeding of Assyrians/Syriacs who continue to live in Turkey. The Human Rights expert Dietmar Oehring reported that religious leaders disclosed that the State was monitoring their activities and systematically tapping their telephone conversations.



Illustration 5: A demonstration for the asylum rights of Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden. Source: *Länstidningen* (1976).

Another explanation for the compliant attitude of the religious leaders in the Middle East is that European politicians are often accompanied by Turkish officials when visiting the Assyrian/Syriac representatives in the Middle East. As mentioned earlier, this makes it impossible for Assyrian/Syriac religious leaders to have an open conversation with European officials, as they are aware that the Turkish authorities can easily accuse a Turkish citizen of committing an offense against the Turkish State or of constituting a threat to

Turkish unity or of 'insulting Turkishness' as formulated in the controversial Article 301 of the current Turkish Penal Code.[357]

As leaders in charge of their flocks, they observed the exodus of their people and dwell on the consequences. It could lead to undermining the authority of the religious leaders who remained behind. They probably have felt the despair and feared the danger of the disappearance of their church, undermining an already weak position in society. Since the most influential laymen had left Turkey, religious leaders were left behind alone to cope with few or no means to protect those community members who had not emigrated. In the *athro* (homeland), especially the Archbishops Mor Ewannis Ephrem Bilgiç of *Tur 'Abdin* and his later successor, Mor Themotheus Samuel Aktaş, made many attempts to stop the mass emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs. In 1993 it was decided that priests who left the *athro* for Europe would be expelled from the church (Merten 1995: 116). Especially in the middle of the 1980s Archbishop Samuel visited the different villages of *Tur 'Abdin* and tried to convince people to stay. The emigration stopped for a short period, but resumed again as soon as an incident, which provoked fear among the people, took place. Their reasons for attempting to keep people in the homeland were patriotic: 'So that the homeland is not deserted [from Assyrians/Syriacs]' (*u athro dlo khole*). This attitude was also made clear to Swedish journalists who were sent to the emigration countries, such as in the case of Finn Norgren working for the Swedish daily *Svenska dagbladet* in 1977.[358] In an interview (*Vi kallar dem Assyrier*, 2 June 1977) the Archbishop Samuel Aktas of Mor Gabriel Monastery reports:[359]

> The Christians have no future here [in *Tur 'Abdin*]. In ten years we are going to become extinct.... It had been better if Europe had said *no* to all immigrants, then we would have a chance here [*Tur 'Abdin*]. You [the European governments] should decide, all of us or none of us… Now, we have become a *half-people*. Both, those who have continued to live here and those who are abroad are not happy...

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[357] See further the public statement of Amnesty International (2005, December 1) *Turkey: Article 301 is a threat to freedom of expression and must be repealed now!* The Turkish government made an amendment to this article and changed the emphasis from 'Turkishness' to 'the Turkish nation'. Before, the restrictions on freedom of speech were formulated under the *so-called* separatism Article §312 of the old Penal Code valid until 2005.

[358] Norgren (1977) published a series of three articles about his trip to Turkey.

[359] My translation of the original in Swedish.

Furthermore, in this article Archbishop Samuel questioned the possibility for the survival of his people's culture in Europe. This fear for cultural survival was also expressed by Patriarch Zakka I Iwas in an interview with the journalist Anders Thunberg (1981) for the radio station *Dagens Eko*. No matter how hard they tried, Sabro's citation illustrates how little influence and authority clergy had left over their flock in the matter of the emigration:

> My parents came to Germany in 1984. In that year the situation in Turkey worsened and my sisters had grown into young women. I was already in Germany. My father said to me: "I came to Europe to save your sisters! Were they to be kidnapped by Muslims I would not be able to save them." He regretted that he had not already left for Sweden in 1976. My father took his final decision to leave *Tur 'Abdin* after he had heard the late Chorbishop Aziz [Günel] talking positively about [the Muslim Prophet] Muhammed and the Muslims in his sermon in Mor Akhusnoyo Church in *Midyad* in 1984. This was probably another attempt of our religious leaders to encourage patience and obedience for the situation they were in. But, as soon as he [father] heard him talking like that, he thought, "This is enough!" He said he could no longer listen to more hypocrisy. In 1976 my father already had a passport ready to leave for Sweden. But, since the late Archbishop Yacob the *'Iwarnoyo* came to the Mort Shmuni church in *Midyad* to please the people and begged them not to leave their blessed *athro*, my father decided not to leave. He even burned his passport in the stove! The late Archbishop Yacob even promised to go to Sweden to fetch back the people that were already there. Later, my father cursed the archbishop because he went to Sweden and never came back to his people in the *athro*.

Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe were aware that the attitude of their representatives in Turkey hindered them being granted asylum. Central to the asylum policy of European authorities was the definition of a refugee as specified in the UN Convention of 1951 in relation to the status of refugees: refugees are outside their country of nationality and are unable or unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social group or political opinion. The interpretation of this definition was grasped as an instrument by those in charge of the immigration policy. Generally they received the B instead of the A-status – in all European countries where this distinction between statuses existed. Consequently they were granted asylum for humanitarian reasons. In Sweden specifically, before the mid-1970s many had been granted an A-status. Thereafter, as a group they usually received a

B-refugee status. The Swedish Immigration Board defended this decision with the argument that they were not systematically persecuted and that the Turkish authorities could protect Assyrians/Syriacs living in Turkey.

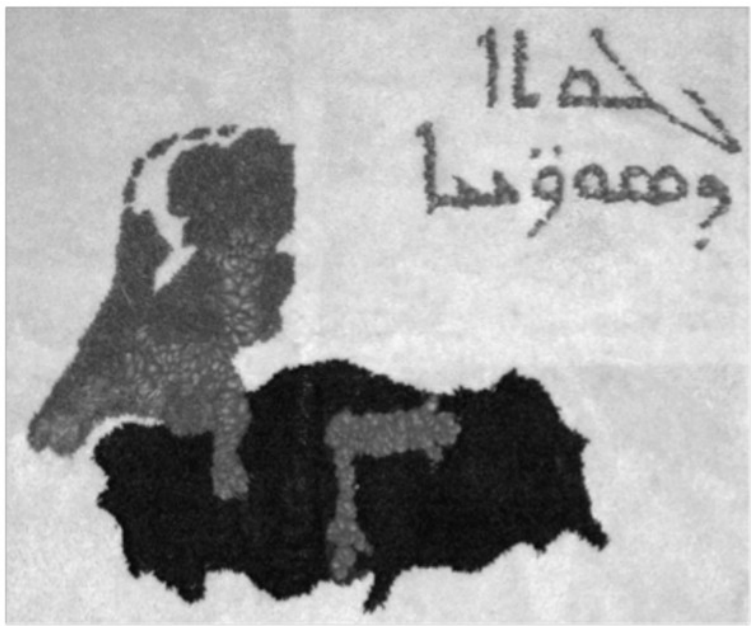

Illustration 6: The emigration of Assyrians/Syriacs to the Netherlands expressed on a hand made carpet by the community that migrated to the Netherlands. Today it is hanging in the corridor of the Syriac Orthodox Monastery Mor Ephrem. Photo: Naures Atto.

In fact, the Assyrian/Syriac emigration resulted in or accelerated a *de facto* change in the Swedish Law pertaining to the status of immigrants. The second paragraph on the immigration law (*utlänningslag*) of 1954 specifies the definition of political refugees. With the two governmental decisions on 26 February 1976 and 12 November 1976, Assyrians/Syriacs – who were at the material time in Sweden – acquired residence permission with a specific refugee definition. In reality this was an expansion of the refugee category. In 1975-76, in the process of changing the immigration law, the government submitted a proposal which also included a proposal for asylum seekers who

need protection but who do not fulfil the criteria of political refugees.[360] As Ornbrant (1981: 28) notes, this addition was born of the practical need to solve the dilemma existing in relation to the immigration of Assyrians/Syriacs to Sweden. The Swedish authorities did not classify the Assyrians/Syriacs as A-refugees with political reasons for settling in Sweden.[361] Nevertheless, they had to find a solution to their mass settlement in the country. The B-refugee status which was mostly granted to Assyrians/Syriacs was classified *on a par* with the A-refugee status – in the sense that individuals with the B-status received and were treated in the same way as A-status refugees. This measure was promulgated after it was realized that Assyrians/Syriacs were going to stay in Sweden (see further Chapter 5).

Contrary to the religious leaders in the *athro*, the late Archbishop Julius Jesu' Çiçek[362] for Central Europe and the Benelux held a different opinion about the emigration of Assyrians/Syriacs from Turkey. Appointed the first Archbishop in Europe, he poured enormous efforts into requesting European governments to grant Assyrians/Syriacs asylum. He himself spoke relatively openly about the situation of the Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey. In my last interview with him in 2005, he mentioned that the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches in Germany had been of great help in this effort.[363] Also in Sweden, the Free Church Council of Sweden (migration/refugee unit) has been very supportive of the idea to take up Assyrian/Syriac asylum seekers as political refugees.[364] In their turn, Assyrian/Syriac activists in Europe published reports about formal and informal oppression and murder as a reaction to the 'positive reports' published by the European authorities about their position in the homeland.[365] Activists used these reports to present their views on the

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[360] Proposition 1975/76: 18, *Regeringens proposition om ändring i utlänningslagen* (1954: 193). The new immigration law entered into force in July 1980.

[361] Gardell (1986: 80) notes that the stand of the Swedish authorities to reject the classification of *Assyrier* as political refugees is against both the Swedish Law and the UNHCR principles.

[362] He arrived in the Netherlands as a monk in the year 1977. Two years later, in 1979, he was consecrated as Archbishop for Central-Europe and the Benelux countries. As one of the first clergy, and later as the Archbishop with the largest diocese in Europe, he exerted a telling influence on different aspects in the lives of his people.

[363] See about the relationship with these churches also Merten (1995: 119).

[364] See further for its analysis about the situation of Christian minorities in Turkey, Free Church Council of Sweden (1981).

[365]In this respect it is necessary to mention the Advisory Reports (*Gutachten*) of the German Historian Gabriele Yonan which were commissioned by various German organizations (both

situation in Turkey to the European authorities. One example is a letter[366] sent by the president of the *Mesopotamien Verein* in Gütersloh (Germany) to the newly appointed Chancellor Kohl on 26 October 1982, informing him of and explaining the attitude of the Assyrian/Syriac clergy in the Middle East:

> To the Chancellor of the Bundesrepublik Deutschland
> Respected Sir:
> We are delighted that you have taken your oath as Chancellor. In the first place we would like to wish the industrious, civilized German people as a whole and yourself in particular good luck. Our origins lie in Turkey, Syria and Iraq. We are Assyrians and are committed Christians. The reason for our residence here is the constant flight which we have had to take from the Islamic persecution and extermination of our people. Jesus also had to take refuge in Egypt to escape killing. 'Germany' has become our Egypt...
> We had to leave our country for one reason and one reason only: our loyalty to the Christian Faith and our people. Of course, no Islamic government will admit this but will invariably claim that the Assyrians enjoy the same freedom as anybody else.
> If you question our priests in the homeland, of course they are not in a position to tell the truth, since by doing so they will face at least ten years imprisonment. Peter also denied the Lord three times because he was afraid.
> We came here with our hearts full of hope, because we knew there were Christians living here. Can Christians not help each other?
> In advance, we thank you for your fraternal help and efforts...

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churches and Human Rights) and which played a positive role in the acceptance or toleration (German *Duldung*) of Assyrian/Syriac asylum seekers in Germany. They had been used at German courts, countering the official reports of the German Ambassador in Ankara.

366 My translation of the original letter in German: 'Sehr geehrter Herr Bundeskanzler, Wir haben uns darüber sehr gefreut, als Sie als Bundeskanzler den Eid geleistet haben. Wir wünschen zuerst dem fleissigen, zivilizierten Deutschen Volk, dann Ihnen einen guten Erfolg für immer. Wir kommen aus der Türkei, Syrien und Irak. Wir sind Assyrer und bekennen uns zum christlichen Glauben. Der Grund unseres Aufenthalts ist die ständige Flucht vor den islamischen Verfolgungen und Ausrottung unseres Volkes. Jesus musste auch vor Tötung nach Ägypten flüchten. Unser Ägypten ist "Deutschland" geworden. … Wir mussten unser Land aus nur einem Grund verlassen: Unsere Treue zum christlichen Glauben und unseren Volk. Natürlich wird das keine islamische Regierung zugeben, sondern immer behaupten, die Assyrer seien frei wie die Anderen. Wenn man unsere Pfarrer fragt, die in der Heimat sind, natürlich können sie die Wahrheit nicht sagen, weil sie dafür mindestens 10 Jahre Gefängnis bekommen. Petrus hat auch aus Angst den Herrn dreimal verleugnet. Wir kamen mit grosser Hoffnung hierher, weil wir wussten, hier leben Christen. Die Christen können einander nicht helfen? Wir bedanken uns für Ihre brüderliche Hilfe und Mühe im Voraus ….'

What is remarkable in this letter is that the president of the *Mesopotamien Verein* presents the Assyrians/Syriacs as Christians, who fled to their 'Egypt', present day Germany, and that the clergy of the Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey bear a close resemblance to (the disciple) Peter, who also denied the truth up to three times. These arguments fit in the religious discourse generally used by the Assyrians/Syriacs in their emigration stories. Moreover, giving Germany the metaphorical position of Egypt ties in the idea that they have become orphans[367] in the diaspora.

4.4.6 Istanbul: an Alternative to Flee to?

The question of whether Istanbul could present flight alternative refuge for the Assyrians/Syriacs instead of them fleeing to Europe occupied the minds of many European authorities.[368] The importance of this question is related to the admission and the recognition of Assyrian/Syriac asylum seekers as refugees. Although European countries have tried to judge the asylum cases of Assyrians/Syriacs on an individual basis, Assyrians/Syriacs themselves have requested a more collective approach to their case as an ethnic and religious minority in the countries from the Middle East. In few instances and for a limited time, German courts acknowledged the collective persecution (*Gruppenverfolgung*) of the Assyrians/Syriacs. With exception of the two collective amnesty decisions of the Swedish government in 1976, the European authorities tried to find interim 'solutions' to this question. And Istanbul was identified as one of the alternatives where the group could settle.

Assyrians/Syriacs themselves had an unequivocal answer to the above-mentioned question. The common idea about a life in Istanbul has been: 'We are like sheep among wolves'. The metaphor of 'sheep' is generally used by Assyrians/Syriacs to express their attitude of obedience adopted towards the Muslim majority in a Muslim society in order to survive. In a nutshell, they are giving vent to their dissatisfaction with this need to obey – in contrast to some influential Assyrians/Syriacs in Istanbul, who have developed a strategy of hiding a distinct collective identity and becoming invisible in the Turkish public space – a second nature to meet the required 'correct attitude of good citizenship' (from an official Turkish perspective). In such a

[367] See also Chapter 5 about the notion of having become orphaned in Europe.

[368] For instance, the German Embassy in Turkey in its regular country reports did always refer to Istanbul as a so-called *inländische Fluchtalternative* (internal flight alternative).

situation, the most their name *Suryoye* can mean is 'Christians' – formulating their collective identity solely in religious terms. An ethno-national Christian collective identity is perceived as a threat to Turkish national identity by the Turkish government and therefore undesirable (see further the previous chapter).

Individuals give examples of their experiences and discomfort with the situation. Assyrian/Syriac children who attended school in Istanbul still encountered difficulties. People who were confronted with such situations and could find an alternative place to which they could move, decided to cut the Gordian knot, like the father of Ken'an, who decided to move to Sweden after the experience of his son at school:

> There were pupils who fought with me and questioned how I as a Christian could become the best pupil at school. Afraid, the next day my father no longer allowed me to go to school. In 1978 he called my sister in Sweden and told her that he would send first me and that he and the rest of the family would follow me.

The strong fear and reaction of this parent is not uncommon among Assyrians/Syriacs in especially the villages of *Tur 'Abdin*, where only a primary school was based in most of the villages. Parents remembered cases of children who were killed at school at such occasions as described above and attempted to protect their children as much as possible. In many cases, these parents in villages decided not to send their children to the secondary school in the nearest town because of not trusting the safety of their children in a majority Muslim environment. Another example about the situation in Istanbul is the experience of a respondent from Germany. In 1985, he fled to Istanbul with his family – earlier he had fled his village *Anhel* to the town *Midyad*. He was fearful because Assyrians/Syriacs had been killed in the neighbourhood in which he was living. After they settled in Istanbul, the family sent their child to the primary school in the *Koca Mustafa Paşa* quarter. The director of the school told them that he would not enrol their daughter as long as he could not read a Muslim identity on her identity card. The father did not think that this was an option: 'We were willing to die for our religion but under no circumstance willing to change it on our identity card. The only option we could think of at that time was fleeing to Europe.'[369]

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[369] The father of this family had visited Germany five times before with a valid visa, but he did not want to stay. Only after the fear had intensified did he decide to seek refuge in Germany.

Considering how many Assyrians/Syriacs have travelled through Istanbul to get to further away places, the inevitable conclusion has to be that as they saw it, Istanbul did not present a permanent settlement alternative. By 1978, about 15,000 Assyrians/Syriacs were living in Istanbul (Björklund 1981: 47). It had become their urban centre in Turkey. In the 1970s it had already functioned as a transit port for the Assyrians/Syriacs on their way 'to the four corners of the world' (*la arba' qernawotho de britho*) as Assyrians/Syriacs refer to their current diaspora among themselves. Between 1978 and 1982, about 750 families had left Istanbul for the West (Roldanus 1985: 96). And, whereas in 1984 the Assyrian/Syriac population in Istanbul numbered 14,000, in 2009 this number increased with several thousand due to the temporary settlement of Assyrian/Syriac refugees from Iraq who seek to find a visa to one of the Western countries.

4.5 The *Athro* has Emptied (1984–Today)

In the previous chapter, I elabourated on the situation of Assyrians/Syriacs in the period 1984-2000, in which emigration assumed the guise of a bitter necessity, also resulting in the emigration of those who had – until then – attempted to endure their violent living conditions in *Tur 'Abdin*. In an interview with the Swedish journalist Finn Norgren (1977, June 2), the teacher at the Mor Gabriel Monastery in *Tur 'Abdin,* Isa Garis (Gulten) forecasted already in 1977 what happened three decades thereafter: 'There is no space for us in the fight between the State and Kurds'. He uses the example of Kerboran[370] in *Tur 'Abdin* where in 1975 about 300 families were living, while a year after emigration started, in 1976 only twenty families remained. As in the previous period, they used their family members in Western countries to find a way out.

I have also shown that although the position of the Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey was unenviable, in the course of time as a group of people they had developed survival strategies which enabled them to live alongside their Muslim neighbours and comply with the governmental institutions with which they had to deal in Turkish society. As soon as people started to leave *Tur 'Abdin*, the position of the local social and power relationship network was thrown out of joint. Both the Kurdish *aghas* and the Kurdish inhabitants

[370] *Kerboran* (Dargeçit in Turkish) gained the status of town in 1989.

in the area took advantage of the changes. Unquestionably, the fear of reprisals by the authorities to quell any unacceptable stance adopted increased, since many of the influential Assyrian/Syriac men had either left or had been killed.[371] Aware there was safety in numbers, Assyrians/Syriacs who were more determined to continue to live in the *athro* (homeland), tried to convince others not to leave too. To live next to an empty house meant to be in a very vulnerable position. Unhappily, influential Assyrian/Syriac men could not be easily replaced, since often the power they exercised was informal; very much part and parcel of their personality. Parents were mountingly confronted with the situation in which they could not defend themselves should their daughters be kidnapped by the Muslims. A couple of girls ended up becoming nuns, simply because their parents could not protect them, as they were the last Assyrian/Syriac family in their village, in the midst of a Muslim population. Deprived of official protection and in situations in which the Kurdish *aghas* could act arbitrarily against their interests, the Assyrians/Syriacs found themselves exposed to all sorts of threats. Therefore, given the instability of their situation, Assyrians/Syriacs were overwhelmed by a great sense of insecurity. An example of how this worked out comes from the Assyrian/Syriac village *Zaz,* which was surrounded by five villages which are today inhabited by Muslims. Saro explained how the Muslims in the villages around *Zaz* were backed up by the *agha* in the region and that therefore the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Zaz* were threatened with death, as was her own family:

> My eldest brother had already fled to Germany in 1984 because my father was afraid that something would happen to him. We came to Germany in 1985… My father identified the thieves, but they were not punished by the authorities… One day, two *Suryoye* were in a van [*dolmush*] with Muslims who threatened my father. They [*Suryoye*] heard them talking about their plan to cut the son of Isa [Saro's father] into little pieces, no bigger than the pieces of his ear lobes. The *Suryoye* told my mother what they had heard in the van. Mother took it very seriously. My youngest sister was just one year old. My mother told us: "Your father will not do what I say." In 1984 he finished the new house… We all begged father to leave… He sold half of the cattle for a quarter of their value and the rest of the house and the land he left behind just as it was… That is how we

[371] Mirza's forthcoming report 'Dokumentation über Ermordungen und Vervolgungen der Assyrischen Christen in der Türkei 1976-2007' shows that a considerable number of the Assyrian/Syriac men who were killed occupied a special position such as that of *mukhtar*.

> abandoned everything behind. After we had left, the village of Zaz was deserted by *Suryoye* in 1993; they bombed our house in 1993. Today you would not even know that there had ever been a house standing there. They even stole the stones from which our house was built!..

As the case of Saro's parents above reveals, not many Assyrians/Syriacs who left *Tur 'Abdin* were able to sell such possessions as livestock, land or houses. Some may have not thought about selling their land at all, keeping the possibility that they would go back one day in mind. But in many cases those who left *Tur 'Abdin* in the 1980s could not sell their land and cattle without the consent of the PKK and the local *aghas*.[372] They were expected to give both of them a share in the profits. In actual fact, the PKK did not want the people to go away, since empty villages would make it much harder for them to continue their guerrilla activities against the Turkish army; they wanted to make use of the villagers to continue their struggle. The people in the area were expected to feed them when the need arose. Therefore, Assyrians/Syriacs often left stealthily and confided their plans to only few people whom they trusted. Another reason for keeping their plans quiet was that their Muslim neighbours could kill them for their money, knowing that they would have collected all their worldly wealth a few days before leaving. Usually they hired a private car to take them to *Midyad,* travelling by night. From there they usually continued to Istanbul by bus.

Apparently the Yezidis (*Çalkoye*) felt that their position in the area had also been irredeemably eroded with the departure of the Assyrians/Syriacs from *Tur 'Abdin*. When the Assyrian/Syriac Malkuno left, his Yezidi agricultural labourer made a cynical joke about it: 'If you leave here, the Muslims will force us to convert to Islam.[373] And since we are not wealthy enough to buy the tin *messine*, we will have to buy a plastic one.' (A *messine* is kind of a jug, which Muslim believers use to wash themselves during the ritual ablutions before their prayers). This example also shows that the departure of the Assyrians/Syriacs initiated a change in the socio-political structure at local level in *Tur 'Abdin*.

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[372] Van Bruinessen (1992: 54) writes that this had something to do with the tradition that land could not be sold to simply anybody because of the rule that privately owned land in the territory of a certain Kurdish clan is expected to remain the territory of that clan.

[373] The elderly in the village of *Mzizah* were informed by word of mouth that the *Shefqattiye* Muslims in *Mzizah* had converted from the Yezidi religion to Islam a few centuries earlier. They had been forced by the local *agha*. Otherwise they would have been killed. Only one of them fled and made it to the village *Hapses* and continued to live as a Yezidi.

In the stories told by Assyrian/Syriac asylum-seekers after the 1980s, the war between the Turkish authorities and the PKK played a loom large. As Merten (1995: 111) notes, the high number of Assyrian/Syriac asylum seekers in Germany in 1984 can be explained by the upsurge in the military struggle of the PKK and the institutionalization of the 'village guards' in south-eastern Turkey. Assyrians/Syriacs were caught in the middle of this conflict even though politically they had no stomach for it – as people who lived through that situation explain it. Since both the authorities and the PKK tried to win the Assyrians/Syriacs over to their side, it was impossible to remain aloof from the conflict. One way or another they became victims. My respondent Gebro from Germany recounts the example of the incident on 14 November 1990:

> *Bnebil* was a Christian village. There were no Muslims in the village… The authorities requested the *Suryoye* to accept their weapons to keep the PKK out of their village. The *Suryoye* did not acquiesce in that request. Whereupon, the authorities accused the *Suryoye* of being allied with the PKK. This accusation made the villagers decide to accept the weapons in order to show that they wanted nothing at all to do with the PKK. When the PKK found out, its representatives paid a visit to the villagers and showed their displeasure with the fact that the *Suryoye* had accepted the weapons. The *Suryoye* said to the PKK: "We took the weapons of the authorities into our houses, but we will not fight you." …The PKK issued an ultimatum to the *Suryoye* to give the weapons back to the authorities or else they would be killed. On a certain day they attacked the house of the mayor [*mukhtar*]. They collected the *mukhtar*, the two *aza*, and the *bakçi* in his house and killed them to a man.[374] They killed the four most important people in the village in official positions. Later the PKK declared that it dispatched them for having accepted weapons from the authorities.

Furthermore, Shabo, who had been imprisoned three times (after baseless accusations of relationships with the PKK), explained to me in a long account[375] different aspects of the life in *Tur 'Abdin* in the second half of the 1980s: that life was controlled by the Turkish military and the PKK, anyone who was not publicly on Turkey's side was assumed to be allied with the PKK, how little influence individuals had over their own lives, how the

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[374] The position of the *mukhtar* is comparable to that of a mayor (in a village or a villagehead). The *aza* and the *bakçi* are lower-ranking positions, assisting the *mukhtar*. The people killed were: Semun Onal, Bahhe Akgül, Yusuf Sürer and Celil Büyükbas.

[375] To be published in a future publication.

remaining Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin* felt about their position, and the attempts they made to remain in their homeland despite the danger in which they found themselves. As he narrated his experiences, it was as if Shabo had just been released, and had not yet reconciled himself to the situation in which he had lived. In the citation below, Shabo illustrates the influence of the arbitrary policy of punishment on the emigration of the last Assyrians/Syriacs in their homeland. He narrates about the moment he was released after having been imprisoned and interrogated for thirteen days:

> While waiting for the bus the older *Suryoyo* man said to me: "No way that I shall remain on this soil a moment longer! This is not a country in which one should live!" He was right. We were completely innocent and had been severely punished for thirteen days. We should actually have had the right to bring them [authorities] to court. When I was imprisoned this thought had crossed my mind. But in Turkey this is not possible... After we were freed in 1988, I continued working in my business. But, life became very problematic. Besides, more and more of our people were leaving, which was a very sad sight to behold. I saw all my friends with whom I went to school flee the village and end up in the diaspora. This was very sad to see. There was no one of my age left, nor anyone of my brother's age who was still in the village. Why didn't we leave? Because we did not want to leave my father behind in the village. Besides that, we did not want to leave our village behind empty of *Suryoye*.

Another respondent, Gallo, had remained in *Tur 'Abdin* until the beginning of the 1990s. His relatives, who had fled the village, had left him their vineyard. One day he noticed that the *mullah* in his village had appropriated the vineyard for his own use. The *mullah* told him that the PKK had granted him permission to have it. When Gallo went to the PKK leadership in charge in the area of *Tur 'Abdin*, he was told that the *mullah* should have the vineyard, since: 'You *Suryoye* flee, do not help us in the guerrilla struggle against the authorities and yet you want to continue owning the land, which is not going to happen.' Gallo felt helpless in the face of this answer and could not stand the situation any longer: 'What right do I have if I have not the right to have my own property? That is when I decided to leave to Germany.'

The flight after the 1980s has often been perceived as a bitter necessity. Even those who had shown reluctance to leave decided to do so. And those who did not leave, more or less took this stand consciously, accepting the

risks for their life. Shabo explains the attempt of his fellow villagers to keep strong, although without much success:

> In our village we had gathered twice in order to keep our strength, to develop patience and to endure until the situation improved. I remember that initially we were composed of 100 *Suryoye* households [*bote*], but even when there were only thirty-four families left, we were happy and could still draw some strength [in relation to the Kurdish population]. When the people [*Suryoye*] started leaving in groups, the first time in the 1980s, we gathered at one of our houses in 1985. We discussed the problem of the flight [*tehzimo*] of the *Suryoye* and that the village would soon be left empty. We did not want that! There we decided to take a collective decision and to either leave or to stay together. We took the decision to stay. If people were to depart individually and leave the other *Suryoye* behind in the village and the members of the number of *Suryoye* were to diminish, the Muslims could persecute [*dayshilan*, literally to trample down] us even more. If our numbers did not decrease, we could still use our power in our dealings with the Muslims. For example, our *Taye*[376] [Muslims] still came to us for anything they needed. But if we had become fewer in number, the Christians would no longer have a great deal of say. And even though they were already in the majority, we were more open-minded, harder workers. We had wells, fields, animals; we possessed more.
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> The second time we came together and made attempts to stop the *golutho* [emigration], a youngster raised his hand and said: "If someone leaves then I shall be the second one to do so." When it's all said and done, they are all youngsters; you never know. Sometime later, one of the guys decided to leave the village, and the others followed him, since he had broken the promise to the group. This is how eventually there was no one of my age left in the village. The promises we had made in our village were actually set as an example to the other villages too. The *Suryoye* in the other villages had nothing but good to say and were very proud of us. Unfortunately when we fled we did not take a collective decision; we took individual decisions.

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376 The phrase *a Tayaydan* ('our Muslims') was used to refer to the Muslims in the direct environment of the *Suryoye*. Usually it was and is used to refer to the Muslims in the village with whom they had built up a specific relationship.

Shabo illustrates the way people fled the situation they found themselves in, by using a story about the doves that wanted to free themselves after they have been caught in a trap:[377]

> …The hunter prepared the trap by scattering seeds around doves to capture them. Then, each dove tried to free itself from this trap. The same happened to us. We were caught in this trap and each individual tried to escape by helping himself out of trap. Since each of these doves tried to escape independently of the others, they did not manage to escape. Then their leader said that they could not continue like this... "If we continue like this we shall all die" said the dove in charge. "But, if we want to survive then we should think of a collective plan to free ourselves." They did indeed manage to get out of this trap by pulling it from the bottom as a team. This is an example, which teaches us something... It would have been good if we could have thought about leaving together, instead of questioning our departure afterwards. Later, each person blamed the other, but this can no longer heal the break – it is too late. We knew that if we left, our brother who stayed behind would be persecuted. And this is not *umthonoyutho* [love for one's people]… In 1988, the *Suryoye* continued leaving and the numbers in the village decreased. The situation had become more dangerous. Therefore, for security reasons I moved to *Midyad*. The military already started to carry out controls at the checkpoint at 7 o'clock in the evening.

After my respondent Shabo was baseless accused of having relations with the PKK for a third time, he decided to flee to Germany in 1988. From the perspective of the Assyrians/Syriacs who had taken the decision to leave the *athro*, those who stayed behind seemed 'crazy'. When the last *Suryoyo* physician in *Midyad*, Dr Edward Tanriverdi, was killed in front of his house in December 1994, some Assyrians/Syriacs of the first generation in Europe commented in anger that it was his own fault 'Why had he not left too?' On the other hand, the *umthonoye* (mainly the younger and educated activist elite) thought that those who had remained behind in the *athro* were heroes, the courageous 'guardians of the homeland' (*noture du athro).* At a conference held in Sweden on the human rights of the Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey in 2005, one of the Assyrian/Syriac participants from Turkey expressed this idea too; indeed angrily, as he condemned fleeing as the easy option. He also

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377 The story about the doves is to be found in the book *Klilo w Dimno*, a Syriac translation from the Sanskrit Panchatantra of animal fables, in the sixth century. See for an English translation Falconer ([1885]1970).

presented himself as a guardian of the *athro*: 'I would rather stay in the *athro* in a situation deprived of liberty than in the *golutho* (diaspora) and enjoy freedom!' In contrast to the older generation Assyrians/Syriacs, the political activists discussed and reported Dr Tanriverdi's murder to demand justice. This example shows that with the formation of communities in Europe, the relative power they once had in *Tur 'Abdin*, evaporated.

In the following chapters I shall show that the younger members of the elite have developed new, modern political discourses. Safe in the guaranteed freedom of expression in the countries of diaspora in which they settled, the political activists among them especially have not been afraid to express their ideas about the violations of human rights of Assyrian/Syriacs in the Middle East. Often, those who stayed behind were mostly the elderly, who experienced extreme difficulties with the prospect of uprooting themselves. They did not want to abandon the native land where they had lived all their lives, the soil they had ploughed since their youth, the crops which they had nurtured, the houses they had built themselves and the sun they loved. An elderly man from the village *Hapses* advised his widowed daughter and her children not to leave for Sweden, because '…you [Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe] will become as peas which you throw onto the soil and are dispersed.' This man had even composed his own version of the song *Shamo mar:*[378] *Shamo mar, men gsaymina, bebritho gmibarbezzina'* ('Shamo tell [me] what are we to do, we are being dispersed all over the world'). A sense of crisis is expressed in this version, just as in the original version of the song in which the boy asks his lover how long they will have to wait before they can get married.

All the aforementioned accounts demonstrate how Assyrians/Syriacs accommodated their lives at the peak of the crisis in *Tur 'Abdin*, and the circumstances under which *Tur 'Abdin* was emptied of Assyrians/Syriacs, with only 2500 individuals left at the time of writing in 2009.

4.5.1 Continued Emigration from Syria

Since the 1980s it has been possible to identify two additional reasons (in addition to the reasons already mentioned for the earlier period) for the emigration from Syria. For this period, the first reason is perhaps the most

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[378] The *Shamo mar* song which has become a classic has for the first time been sung by the singer Habib Mousa. The lyrics are by Danho Dahho and the music by Chorbishop Paul Michael (Lebanon).

obvious; some Assyrians/Syriacs leaving Syria migrated for economic motives. As a consequence of the reduced annual rainfall and the closing of the dam at the Syrian border by Turkey, the crop yields in the *Gozarto* region were no longer sufficient. This and the consequent rising unemployment meant people were no longer able to make their living. They used the opportunity to join their relatives in Europe. The second cause was less obvious, namely Assyrian/Syriac men who had difficulty in finding a suitable partner in Europe went to Syria to find a marriage partner. Marrying an Assyrian/Syriac male from Europe was therefore an easy solution for single girls.[379] These two aforementioned reasons reinforced the chain migration from Syria.

4.5.2 A New Emigration Wave from Iraq

In the period between the Simele Massacre and the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003, Chaldeans/Assyrians/Syriacs[380] found themselves living in a subordinated position under the strongly ubiquitous policy of Arabization. They had been considered 'Christian Arabs' by the Iraqi regime. At the same time, the Baath regime had made strong attempts to attract them towards the side of the government in order to develop a stronger position in relation to the Shiites in the South and the Kurds in the North. The regime also manipulated internal conflicts and played on the distinction between denominational differences within the group. Those who were willing to accept living with an Arab identity were favoured by being offered positions in the Baath administration.[381] In this period, Assyrians/Syriacs were also seriously affected by such events as the Iran–Iraq War (1980-1988), the Anfal Campaign and the Halabja Massacre (1987-88). With the American invasion in 2003 and the subsequent fall of the Baath regime, the old status quo collapsed. In the subsequent confusion, increased violence flared up

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[379] This resulted in the situation in which a male from Europe could go to Syria for a couple weeks on holiday, find a girl to marry and continue to live together in Europe. The Assyrian/Syriac actor and film director George Farag in Germany made some sketches about this theme in his films *Holo Malke bi golutho* (Uncle Malke in the diaspora) (1993) and in his latest film (2006) *Holo Malke bi malkutho* (Uncle Malke in Heaven). In both films he criticizes men who approached the girls in Syria as an easy solution to find a partner.

[380] I use this combined name following the agreement of some representatives of the three church communities mentioned at the time of writing.

[381] A well-known example of someone who achieved a high position was the Chaldean Tariq Aziz (his original name was Mikhail Yukhanna), who held the post of Deputy Prime Minister (1979-2003) and Minister of Foreign Affairs (1982-1991).

against Christians and other minorities in Iraq,[382] perpetrated by the majority groups in the country. This persecution eventually led to their mass emigration.[383] Despite these negative outcomes, a new opportunity has unquestionably emerged for the recognition of their cultural, political and administrative rights[384] in one of their historical geographies, the Nineveh plains in northern Iraq.[385] So far none of these rights has been realized. Instead, a great number of them have found a way to flee the country.

Since 2003, the high number of Chaldean/Assyrian/Syriac refugees from Iraq who have settled in Sweden has caught the attention of the international media. In 2006, about 90 per cent of the 1,809 refugees who applied for asylum in Södertälje were from Iraq.[386] Ultimately, around 10 per cent of all refugees from Iraq did actually settle there.[387] This percentage is higher than in any other municipality and about 99 per cent of the 1,300 refugees who settled in Södertälje between May 2006 and May 2007 were Christians from Iraq: Members of the Chaldean Church, the Assyrian Church of the East and the Syriac Orthodox Church. Here again, they used their former collective ties in making their choice of settlement after their flight from Iraq. The presence of family members and friends has been undeniably important, but the existing infrastructure of secular institutions and churches also guarantees them a warm welcome.

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382 The persecution of Christians and other minorities is well documented. See further, http://www.christiansofiraq.com/, www.aina.org and www.unhcr.org.

383 Many of these refugees live in the refugee camps in Syria and Jordan. Those who have managed to escape to Europe, to Sweden in particular, have chosen to live in Södertälje.

384 This is the foundation for the right to build their own autonomous area. See further the Iraqi Constitution, Article 125: 'This Constitution shall guarantee the administrative, political, cultural and educational rights of the various nationalities such as Turkomens, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all other constituents, and this shall be regulated by law.' (The Iraqi Constitution, [Chapter Four] ,The Local Administrations Article 125). See also the Constitution of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq: 'Kurdistan Region as a republic within the boundaries of a federal Iraq recognizes All Ethnic Groups: All nationalities and ethnic groups are recognized by the Kurdistan Region's constitution, including Kurds, Arabs, Turkmens, Chaldean-Assyrian-Syriacs, Yezidis, Armenians and Shabaks.' (http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS143893+15-Jul-2009+PRN20090715).

385 Several lobbying organizations have been established to pursue the claim for their autonomy, such as the 'Iraqi Sustainable Democracy Project' (2005), the 'Assyria Council of Europe' (2007) and a recent initiative has been taken by ADO, which aims to achieve a consensus between competing Assyrian/Syriac/Chaldean parties in Iraq.

386 1,059 refugees were granted a permit to stay in Sweden. The others continued to wait for an answer.

387 Interview with an employee of the municipality Södertälje, held in July 2007.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I commenced by showing that the emigration of the Assyrians/Syriacs in the first part of the twentieth century took place within the Middle East and that their emigration in this period to areas outside the Middle East was mainly directed to North and South America. I then proceeded to discuss the first emigration waves to Europe, starting in the 1960s from Turkey, Lebanon and Syria. These initial waves occurred independently of each other and were prompted by different reasons. I have studied the emigration process in relation to the emigration discourses of my respondents and against the background of historical events in the societies concerned. The discourses of Assyrians/Syriacs display two main dimensions. On the one hand, they reflect on their position in the Middle East having lived as a subordinated group about which they have expressed much dissatisfaction. On the other hand, they have identified Western countries as 'Christian' and thus as potential partners who can provide them a new 'home'; to such an extent that they have exchanged their homeland (which is dominated by regimes which give them little space) for a position as 'foreigners' in a geography which is new to them in many respects, except for sharing Christianity as a religious belief. In their discourse, Western countries have been placed in their *chain of difference* (sameness). Therefore, I defined the mass emigration of Assyrians/Syriacs as an exodus to achieve and realize their *myth*. The formation of the *myth* is directly related to their historical subordinated positions and to the constructed image of Europe as a new, alternative place of settlement; a place which they initially defined as 'Christian', a place where they have eventually enjoyed many rights – social, cultural and political – and a place where economic stability could assist them to develop; everything they could not enjoy in their ancestral areas.

Furthermore, I have illustrated in this chapter how familial and collective ties among Assyrians/Syriacs have played an essential role in the emigration waves, the intensity of emigration and the pace of the emigration. One corner stone of the chain migration lies in the extended family structures in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. It can be postulated that the specific social dynamics resulting from the collective ties among Assyrians/Syriacs have played an essential role in the migration mechanism. The increased mobility ushered in by the latest technology of advanced transportation means has also played an essential role in the success of the alternative migration routes taken. The mechanisms used by

Assyrians/Syriacs in the migration process have competed with an increasingly restrictive immigration policy stipulated by different European countries from about the mid-1970s. Their application for asylum on the basis of the definition of a refugee has often been rejected because the receiving authorities did not classify them as such; they did not recognize their subordinated position and persecution in the societies of the Middle East (including Turkey). Non-official persecution, discrimination and its consequences for their individual and collective life have not been taken into account. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties they have encountered in the emigration and asylum process, Assyrians/Syriacs have been persistent in their claim that they are an oppressed minority in the Middle East and they managed to settle en-mass in Europe. Mostly, they were granted a permit to stay based on humanitarian reasons (B-status); those who were granted the A-status in Europe have been few and far between.

In the next chapter about the group's settlement, I shall illustrate that the same familial ties and the dispersed character of their emigration process has marked their settlement and with that their transnational relationships which they have built up in the last forty years.

5 SWEDEN – THE LAST STOP

> The Turks and the Kurds have not bettered themselves as we have, since they have a homeland to go back to… But for us, Sweden is the last stop. We invest and buy houses here…
>
> Eliyo, teacher of Syriac

Presenting Sweden as the 'last stop', it is possible to read several assumptions into Eliyo's statement. His first postulation is that the journey which the Assyrians/Syriacs have made has had different stops along the way and consequently the people have been scattered; representing their move to different places, with Sweden as the final destination. Eliyo also draws the conclusion that, as a people, Assyrians/Syriacs do not intend to return to their *athro* (homeland), nor do they seem to show any disposition to continue their 'travels'. Furthermore, he believes that, since Assyrians/Syriacs intend to remain and put down roots in their new country, they have 'integrated' more successfully than other migrants who do have a homeland to return to. In this statement, he also intimates that Assyrians/Syriacs will have a positive future in Sweden and that the Swedish authorities will not have to worry about any difficulties with them as new Swedish citizens. I shall illustrate that Assyrians/Syriacs perceive themselves as 'new settlers' who have established themselves relatively quickly in their new country.

In this chapter, I shall look into the settlement of Assyrians/Syriacs in relation to the integrationist policy of the Swedish authorities and the effect of this 'intersection'. As indicated in the previous chapter, their emigration has constituted a dislocation in many respects. This process reveals some important characteristics: first, the emergence of a *diasporic* community; second, the emergence of new subject positions which differ from the traditional subject positions in their homeland; third, the dislocation of their collective identity. The Swedish integrationist discourses – which Assyrians/Syriacs have perceived as extremely positive and encouraging – have functioned as a general framework in the settlement process. My point of departure is that it is possible to speak of interaction between the Swedish integrationist discourses and the settlement discourses of Assyrians/Syriacs. Identifying themselves as permanent settlers, Assyrians/Syriacs have

perceived Sweden as their 'new homeland' which has offered them many possibilities.

The orientation towards *permanent* settlement in Europe has also been expressed in the way Assyrians/Syriacs have referred to their settlement space. Assyrians/Syriacs in the homeland spoke about them in terms of 'they have gone to foreign lands' (*azzen li nukhrayto*).[388] 'Foreign lands' (*nukhrayto*) had been transformed into an abstract idea about unknown places. This reference to 'foreign lands' expresses their ideas of how they have related to the new areas in which they would settle initially, in contrast to the ancestral geography, which is where their roots are. 'Foreign lands' also has a connotation of a black hole; the unknown, and not knowing what to expect there.[389] In the article *En Presentation av Assyriska riksförbundet* (1 September 1980), the editor of the magazine *Hujådå* wrote about the early period of settlement in Sweden:[390]

> For many of us, Sweden was an unknown country. Despite this, we commenced the journey towards our destiny without thinking about the consequences. We looked for a country where we would be accepted as human beings. The dreams were big but, at the same time, the level of unawareness in the group was high. We encountered big language problems... In many situations, we felt really alone and abandoned in the new society. The journey to Sweden was short but in reality we crossed many years in time. The culture shock was a fact. Today, thanks to the strong solidarity within the community we have survived as a group in Sweden.

In Europe, those who were already settled in the *nukhrayto* (for about the first fifteen years) referred to it in the same way: *Athina li nukhrayto* (We have come to 'foreign lands').[391] With the passing of time, they have begun to

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[388] This idea is also expressed in the song *Azzen* (They have gone) by the singer Josef Babure (released on his cassette *Qolo d-Lebnon,* 1989): *Azzen, nafiqi mu athrathe, mahzamme li nukhrayto, hawen tamo goluye* (They have gone; they moved away from their *athro*, they have fled to foreign lands; they have become refugees).

[389] The term *nukhrayto* (foreign lands) should be understood in relation to what is considered to be 'home'. In *Tur 'Abdin* people already referred to other villages in terms of the *nukhrayto*. They could, for example, say *hulukh i-barthaydukh li nukhrayto?* (Did you marry your daughter abroad?). In this case, they meant a village a few kilometres away. Today, the meaning of the *nukhrayto* has changed to mean areas farther away, such as those in the Western diaspora.

[390] My translation of the original in Swedish.

[391] Singers who have sung about having become foreigners in the *nukhrayto* are, for example, Hanna Shabo (1985) and Cebrail Aryo (1983, 1987).

refer to their new settlement outside the homeland as the *golutho* (diaspora). The focus has changed to an enduring residence in the *nukhrayto* (foreign lands). The new homeland has become the diaspora 'in the four corners of the world' (*ba arba' qernawotho de britho*). Moreover, they have begun to express their presence in the world in terms of dispersion – 'Our people are dispersed' (*U 'amayadan mbarbezoyo*). The state of dispersion in Western countries is signified here as a collective fate of living in the *golutho*. This implies that they identify each other as members of the same people – the *'amo Suryoyo*. Consequently, despite their collective exodus, they have sustained a strong identification with each other.

In the present context, their *golutho* or *diaspora* has developed a double connotation. Certainly, their dispersed situation is perceived as a sad fact. From this perspective, it is felt to be a situation of being displaced from the ancestral homeland (*u athro da abohotho*). Nevertheless, it has created space for them in different aspects of life. This aspect gives them reason to value the state of the diaspora and develop it into a home for themselves. The *split subject* is healed through the creation of a new home; a new imagined community in the diaspora, although inherently dispersed. The idea of being dispersed as a people, in conjunction with the sense of being a distinct people without a country, has also resulted in them having a developed a relative view of the importance of their own State to sustain and develop their nationhood. What has become more important to them are the connections with the people to whom they feel related (this might be for a temporary period). Today, family connections function as a transnational structure for the 'national connections' of a people between States worldwide. Furthermore, more formalized institutional structures such as that of the dispersed church and secular institutions also play a role in the maintenance of connections between Assyrians/Syriacs. Visiting each other, family members bring something with them from the country they live in. This is how these family networks have functioned as a channel for the mobility of goods between Assyrians/Syriacs 'in the four corners of the world'. Assyrians/Syriacs are now knowledgeable about the quality of Swiss knives, about the delicious taste of Swedish chicken herbs and about Dutch *pindakaas* (peanut butter). These are among the favourite goods which are transported as presents for family members living abroad.

Transnational interconnectedness – also at familial level –, is expressed when people phone the TV channels *Suroyo TV* and *Suryoyo Sat* to great their people: 'I would like to send my regards to my people in the four corners of

the world' (*kobeno a shlomaydi lu 'amaydi ba arba' qernawotho de britho*). Some also seize the opportunity to mention individual family members living in the different countries of the world. In addition to the dispersed character of their emigration, they have settled in Western countries in which they have encountered an overwhelmingly modern society, both technologically and in the expression of ideas in which the individuals – instead of the collective – are central.[392] In this sense, the society in the West can be characterized as the opposite of the society from which they emigrated in the Middle East in many respects: agrarian, traditional, religiously based, face-to-face communication,[393] and an organization of people glued together by collective values. I shall illustrate this 'jump into modernity' by an example from the departing society. An elderly Assyrian/Syriac man was working in his vineyard in the village of *'Arnas* in *Tur 'Abdin,* when he saw an aeroplane flying over.[394] He knelt down on the red earth, opened his arms and prayed to God: 'Oh Lord, here I am, come and fetch your *amanee*' ('what belongs to you'). This man was under the impression that the plane was the angel of God who had come to take his spirit. Being a faithful Christian, he welcomed 'God's messenger'. This is one of the many examples revealing the abruptness with which Assyrians/Syriacs came into contact with modernity, both in the *athro* and later at a greatly accelerated pace in Europe.

The confrontation with the new world and the dislocation caused by it has required shifts in their mindset in order to be able to understand the society around them. Moreover, they have had to redefine their position – both at individual and collective level – in relation to their new environment. This has spurred discussions and induced changes in perceptions about many, if not all, aspects of their life. Depending on who could exert influence on the agenda to be discussed, some aspects were omitted and have become taboo, while others have become central in the new countries of settlement. In this process, power and influence have depended largely on traditional relationships. However, the hegemonic articulation of new discourses has been imbued with new influences emanating from the

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[392] On the Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map which is based on the World Values Survey, the geographical area (Middle East) from which the Assyrians/Syriacs moved is characterized by values which are strongly traditional and based on survival values. In contrast, they have emigrated to an area (Northern Europe) where the values 'secular-rational' and 'self-expression' score highly.

[393] The modern media were still absent, especially in the area of *Tur 'Abdin*.

[394] This may have taken place in the 1970s.

educated or the new-rich elite. This has generated a specific form of social dynamics.

Among the aspects most discussed have been the definition and presentation of the *'amo Suryoyo* to the new 'others'. Assyrians/Syriacs refer to the 'others' using the term *nukhroye* (foreigners). These could be various categories of people who are all defined within the *chain of equivalence* (the 'others'), whereas they define themselves through the *chain of difference* ('us'). In the Middle East, the main group of 'others' in contrast to whom they developed their collective identity have been the people whom they have categorized as Muslims (*Taye*). With their settlement in Western countries, this principal category of Muslims as 'others' has gradually changed to a category of Christians representing the majority society as the 'others'. This change introduced the need to re-define relations to the new 'others'.[395] Consequently, the relationship with the Christian 'others' has affected the way they have wanted or needed to position themselves in order to keep a distinct identity. This search for an identity after dislocation is expressed in the poem *Identitet* (Identity) written by the activist Yusuf Barkarmo (1985) in the first years of his settlement in Sweden: [396]

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[395] A remarkable phenomenon among the elderly Assyrians/Syriacs has been that in their first contacts with Europeans as the 'new others' they have been using the languages which they used with the 'former others' when living in the Middle East, because they did not have a command of European languages yet. Knowing that Europeans did not speak their mother tongue *Suryoyo*, they assumed that they would understand if they would communicate in languages which they formerly used to communicate with the 'others' in the Middle East.

[396] My translation from the original in Swedish:

Tigris, Eufrat, Assyrien/ Turkiet, Irak, Syrien/ Förtryck, förföljelse/ Europa, Skandinavien

Sverige välfärd och frihet/ samverkan och valfrihet/ svartskalle/ främling/ trygghet

Jag söker identitet

Socialbyrå hög status?/ fördomar/ segregation/ samhörighet/ Allt stämmer väl och utmärkt

Religioner/ traditioner/ kulturkonflikter/ föraktfullhet räknas respekt/ anpassning språksvårigheter.

Utbildning en rättighet/ mobbning/ kiss i sängen/ ont i magen/ stress, skolk/ halvspråkighet.

Serietidningar/ tv, video/ musik, sprit, dans/ aktivitet.

Jag söker/ jag söker min identitet

Bil, video, färg-tv/ sex, mode, idol, självmord/ äktenskap? Nej, sammanbo/ hög standard en verklighet./Diskriminering/ isolering/ arbetslöshet/ O, nej! Jämställdhet och jämlikhet./Rösträtt?/ NEJ, NEJ!/ jobb och skatt min skyldighet.

Jag söker och söker/ trötthet, ensamhet/ att jag är desperat får du tycka/ men ur detta livets kaos/ formas min identitet.

> Tigris, Euphrates, Assyria/ Turkey, Iraq, Syria/ Oppression, persecution/ Europe, Scandinavia.
> Sweden welfare and freedom/ co-operation and freedom of choice/ black head/ foreigner/ safety.
> I am searching for an identity.
> Social office, high status? / prejudice/ segregation/ solidarity/ All of them fit well, perfectly.
> Religions/ traditions/ cultural conflicts/ Scorn is seen as act of respect/ the difficulties of adjustment.
> Education is a right/ harassment/ bedwetting/ pain in the stomach/ stress, truancy/ half-language-ness.
> The newspapers/ TV, video/ music, alcohol, dance/ activities
> I am seeking/ I am seeking for my identity.
> Cars, videos, colour tvs/ sex, fashion, idols, suicide/ marriage? No, living together/ high standards are a reality.
> Discrimination/ isolation/ unemployment/ Oh, no! Equality between men and women [*jämställdhet*] and [general] equality.
> The right to vote? / NO, NO!/ job and taxes are my responsibilities.
> I am searching, searching/ becoming tired and lonely/ You might think that I am desperate/ but my identity is formed by this chaos of life.

In this chapter, I shall discuss the process of settlement of the Assyrians/Syriacs in the context of the Swedish policy towards this group of 'new settlers'. In Section 5.1, I shall deal briefly with the immigration and settlement policy to contextualize the time and space of settlement. The Swedish integration policy and its consequences will be the main focus in Section 5.2. This will be followed by Section 5.3, an explication of the formation of *New Midyad* in Södertälje and the rapid establishment of the group in the new country. In Section 5.4, I discuss how the quest for a re-definition of the collective identity of the *'amo Suryoyo* developed during the settlement process. In the final section of this chapter, 5.5, I explain the *Hostages' and Orphans' Dilemma* (*Yasire u Yatume*) which they have been experiencing as a new challenge to life.

5.1 Place of Arrival and Settlement

Assyrians/Syriacs settled in a society which had rapidly developed into a welfare state in the Post-War period. Welfare, democracy, neutrality, modernity and *Norden* (the North) are considered the central *nodal points* in the Swedish model (Micheletti 1995, Stråth 2002). The 'Swedish Model' was

famous for its high living standards: A system which incorporates a free economy, democracy and a high-level of social security and welfare of which the motto is to support all individuals from 'the-cradle-to-the-grave'. The Social Democratic Party has played a key role in this development.[397] The hegemonic articulation of consensus-based discourses in Swedish politics is one of the main driving forces behind the development of this unique welfare system. The 'good days' of the Swedish economy continued until the mid-1970s, when the country began to face economic problems. This happened to coincide with the peak period of the mass emigration of Assyrians/Syriacs to Sweden.

Sweden began to accept immigrants and refugees from its Nordic neighbours and from central and southern European countries when the economic conditions of the Post-War period were flourishing.[398] This intake of migrants increased the diversity in the population background drastically (Hammar 1985: 49).[399] Until the end of the 1960s, immigration to Sweden did not feature on the political agenda; it was regulated in 1967 (Hammar 1985: 17), the year in which the 'stateless Assyrians' from Lebanon arrived in Sweden. This was also the time when Sweden no longer needed labour migrants. In this context, the first Assyrian/Syriac refugees were received by the refugee centre of the Labour Market Board (AMS, *Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen*) in Alvesta in southern Sweden and from there they were distributed to ten other municipalities in southern and central Sweden, in compliance with a national policy of the dispersion of new immigrants: Eskilstuna, Märsta, Nyköping, Södertälje, and some other municipalities (Björklund 1981: 58-63). Some smaller groups in Stockholm and Gothenburg were an important pull factor for more Assyrians/Syriacs to settle in these cities. My informant Mousa Afram, who was among the people who arrived on the first aeroplane from Lebanon, confirms that the policy about which the people themselves had protested for seven days, was to settle each family in a different place. Afram says that in Lebanon the Swedish authorities had promised that they

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397 The Swedish Social Democratic Party governed the country without any break from 1945 to 1976. The *folkhem* (the Home of the People) ideal with the *folkrörelse* (people's movement), which evolved at the beginning of the 20th century, constitutes one of the core elements in this development.

398 Initially attracted from Finland, Yugoslavia and Greece during the 1950s and the 1960s.

399 According to the Swedish Statistics, in 2003 the number of foreign citizens in the country was 476,000 and the number of foreign-born inhabitants was 1,078,000. People born in Sweden with one or both parents born abroad numbered approximately 880,000, respectively 16 and 20 per cent.

would be settled in the same place. A reminder of this earlier promise was to no avail.

A large number of Assyrians/Syriacs settled in Södertälje, a town west of Stockholm. Södertälje has always had an important place in the Swedish economy. Two of the biggest industrial enterprises in Sweden, AstraZeneca and Scania, are based in this town. According to the booklet *Södertälje in the World, the World in Södertälje*,[400] it is one of the most trade-intensive municipalities in Sweden. Nowadays, it is home to more than 6000 enterprises which produce more than 20 per cent of the total Swedish industrial export. In order to accommodate the needs of the Assyrians/Syriacs who settled in this town, new residential areas were built during the 1960s and the 1970s: Ronna, Geneta, Fornhöjden, Saltskog and Hovsjö (Björklund 1981: 5). An important consideration in the construction of the houses was that they were built spaciously to accommodate the traditionally big families.[401] In contrast to Björklund, Olle Wästberg[402] indicates that the apartments which the municipality had built in Ronna[403] were empty at the moment they arrived in Sweden (*Hujådå*, September 1999). He claims that the local politicians in Södertälje regarded this as a chance to fill their empty apartments; a move which was made even more attractive because the State paid for the refugees' housing costs.

In 1975, there were about 1000 Assyrians/Syriacs living in Sweden, mostly in Södertälje and the Stockholm area (Björklund 1981: 63). Although Södertälje had space to accommodate[404] more immigrants, the local authorities seem to have been overwhelmed by the mass settlement of this group in Södertälje (see further Ornbrant 1981, Björklund 1981: 102, Gardell 1986). The municipality of Södertälje insisted that the central government step in and handle the matter of the *Assyrier* in the autumn of 1975 (Björklund 1982: 28). On the basis of a modification in the Swedish Immigration Law (Article 2, 1 January 1976), on 26 February 1976 the

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400 The website of Södertälje Municipality (see Bibliography).

401 The number of family members in many of the early Assyrian/Syriac families has decreased and they have moved to other quarters of the city. Today, many of these apartments are inhabited by Assyrian/Syriac/Chaldean refugees from Iraq.

402 Olle Wästberg was a member of the Swedish Parliament between 1976 and 1982 and Vice-President of the *Assyriska/Syrianska flyktingfonden* (1977-2000).

403 Today, about 95 per cent of its inhabitants are Assyrians/Syriacs.

404 For instance, there were more than 100 empty apartments in the quarter of Ronna alone in 1975.

Swedish government decided to grant Assyrians/Syriacs from Turkey asylum (see further the previous chapter). In the same governmental decree (1976), a visa obligation for Turkish nationals was announced. It was emphasized that it was no longer possible to allow more Assyrians/Syriacs to settle in Södertälje. Subsequently, in co-operation with the Labour Market Board the municipality of Södertälje made two attempts to stimulate the newcomers to settle outside the city (Andersson 1983: 68-69). In 1976, thousands of Assyrians/Syriacs were removed from AMS refugee camps and from Södertälje and distributed to more than forty different municipalities in central and south Sweden (Carragher 1978). Many Assyrians/Syriacs who were approached to settle outside Södertälje only wanted to do so as a group of families (Ornbrant 1981: 55), an indication of how strong their mutual ties were at that time. As in the 1960s, many of them returned to Södertälje soon afterwards. A respondent who holds a very central function within the community in Södertälje explained to me that in order to be moved to Södertälje, he said that he wanted to attend the cooking school in Stockholm, enrolled in this school and achieved the resettlement in Södertälje for which he had aimed, without ever finishing 'his education'. Other friends of his followed similar successful strategies for resettlement. A third attempt at resettlement by the authorities was made between 1981 and 1983.

Financial inducements were offered to those accepting settlement and a job outside the city. After much hard work on the part of the municipality, only a few took this offer up. Remarkably, the 're-settling campaign' was conducted by the Labour Market Board, in co-operation with the Board of Health and Welfare (Björklund 1981: 102). The Labour Market Board used its refugee centres and contacted employment boards to locate vacancies for the new immigrants elsewhere. The municipality of Södertälje did its bit in assisting these efforts by withholding social assistance and obstructing access to municipal housing (Björklund 1981, Ornbrant: 1981: 78). The isolation induced by this policy of dispersion was strengthened by the fact that the immigrants experienced difficulties developing new contacts with the local Swedish inhabitants. This stands to reason as they migrated from a society in which life was organized on a collective basis – at its centre family and acquaintances. Moreover, they migrated from a society where they lived as a minority group among a majority population and hence as a close

collective.[405] In an effort to evaluate the policy governing the distribution and resettlement of Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden, the authorities appointed a working group in February 1980.[406] This working group also concluded that living as a collective was a way to break away from the isolation they had experienced in Swedish society. The nub of the problem was that living in a concentrated area allows them to participate in activities organized by the community and in Syriac Orthodox Church services. This need for cohesiveness is why Assyrians/Syriacs did not understand the reason for the dispersion and questioned its purpose (Ibid. 3-7). The report ascribes this policy to the scanty knowledge which the officials in charge of the settlement policy had of the group. Recognizing this failure, the municipal policy of dispersion was changed in favour of one distributing the Assyrians/Syriacs within the province of Stockholm. It was constantly stressed that resettlement should be on a voluntary basis and take place as much as possible in close co-operation with the group.Despite the great attraction of Södertälje, there were also people who remained in the cities to which they had been moved. One such example is Shabo who talks about the year 1976. Shabo expresses himself fairly positively about the way he experienced his introduction to Swedish society and he even seems to have been astonished by his reception:

> …After we were granted asylum, we applied for work. They asked us where we wanted to live and work. We told them we did not mind. They showed us Jönköping on the map. We noticed that it was situated on the water and therefore expected it to be a pleasant place. For that reason, we chose to live there. We were about ten young men in all. They told us that they would drive us [to Jönköping] and if we did not like it, they would bring us back [to Södertälje]… The media wrote a lot about us. Headlines in the [local] newspapers read: "The first Assyrians arriving in Jönköping," and "Welcome to Jönköping." Before us, in 1976 there had

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405 The title of the book by the Dutch anthropologist Schukkink (2003) about the Assyrians/Syriacs in the Netherlands implies this too: 'De Suryoye, een verborgen gemeenschap' [The *Suryoye*: a hidden society].

406 The working group consisted of high-ranking officials from the Migration Board, the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Labour Market Department, the Federation of Swedish Municipalities, Södertälje Municipality, and representatives from the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* riksförbundet. The working group published three reports (1980, 1981:10, 1982:1) about the situation of Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden, and particularly about the current project for the resettlement of *Assyrier/Syrianer* to other municipalities.

> actually already been *Suroye* in Jönköping. In that period, the *Othuroye*[407] [Assyrians] had slowly become increasingly visible. Therefore, we attracted the attention of the media. The Swedish people knew very little about the *Othuroye,* and anything new is always interesting. The mayor of Jönköping welcomed us and invited us to dinner in a restaurant and afterwards we were taken to a hotel. The next day, they took us to different factories so that we could decide where we wanted to work... We were also allocated a house to live in… They drove us to and from work until we had our own drivers' licences...

These first settlers became a reason for newcomers to settle in towns which are located in central Sweden, such as Västerås, Örebro, Jönköping, Norrköping and Gothenburg. The present geographical spread of the community is to a great extent explained by this Swedish settlement policy. Finding appropriate jobs for the Assyrian/Syriac refugees was one of the tasks assigned to the receiving municipality. The profile of Assyrian/Syriac settlers, as I indicated before, did not suit the needs of the Swedish market. They were either farmers or craftsmen. Nevertheless, they accepted the jobs on offer for industrial workers, assisted by the municipalities, jumping at the opportunity to enter into the Swedish labour market and society. These jobs served as a springboard for the next job, which was either a conscious choice or because they were dismissed in the aftermath of the industrial recession at the beginning of the 1970s.

5.2 Integration of the Stateless Assyrians

The period before Assyrians/Syriacs settled in Sweden, the policy of the authorities was based on the idea that immigrants would eventually assimilate in Sweden. Therefore, there were no specific programmes planning their future in society (Hammar 1985: 33). In 1965, an important change was made in integration policy: a task force was established to propose measures aiding the integration and adjustment of foreigners (Ibid. 32). This new policy materialized the offer of free instruction in Swedish, the publication of an 'Immigrant Newsletter' with information about Swedish society in several languages and Swedish officials made use of the publication 'New to Sweden' in which the rights and responsibilities of immigrants were

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407 *Othuroye* is here used synonymously and interchangeably with *Suryoye* but it is also used across denominational.

explained.

In 1975, the Swedish Parliament decided that immigrant and minority policy should be based on *equality* (already established in 1968), *freedom of choice* and *partnership* (Hammar 1985: 33). *Equality* aimed at offering immigrants the same living standards as the rest of the population. *Freedom of choice* referred to the choice which was given to immigrants of retaining and developing their cultural identity. *Partnership* implied the positive effects of working together for both the immigrants and the native Swedish population. Hammar (Ibid.) notes that these aims have retained a general character and that what actually happens depends largely on the agencies implementing this policy. The main agency for the integration policy, the Swedish Integration Board, co-operates with several other agencies involved in the formation and implementation of the policy. The municipalities play an important role in implementing the national goals in a very close relationship with the Labour Market Board, the Federation of Swedish County Council, the Migration Board, the National Agency for Education, the National Board of Health and Welfare and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities (Franzen 2004).

The execution of the Swedish integration policy is delegated to municipalities, with the request that they take in a certain number of refugees.[408] Depending on this number, each municipality is granted an 'integration subsidy' to assist with the reception of the refugees and to prepare them for society: educationally, socially and economically. The main goal of the Swedish national programme for the reception of immigrants is: '... society's initiatives for newly arrived refugees and other immigrants should provide everyone the opportunity to support oneself financially and to actively participate in Swedish society' (quoted in Franzen 2004: 2). Despite differences at the local level, looking at the way Assyrians/Syriacs have made use of this policy and their development it could be said that it has had considerable effects on their situation. I shall examine these three aspects of Swedish integrationist discourses and their relationship with the way Assyrians/Syriacs established themselves in Sweden in more detail.

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[408] In 2007, the municipality of Södertälje complained about the high number of new immigrants to the city and requested the national authorities to apply a law which requires immigrants be no longer allowed to make their own choice to live in a specific area of settlement (Interview with an employee of Södertälje Municipality, 2007).

5.2.1 Equality

The policy of *equality* became particularly visible after the first governmental decree in February 1976, when the first general amnesty was granted to a large group of Assyrian/Syriac asylum seekers. Between 1975 and 1977, the municipality of Södertälje received 22 million Swedish Krones for their reception and 'integration' (Ornbrant 1981: 153). After the mid-1970s, as a group Assyrians tended to be granted a B-refugee status and were classified *on a par* with A-status refugees. This made access to special aid programmes available (Björklund 1981: 123). The Consultative Group for Assyrian Refugees was responsible for their realization. Assistance to the Assyrians was to be carried out in co-operation with the Labour Market Board, the Immigration and Naturalization Board, the National Board of Health and Welfare, the National Board of Education and the National Police Board (Memorandum Information to municipalities in relation to the Arrival of Assyrian Refugees, 3 March 1977).

As Björklund (1981: 124-5) points out, the consequence of the policy delineated in the Memorandum was that the Assyrian/Syriac refugees ought to have been assisted in the way they 'needed', as they were going to remain in Sweden. At municipality level, specific services had been planned and executed, from accommodation to recreational activities (Björklund 1982). This strong State intervention is characteristic of the discourses of Swedish Social Democracy, namely the provision of services from 'cradle-to-grave'. In order to communicate this policy to Assyrians/Syriacs, the authorities also invested time and money in informing them about their new environment. For example, at the end of the 1970s, instead of the usual written documentation, families received a cassette (a 'talking newspaper') with information in *Suryoyo* (circumventing their lack of literacy), informing them about the different Swedish institutions. The policy of *equality* also meant that the access to educational resources, especially to Swedish language courses, was free and easily accessible. It was perhaps for the first time that Sweden had had to deal with such a big group of illiterate or poorly educated people at one time. The activist Shabo provides an example of how this worked out positively for him:

> In 1976, I had already begun [learning] the Swedish language in the first week of my arrival, even before I registered at the police station!.. The third day I started school… Within three months, they asked us to work as interpreters. They accepted us after we had sat an exam for interpreters. We were even paid for it!

Shabo reflects on the time in which he began to learn Swedish with pride and some surprise.[409] The fact that the courses were free made them easily accessible and stimulated people to attend them. When talking about their knowledge of the Swedish language generally, respondents exclaimed about how fast they had learned it and how they had even won prizes for what they wrote in Swedish during their first school years; competing with Swedish children. Knowledge of the Swedish language became the foundation for the next step in society, namely finding a job and assuming a position as intermediator between their own community and the Swedish authorities. The hegemonic articulation of Swedish integrationist discourses made it necessary to co-operate with 'representatives' of the group who knew the language. They began to fill the gap in the need for communication between the authorities and the group. As I illustrate in the Chapters 6 and 7, the new circumstances and the subsequent needs which have arisen in the diaspora have created space for the younger, educated generation to assume central roles in the community, stepping into the breach of their new needs in a modern society. This shows also the emergence of new subjects after dislocation.

This process of learning the Swedish language has been different for the Assyrian/Syriac refugees from Iraq who settled in Södertälje after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Despite the fact that this group of refugees is more highly educated than the Assyrians/Syriacs from Turkey (and also those from Syria and Lebanon), they seem to have experienced greater difficulty learning Swedish. The difference lies in the fact that, when the Assyrians/Syriacs from Turkey, Syria and Lebanon arrived in Sweden in large numbers in the 1970s, the local society was still dominated by the majority of the Swedish population with whom they had to learn to communicate before they could function in society. In contrast, in present-day Södertälje and its environs, there are quarters where most of the shops are owned by Assyrians/Syriacs and where over 90 per cent of the population has this background. This makes it possible for new Assyrian/Syriac refugees from Iraq to communicate in their mother

[409] Shabo expressed his surprise about being paid for the job of an interpreter for the Assyrians/Syriacs, probably since in his eyes this was as an unquestionable moral obligation to his people; a collective approach in which the individual is in charge of the collective needs.

tongue,[410] leading to a delay in the development of their knowledge of Swedish[411] and consequently to a delay in finding a job.[412] This development has caused the local authorities some anxieties, since they do not seem to have it under control.

5.2.2 Partnership

The aim of the government (1975) to develop a Swedish society which is based on partnerships has made the ethnic organization of Assyrians/Syriacs possible.[413] *Partnership* is based on the idea that immigrants and minorities should work together with the majority population in the development of society (Hammar 1985: 34). This goes hand in hand with granting all the partners involved the freedom of association and the public support needed to found and maintain their own associations. As a result of this policy, after Assyrians were granted asylum they began to gain access to the same organizational resources and opportunities as the native Swedish population. This has had a considerable effect on the organization and development of the Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden. Not the least because of the low threshold in founding organizations. [414] The sole requirement is that the statutes are based on democratic rules (such as democratic voting principles); this is also a condition for financial support.[415] Depending on the fulfilment of these

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[410] Among the newcomers from Iraq, there are also Assyrians/Syriacs who have acquired Arabic as their mother tongue and who continue to use it intensively within their social network in Sweden.

[411] One of my respondents mentioned that some people who arrived newly from Iraq and spoke the *Sureth* language learned to speak faster *Suryoyo* than the Swedish language.

[412] One difficulty for the new settlers is that, in contrast to the 1960s and the 1970s (when it was relatively easier to find manual work for which they did not need necessarily very good Swedish language skills), today a good knowledge of the Swedish language has become a requirement since such manual work is scarce.

[413] See further about this aim, the *Statens offentliga utredningar* (1974, The Swedish Government Official Report).

[414]A non-profit organization can be founded by a minimum of three people who have a common interest. This organization becomes a juridical person when it has acquired its own statutes and a board. See further:

http://www.sodertalje.se/mainupload/dokument/Se%20o%20göra/Föreningsservice/Starta%20förening/Bilda%20förening.pdf.

[415] Subsidies for self-governing organizations are based on the number of members of the organization. In 2006, *Syrianska riksförbundet* had approximately 20,000 members and *Assyriska* had 9,000. See further for the rules for the financial support of organizations:

http://www.sodertalje.se/mainupload/dokument/Se%20o%20göra/Föreningsservice/Söka%20bidrag/Regler_föoreningsstod_070307.pdf.

principles, the State will consult with their representatives and allow them to participate in the decision-making processes in Swedish society.

Indeed, migrant organizations developed the function of teaching newcomers about the principles in the Swedish society; they aided their adjustments to those principles and helped them apply them in their new lives. The ethnic organizations have developed the role of gate-keepers, of educational institutions and of places in which representatives of the ethnic group can be instructed so as to be able to participate and function in the Swedish political system according to its principles. This includes the idea of involving them actively in decision-making processes about issues concerning the ethnic group to which they belong. Therefore, the active participation of their representatives is perceived as essential. It was also on this basis that the authorities stimulated the foundation of the first Assyrian/Syriac association in Sweden – *Assyriska föreningen i Södertälje*[416]. After the presence of Assyrians/Syriacs was acknowledged as a new interest group, Swedish institutions needed representatives from this group with whom to communicate on its behalf. The Swedish Immigration Board, the Council of Free Churches and some other national associations (such as KFUK-KFUM[417]) were instrumental (Rubenson 1996: 238) in the foundation of the *Assyriska föreningen* in 1971. In 1975, the *Assyriska föreningen* merged with the *Assyriska Ungdoms Föreningen Ninves Sportklubb*[418] (founded in 1974). In the decades which followed, this pioneer group became the model for many Assyrian/Syriac organizations. This is the explanation of why the associational life among the group emerged at an early stage of settlement in Sweden.

In a period of almost forty years, the *Assyriska föreningen i Södertälje* developed different functions in Swedish society; offering a home after the dislocation suffered by community members. Initially, the first association functioned as an office where Assyrian/Syriac newcomers could go to for anything they needed to assist with their settlement in Sweden. With the help

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416 The name of this association in *Suryoyo* was *Hudro d-Suryoye b-Södertälje* (Beth Sawoce 2007).

417 KFUK-KFUM is the Swedish-based YWCA; a border-crossing Christian youth movement.

418 This is the first club in which the youth of the present well-known soccer club, *Assyriska FF*, played together. After it merged with the *Assyriska föreningen*, soccer continued to take a central place, especially after the team reached the higher levels. This is how soccer has played a central role in the social activities of this organization, of which the major event was the rise of its soccer club *Assyriska FF* to the *Allsvenskan* in 2005 (victory in 2004) – thirty years after the foundation of the club.

of Assyrian/Syriac intermediators, the Swedish authorities informed them about Swedish society.[419] The function which the *Assyriska föreningen* has retained up to the present-day has been by far the most central: it became the place where the first ideas about an *umtho* (nation) were crystallized furthering greater detail, taking shape from the ideas of *umthonoye* who arrived from different countries of the Middle East. In time, it developed a broader socio-cultural function for Assyrians/Syriacs (see further Chapters 6 and 7).

An indirect consequence of their right to found their own associations, the financial and advisory support by the authorities and the general framework of Swedish regulations has been the influence these aspects have had on the institutional culture of the Assyrians/Syriacs. The availability of this space with new opportunities has also increased the competition and conflict between the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* elites, especially at institutional level. The easy access to governmental support and the liberal Swedish regulations have both enabled them to establish new organizations and to mobilize their own ideology in opposition to existing ideas. This is expressed in the institutional structure of almost every town which is inhabited by Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden.[420] Each town has at least two associations, each adhering to either the *Assyrier* or the *Syrianer* ideology. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, without this high level of institutionalization the discussion about the 'right name' of their people would perhaps have developed differently and would have been far less institutionalized and antagonistic than it is at the present day.

As stated, the associations and the activities organized had to be based upon Swedish principles. This is the focal point at which Swedish public discourses influenced and greatly shaped the institutional structure of organizations. A look at the statutes of both federations reveals unequivocally that these principles are expressed in the aims of both the *Assyriska riksförbundet*[421] and the *Syrianska riksförbundet.*[422]

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[419] People who did not visit the association heard about the issues discussed from other family members. The information which reached them was rapidly diffused among them because of their strong bonds and networks.

[420] The policy of dispersion of new immigrants throughout Sweden at certain time periods is another factor which increased the need for Assyrian/Syriac institutions in a certain place.

[421] With its aim of representing Assyrians in Sweden, the *Assyriska riksförbundet* mentions such specific goals as: putting the Assyrian question on the agenda of the United Nations; defending the use of the name 'Assyrian'; working to preserve the language and develop the Assyrian culture; promoting study and sports activities and striving for the right to have the Assyrian (Syriac) language taught at primary schools. It also states that it promotes democracy,

Furthermore, the Swedish emancipatory discourses have also stimulated the participation of Assyrian/Syriac women in the public sphere. At the website of the *Assyriska Kvinnoförbundet* (Assyrian Women Federation), it is mentioned that, in 1980, the *Assyrier* women became aware of their marginalized position in the *Assyriska* organizations which were practically entirely run by men.[423] In the mid-1980s they founded the predecessor of the present-day *Assyriska Kvinnoförbundet* as a reaction to this.[424] The anthropologist Maryam Garis Guttman believes that by the 1980s the *Assyrier* women were much more aware of their marginalized position in the public sphere and aimed to change this at institutional level,[425] whereas today they are more passive.[426] Initially both federations had a women committee in charge of specific activities aiming at women. At the time of writing, there are a few women on the board in both federations and in the case of the *Assyriska riksförbundet* two women have been president since it was founded.[427] The active participation of women has been considered as an expression of processes of modernization within the group. The existence of specific youth federations also is attributable to the policy of the authorities. The aim has been to stimulate independence from the main federations and by doing so to give more space to the emancipation of the youth. The two federations representing the Assyrian/Syriac young people in Sweden are the *Assyriska Ungdomsförbundet* (AUF),[428] founded in 1991, and the *Syrianska*

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equality and gender equality; that it will promote youth activities, so that young people participate actively in civic life; that it will contribute to children and young people developing bilingual skills and that it will promote Assyrian integration at European level.

422 Fighting processes of exclusion and discrimination; promoting the integration of the *Syrianska* people in society; raising awareness for gender issues and initiating projects which deal with this, disseminating educational knowledge among its members, and so forth.

423 See further, http://www.assyrianwomen.com/

424 Recently, the Assyrian Women's Federation has accorded the gender issue a more central position on its agenda; it has organized various seminars and published the handbook *Jämställdhet här och nu* (2008) to encourage the development of an associational life with a focus on gender equality.

425 Personal conversation with Maryam Garis Guttman, 2009.

426 See further Garis (2005: 174-5) where she discusses the relatively low impact which the Swedish debate about gender equality has had on an internal debate among Assyrian/Syriac women.

427 Ninwe Maraha served as a president in the year 2001 and Rachel Hadodo between 2007-2009.

428 The predecessor of AUF was the *Assyriska Ungdomskommittén* (AUK) – a federation of the youth committees of *Assyriska* associations in Sweden which was founded in 1985. In 2009, AUF had 32 member organizations; with a total number of about 8500 members (the majority

Ungdomsförbundet (SUF), which was founded in 1992. Its name was changed to the *Syrianska-Arameiska Ungdomsförbundet* (SAUF)[429] in March 2010. Another example of the Swedish influence on the Assyrian/Syriac organizational life is that the political organizations of immigrant groups, such as ADO, have not been officially recognized. This is probably an important reason ADO has remained in the shadow of the Assyrian Federation and associations, despite the fact that most of these, especially in the beginning, were actually founded by ADO.[430] This 'shadow position' occupied by ADO as a political organization has developed more space for activities with a socio-cultural character (see further Chapter 6). An indirect consequence of the Swedish regulation policy has been that the authorities have managed to steer their direction in the character of the political organization.[431]

5.2.3 Freedom of Choice

Freedom of choice refers to the immigrants' right to 'retain their own identity' and found their own associations as long as they continue to participate in Swedish society.[432] This right was formulated in an amendment which the government passed in 1976. The space to nurture 'their culture' and language, plus the educational law that immigrant children have the right to be taught in their mother tongue,[433] has undoubtedly resulted in a modern revival of Syriac and the spoken *Suryoyo* language. New literature is being produced in both languages, the vocabulary has been enriched with new,

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was in the age range between 7-25 years). Their focus of attention is revealed in the titles of its five committees: National and Cultural, International and Homeland, Sports, Media and Information Technology (see further www.auf.nu).

[429] It has 50 member organizations (including youth sections) and 13,000 members in the age group (7-25). See further http://www.sauf.nu/

[430] Another reason for the 'low profile' of ADO in Europe is that it had developed an underground culture, because it was an underground organization in Syria until the early part of the 1990s. Until then, the ADO leadership especially in Syria tried to keep the profile of ADO low, because of the risk to its members.

[431] The development and organization of Assyrians/Syriacs varies in the different European countries. Comparing the situation in Germany with that in Sweden, the pace of institutionalization in Germany has been less fast, the number of institutions are much fewer than in Sweden and they receive far less financial support from the German authorities.

[432] See further *Statens offentliga utredningar* (SOU 1995: 88).

[433] The starting point for this policy is that immigrant children will be able to learn the Swedish language better if they first learn their own mother tongue properly.

modern words and elite members have begun to think of strategies which can help the survival of these languages.

In the long term, this right to 'retain their own identity' has resulted in a new approach to culture among Assyrians/Syriacs themselves. The local Swedish institutions invited the Assyrian/Syriac associations to display their culture to Swedish audiences. In part this had to do with the role of getting to know the background of the Assyrians/Syriacs or becoming acquainted with each other better. The culture of the Assyrians/Syriacs has been presented especially through the folkloristic dances and food. The scholar Sabro Garis, who was one of the initiators of a folkloristic dance group and the music band *Gudo d-Ninwe* in Gothenburg, says: 'We took the opportunity to present ourselves; [showing] that we are a people with a distinct culture, language, history, and so forth.' For elite members such as Sabro, the performance of folkloristic dances and their culture have not remained functioning at a socio-cultural level. It has developed a political dimension; by presenting their culture, they presented Assyrians/Syriacs as a distinct people.

In this process, the 'culture of the *Suryoye*' has gained a new dimension which was absent before. It has been made exotic. Where Assyrians/Syriacs often equate *'adat* with the Western term 'culture', the meaning attached to the latter term seems to have changed and been reified in a new meaning. Traditionally among Assyrians/Syriacs, *'adat* (traditions) have not been talked about from the perspective of exhibiting them to the 'others'. Instead, *'adat* were often used normatively, discussing how a matter or situation ought to be – 'this is how we do things'. *'Adat* delineated what was socially acceptable and what was not. In contrast, *kultur* which has been adopted as a new term in *Suryoyo* language (besides the use of the *mardutho*) has developed the connotation of a grand 'culture'. In the last few decades, this usage has been taken over by Assyrians/Syriacs worldwide, even as far as the agricultural area of *Tur 'Abdin*. Its focus is concentrated more on the 'positive' aspect of the *'adat* or culture. It is 'the culture' (*u kultur*) which is promoted, exposed to the others and whose development is stimulated, as a *nodal point* attached to the identity discourses of Assyrians/Syriacs. It is that part of the *'adat* which was initially exhibited to the Swedish people, the new 'others'.

This part was added by another from a more distant past. *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* organizations have been selecting elements of their assumed past and have presented these specifically as part of 'their culture' to present-day audiences. It was the part which is supposed to have been neglected

historically and which should be taken up again, insisted upon by both ideologies. In the folkloristic dances, the *Assyrier* use costumes which are based on the costumes used by the members of the Assyrian Church of the East in the *Gozarto*, in Syria.[434] In short, it could be said that the space which the Swedish authorities created for the Assyrians/Syriacs to exhibit 'their culture' has led to a whole new approach to *'adat* in terms of *u kultur* and has given it a new dimension.

5.2.4 Position of the Church in a Swedish Context

The secular Swedish integrationist discourses have also significantly influenced the position of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden and its relationship with Assyrian/Syriac secular institutions. From the perspective of the Swedish State, religion is a private matter. Therefore, the church is no longer assumed to be the *only* glue between members of a migrant group like the Assyrians/Syriacs. This approach has resulted in a situation in which the Syriac Orthodox Church began to lose ground to the Assyrian/Syriac secular institutions, particularly in the early years of the settlement. The Swedish authorities targeted secular institutions as the representatives of the Assyrians/Syriacs. This approach was diametrically different to the *millet* system in the Middle East, a legacy from the Ottoman Empire, where *millet* (nation) referred to the religious *millet* and had become synonymous for the national identity of a group of people. In that system, the religious leaders of a *millet* represented the people. Although that system has been abolished, minorities continue to be recognized solely on a religious basis. Therefore, in the Middle East the religious leaders of these minorities have continued to function as their representatives.

In Sweden, the change in the position of the church to being relegated to the background or to a different dimension and the policy of stimulating secular institutions to emerge into the foreground has also meant that the latter began to be given more 'credibility' to continue and develop (as discussed above), especially in the first period. For instance, compared with the secular institutions, the Syriac Orthodox Church has been granted little

[434] They have been introduced into Sweden through the ADO-centric organizations which had developed contacts with the Assyrians in the *Khabur* region and who had copied the folkloristic costumes from them.

subsidy and has not been granted a position in Swedish public law.[435] At the local level, the approach of the authorities towards the Syriac Orthodox Church changed at a later stage of the settlement, when they became aware of its central role in the Assyrian/Syriac community. For example, in their communications with the community the authorities have also made use of the clergy and the church board and visited the community at church. This has given the church relatively more space than it had in the beginning.

At this juncture, something should be said about the installation of the first clergy in Sweden. In 1970, four years after the settlement of the group, Patriarch Jacob III appointed Father Yusef Said (from Iraq) to serve the community.[436] This draws attention to the fact that, during the first two years, the salary of Father Yusef was financed by the Swedish Immigration and Naturalization Board; something which KFUM had been advocating (Björklund 1981: 63). With the mass emigration during the mid-1970s, the need for priests increased and community members began to approach priests who were still based in the homeland. An example is given by Father Simon:

> In 1975 I visited Germany and the Netherlands – at that time there was no priest yet in the Netherlands. The *Suryoye* in the Netherlands wanted me to stay there. I told them that I had just renovated my church and that I could not stay… In 1976 I came to Europe a second time. My uncle in Sweden had passed away. There was no priest there either.[437] [The family] Dbe Halef Ya'coubo asked me to stay and become their priest. But I told them: "I did not come to stay and therefore I shall go back [to *Tur 'Abdin*] again." When I went back, I noticed that half of the village had already left!... It was very sad since I had just finished the renovation of my church and I wanted to build an extra guestroom to be able to receive guests to

[435] Only the Swedish church is granted a position in public law and therefore it is the only national church (Rubenson 1996: 240). Consequently, only the Swedish church is permitted to receive a certain tax income from Swedish citizens. Currently, the Syriac Orthodox Church has applied for the same status, which inherently means that it will be able to apply the same tax system if this status is granted.

[436] This is also how other priests from the homeland were asked to serve the new community in Germany during the 1970s. In Germany, the community consecrated Deacon Bedros Dbe Shushe (from *Midyad*) as the first priest to serve them. Others priests who followed him during the 1970s were: Yuhanon Teber (from *Midin*), Abdullahat Qas Afrem (from Syria) and Yusef Harman (from *Kerboran*).

[437] Father Yusef Said was the priest at that time but the community was perhaps in need of more priests. Besides, it seems that during that period, there was a disagreement among community members about the appointment of Father Yusef. See further Chapter 7.

> the church respectfully. On the other hand, I understood why the people wanted to leave this oppression we live in. Our people longed to live in a Christian country, since they had experienced heavy oppression [*ta'da*]. They dreamt of finding a sheltered place [*setrina*] under the rule of a Christian country and to escape oppression [*khulsina mu dhelm*]. They had this opportunity, this road which opened [*u darbano de ftih*] and they took it.

Meanwhile, within the framework of the Swedish integrationist approach, the authorities assisted and advised in the establishment of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden. The clergymen were involved in projects, such as the KFUK-KFUM project. In order to illustrate the initial process, I shall discuss some elements from the report of the KFUK-KFUM *Projekt för vissa flyktingar från Libanon, Syrien och Turkiet,* (Project for some refugees from Lebanon, Turkey and Syria)' (Carragher 1978).[438] The activities of KFUK-KFUM illustrate the integrationist discourses of the authorities. The purpose of the project was to integrate the Syriac Orthodox Church into the Swedish system.

Within the framework of the mentioned project, KFUK-KFUM discussed co-operation with the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Swedish Free Church Council (*Frikyrkoråd*). The project leader, Desmond Carragher, sent a proposal about the organization of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden to Patriarch Yakob III in Damascus. The *Central Project Group for the Syriac Orthodox Church* (CPSOK) was also included within the project in order to discuss the general affairs and needs of the Syriac Orthodox Church pertaining to church organization, administration, economy and other requirements. In the beginning, the project group pursued a progressive agenda; its aim was to develop an organizational structure for the Syriac Orthodox Church which was similar to that of the Swedish church. For instance, a federal structure for the church organization (four regions in Sweden), a central church council and each regional parish should become responsible for its own economy, administration, parish service and educational programme. A priest would be employed full-time. Moreover, the group wanted to advance the democratization process by holding parish elections; giving the right to vote for both men and women. To what extent this progressive agenda was implemented and positive results were realized is not clear from the activity report of 1977-78. The conclusion of the report is that the first step towards the democratization of the church organization

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[438] See for a further discussion of this report, Chapter 7.

was taken with the implementation of the first national structure of church boards which was based on democratic elections.[439] It also concluded that the interest of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the implementation of the Swedish organizational church structure increased. Today, although the election system has remained intact, the structure of the church is divided and there are now two archbishoprics in Sweden. Each has its own national board and its local parish boards.

5.3 New *Midyad* in Södertälje

> The Swedish expectations notwithstanding, the Suryoye have to a large extent turned out to be enterprising, clever and innovative. While the Swedish authorities have tried to administrate their distribution…, they have succeeded in finding homes where they live for the most part with extensive social networks within a convenient distance; while the authorities have complained about the hopeless unemployment, the Assyrians have largely managed to arrange jobs for themselves; while the authorities have tried to prevent their immigration, the Assyrians have organized their relatives' travels to Sweden and their organizing the simplest matters, more and more Assyrians have founded small businesses…, which in a number of cases have grown into organizations of remarkable complexity.
>
> Björklund (1981: 130)

In 1981, Björklund already summarized the discrepancy between the perception of the Swedish authorities about the Assyrians/Syriacs and the reality these authorities encountered. It resulted (as Björklund writes) from the 'tendency for the Swedes to regard the Assyrians as helpless and quite incompetent, illiterate as they are and unacquainted with the complicated industrial society'. Writing in 2009 and reflecting on the early 1980s, it is possible to draw the conclusion that the characteristics of this *knushyo Suryoyo* (Assyrian/Syriac society), as noted by Björklund above, have strengthened even more, expressing the dynamism and inventiveness of the Assyrians/Syriacs as a group of people (or 'survivors'). In the following

[439] At that time, the federal church structure was implemented with one national church board, four regional church boards and each with ten local parishes which had their own church boards.

section, I shall draw a picture of different elements of this *knushyo Suryoyo*, bearing in mind that it developed in relation to the reception policy described earlier in this chapter.

Between 1971 and 2005, the number of the inhabitants of Södertälje did not increase much (from almost 80,000 to 80,553), but the background of the settlers changed. The population with a foreign background (36.8%) in Södertälje is more than twice as that at the national level (16.3%). The text explaining this table states: 'Södertälje is a municipality in which many nationalities live together. The dominant groups are the Finnish and the *Assyrier/Syrianer*, who can be defined as a population group which originates from Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon'. [440] Swedish people have been leaving the city to be replaced by new immigrants eager to settle in neighbourhoods where their relatives or community members live.[441] In the table of citizens with a foreign[442] (*utländsk*) background, about 15,000 people are mentioned as having a background in the countries Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon (in order of highest number) (Annual Report 2005). It is important to note that the third generation is no longer counted as foreign. This results in a lower number of Assyrians/Syriacs than is the actual number of people identifying themselves as such (besides their self-identification as Swedish). Assyrians/Syriacs personally consider their number in Södertälje to be at least about 25,000 of the over around 100,000 Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden. This makes them the largest immigrant group in this town. The booklet *Södertälje i världen, Världen i Södertälje* portrays the group as the most successful of all the immigrant groups in Sweden, taking their low rate of unemployment as a guide.

Earlier in this chapter, I illustrated how the Swedish authorities have attempted to distribute Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden. Despite their efforts, they managed to create their own *knushyo* (society, or in Tönnies' terms, *Gemeinschaft*), with its main centre in Södertälje. Today, Södertälje has begun

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[440] This is my translation of the original in Swedish. It is remarkable that, in the annual report, the *Assyrier/Syrianer* are referred to as a specific group, although in the table about the background of the population in Södertälje, they are categorized according to their former nationality. This shows that, at local level, they have achieved the non-formal status of being identified as a specific group, despite the fact that at the national level there is not yet any formal administrative category to distinguish them.

[441] At the end of the 1970s, about 16 per cent of the population was counted as foreign. In 2007, according to statistics of the municipality, about 40 per cent of the population is immigrant.

[442] People born abroad or whose parents were born abroad.

to be called *New Midyad*, after the town from which a large number of the *Assyrian/Syriac* inhabitants emigrated. The reason for the concentration of *Midyoye* in Södertälje is that those who were moved by the municipality to other places, returned to it as soon as they had the chance (Björklund 1981: 103). Those Assyrians/Syriacs migrating from other villages in *Tur 'Abdin,* who had been encouraged to move out of Södertälje in 1976, gathered in other towns.[443] Many Assyrians/Syriacs from Syria and Lebanon tended to settle in the Södertälje quarters of Hövsjö and Geneta, instead of in Ronna. In 2009, a large number of the inhabitants in these quarters were new refugees from Iraq. Other Assyrians/Syriacs have begun to move away and buy houses in other quarters of Södertälje or outside this city.

Assyrians who arrived in Sweden in the mid-1970s soon felt at home with the *knushyo Suryoyo* they encountered in Södertälje. They met many people they already knew from the homeland – in the street, in church and in the associations which they established. The structure in the *knushyo Suryoyo* offered the newcomers many opportunities to engage in different aspects of the society. A second significant point is that the *knushyo Suryoyo* was characterized by a 'new collective mix of Assyrians/Syriacs.' They met *Suryoye* from other parts of the world with whom they might never have been in touch before – although they might be close or distant relatives. In the process of identifying each other in Europe, Assyrians/Syriacs from Turkey (as it was common in *Tur 'Abdin*) asked the Assyrians/Syriacs from the *Gozarto*: 'What village [in *Tur 'Abdin*] are you from originally'? (*bu 'asel mayna qrithowayt*?). They asked this question since they knew that the Assyrians/Syriacs in the *Gozarto* had migrated there in modern historical times. Although most of the families in *Tur 'Abdin* already had relatives in Syria and Lebanon, Assyrians/Syriacs from the *Gozarto* who were asked about what village their parents were from originally were often annoyed and perceived this to be a discriminatory question. They often reacted with 'We are all *Suryoye*! Why do you (people from *Tur 'Abdin*) always ask about the place a person comes from?' The answer which followed was often that they wanted only to identify the people to whom they were talking by their village

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[443] For example, the *Kerboraniye* in Västerås, the *Botoye* in Örebro and Gothenburg, and the *Qelthoye* (Arabic-speaking) in Märsta, a suburb of Stockholm. The *Qelthoye* have a successful soccer team, *Valsta Syrianska IK* (located in *Märsta*), playing in the third highest Swedish league, *Division 1* since 2006. Throughout Europe, there was a similar process to that in Sweden where new relatives mostly joined family members who had already settled in a certain area.

and family relationships.[444]

In relation to the latter, an even more common question they ask each other when meeting for the first time is: 'Whose son/daughter are you?' Although in a new setting, Assyrians/Syriacs generally know each other through their extended families. Individuals are shorn of their meaning without the context of their relationship to one another. Therefore, if an individual does something positive, the positive reward extends to all the people in the collective group to which that individual belongs. Conversely, when that person does something which is perceived by the people to be negative, the reverse happens. Moreover, the collective image of the group reflects on its individual members. One of the consequences of living as a collective in certain areas has been that 'social control' among Assyrians/Syriacs has been kept intact. This situation is not to everyone's taste and has prompted some individuals and families to decide to settle somewhere outside Södertälje; 'fleeing social control' and its consequences.

The mix of backgrounds which gathered in Sweden is also reflected in the language use of this group. Assyrians/Syriacs are often bi-lingual. Depending on the area of emigration, they speak either *Suryoyo* (which they see as their traditional mother tongue) or Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish (often a combination of these languages) and new acquired languages in the diaspora. The liturgical language has continued to be Syriac. In a few cases the congregation exists of many people who were raised with Arabic, Turkish or Kurdish. Consequently, at least one of these languages is used for the sermon and depending on the situation, parts of the liturgy may also be in these languages (especially Arabic), besides Syriac.[445] Syriac is continued to

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[444] After Assyrians/Syriacs who had migrated from the *Tur 'Abdin* region in Turkey across the border into the *Gozarto* region in Syria (in the post-WW I period), had stopped identifying each other by their villages of origin in *Tur 'Abdin*. Respondents mention that the elite in the *Gozarto* had made efforts to stop making distinction between people from different villages and towns, as a process of emancipation of the people (in order to eliminate the difference between town and village people). Another reason for the difference experienced in Europe is that Assyrians/Syriacs arrived in Europe directly from *Tur 'Abdin*, while those who arrived from the *Gozarto* in Syria had left *Tur 'Abdin* one or two generations earlier.

[445] In the St George Church in Linköping, Father Sleman holds his sermon in five different languages (*Suryoyo*, Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish and Swedish), depending on his audience in the church. He meets in the needs of especially the first generation Assyrian/Syriac immigrants from different areas of the Middle East. Father Sleman originates himself from the town *Kerboran* in *Tur 'Abdin*, where the mother tongue of the ordinary Assyrians/Syriacs had become Kurdish since about the period after the *Seyfo*. Assyrian/Syriac elderly witness that only a few individuals continued to speak a form of *Suryoyo* in this town; it is not known whether this was the Eastern or the Western dialect (Private correspondence with the linguist

be seen as their national language.

The *knushyo Suryoyo* in Södertälje and its internal dynamic has functioned as the open framework in which Assyrians/Syriacs have made use of the opportunities offered by the authorities. The strong family connections and collective way of life has often assumed an educational function in transferring and transforming knowledge and by doing so, the development of the community, although this may not always be positively. Raising this element up to a higher national or international level, their interconnectedness also reveals its benefits in the adaptation processes to the new societies of settlement. The satellite TV channels *Suroyo TV* and *Suryoyo Sat* have enhanced this effect. Assyrians/Syriacs worldwide can watch the same programmes at the same time. This functions as a new network of connections.

5.3.1 Södertälje: a Ghetto?

In the last few decades in which a demographic change has taken place in Södertälje, this town has developed different meanings for different groups. The authorities and the media usually define the town, more specifically some quarters of it (such as Hovsjö and Ronna), as 'segregated' or as a 'ghetto' where a 'problematic' group of Assyrians/Syriacs lives. This contrasts with how Assyrians/Syriacs themselves perceive their presence in this town. Although their settlement in specific quarters of Södertälje commenced as a result of the housing policy of the municipality, it fast turned into what people commonly refer to as a 'ghetto'. Later, for the people personally making individual choices living in these ethnic segregated areas meant that the enforced 'ghetto' turned into an 'ethnic enclave'. Respondents told me that they joke with their Swedish friends from outside Södertälje who visit this town, telling them: 'Don't forget to apply for a visa before you come to Södertälje.' To take the case of the Assyrians/Syriacs in the Ronna quarter of Södertälje, these people seem to identify strongly with their neighbourhood (which consists mainly of big apartment blocks). In 2007, I was walking through it when I saw a trendy male teenager whom I asked in his mother tongue, *Suryoyo*: 'How do you like living here?' He

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Michael Suroyo, 2009). They note that they used the 'a' instead of the 'o', respectively used in Eastern and Western *Surayt*. Until the *Seyfo*, it was known that there was a quarter where the whole population spoke it. The drastic change to speaking Kurdish may have resulted from the severe killings which had been caused among Assyrians/Syriacs during the *Seyfo*.

answered with a smile: 'It is great to live here. I feel at home with so many *Suryoye* around me.' He does not feel estranged from the environment he lives in, something which is quit common for the Assyrians/Syriacs living in Södertälje. This does not necessarily mean that he and others do not function well in Swedish society.

To feel at home and 'integrated' (as people commonly call it) means something different for people living in the quarter of for example Ronna (mostly populated by Assyrians/Syriacs) than it does for outsiders. For example, the Swedish authorities' discourse speaks of the Assyrians/Syriacs in Ronna being segregated,[446] implying a negative development in this group. My analysis of the 2005 Annual Report of the Södertälje municipality reveal that it received a disproportionate number of Christian refugees from Iraq after the fall of the Baath regime in 2003. The message of the figures and discourse to be abstracted from the 2005 Annual Report is that the municipality no longer has the capacity to deal with them. In the same report, it is stated that, after an interval of three years, immigrants had still not managed to find jobs, to integrate, that they continued to depend on the State and tended to become social outsiders.[447] These remarks seem to have summed up the general perception about the immigrants in Södertälje. The report fails to mention that about 37 per cent of the people receiving social welfare in Hovsjö in 2005 were newly arrived refugees who had fled the war in Iraq. This influx of new immigrants kept the average income of households in Hovsjö low. The report also argues that integration is undermined by the growing number[448] of immigrants in Södertälje, which

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[446] This discourse became dominant again after the 'Ronna incidents' (*Ronna-händelserna*) in 2005. It all started when a fifteen year old Assyrian/Syriac boy in the Ronna quarter of Södertälje called a Swedish girl of the same age who happened to be passing by: 'Fucking whore.' The girl retaliated with: 'Fucking black head' and afterwards her father called the police. This was the reason for what a few hours later came to be classified as the 'violent riot' in the Södertälje's police report. The incident spun out of all proportions when the police arrived in Ronna from Stockholm with an extremely big force (100-150). This was the breaking point for the incident. The local Assyrian/Syriac inhabitants considered the police actions discriminatory and, later that same day the police station in Södertälje was shot at with automatic gunfire by young Assyrian/Syrian men. This evolved into a several weeks of debate about integration policy, Södertälje, ghettoization and a very negative image of Assyrians/Syriacs in the Swedish media.

[447] Of the social welfare provided to the population in Södertälje, 59% was spent on the neighbourhoods Fornhöjden, Hovsjö, Geneta and Ronna (Annual Report Södertälje, 2005: 23).

[448] In 2005, about 900 new asylum seekers settled in Södertälje (Annual Report Södertälje, 2005: 23).

has induced ethnic segregation. This rather negative image contradicts the figures about employment, income[449] and education[450] of the citizens in Södertälje, presented in the same annual report.

The discourses on segregation employed by the authorities imply that immigrants should remain invisible, should assimilate and that, if they do not conform, they should be classified as problematic. The media has played a central role in voicing this discourse. In the period until the mid-1980s, Gardell (1986: 78) distinguishes three different media discourses about this group. In the first period (1967), when 205 Assyrians/Syriacs arrived in Sweden as 'stateless people', they were presented as 'honest people with no record of criminality'. In the second period, with their mass emigration in the mid-1970s, they were presented as an 'illegal' group consisting of many economic frauds. As discussed in the previous chapter, this was also the period in which the authorities had made determined efforts to keep this group out of Sweden. In the media, most of the attention was directed to the problems which they caused as 'immigrants', or as the 'others'; an image which stigmatized the group in Swedish society.[451] This was also the case at the local level where the media was used as the vehicle to express the negative discourse of the municipality of Södertälje about the relatively high numbers of Assyrian/Syriac settlers in the city and the problems[452] linked to them (Björklund 1981: 120, Ornbrant 1981: 10, Anderson 1983: 50). In the third period (towards the mid-1980s), their image was modified and they

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449 A glance at the income level shows that the income per individual had increased each year between at least 2001, and 2005 (respectively the first year and last year mentioned in the report), to an amount of 36,654 Krones, which is 2,330 more than it was in 2004 (Annual Report Södertälje, 2005: 8). With a percentage of 4.2, the unemployment rate in Södertälje is even lower than the national level (4.3 per cent).

450 Educationally, the level of the population in Södertälje barely differs from the average at national level, despite the fact the first older generation Assyrians/Syriacs from Turkey were either illiterate or poorly educated. However, as can be seen in the statistics, at some educational levels Södertälje has higher educational records. *Folk-/grundskola* counts 23 per cent in Södertälje against 25 per cent at national level, while the number of people with a pre-university level count 48 per cent in Södertälje, against 45 per cent at national level. Population with a university degree (BA, < 3 years) is in both cases the same and the population with an MA (> 3 years) is 1 per cent above the national level.

451 See further for this image in the Swedish media, Chapter 7.

452 In reality the 'problems' seem to have been exaggerated. Stefan Andersson (1983: 66) mentions that, according to statistics of the National Police Board in 1980, forty of the 700 cases brought before the district court of Södertälje were related to Assyrians/Syriacs. Two of them concerned serious charges relating to fraud and drugs. About ten dealt with false driving licences from Lebanon and others were minor offences.

have been presented as 'ambitious', 'hard-working' and 'enterprising'. Since then this image has been dominant, occasionally interrupted by some negative news items, mostly related to criminality among the younger generation of Assyrians/Syriacs. The problem of criminality has also been considered as an increasing problem by the ordinary Assyrians/Syriacs.

Alongside the – over time – diverse discourses of the local authorities and the media about the immigrant-dense character of Södertälje, a fairly positive discourse has emerged among Assyrians/Syriacs about their presence in this town. They have come to perceive this town as their new 'home'; their *New Midyad* in Södertälje.[453] In this respect their visibility in society has developed space for feeling at home. Therefore, Assyrians/Syriacs personally do not consider the phenomenon of living with a high concentration in certain areas such a big problem and they do not perceive it to be an obstacle to adapting and functioning well in Swedish society.[454] In contrast, it has shown that their presence there has evolved in a sense of feeling at home in the new country and with that the strengthening of the connection of that collective to their new space of settlement. This solidarity is an instrument which helps to avoid the alienation which can occur in situations in which people feel that they are very different from the majority in their neighbourhood, and therefore *not* at home. Living as an ethnic enclave in certain neighbourhoods and the strong group ties between Assyrians/Syriacs in different areas of Europe have been instrumental in their upward mobility and the upsurge in self-confidence in the group, which has enabled them to take a pro-active position in society. They have already shown this in their economic entrepreneurship, in the educational field and, specifically in Sweden, in their political participation.

5.3.2 Achievements in the New Country

In connection with what has been said above, it could perhaps be said that Assyrians/Syriacs' greatest achievement in Sweden has been that they have succeeded in creating a 'new home' for themselves in another corner of the

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[453] This is similar to the idea about the life they developed in the *Gozarto* (Syria), especially in *Qamishlo*, after they settled there in the years after the *Seyfo*. They speak with great pride about what they developed there in a short period of time: schools, cultural clubs, music, an economy and, since the mid-1950s their first political organization, ADO.

[454] Nevertheless, they do recognize the specific problems which they encounter as a group in such a context: the poor mastery of the Swedish of some of them (especially the new refugees from Iraq), the high degree of social control in the area or certain forms of criminality.

world. As mentioned earlier in this chapter and again extensively discussed in Chapter 7, they have managed to build up their own institutions in different fields and to secceed economically. Characteristic of Assyrian/Syriac entrepreneurship in Sweden is that it began with opening small businesses, such as kiosks, catering firms and tailoring.[455] Except for the profession of tailor, the other businesses have been branches which are new to them. Despite having to adapt, they achieved success at an early stage. Assyrian/Syriac businesses often involve various family members, either through their financial contributions or by employing them.[456] This might be one of the reasons for their success. Costs have been kept low by the use of financial support within the family network. The family network has also functioned as a backup in any risks taken. This flexibility in taking risks became an entrepreneurial advantage. The characteristics of their entrepreneurship can be explained by their experience of having lived as a minority in the different countries of the Middle East – where the socio-political structure and system did not work in their favour. Their entrepreneurial experience in Sweden and the high increase in the number of university graduates[457] among the younger generation has resulted in bigger businesses, chains of businesses and in more professional organizations. Moreover, those with a tertiary education have launched professional careers in different fields, including politics.

In the last decade, Assyrians/Syriacs have become more engaged in the Swedish politics. Especially in the last national and local elections, the number of Assyrian/Syriac candidates increased visibly. In the 2010 elections, five[458] Assyrians/Syriacs managed to become Members of the

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[455] Today, Assyrians/Syriacs are selling these small businesses, mostly to the members of other immigrant groups.

[456] See further about entrepreneurship among Assyrians/Syriacs, Pripp (2001).

[457] At the beginning of the 1990s, there were only a few highly educated Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden, who all knew each other (if they lived in the same area). In 2007, the Assyrian/Syriac students organized themselves into two student federations, each with over 1000 student members. The *Syriac Assyrian Academics in Sweden* (Saais) was established in the year 2001. *Saais* works independently of other organizations. The ambition of *Saais* is to reach out to everyone in Sweden who is actively interested in higher education and the labour market. The *Syriac/Aramaic Academic Federation* (SAAF) was founded in 2002. It aims in the first place at motivating people to pursue higher education and secondly, at organizing social events for its members.

[458] These are Yilmaz Kerimo (since 1998 MP), Ibrahim Baylan, Robert Halef, Robert Haddad and Metin Ataseven. Ibrahim Baylan held the position of Minister of Schools in the Cabinet

Swedish Parliament (*Riksdag*). And a considerable number became members of the municipal (*kommun*) and county (*län*) council. Södertälje is the municipality which has the highest number (13) of Assyrian/Syriac members in the council, holding 20 per cent of all seats (65). Not only have they become more visible in Swedish politics; the political space has also meant that they have begun to negotiate – independently of their clergy – their socio-political rights in the Middle East. The recognition of the *Seyfo* as a genocide by Swedish Parliament can be seen as a milestone of their political lobby work (approval of resolution 11 March 2010).

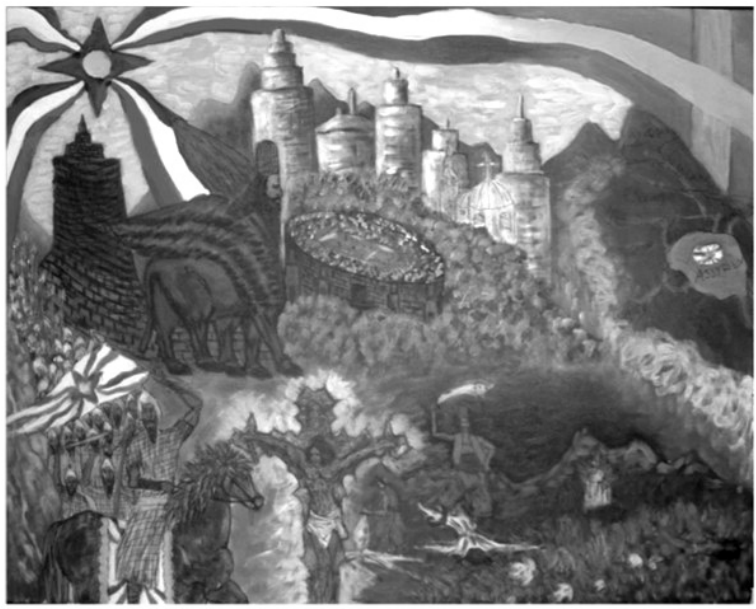

Illustration 7: Painting by Sargon Maraha, bringing together elements of his collective identity under the Assyrian and the Swedish flags: the Assyrian Empire, its glory expressed in architecture, art and military. The Christian identity of his people is also expressed through the crucified Jesus in the front and as victims in the *Seyfo* during the First World War in Ottoman Turkey. It draws the attention that the stadion of the soccer team Assyriska FF has been placed in the most central place of this painting, perhaps as the first great achievement which he as a young man believed his people had realized in the diaspora. Photo: Naures Atto.

Especially in the first decade, the Swedish media broadcast negative news items about Assyrians/Syriacs as a segregated group in Södertälje. It is not

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of Göran Persson from 2004 to 2006. He was the first non-European immigrant to become a member of a Swedish Cabinet.

uncommon for immigrant-dense cities to have a negative connotation or a low status. Slowly but surely, this image of Södertälje has changed as a consequence of a positive development in this city. For instance, in 2004 the Assyrian/Syriac soccer team, *Assyriska* FF, succeeded in attracting positive attention after it managed to reach the first league in the Swedish competition (*Allsvenskan*). It became the first immigrant team in Europe to reach that position. Another team of theirs which is also based in Södertälje, *Syrianska FC* was promoted to the Swedish first league in 2010. Assyrians/Syriacs have been unquestionably proud of having achieved this success, especially because they find themselves in the diaspora. As a municipality, Södertälje uses this soccer success to underline the success of its 'integration' policy.[459]

Reflecting on these achievements, Assyrians/Syriacs are generally positive about their position and the development of their people in Sweden. When talking about their position, they compare themselves with other migrant populations who have settled in Sweden during the last forty years. The elite ascribe the 'success' of their people (in relation to other migrant groups) in Sweden to their hard work and their open and positive attitude towards Swedish society. The historical experience of the Assyrians/Syriacs as a minority group and the consequence that they have developed a collective way of life as a 'community' in which they have tried to help each other to survive is also believed to have eased their settlement process in Sweden.[460] Overall, they assume that they do not cause too many upheavals in society and that they have 'integrated well'. They use the term 'integration' in the sense of 'adaptation'. Acculturation (the modification of one culture as the result of contact with another culture) is a dominant feature of the way Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden (and in other European countries) adapt to society.[461] It comes close to their idea of what integration means to them and

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[459] The soccer player Kennedy Bakircioglu and the basketball player Nina Baresso were chosen as Ambassador's of Södertälje; respectively in 1999 and in 2004. In 2003 Baresso played for the Solna Vikings which won the national championship in the *Swedish Women Basketball League*.

[460] In contrast to the Assyrians/Syriacs, other migrant groups which used to belong to the majority and dominant group in their homeland and which have gained the status of a minority in Sweden are therefore said to experience more difficulties in adjusting themselves to the new position of a minority group. This idea is also illustrated by the study of Woellert, Kröhnert and Klinghol (2009). The authors conclude that Turkish immigrants, who are the second biggest immigrant group in Germany, are least integrated, no matter how long they have been living in Germany.

[461] See further Cetrez (2005) about the acculturation process of Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden.

they prefer this path to assimilation which is perceived as a danger (of their disappearance as a distinct people). This idea implies that it is possible to retain a certain distinct identity and simultaneously to function well in Swedish society. The idea entertained by the activist and scholar Shushan that Assyrians/Syriacs want to be 100 per cent Assyrian/Syriac and 100 per cent Swedish approaches this way of thinking. Bringing up *'adat* (traditions), they believe that they have managed to live according to the values they find important in their own culture and that they have succeeded in combining them with the Swedish way of life. Often, representatives of Assyrian/Syriac institutions or concerned parents attempt to promote the idea of living by the best traditions of both the Swedish and Assyrian/Syriac culture, simultaneously distancing themselves from the negative characteristics of both cultures. They reify culture and rationalize their negotiations with this element of society, as if culture can be captured and managed to one's own satisfaction. 'Negotiating culture' is approached as a rational process. This pragmatism says something about the 'positive' intention more than about to what extent they are successful in their intentions. Several elite members mentioned their active participation in the Swedish national holidays. During my fieldwork, I experienced this active participation on, for example, the celebration of *Midsommar*[462] (Midsummer) and Santa Lucia.[463] In some of the Syriac Orthodox churches, they have begun to organize the Santa Lucia processions, a clear influence from the local Christian tradition on Orthodox Christianity.[464] Another example is the confirmation ritual at the age of twelve which is adopted from the Roman Catholic Church.

5.3.3 The Swedish 'Heaven'

Altogether, the achievements of the community and the liberal Swedish policy must unquestionably have led to the way in which Assyrians/Syriacs have come to conceptualize Sweden as 'heaven' (*malkutho*). This reference is made on the basis of their experiences both in the *athro* and in other European countries, especially in Germany. 'Sweden as heaven' is a concept

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462 In 2005 it was the first time that Assyrians/Syriacs organized the city's *Midsommar* in the churchyard of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Örebro.

463 Santa Lucia is an Italian saint who is said to have brought food to the poor in Sweden during the Middle Ages. In Sweden they celebrate Santa Lucia on 13 December.

464 Examples are the churches Mor Ephrem (Södertälje), Mor Petrus (Stockholm) and Mor Gewargis (Norsborg).

which reflects the positive aspects of Swedish society, stressing all the facilities provided, the freedom experienced and stability in particular. Despite experiencing some difficulties in the beginning, Assyrians/Syriacs have also expressed themselves in relatively positive terms about their reception in Sweden. They have developed respect for the country and generally express their gratitude. People conceptualize the 'Swedish heaven' at both an individual and a collective level. During the spontaneous after-match party of the soccer game which brought *Assyriska FF* to the *Allsvenskan* (the Swedish Premiere League) in 2004, I saw an emotional fan (in his early forties) with tears of happiness in his eyes waving the flag of this soccer club with a small Swedish flag stitched in its corner. When I asked him about the latter, he explained that he wanted to express his feelings of gratitude to Sweden 'for having taken us in and giving us these opportunities'.

Another example of this attitude of appreciation was voiced by the activist Aday. He compares his reception in Sweden with that in Austria, where his asylum application was rejected and concludes that the way he was received by the Swedish authorities has made an important influence on his attitude towards its society:

> The conditions in the 'camps' in which we were housed as refugees in Austria were terrible. I imagined that Hitler's camps must have been similar... When I came to Sweden, I was accommodated in a hotel with my own room, TV and shower. I was thrown into confusion and assumed they [authorities] had made a mistake… I have a very positive attitude towards Sweden… I believe that Sweden is one of the countries in Europe which pursues a policy of showing respect to refugees. This has left me with a positive attitude towards Sweden. As you can see, I have the Swedish flag in my house. Usually I have an aversion to flags. When I was young I used to play with the idea of burning all the flags of the world one day. My sentiments about nationalism were very negative. But, I can accept, even like to have the Swedish flag in my house. I have respect for Sweden…

Hammar (1985: 25) writes about the changes immigrants have encountered upon arrival in Sweden:

> Immigrants arrive in a society with a very explicitly expressed responsibility for the welfare of each individual. No longer are they expected to turn to family and friends for help when sick, aged, or in

> trouble. Instead, they are encouraged to turn to a social agency which is administered by the state or the local community.

For the elderly woman Maro, one aspect of this heaven has been that Swedish institutions take care of the elderly with all the facilities provided – the same as for any other Swedish citizen. She expresses her appreciation in terms of: 'We are praying for the Swedish authorities – even our sons would not take care of us as much as they do. It is their country; they allowed us into this country – and therefore we should pray for them day and night.'

5.4 The Formation of New Identity Discourses in the New Country

As I emphasized in the introduction to this chapter, emigration and settlement in the new country led to a transformation process in the identity concepts of Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe. From the very beginning, the new settlers were faced with the problem of positioning themselves in the new context; first in relation to the new 'others' and later, internally, in relation to each other's new discursive identifications. In this section, I shall discuss the emergence of the need for a new identity discourse during the settlement process.

5.4.1 Who Are You and Where Are You From?

> When they asked me: "Where do you come from?" I answered: "I am stateless." …In the eyes of the Swedish government, I was a stateless person; that is how it classified me. I felt very happy I was able to make this classification and to tell them this. Under the Geneva Convention, one has the right to claim a stateless status.
>
> University graduate Sallo, migrated from Lebanon in 1991

Only few people make the idea of 'being stateless' explicit and formalize it in the way Sallo did. The first Assyrians/Syriacs who arrived from Lebanon in 1967 were introduced into the Swedish society as 'stateless Assyrians', on the basis of the first letter in which the World Council of Churches presented them to the Swedish authorities (see Appendix 7). In Sweden, the singer Hanna Shabo (1976) sang about this aspect in the refrain of the song *I*

'askariye du Swed ('The Swedish Military Service') – *Mama latlan daule, gezzino lu Swed* ('Mother we do not have a country, I am going to Sweden') – in answer to his mother's reluctance to go to Sweden. The title of this song 'Swedish Military Service,' is a metaphorical reference to his new relationship with and loyalty to Sweden. The idea of being stateless is dominant among Assyrians/Syriacs and assumes a sense of distinct collective identity from other groups in the countries of emigration in the Middle East. They can be heard saying to each other 'We do not have a country and therefore we are defenceless' (*Latlan daule u maukha twiroye na*). Not having a country is used as an explanation for their historically weak political position in society.

The poem *Vem är jag?* [465] (Who am I?), composed by an anonymous *Assyrier* who wrote it while awaiting his asylum application in a refugee camp in Sweden in 1978, illustrates the impact of living with the feeling of being unrecognized and stateless, especially as an immigrant in a new country (Published in *Hujådå*, July 1978):

> I wake up in the morning and my voice is sobbing, my heart is crying out "Who am I?" And I am lost between imagination and the willingness of the pain and worries.
> I'm sad and I do not know what it means to be happy.
> I am thirsty for sunshine and tears of sorrow fall constantly and say:
> "Who am I? Who am I?" And Nineveh's[466] voice is dead now, dead and stripped and burning and I continue to progress farther with my weak life in silence and my identity card displays:
> Name: Exhausted
> Citizenship: rogue
> Age: 4749 years[467]
> Address: Lost

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[465] My translation of the Swedish original *Vem är jag?* (Hujådå, July 1978); note that his command of Swedish was not very good. In the English translation, I have attempted to remain close to the Swedish original:

Jag vaknar på morgonen och min röst snyftar, hjärtat skriker vem är jag? Och jag saknade mellan inbillning och viljan mellan värken och bekymret./ Jag är dyster och jag vet inte vad det betyder att vara glad./ Jag törstar efter solvärmen och hela tiden faller tårar av bedrövelse och sager:/ Vem är jag? Vem är jag? Och 'Ninives' röst är död idag, död och berövad och brinnande och jag går med ett svagt liv i tystnaden och mitt personkort är följande:/Namnet: Medtagen / Medborgarskapet: Skälmen / Ålder: 4749 år / Address: Förlust / Kännetecken: en ansikte blick, två blinda ögon, ett svagt hjärta, två förlamade händer, en trasig kropp./ Jag sover, vaknar och min röst med förlust, gå inte! Kom inte dit! Viskar, ty talet är lögn och livet är förfalskat…

[466] Reference to Nineveh as the capital city of the Assyrian Empire (705-612 BC).

[467] The age is based on the Assyrian calendar.

> Characteristics: a glance in a face, two blind eyes, a weak heart, two paralysed hands, a broken body.
> I sleep, wake up and with my lost voice: Do not go! Do not come here!
> Whispering, because speech is a lie and life is a forgery…

The metaphors used in this poem exhibit the idea of a *split subject*. Simultaneously, the subject has not found its way to heal itself through the objectivity present in the status quo. Not being recognized and being stateless have blurred the clear definitions of 'Who I am'. The first settlers faced similar problems in relation to their self-identification. They sometimes answered the same question 'Who am I?' by indicating only their 'religion' (which did not make any sense to Europeans), sometimes by emphasizing a national identity as Assyrians, and sometimes by mentioning the country from which they emigrated. As I have explained in the introduction to this book, the confrontation between the religiously based mindset of the Assyrians/Syriacs and the secularly based European equivalent made them aware that they had to redefine the identity in which they position themselves in the new societies in which they settled. This is how their migration eventually led to a change in their identification. In time, first among the elite and later among the ordinary people, their ethno-religious concept of identity was exchanged for an ethno-national concept.[468]

In Europe, national categories of people have often been based on politico-geographical boundaries.[469] Because of the legitimacy of the category of 'nation-states' and the politics of labelling, some groups are accepted as a nation and others are not. Consequently the Assyrians/Syriacs have been tagged with the Western concept for defining national groups. From the beginning, they have *not* been recognized as a distinct national group and hence were registered according to their former nationality.[470] One side

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[468] The change to an ethno-national idea of collective identity with their settlement in Sweden has already been concluded by the sociologist Deniz (1999).

[469] The fact that States in the Middle East have copied this model of nation-building is also expressed in the way the Assyrians/Syriacs are categorized as a religious group only, and defined by the different states as Christian Turks, Christian Arabs and, more recently, since the foundation of the autonomous region Kurdistan in northern Iraq, also as Christian Kurds. There too, the national politics seem to be heavily focused on and still are in the process of nation-building. The Assyrian/Syriac elites in the diaspora reject these categories and campaign against them in their writings.

[470] Theoretically this categorization according to nationality is also problematic because, even in Europe, it is used in several ways. Lewis (1994: 71) notes that there are differences in interpretation of the word 'nationality' between the different European countries. In the English and French languages, the words *nationality* or *nationalité* indicate the country of which

effect of this policy is that the Swedish authorities were not able to distinguish the Assyrians/Syriacs as a distinct group, nor were they identifiable in the national statistics.

Categorization according to nationality also had consequences for the daily life of the Assyrians/Syriacs in their interactions with the Swedish. Generally speaking, Swedes did not know much about the newly arrived Assyrians/Syriacs. In conflicts with this group, Swedish teenagers used curses like *jävla Turk*! ('Damn you Turk!') and *Turk i burk smakar urk* ('A canned Turk tastes nasty') – pejoratives they used indiscriminately for all people from the Middle East; ample evidence this group of Swedish people did not distinguish between the various migrant groups in Sweden. For the Assyrians/Syriacs, these kinds of expressions had a doubly negative connotation, because of their dis-identification with the category 'Turk'. Among the younger generation, these experiences also played a role in sensing a greater need to position their group differently to the way in which the Swedish masses identified them. This 'problem' of classification was also experienced by the first Christians migrating from the Middle East to North[471] and South America,[472] and to Australia[473] in the second half of the

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a person is a subject. In Germany the word *nationalität* has more of an ethnic than a legal character. The word *Staatsangehörigkeit* in German has a similar meaning to the English word *nationality* (Ibid.). The Swedish *nationalitet* is used with the same meaning as the English *nationality* (see further Eriksen 2004).

471 Kayal (1975: 112) writes that they were often identified by the Americans as Turks or Arabs and treated accordingly. In a similar way to the situation in Europe, Kayal ascribes this to the fact that the immigration authorities did not differentiate between the different people coming from the Ottoman Empire. At all the ports to the United States, they were registered as 'Turks' and in South America as 'Turcos'. However, in 1899 the 'Syrians' began to be classified differently among emigrants from the Ottoman Empire (Kayal 1975: 73; Naff 1992: 142). The new classification was important to the Christians from the Ottoman Empire since, according to Kayal (1975: 75), they thought it a curse to be classified as 'Turks'. See further Donabed (2003: 61-66) who shows documents in which Assyrians/Syriacs who emigrated from Kharput to America, often classified their 'race' as 'Assyrian' and their 'former nationality' as Turkish between 1870 and mid 1930s. Another change in the classification of the Lebanese Christians took place with the United States census of 2000, when it become possible to be classified as 'Syriac'. The Maronites too were called on by the US Maronite Church Memorandum and by the American Maronite Union (AMU) to register as 'Syriac' (part of the category Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac) instead of as Arab or Lebanese (http://amalid.com/articles/Maronites_are_Syriac_Not_Arab.htm).

472 In Argentina too, prior to the 1920s, the Arabic-speaking people from the Middle East were classified differently: Turks, Arabs (1888-1897), Turks, Syrians (1898), Syrians (1899-1909), Ottomans (1912-1914) (Bertoni 1981 in Klich 1992: 249). Lesser (1999: 49) mentions that both Brazilians and the group itself made a joke about the designation by which people from 'Syria-Lebanon' gradually became known in Brazil: 'While newly arrived immigrants

nineteenth century (Kayal 1975: 73). Later in this section and farther on in this study, I shall show that the Assyrian/Syriac elites have challenged this classification by voicing their disagreement with its use and by offering an alternative. I shall also demonstrate that, in the process they initiated to redefine their collective identity, they copied the same Western concept of national identity to position themselves in secular European societies in order to be accepted as an *ethnie* or a nation (*umtho*), instead of 'merely' a religious group.

In addition to the discrepancy in relation to their identity, a common occurrence in all European countries has been that Assyrians/Syriacs are assumed to be or identified as Muslims, a misconception perhaps attributable to the common idea in Western countries that people in the Middle East are all adherents of Islam. Consequently, their church is referred to as mosque, their Bible as the Koran and their fast as Ramadan. Examples of such confrontations are discussed among Assyrians/Syriacs when they talk about the way the 'autochthonous' population in Europe approaches them. They express their astonishment about how, even after several corrections, individuals still do not understand that they are Christians and not Muslims. An elderly female respondent who visited her relatives in Sweden explained to me that for several years she had attended the Roman Catholic Church in Germany, since there was no Syriac Orthodox church in the neighbourhood. One day a German lady came up to her and asked her: 'Are you reading the Koran?' The Assyrian/Syriac woman was unpleasantly surprised by this question and answered her: 'No, I am reading the Bible; why else would I come to your church?'

Another reason prompting this sense of urgency to find an answer to their identity has been the confrontation with the two interrelated questions: 'Who are you? Where are you from?' Any Assyrian/Syriac has been confronted with these questions upon settlement in Europe. Assyrians/Syriacs for their part have used the answers to these questions as an opportunity to focus on what they have found important in the collective

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were 'Turcos', a first steady job transformed them into 'Syrians', and shop or factory ownership remade them into 'Lebanese'.

473 Batrouney (1992: 417) too mentions that the early Lebanese immigrants to Australia were classified as 'Turks', because of the 'Turkish' documents with which they travelled to Australia. After Lebanon became semi-autonomous in 1926, people migrating out of Lebanon travelled with Lebanese passports. Only in 1954 did the Australian census officials made a distinction between Syrian and Lebanese migrants.

identity of their people when presenting themselves to the Swedish. Therefore this answer was not settled after the first asylum procedure they went through. Any Swedish person they encountered for the first time could potentially ask them these questions. Experiencing this as a daily reality – an answer became imperative. At a personal level, these questions made Assyrians/Syriacs conscious of the former designations and the categories they used when defining themselves. The student Matay explains how he dealt with these questions at the age of fourteen at the beginning of the 1980s:

> They asked me, for example, "Where are you from?" For me, it was very important to say that we are not Turks when telling them that we are from Turkey. When I said that I am not a 'Turk', it meant not being 'Muslim'. To me, being a 'Turk' was synonymous with being 'Muslim.' I thought it was important to explain to them that I was different from the other people whom they called Turks; with such names as Osman and Mohammed... for me personally; Christianity is like a culture which we live. Christianity is not just a matter of theology; it is much more than that…

Matay's answer in the citation is not unique to him, but is indeed a common answer among his people. Matay begins by answering what he is not: he comes from Turkey but he is *not* a Turk. This shows that it is paramount to him first to state that which he dis-identifies with. It also assumes that he had experienced the situation in which outsiders have assumed he was a Turk when he told them that he migrated from the geographical entity which is present-day Turkey. In his answer he set the boundaries for what he sees as the main constitutive outside. As indicated before, usually Assyrians/Syriacs state that they do not identify in the first place with the national identity of the country from which they migrated. From their point of view, to be from Iraq, Syria, Turkey or Lebanon does not make them either Arab or Turkish.[474]

Internally, the question, which followed 'What are you then?' was harder

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[474] Especially Assyrians/Syriacs from Lebanon, but also those from Iraq, did not distance themselves from respectively Lebanese or Iraqi national identity. At the same time, they *did* want to express their *Assyrian/Syriac* background in relation to not being Arabs. Nevertheless, in some cases, Assyrians/Syriacs from urbanized areas in Iraq have often been Arabized to such an extent that they do identify as Arabs; basing their identity to a great extent on their (in some cases) new mother tongue Arabic and the adopted culture which they define as Arab. In such cases, their distinct 'identity' from other 'Arabs' has been reduced to a religious aspect.

to answer. Given the fact that Europeans use a different concept of collective identity to that of Assyrians/Syriacs, it can be said that the question 'What are you then?' generated the need, and with that the space, to redefine the collective identity of the Assyrians/Syriacs, both linguistically and conceptually. Moreover, it is a question, to which any Assyrian/Syriac can relate (as mentioned before). In the Middle East, only some of the educated elite had embraced a secularly based national identity (see further Chapter 6). Now in Europe, this quandary has reached the ordinary people because it has become a 'practical need' and because it has become possible to express this need in the 'proper' terms. This is how internally, the question 'What are you?' has played a central role in the internal dynamics among Assyrians/Syriacs. It is an issue developing from the debate about the 'right name' of the people (but also the other way around). Although this question is directed to an individual, the answer is expected to be related to a collective group. The categorized dimension of a collective group is that it bears a history and that it connects the present to the past of the collective. The *myth* about the past functions as a legitimacy for the present of the collective.

5.4.2 Meeting the New 'Others'

In Chapter 4, I discussed how Assyrians/Syriacs who came to Europe thought that they were going to settle in Christian societies and hence – expected implicitly – that they would encounter a similar religiously based society as in the Middle East.[475] This time they assumed they would be part of the majority. They arrived in Sweden with a 'clear' idea about what it means for *them* to be Christian and brought a whole set of highly developed cultural aspects related to how they practised *their* Christianity in the homeland with them to Sweden. Historically, the collective identity of the Assyrians/Syriacs has been formed in relation to Islam, because the followers of this religion were the dominant group which formed the 'others' for many centuries. Characteristic of any identity is that it is relational; it is expressed in relation to the 'others'. People say what they are above all in order to show what they are not.

After their settlement in Europe, it was of paramount importance to Assyrians/Syriacs to explain to Europeans that they were Christians and

[475] This assumption has also been pointed out by Deniz (1999).

certainly *not* Muslims. However, in embarking on this process of communicating 'their identity' to the 'Christian others' in Europe, the masses of the Assyrians/Syriacs were not yet conscious that identities in Western countries were not formally defined along religious lines, but along national secular boundaries. Or, as is the basic idea in secularism, the norm is not to distinguish between religions in particular, because religion has become a private matter. Assyrians/Syriacs have learned this idea only with time.

Initially the older generation among them did not understand the concept of secularism and therefore failed to comprehend that secularism and Christianity could co-exist. They referred to the Swedes as atheists in situations in which they became disappointed that the Swedish did not distinguish between religious groups (or implicitly favoured Christians). The idea that Swedes are atheists was a strong reaction to their thwarted expectations of settling in a Christian country. Older generation Assyrians/Syriacs especially have continued to position and reflect on themselves in relation to the Muslims. The reaction of the elderly Assyrian/Syriac woman, Maro, to her son's[476] explanation that the Swedish news reporter on TV announced that 'Gays have been allowed to get married in Sweden,' exemplifies this mindset: 'So, now Muslims will be able to laugh up their sleeves at us!' (*Anaqa tro tawo a Taye guhkhi a'lan!*). Implicitly, *Hulto*[477] Maro shows that she does not approve of gays getting married, *but* what bothers her even more is that Muslims will have more opportunity to mock 'us,' *Christians*. From her perspective, it is like washing one's (Christian's) dirty linen in public. In a conversation with *Hulto* Maro, she says in an astonished tone – still not understanding the Swedish approach – but apparently passively accepting it: 'This is how it goes here', elaborating on the difference between her approach and that of the Swedish:

> There are no *Taye* [Muslims] and *Suroye*[478] here [Sweden]! When we tell them that the Muslims do not like us, they [Swedes] ask us why we distinguish between Muslims and Christians. They do not want to make this distinction.But the Muslims and we are miles apart from each other! They [Swedes] say: "If a girl wants to marry a Muslim then she can…"

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476 Her son was one of my respondents and informed me about his communication with his mother.

477 *Hulto* means 'aunt' (mother's side). It is used as a courteous form of address when speaking to an older woman or when referring to her.

478 *Suroye* is here used with the meaning of 'Christians' or ethno-religiously, as was common in *Tur 'Abdin*.

By her first sentence 'There are no Muslims and Christians here', she means to say that no *distinction* has been made between 'Muslims' and 'Christians'. *Hulto* Maro implies she was not reconciled to this essential aspect of secularism in Swedish society. In the quotation, she explains why. In reflections made by the older generation Assyrians/Syriacs, the remark is often made: '*Ma lo kud'i men semme eban*?' ('Don't they know what they [Muslims] did to us [Christians]?') Or, the comment: '*Gedgauri a bnothaydan u gsaymi a dkothani kulle Tayutho'* ('They will marry our daughters and convert all these places [Europe] to Islam'). The implicit idea is that Assyrians/Syriacs (as Christians) perceive themselves as part of the 'Christian countries' and fear the intentional Islamization of these countries. Their fear is focused on the collective instead of the individual marrying a Muslim; marriage is transformed from a personal into a collective act and with that it becomes a dislocatory moment. Hence, assuming the same process which took place in the Middle East where Christianity was once the dominant religion.

The religiously based society as an integral part of a person's luggage in their mindset has also influenced their settlement in Sweden. The high number of Assyrians/Syriacs in Södertälje has made it possible for them to exert influence on some socio-political issues in the city. An example is that Assyrians/Syriacs have tried to prevent Muslim migrants from settling in the city. The children of those Muslim families who lived in Södertälje were teased by Assyrian/Syriac children to such an extent the Muslim families decided to leave the city and settle somewhere else. Nahir, a local Assyrian/Syriac politician, says that he tried to explain this problem to his Swedish colleagues working for the municipality when he advised them not to settle Muslim families in neighbourhoods where many *Suryoye* live:

> We came from countries where they [Muslims] were in the majority and greatly oppressed us. We still carry this with us in our hearts. My Swedish colleagues thought that I was a racist when I gave this explanation. I told them that in giving them this explanation, racism was far from my mind. I wanted to make it clear that it was because we have internalized a dislike for Muslims as a consequence of what we had experienced from them in the *athro*.

Gradually, Assyrians/Syriacs have learned that the Swedes do not perceive them as part of one collective group of Christians and that the Swedish Christians live their Christianity differently from the way they do. Moreover, the intensified contact between them has made Assyrians/Syriacs palpably

aware of the differences between the two groups. It was for the first time that they were confronted *en masse* with another form of Christianity which was lived differently from theirs. Interacting with the Swedes, they have gradually understood that being Swedish does not necessarily mean being Christian. Moreover, they have realized that being Christian does not mean following the same Christianity or traditions as that of the Assyrians/Syriacs. In the first years of settlement, Assyrian/Syriac children noticed that the Swedish children did not fast, that Swedish education taught the theory of evolution and that many Swedes did not relate Easter and Christmas to Christianity. These experiences were thought to be too different from their own and therefore 'less Christian'.

In time, the same older generation have begun to place the importance of 'their Christianity' in relation to broader social life into perspective. They make remarks like: '…Nevertheless, they [Swedish] are better than we are.' This can be better understood as a criticism of the (assumed changed) moral values among Assyrians/Syriacs in Swedish society. When judging certain practices among their people, they pose the question: 'What meaning does our Christianity have if we behave this way?' Aspects such as gossiping, criminality and fraud committed by community members are considered evil acts and judged negatively from that perspective – assuming their absence among the Swedes (an indication that they do not know the society well yet).

Besides the Christian religious context in which Assyrians/Syriacs developed their norms and values, so far one of their most important distinguishing characteristics has been that they still retain some traits of what was overwhelmingly a rural society with the closed character of a minority community in the Middle East (see further Chapter 3). Against this background, it is understandable that the aspect of social control has played an important role in such normative mechanisms as 'shame' and 'sin.' Traditionally, people have judged each other according to these two norms (among others). 'Shame' is a secular moral concept, whereas 'sin' is a religious concept. Ideas about what is 'good' and what is 'bad' – have been maintained through social and religious rules. From this perspective, experiencing some Swedish norms and values which were incomprehensible and unacceptable from their perspective, some older generation Assyrians/Syriacs judged the Swedish people saying censoriously: 'They know neither shame nor sin' (*lo kud'i lo 'aybo u lo htitho*). They did not understand the extent of freedom in social norms and the free Christian moral in Swedish society (compared to their own Christian moral). They

developed their prejudices asserting Swedes have too free a sexual morality (referred to by the term *falite*), assumed that this often results (among other things) in divorces, something which does not fit in with their system of norms and values.

Another example taken from their first experiences in Sweden illustrates how the norms among Assyrians/Syriacs have changed over time. Martha (at that time a young girl) reflected on her first summer in Sweden: 'I found the Swedish people very strange at first. Whenever there was some sunshine they would lie down in their swimsuits, which we found strange; we asked ourselves why do these people lie down 'nude'?!' In other words, in their eyes, to see someone sunbathing in a swimming suit was tantamount to seeing someone nude. From their perspective, it could be perceived as a shameful act *and* as a sin, since they came from a society where they had been taught that the body should be covered from both a religious and a social perspective. Nevertheless, with time they have come to an understanding that (as they express it themselves): 'Whether we want it or not, this is how life is here; we shall have to accept it' (*Eb'ina u leb'ina, a haye d-harke haukhane; glozem maqeblinane*). It is an attitude of relinquishing and of accepting the way of life in the society. Not necessarily because they had consciously chosen to do so, but more because of the overwhelming strength and influential power of the surrounding society, which they can no longer resist. Consequently, despite their negative judgement of, for example, sunbathing when they settled, today it has become part of the 'Assyrian/Syriac way of life.' Even elderly Assyrian/Syriac women have begun to go to the beach in their swimming costumes.

In contrast to the older first generation, the younger generations have been more receptive to the internalization of new norms and values in their 'Assyrian/Syriac way of life' (*Suryoyutho*). Their conception of an 'Assyrian/Syriac way of life' has developed in a Swedish context and is concentrated on a future in Europe. It has developed a dynamism born of the relatively intensive and active participation in Swedish society. This goes a long way towards explaining why they are less conservative and more receptive to newly encountered values. When referring to a 'Swedish society', I do not necessarily mean the interactions with the Swedish people. Instead, I refer to the Swedish context in which Assyrians/Syriacs are open to influences which are part and parcel of Swedish society. Often, the Swedish standards have become the new standards for the younger Assyrian/Syriac generations. They may also offer a clue to the differences which have

developed among the same generation of Assyrians/Syriacs living in other European countries. When Assyrians/Syriacs watch programmes on *Suroyo TV* and *Suryoyo Sat*, they often comment on the people they are watching, paying explicit attention to their attitudes and the fashions they affect. They claim to recognize in which country they live, simply from their appearance.

5.5 Diaspora: The Hostages' and Orphans' Dilemma

The mass settlement of Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe – allied with the consciousness that 'the *athro* has become empty' of Assyrians/Syriacs – has developed new reflections among them about the role of the *athro* in their life. The Syriac verb *yitheb* means 'to settle' (somewhere) (Audo: [1897] 1985). The term for foreigner, guest or settler is *tawtobo* and is derived from this verb. The mass settlement in Europe has turned them into 'foreigners'; both from their own perspective, and from the perspective of the receiving societies. Especially in the beginning, they referred to the new areas of settlement as *i nukhrayto* (foreign lands). From their perspective, the new countries of settlement were 'foreign' to them since they identified their roots as being somewhere else: in the *athro* of their ancestors. This reflection indicates that they were very conscious of this geographical change and that it mattered to them.

Their mass settlement in Europe had three main consequences. First and foremost, they migrated from countries in the Middle East where they now reflect on their former position as being that of *yasire* (hostages). Undoubtedly, emigration has freed them from that position. Nevertheless, emigration has disconnected them from their *athro*; they have become uprooted from their homeland. It is from this perspective that they have begun to refer to themselves as having become *yatume* (orphans): 'We have become dispersed in the world as orphans; indeed, we are orphans, what else are we? We do not have a country and we are foreigners everywhere' (*Mbarbezina khda yatume be britho; yatumena ma menna. Latlan athro u bkul duktho nukhroyena*).

The third consequence is that their mass emigration has resulted in a great dispersion; even at family level. The close community ties between them have made them very much aware of this aspect. Among the older generation I heard the expression: '*Khda yatume mbarbezina be britho; Khed lappe d-hemse d-bayzatla bi arho u kul habtho dezza l-khasra*' ('Like orphans who have

been dispersed through the world; like a handful of peas which you throw on the soil, each of them rolling in a different direction'). Underlying this is the idea that the dispersion of the Assyrians/Syriacs all over the world has been caused by an uncommon occurrence, an event which should not have happened: peas (*hemse*) should remain together in the 'hand' (*lappe*) and are to be eaten and not to be thrown on the ground. Because the peas were not treated properly, an uncommon fate befell them. By analogy, the migration took place in a way which led to their worldwide dispersion; this has been so overwhelmingly significant that they feel *yatume be britho* (orphans in the world). They are no longer the close collective they used to be like a 'handful of peas' (*lappe d-hemse*). The aspect of dispersion is also expressed in terms of *tayihina be britho* (we fled and have become lost in the world). *Tayihina* is derived from the verb *tyoho* (to flee, to be expelled) in *Suryoyo*.[479] *Tyoho* implies that its cause lies in a force outside the control of the person who flees – just like peas which are thrown on the ground and each of them disappears in a different direction – culminating in the mass dispersion of the Assyrians/Syriacs. It is also a reference to the emigration which occurred without planning or control; as if an external force sent them into 'the four corners of the world'.

At this juncture, both the act of emigration and the act of settlement 'in foreign countries' (*bi nukhrayto*) are described by the same term *golutho*. The Syriac term *golutho* is derived from the verb *glo*[480](to be taken captive) in Syriac (Audo [1897] 1985: 140). The term *ethgalwi* means 'brought' or 'sent into exile' (Ibid.). Both the terms *galwoyo* and *goluyo* mean 'the one who is taken into captivity.' In daily life, Assyrians/Syriacs use the latter term (*goluyo*) when speaking about a refugee. Although the traditional use of *golutho* means 'place of captivity', in the modern use this idea of being captive in the *golutho* (diaspora) is absent. Instead, the modern idea of *golutho* (diaspora) implies a much greater dispersion of the people and a rupture with the *athro*, and therefore a state of being in (collective) exile. The use of the term *golutho* therefore expresses the implied strong connection to the *athro* and the strong sense of belonging of Assyrians/Syriacs as a collective. Moreover, it stresses that the current state of dispersion is not 'normal.' Nevertheless, the extent

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479 When a woman in *Tur 'Abdin* had a conflict with her husband, she would tell him angrily: '*Gtayhono minukh b-britho*!' (I will flee from you and disappear into the world!).

480 In the Old Testament, these are the Syriac terms used to refer to the captivity of the Jews in Babylon. The definition that Audo ([1897]1985: 539) gives of the term *glo* is 'when a power or people take another people into captivity and make them hostage' (*yasire*).

of dispersion has not stopped the people from keeping in touch. They travel to attend baptisms, weddings and funerals – symbolic events in which they show their connection. Intermarriages between people from different continents help the maintenance of this contact.



Illustration 8: The hostages and orphans dilemma is expressed in this drawing by the autodidact artist Sharro Malke. Photo: Naures Atto.

In the first part of this chapter, I have shown that Assyrians/Syriacs have become aware that the future *athro* is going to be in Europe. Therefore the diaspora has become the main orientation in their lives. Becoming aware of this reality is accompanied by a strong sense of the eternal rupture with their historical *athro*. This culminates in the sense that they have become *yatume* (orphans). It develops into one side of what I call the Hostages' and Orphans' Dilemma (*yasire u yatume*). The other side of this dilemma is that they view their position in the *athro* as that of *yasire* (hostages). The main question in this dilemma becomes what situation should be favoured or what discursive track should be followed: to continue to live as 'hostages' in the *athro* or as 'orphans' in the diaspora? After experiencing this dilemma, Assyrians/Syriacs began to make up the balance for their *'amo*. Depending on their orientations, the elite have developed different approaches in

dealing with it.[481] This dilemma has also been discussed in terms of *fayda u khsara* (gains and losses). In relation to the latter, the dispersion to the 'four corners of the world' is perceived as the first step towards extinction. Many Assyrian/Syriac elite members have referred to their situation in the Western diaspora as one in which assimilation lurks, saying: 'Europe is a deep sea in which you get drowned, whether you want it or not' (*Aurupa yamo raboyo u gmehnoqat ebe; eb'at u leb'at*). Realizing their relatively small, dispersed numbers, they refer to themselves as the little boat which could and which will sink in the future in this big sea which is Europe (*sfitho na'imto b-yamo rabo*). The autodidact artist Sharro Malke in Gütersloh has expressed this in one of his paintings: fleeing from the dangers in the Middle East; ending by sinking into the deep European sea.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the settlement process of Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden. I have argued that the group has perceived Sweden as the 'last stop' in their exodus from the homeland. Consequently, Sweden has become the Assyrians/Syriacs' new 'home'; a shelter from their lesser-known persecution in their historical *habitat*. Therefore, in the process of their settlement, they have oriented themselves as *permanent* 'settlers'.

To conclude, I want to emphasize three main points in relation to their settlement. Firstly, it has shown that Assyrians/Syriacs who have lived for hundreds of years in a subordinated position in their homeland have succeeded in establishing themselves relatively fast in an environment which is in many respects different from that in their homeland. The way they established themselves can be seen as the result of an interaction process between the discourses of the receivers and those of the new settlers. Swedish governmental discourses about the integration of immigrants in society have developed space for the new settlers: *equality*, *partnership* and *freedom of choice*. Assyrians/Syriacs' strong desire to settle *permanently* in the new country and the will with which they have managed to build a new home has been very important in the achievements which the group has realized.

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[481] I shall devote a future article to the further handling of this dilemma.

The second point is related to the discrepancy between the way in which the local authorities have portrayed the relatively dense presence of Assyrians/Syriacs in Södertälje and the achievements of this group in Sweden. I have illustrated that their ethnic enclave, New *Midyad*, in Södertälje has had a positive influence on their development as a group of people. This does not mean that there are no problems which remain challenges to be solved. What I consider to be more important is that they have managed to build up a community life with the resources provided by the Swedish authorities. This is characterized by the increase in their 'capital' in different fields of society (economically, educationally, politically and socially). This strong foundation will be of the utmost importance in the long term. I consider problems which can be detected within the group to be common to society and to be solved by the institutions in charge.

The last point concerns the impact of the dislocation and the settlement process on their identity discourses. As indicated, in this study emigration and settlement in the new country are defined in terms of *dislocation*. This has caused the need for a redefinition of the collective identity of their people, both conceptually and through the representation of a name. In order to understand this process of negotiating their identity in the discursive field in more depth, I shall devote the next chapter to the emergence of the discourses of *umthonoyutho* from a historical perspective.

6 DISCOURSES OF *UMTHONOYUTHO*

In the chapters about the emigration and settlement in the European context, I pointed out that these processes have caused many changes for Assyrians/Syriacs in the socio-political and economic fields. As a consequence of the high number of people emigrating from the homeland (about 300,000 live today in Europe), Assyrians/Syriacs have begun to perceive themselves as a diaspora community. This sense of being scattered grew into the idea of having become a 'dispersed people' (*'amo mbarbezo*), approaching the concept of a 'dispersed nation' (*umtho mbarbazto*) who have become disconnected from the geographical homeland. In the previous chapter, in a broader context I discussed why and how Assyrians/Syriacs perceive this aspect of dispersion as something negative.

The dispersion of their people has obliged Assyrians/Syriacs to reformulate their survival strategies in the new socio-political context of the diaspora. Assyrian/Syriac activists have introduced new discursive strategies and mechanisms to promote the recognition and survival of their people. The activism resulting from the *myth* for survival can be understood in terms of the healing of this *split subject*. Activists stress and sustain the strong sense of collective belonging among Assyrians/Syriacs. In this context, the newly developed concept of the 'Assyrian/Syriac nation' (*Umtho Suryoyto*) has assumed the function of a basis for a new appeal: to be recognized nationally and internationally as a people and to be entitled to national rights in order to survive among other nations (*emwotho*). Different Assyrian/Syriac groups have begun to lobby national governments and international organizations to take the Assyrians/Syriacs into consideration in their policies. 'National rights' assume often cultural, linguistic and religious rights. In a few cases, depending on the context, this may also include the right for autonomy.[482]

In this chapter, I shall go one step farther in an attempt to understand the discourses of *umthonoyutho* from a historical comparative perspective. Progressive ideas about the 'unity' and 'survival' of Assyrians/Syriacs are not

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[482] See for instance the request of Archbishop Ephrem Barsaum at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 (Chapter 2) and the recent discussions about the need for autonomy in Iraq after the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003.

new. An examination of their origins and their development will help to comprehend the discursive practices in relation to the 'identity question' of Assyrians/Syriacs in the European diaspora. It is therefore important to look into early *umthonoyutho* (from the beginning of the twentieth century) and its relationship with the present-day discourses of *umthonoyutho*. I shall illustrate that there is both continuity and change in the discourses of *umthonoyutho* in the last century. In the following, I shall begin by conceptualizing the *logic of umthonoyutho*. Thereafter I shall proceed to look at the emergence and development of these *umthonoyutho* discourses from a historical perspective by touching on the ideas of early *umthonoyutho* put forward by such people as Naum Faik, Ashur Yausef, and others. I continue by discussing the emergence of the Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO, *Mtakasto Demoqratoyto Othuroyto*) in the discursive field in Syria. In the last section, I deal with the hegemonic articulation of these discourses after emigration, particularly in Sweden.

6.1 The Logic of *Umthonoyutho*

Inherent to the *logic of umthonoyutho* has been the process of the rethinking of traditional concepts caused by such processes of modernization as secularization and democratization among Assyrians/Syriacs. Usually, the *Suryoyo* term *umthonoyutho* has been translated by the English term 'nationalism'. Perhaps this is because at the present time, *umtho* (the noun from which *umthonoyutho* is derived) is commonly translated as 'nation'. Historically, the word *umtho* has been used since at least as early as in the twelfth century.[483] Nevertheless, it is not clear what precise meaning Assyrian/Syriac authors throughout history have given to the term *umtho*. What is more important to this study is the use and meaning of *umtho* in the present-day context, which is close to the modern concept of nation.[484] The two Archbishops Behnan of Mosul and Archbishop Matay of Mor Matay in

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[483] See further for the use of *umtho* in the twelfth century, Debié (2009). See also Kiraz (2005), who refers to the use of *umtho* in a colophon of a *Phanqitho* manuscript, scribed by patriarch Nuh the Lebanese in 1504.

[484] The reference to *umtho* is the result of self-ascription. In most cases, for outsiders Assyrians/Syriacs have remained a religious group; they have not been recognized in terms of a 'nation'. The closest they approach this definition is the reference to them as an ethnic group. In discourse theoretical terms, an ethnic group results from the objectivation of *nodal points*. See for two definitions of an ethnic group from two other approaches, Smith (1986: 21-31) and Eriksen (1993: 12, 34).

Mosul approved the consecration of Patriarch Jacob II, saying 'May the Lord make him a blessing for the *umtho* (Dolabani 1929 in Kiraz 2005: 4). Another example which illustrates the use of the term *umtho* in the 19th century is a letterhead (1 January 1875) of Patriarch Ignatius Peter III: '… Ignatius Patriarch of the Apostolic See of Antioch, who is Peter III, over the *umtho d-Suryoye*' (Kiraz 2005: 3). During his stay in *Tur 'Abdin* at the end of the nineteenth century, Oswald Parry ([1895] 2001: 345) observed and recorded, 'The Syrian people – or nation – as they love to call themselves...' This statement leads to the surmise that he had communicated with the elite members of this group and made this observation in that context. Apparently, these 'Syrian people' (as Parry refers to them) communicated their sense of being a 'nation' very explicitly.[485]

Although I do translate *umtho* by 'nation', 'ethnie' or 'people', I find it problematic to translate *umthonoyutho* literally as 'nationalism' because this fails to capture the force of what *umthonoyutho* means among Assyrians/Syriacs in the contemporary context. Therefore I have attempted to arrive at a new definition of *umthonoyutho* and by doing so I aim to reach a broader understanding of this concept in order to be able to use it as an *emic* term in the rest of the thesis. My purpose in doing so is to grasp its meaning when Assyrians/Syriacs use it in everyday life or in the discursive field. Therefore, I have specifically asked my respondents what they mean by an *umthonoyo* (someone who follows the principles of *umthonoyutho*).[486] On the basis of their answers, I have concluded that *umthonoyutho* means 'to sense and express love (*hubo*) for the Assyrian/Syriac people and to dedicate one's life to their care in a broad sense (language, culture, history, homeland and church)'. This presumes an ethno-national awareness because the focus is assumed to cut across denominations and, more specifically, to heal the 'people' after a long period of dislocation as a consequence of having been organized into different church communities. The highly educated professional and activist Aho touches on this in his reference to the secular aspect of *umthonoyutho*:

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[485] A question that should be asked here is what term they used in the language of communication with Parry. If they communicated in Ottoman Turkish they may have used *millet*, which would mean a religiously based nation. But assuming that Parry was well known with this category one may expect that he would not have been surprised by this usage. Therefore they perhaps used a different term.

[486] The term *umthonoyo* (or its plural: *umthonoye*) is used more frequently than *umthonoyutho*. Therefore I expected it to be easier for them to define it.

> If people are *umthonoye*, religion is set to one side. But, if religion is a very strong element, the *umtho* is far less important. For example, if you tell a religious *Suryoyo* person about the *umtho*, they say: "Oh, the most important thing is that Jesus saves us." For my part as an *umthonoyo*, religion is less important.

Generally, individuals who perceive themselves as *umthonoye* expect every Assyrian/Syriac to become an *umthonoyo* and to contribute to the betterment of the situation of their people, on the assumption that they have been 'wounded' in some way or other, as one of my respondents said:

> When we come together, we should heal each other's wounds [*mdarmenina u kewo dehdode*], we should help one another. Then our whole society, all our people will benefit.

Several elite members explicitly said that *umthonoyutho* does not imply that a dislike should be taken to other people (nowadays often implied in the use of 'nationalism'). Some declared that they are not *umthonoye* themselves (meaning not actively involved in activism), but that they can understand and accept *umthonoyutho* among Assyrians/Syriacs. Abrohom, who is a very engaged activist in a broader leftist movement in Sweden, says:

> I am not an *umthonoyo*. But it is normal for a group of oppressed people to be *umthonoye*. However, if a very powerful country is *umthonoyto*, I regard this as a negative fact. But if weak people are *umthonoye* – they are oppressed anyway – in order that their own respect and their own psychological state are boosted, it is good to become *umthonoye*.

Abrohom's citation indicates that *umthonoyutho* has developed the meaning of the struggle for the rights and survival of Assyrians/Syriacs and consequently *umthonoyutho* is articulated in terms of a leftist discourse. In the 1970s, for example, it was a matter of course to see this leftist discourse expressed in the rhetorical discursive practices of the *Assyriska* Movement in Sweden. This was emphatically stated with the first publication of the magazine *Hujådå* on 1 May 1978; an event in which *Assyrier* activists seemed to consider that it was important to participate. In that same year, about 800 *Assyrier* participated in the 1 May demonstration in Stockholm. They carried such slogans as:[487] 'Support the rights of Assyrians in the Middle East', 'Assyrians need political asylum' and 'Assyrians show solidarity with all

[487] My translation of the original in Swedish.

oppressed people of the world.' On that day in 1979, the activist Gabriel Afram said in his speech (*Hujådå*, June 1979):[488]

> The Assyrian Worker cannot be excluded from the International Workers' Movement. The *Assyriska* Workers' Movement will never accept being rubber-stamped as nothing more than a religious minority; neither in Sweden nor in any other country; instead we shall struggle side-by-side with the Swedish and the International Workers' Movement.

This type of *umthonoyutho* approaches the definition of 'patriotism' (from the Greek *patris*), that is as 'love for and/or devotion to one's country'.[489] Among the ancient Greeks, patriotism consisted of ideas derived from language, religious traditions, ethics, law and devotion to the common good, rather than any pure identification with a nation-state (Laqueur 1997: 90). Similarly, the aspect of 'individual responsibility' to the common good (of the Assyrian/Syriac people) is central to the concept of *umthonoyutho*. As I shall illustrate, *umthonoyutho* has not always been explicitly communicated. Instead it can be understood to imply a certain attitude of devotion to the common good of the people. This is the reason why people are referred to after their death as having been strong *umthonoye* – in a reflection of what they did for the people in life. An example of an activist who has been seen as the ultimate *umthonoyo* is Dr Melek Besara. [490] After his death his friends published the book entitled *Dr Melek: a life dedicated to the people. Umthonoyutho* has developed a broader meaning which is not limited to the political sphere, as Hanuno illustrates in his example, it had incorporated activism:

> We began to see anything we did as *fulhono* [activism]. There were two friends who fell in love with each other, but neither set of parents would give their consent and raised objections to the marriage. We helped them

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[488] My translation of the original in Swedish.

[489] See for further reading about Patriotism Bar-Tal and Staub (1999). And for a philosophical discussion of patriotism, MacIntyre (1995).

[490] At that time Dr Melek's family name was still the Turkish name 'Kavakçioglu', resulting from Turkish assimilationist politics and the imposition of Turkish names on all people living within Turkey's territories. A few years ago, the family changed it to their traditional family name 'Besara'. Dr Melek was born in *Midyad*, *Tur 'Abdin*. He studied Medicine in Istanbul and as ADO member he became active in the local Assyrian/Syriac association *MED Kültür Derneği*. He continued his activism in Sweden where he died as the result of an illness in 1996. His friends and family founded the 'Dr Melek Homeland Fund' to commemorate his dedication to his people. The fund helps financially projects in the homeland.

> to elope to Father Bedros[491] who blessed their marriage. We wanted to demolish the old ideas and rules pertaining to getting married. Father Bedros said: "If they love each other, I shall bless their marriage."

In the light of the discussion above, *umthonoyutho* can be seen as a *nodal point* composed of all the ideas and activities directed towards the development and strengthening of the *'amo Suryoyo*.[492] Bearing this use in mind, when I write about nationalism among Assyrians/Syriacs in this study, I shall use the English term 'nationalism'. In conclusion, an *umthonoyo* can be a nationalist but not all *umthonoye* are nationalists in the modern sense of this term. Indeed, not all nationalists are necessarily considered *umthonoye* by the ordinary people; a nationalist project may not be advantageous to the cause of the people.

Eriksen (1993: 6) distinguishes nationalism from ethnicity in its relationship to the state. Where a nationalist argues that political boundaries should be co-terminal with cultural boundaries, ethnic groups do not necessarily demand the command of a state. This changes when political leaders of an ethnic movement do demand command of a state; a move which transforms it into a nationalist movement (Eriksen 1993: 6). In the light of this distinction, it is therefore necessary to say something about the discourses among Assyrians/Syriacs about this aspect. Overall, there is a strong tendency towards finding strategies for maintaining a national cultural distinctiveness and existence, no matter where they live. Hence, the focus is not on a political, geographical area but on cultural rights instead. This has become even more marked after their emigration to Western countries. Consequently, ethnic distinctiveness takes place mainly through culture and far less through a geography which binds a distinct culture together. Simultaneously, at times when elite members find the urgency for autonomy in order to survive as a national group, they may stress this wish, such as in

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[491] Father Bedros dbe Shushe was the first priest to serve in Germany and he shared the *umthonoyutho* of the Assyrians.

[492] In the last few decades, many of the *umthonoye* among Assyrians/Syriacs have identified themselves as 'Assyrian' (but not necessarily all). Initially, to identify as 'Assyrian' meant to adopt an explicit stance for something. The implication was to stand for the common good of the people (at least, from the perspective of the *Assyrier*). Therefore, at the height of activism, to identify as 'Assyrian' implied being an *umthonoyo* and devoting oneself to the common good. Nowadays, it is possible to observe that identifying as 'Assyrian' does not necessarily mean to 'devote oneself to the common good'. A person can be born 'Assyrian' and live an individualistic life, not necessarily explicitly choosing an ideology which is connected to this name and to the core of what this ideology stands for.

the present-day situation of post-Saddam Iraq.

In the above-mentioned definition of *umthonoyutho* (in the sense of patriotism), it is evident that the focus is directed much more towards the people (*'amo* or *umtho*) than towards the motherland (*motho*). In the *Suryoyo* language and in the Assyrian/Syriac cultural tradition, the term 'fatherland' does not exist. Instead, there is the term 'motherland'. Nevertheless, the *Suryoyo* term for 'motherland' (*motho*) and the adjective derived from it for 'patriotism' (*mothonoyutho*) are hardly ever used in everyday life except in poetry about the motherland.[493] Love for the people incorporates or perhaps more specifically implies love of the motherland (*motho*), as one element of the whole. This is probably because Assyrians/Syriacs do not consider that they have hegemony over a country. More specifically, in everyday life they speak about the *athro* (homeland), which has a more abstract meaning than motherland. In poetry, the motherland is referred to as *Beth Nahrin* (Mesopotamia) or *Othur* (Assyria), a symbolic geographical home.[494]

In its more abstract sense, *athro* can be used with different meanings and can be different geographies simultaneously.[495] In a nutshell, the use of *athro* in the contemporary context fits into or accommodates their worldwide dispersion in which Assyrians/Syriacs are denied a distinct national identity and status. The focus of activism has therefore shifted towards the dispersed *'amo* in need, because the dispersion and its consequences are seen as negative, as endangering the *'amo Suryoyo*. Stressing this precarious position, elite members sum up this situation in terms of *Seyfo di mardutho* ('sword of culture'; or, less literally: the 'extinction of culture').[496] This phrase demonstrates and explains that the dangers they believe they encounter in the diaspora differ from those they once faced in the Middle East. In their historical geographies, they perceived themselves as an endangered entity politically because of the few human rights to which they were entitled as a people.

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493 Lewis ([1964] 1994: 75) notes that 'the first stirrings of the new loyalty in the Middle East took the form of patriotism, not nationalism. They were inspired by the example of Western Europe (particularly of France and England) where nationhood and statehood were combined...'

494 Identification with a specific geography is expressed in songs like *Beth Nahrin at ithaik mothan* (Mesopotamia, you are our motherland).

495 See for a discussion about the *athro* a forthcoming publication of mine.

496 *Seyfo di mardutho* is an analogy and reference to the *Seyfo* (here: genocide) of Assyrians/Syriacs during the First World War in Ottoman Turkey.

Assyrians/Syriacs sense that the greatest danger they face in the diaspora is cultural extinction. They fear assimilation which could eventually be the equivalent to total extinction – the threat they once physically faced in the Middle East. This overwhelming fear of extinction is also referred to in the expression *kalan qem nfoso da raghle* ('We are about to draw our dying breath').[497] Assyrians/Syriacs use this expression to express their fear: 'We are on the verge of extinction'. This testifies to the fact that they do not want to give up their distinct existence as a people and fear their (cultural) extinction. It explains why the *'amo* or *umtho* is approached and treated as a 'sick individual' in need of care. *Umthonoyutho* can be seen as the medicine which is believed to be the cure for this 'sick *umtho*'.

To conclude, although the term *umthonoyutho* is used among Assyrians/Syriacs as a *nodal point* with a fixed meaning, in the field of antagonism it may at times also be a *floating signifier* and thus implying different meanings simultaneously. One of the archbishops in Sweden indicates this non-fixity and its relationship to the maturing of Assyrian/Syriac institutions:

> The *Umthonoyutho* of today will mature [*gbeshlo*] one day; and the sons of our people will grow up... Meanwhile our institutions still have to develop a great deal; they have 'just put their pan of food on fire'.

The temporary absence of a fixed meaning allows space for political discourses to compete for charging the meaning of what 'for the common good of the Assyrian/Syriac people' really is and therefore, what *umthonoyutho* means in a specific discourse.

6.2 *Umthonoyutho* from a Historical Perspective

To achieve an understanding of *umthonoyutho* in its discursive form in the Western diaspora, I shall commence by discussing the rise of the ideas on which it was built about a century ago. This historical aspect will allow a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of *umthonoyutho,* the discourses of nationhood and identity, and the antagonistic relationship between the present-day discourses.

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[497] Literally, *nfoso da raghle* means 'death throes' or 'jerking feet'. In everyday life, this expression refers to the situation in which the feet of someone who is about to die begin to jerk uncontrollably.

6.2.1 Early *Umthonoyutho*

Umthonoyutho, more specifically ethno-national consciousness, among Assyrian/Syriac elites as a contemporary modern concept must have been developed in some form in the nineteenth century.[498] The English scholar O. H. Parry, who lived among the Assyrians/Syriacs for a short period at the end of the nineteenth century, describes them as 'intensely patriotic and tenacious of their creed'. In the mid-nineteenth century, the American Protestant missionary Horatio Southgate ([1844] 2003: 80) made an observation about the Assyrians/Syriacs living in Kharput about whom little is known. He writes that the Armenians used the designation *Assouri* to refer to the Assyrians/Syriacs there in 1844: 'I observed that the Armenians did not know them under the name which I used, Syriani; but called them *Assouri*, which struck me the more at the moment from its resemblance to our English name Assyrians, from whom they claim their origin, being sons, as they say, of Assour (Asshur)...'[499] It was the era in which new ideas about a national identity were rapidly taking root in the geography of the Middle East. Until then, there was little need for identification along ethnic lines in the religious-based *millet* structure of the Ottoman Empire. In this burgeoning of their ethnic and national consciousness, the people in the Ottoman Empire had been influenced by nationalist ideas which had developed in old medieval empires and colonies and spread all over the world as new 'imagined communities'. Buttressing what Benedict Anderson (1983) in his seminal work *Imagined Communities* points out as the role of newspapers and novels in the rise of 'imagined communities' as nations in the eighteenth century, the new discursive space was more or less shaped by educational and editorial activities.

In the rise of discourses of *umthonoyutho* among Assyrians/Syriacs, it is certainly possible to trace the role of the printing press and the accompanying educational role among especially the elite from about the end of the nineteenth century. Elite members developed a discursive path of *umthonoyutho* as a response to the developments in the socio-political context

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[498] The first name of Ashur Yausef, 'Ashur', is a name which was not at all common at a time in which people focused mainly on their religious identity. According to Agopian (2010) who studied a biography of Ashur Yausef in Armenian, by Ezekiel Maldjan 1921), Ashur's birthname (1858) was 'Abraham'. He may have changed it to 'Ashur' at an older age.

[499] 'Sons of Assyria' can also be read on the placard which is carried by Captain Abraham Yousef (who originated from Kharput) in the July 4th Parade in Worcester (Massachusetts) in 1922 (see further Donabed 2003).

of a crumbling Ottoman Empire, which provided an open space for the articulation of new discourses. This is the moment for the rise of the national 'awakening' of different groups in the Empire. Assyrian/Syriac elite members began to translate books into their mother tongue, and published a whole gamut of magazines, newspapers and books, wrote articles about the history, unity, religion and church; they threw themselves into literature, wrote analyses of their people's situation and so forth. It was a common practice among them to place a strong emphasis on the importance of their people's education. In this sense, they assumed the position of *malfone* (teachers). Likewise as *snighre* (lawyers), they struggled for their people's rights. Unequivocally, the roles they assumed illustrate an obvious top-down, elitist (intellectual) activism. This activism among Assyrians/Syriacs is specific for this period. Later in this chapter I shall illustrate that due to dislocatory changes the *umthonoyutho* discourses have been picked up by the ordinary Assyrians/Syriacs in the European diaspora and transformed in the antagonistic discursive field.

The fact that Assyrians/Syriacs had space to run their own institutions in bigger cities of the Ottoman Empire allowed them to lay the foundation for this. In 1879, Assyrians/Syriacs in Diyarbakır had already established an organization which they called the *Süryani Kadim Kardeşliği*[500] (Ancient *Suryoye* Brotherhood) (Gabriela Yonan 1985: 33). In 1881 they founded a grammar school of which Hanna Sirri Ceqqi was the director.[501] Although he is not well known today, he is considered to be among the first *umthonoye* in the homeland. Naum Faik[502] (1868-1930), who has become the symbol of early *umthonoyutho* and an example to his present-day successors, was one of the students at this school. In 1909 Naum Faik and other intellectuals founded a

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[500] This brotherhood organization was called after the name of their *Süryani Kadim Millet* (Ancient *Suryoye Millet,* established in 1882). 'Ancient' was added in order to make a distinction between this church community and the *Süryani Katolik Millet* (established in 1843).

[501] After eight years the school was closed for political and financial reasons.

[502] His original name was Naum Elias Yacob Balakh or Palak (as some spell it) and he was born in what is now Diyarbakır. He had a flair for languages: Syriac, Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Kurdish and English. From 1888 to 1912 he taught in Diyarbakır. In 2009, the Diyarbakır Sur Municipality Council decided (9 December) to change name of the street *Pusucu 1. Sokak* into *Naum Faik Palak Sokak* (in the *Ziya Gökalp* Quarter). In the same year, the Kurdish mayor of the Sur Municipality, Abdullah Demirbaş, who was responsible for this change, was sentenced to a two-years imprisonment for committing 'language crimes'. Demirbaş had published a booklet about Diyarbakır in different local languages with the idea to reach the people with the different backgrounds.

literary society *Al-Intebah* (Awake). His poem[503] *Ett'ir bar Othur Ett'ir* gives an indication of his ideas at that time:

Awake son of Assyria, awake.
And see how the world is enlightened.
The chance has flown [from us].
And time has ebbed swiftly.
Awake son of Assyria, Awake!
In enlightenment shall we take refuge.
To exaltation shall we fly.
If we do not awake we shall face misery.
Awake son of Assyria, Awake!

The emphasis in this poem is on the 'awakening' of the people, who resemble a slumbering body which assumes a need to be awakened. A second central point is articulated in the sentence 'Rise up and band together to strengthen'. The *myth* of unity is formulated as a condition for gaining strength in relation to other already 'awakened' nations.

The goals of the literary society *Al-Intebah* were to spread these ideas among the people, to organize the church and to re-establish the grammar school. In the Zafaran Monastery (Mardin, Turkey), Naum Faik had the opportunity to dig deep into the literary works in the Patriarchal library and to use the press.[504] The fact that in 1909 (up to 1914) the first Assyrian/Syriac magazine in America was published with the same name as that of the literary society – *Al-Intebah* – is by no means an accident, as Gabriela Yonan (1985: 39) remarks. This is a pertinent clue to the continuation of their ideas and their relationships. The contents covered such themes as history, language, church history and general news. It was written in *Garshuni* (Ottoman Turkish in Syriac script).

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503 The original was written in Syriac and appeared in one of the issues of *Kawkab Madenho* which was published between 1910 and 1912. I thank Michael Suroyo for his assistance in the translation into English. This poem was used for the lyrics of a song which was recorded by Elias H. Boyaji.

504 One of the Patriarchs received this press from Queen Victoria (1819-1901) of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

Between 1910 and 1912, Naum Faik and Baschar Hulmi Boreji[505] published their first magazine named *Kawkab Madenho* [506] (Star of the East) (Yonan 1985: 35).[507] The themes of the articles related to different aspects of the people: the church, literature, history, language, church history and news. After Naum Faik fled to America (Paterson, New Jersey) in 1912,[508] its publication was stopped. Nevertheless, in America he continued his work by contributing to *Al-Intebah*. It was closed down after he began publishing two new magazines, namely *Beth Nahrin* (Mesopotamia) and *Huyodo* (Unity), between 1916 and 1929.[509] Its name (*Huyodo*[510]) is probably an indication of his desire for the national unity of the Syriac Churches. After 1912, Boreji began publishing a new magazine called *Shifura* (Trumpet), which continued until 1915 when the *Seyfo* struck Diyarbakır and affected it so dramatically. Another magazine which was published in 1913 and 1914 in Mardin was *Al-Hikma* (Wisdom). This was a church-oriented magazine whose editor was Michael Hekmat Ceqqi.[511]

Another early *umthonoyo* who continues to play a symbolic role today is Ashur Yausef (1858-1915).[512] From 1910 to 1915 he published the monthly magazine *Mürşid-I Âsûriyûn* (The Assyrian Guide) mainly in Ottoman Turkish[513]. Ashur Yausef was among the first Assyrian/Syriac intellectuals to be assassinated in Kharput during the *Seyfo*. In the last letter he wrote in prison to his brother, Hanna Yausef in America on Monday 20 April 1915, he says:[514]

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505 Instead of 'Boreji', the spelling of his name might have been Boyeji (painter).

506 Another magazine with the name *Kokhva* (Star) had already been published in Urmia in 1906.

507 It came out twice a month and was spread mainly among the Assyrian/Syriac congregation in Diyarbakır. They used *Garshuni* (Ottoman Turkish in Syriac script).

508 The Golden Jubilee publication of the Assyrian National School Association (1949) mentions that he emigrated in 1911.

509 While in America, he translated many works into Syriac and wrote others, including poetry. *Huyodo* was produced in five different languages and three scripts: Eastern and Western Syriac, Arabic, Garshuni (Syriac in Ottoman Turkish) and English.

510 The magazine *Hujådå* in Sweden is named after it.

511 He used the press in the Zafaran Monastery to publish it.

512 Ashur Yausef was born in Kharput, Turkey, in 1858. He was educated at the Central Turkey College in Ayntab and taught in different places, among them the American Euphrates College in Kharput, Amasia, Smyrna and Antioch (Donabed 2003: 113).

513 See for a bibliography of Assyrian/Syriac periodicals in Ottoman Turkish, Trigona-Harany (2009).

514 A section of the complete letter as appeared in Seffer (no date: 18-19).

> *…for I know we will be cut to pieces when we leave here, though I do not know when and where. Do not worry over my death – it is God's will – I am going to Heaven to protect the rights of the Assyrians at the presence of the biggest and greatest Judge. The books and the work I had started about our nation's education remain unfinished…*

Leaving aside the heroic character of the letter, reading between the lines it is possible to discern the characteristics of the discourses of *umthonoyutho* at that time. A central idea in the letter is 'I am going to Heaven to protect the rights of the Assyrians in the presence of the biggest and greatest Judge'. The strong emphasis on the education of the 'people' and the protection of his people's rights are central elements to his discourse. It is essential that his ideas should be contextualized in the light of developments in relation to ideas of nationhood in the broader geography.

Another group which should be mentioned in this context is that of Assyrians/Syriacs who had fled to America from Diyarbakır in the period of the massacres of 1895 and 1896. In their new country they still concerned themselves with the cause of their people back home. In 1899 the Assyrians/Syriacs in the area of New York and New Jersey met at Sterling in New Jersey with the idea of establishing a social and cultural association. In 1900 Gabriel Boyayji (Boyaji) had just arrived from Diyarbakır and had informed them about the situation back home. As a new member, he advised them to work to establish a school in Diyarbakır.[515] At Boyayji's suggestion, it was called the *Assyrian National School Association* (ANSA) (Kass-Elias and Safar 1999).[516]

The activities among the Assyrians/Syriacs in Adana (Turkey) are also important in interpreting the later developments in the diaspora. Assyrians/Syriacs who had established themselves in Adana around 1910 took the initiative to establish a church and the school[517] *Terraki Medresse Süryaniye* (TMS, Progressive *Suryoyo* School). It was probably the first modern

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[515] They agreed to raise money for the school. It is possible that the grammar school which was founded in 1881 and closed in about 1890 was re-opened then. After the *Seyfo*, the goal of the association broadened its scope to assisting needy Assyrians/Syriacs worldwide. The association realized that survivors had fled to safer areas or areas where they could make a living (see further Kass-Elias, Safar 1999).

[516] ANSA has played a considerable role in the education of orphaned Assyrian/Syriac children and others in need. Nowadays ANSA has been renamed *The Assyrian Orphanage and School Association of America*.

[517] From an interview with the son of a family who moved to Adana from *Midyad* around 1910. Two rich individuals among them financed the school (Sa'do Maqsi-Elyas and a member of the Dbe Shakkere family).

Assyrian/Syriac school in the twentieth century.[518] During the *Seyfo*, Assyrians/Syriacs living in Adana were better off than their relatives in *Midyad*, where most of their population was killed.[519] In 1919, just after the *Seyfo*, they enlarged the school by building an orphanage for the children who had lost their parents during the *Seyfo*.[520] For political reasons, the school and the orphanage were closed down in 1921, to be re-established later in Lebanon.[521]

The monk Yuhanon Dolabani[522] (the later Archbishop Mor Philoxinos Yuhanon Dolabani in Mardin, 1885-1969) was one of the teachers at the school in the period after the *Seyfo* until it was closed in 1921. According to Abrohom Gabriel Zsaumo (1988: 185), who was a student at the orphanage, the church hierarchy forbade Dolabani to express his patriotic ideas in writing after church representatives returned empty handed from the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and lost their hope for being able to do anything for their people in Turkey. Father Bedros Dbe Shushe (Germany) mentioned to a respondent of mine that Dolabani informed him that he had been excommunicated in that same period for six months, for the same reason as Zsaumo mentions. Another source which indicates this indirectly is the magazine *Leshono d-Umtho*[523] in which Dolabani published some of his

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[518] It should be remarked that the original name was Arabic, while the abbreviation is pronounced in Syriac as *Tau, Mim, Semkad* (TMS). Besides theology, Syriac language and literature, physics, chemistry, maths, French, Arabic, and Turkish were taught.

[519] See further about the *Seyfo* in *Midyad*, Gaunt (2006) and Beth Sawoce (2006) for oral stories in *Suryoyo* (*Surayt*).

[520] Assyrian/Syriac orphans from different places in Turkey came to this orphanage and attended this school. The French High Commissioner and the *Assyrian National School Association* both financed the orphanage.

[521] France was planning to leave Turkey. Therefore Assyrians/Syriacs no longer felt protected. Since Lebanon still remained under French mandate, in consultation with Patriarch Elias they chose Lebanon as the new location for the TMS School.

[522] Dolabani was born in Mardin. He attended the local Turkish school. Afterwards he resided in different monasteries in *Tur 'Abdin* and Mardin. In the Zafaran Monastery he continued his intensive study of Syriac. From the time he spent in the Zafaran Monastery, he made good use of the press to publish the works he wrote. In 2007, a biography of Mor Philoxinos Yuhanon Dolabani with the writings from his diary and some of his poetry was published by the Assyrian Youth Federation and the Assyrian Federation in Sweden (Dere and Isik 2007).

[523] *Leshono d-Umtho* was published between 1 February 1927 and 15 March 1933; the first six months it appeared monthly and later semi-monthly. According to Abrohom Nuro (1967) its publication continued until 1946.

umthonoye poems anonymous.[524] Contemporary members of the elite praise him for his personal integrity as a spiritual man and for his *umthonoyutho*.[525]

Without going too deeply into the question of how Assyrian/Syriac elites identified with the ancient Assyrians and Arameans, it is useful to touch on it to sum up some of the main characteristics of this *umthonoyutho* in the early twentieth century. This is important in order to illustrate the historical change in the discourses of *umthonoyutho*. In 1910, Naum Faik (quoted in Trigona-Harany (2009: 126) expressed himself as follows in relation to an Aramean and Assyrian past in his magazine *Kawkab Madenho*:

> If those who do not trust in this truth examine our *Süryânî* [*Suryoye*] millet, then first of all they shall see a low, base and unimportant place in society for this people which derived from the stock of those once worthy of names *Asûrî* [Assyrians] and *Arâmî* [Arameans] and which later split into five groups – the *Süryânî*, Nestorians, Chaldeans, *Süryânî* Catholics and Maronites – out of ignorance and zealotry.

One can also detect indications of identification with both Assyrians and Arameans[526] in the poetry of Dolabani. Nevertheless, in the present-day *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* elite members often refer specifically to those writings of Archbishop Dolabani which fit in their ideology. The *Syrianska* activist Ken'an refers for example, to Dolabani's book *Kthobo d-Yauno* (1916), where he writes: '... *Rhimo Oromoyo yadid*' (Dear beloved Aramean). For Ken'an, Dolabani included 'Arameanness' in the concept of *Suryoyutho* and concludes thus that Dolabani identified as 'Aramean'. In contrast, the *Assyrier* have recourse to references indicating Dolabani identified as

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[524] See for instance the poem *Ulitho d-Motho u samo d-Haye* (Lamantation about the nation and medicine of life) (Dolabani 2007: 309). This same poem was published anonymous in Hackverdi (1928). The first stanza is as follows (my translation from the original in Syriac): How can the sons of the nation be sent into exile?/How can they accept any form of oppression?/As if they were sons of foreigners.

[525] His assistant during 1953-4, Ilyas Shahin, mentioned two examples to me from which he drew the conclusion that Dolabani was an *umthonoyo*. Firstly, when he heard that the magazine *Sefro Suryoyo* was about to be published in Aleppo, Dolabani had asked Ilyas Shahin to thank them for sending it, to congratulate them and to encourage them to continue its publication. Secondly, Dolabani continued to receive the magazine *Asociacion Asiria* (*Hdonoyutho Suryoyto*) by Farid Nuzha (Argentina), despite the fact that Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum had excommunicated Nuzha.

[526] See, for example, the first two lines of the first stanza of Dolabani's (2007: 298) poem *Neshono d-Othur* (The splendour of Assyria) where he writes: 'I am a brilliant Assyrian, I am a bright Aramean (*Othuroyo no nasiho, w o Oromoyono sahiho*).' This poem was sung in the Assyrian Orphanage in Adana

'Assyrian'. For instance, the teacher of Syriac Eliyo refers to a poem which Dolabani wrote when he was a monk: 'My bones would stir in my grave if someone were to come to my last resting place and plant the flag of Othur on my sepulchre' (*Neq'un garmai men qbur, kad tihe eman Othur*). Another indication of the presence of identification with an Aramean past is the name chosen by Sanharib Balley for the magazine *Savto*[527] *d-Oromoye* (Voice of the Arameans).[528] Furthermore, Trigona-Harany (2008: 11) notes that the nineteenth century Ottoman Archive reveals the idea of an Aramean descent among the Assyrian/Syriac people.[529]In 1910 the use of the name *Arameans* is also to be found in two poems (by Jacob Saka of Bartelleh and by Anton 'Abd al-Nur of Mosul) which were sent to Naum Faik to congratulate him with his magazine and which he published in *Kawkab Mdenho* (No. 2: 4) (Kiraz 2005: 8).

Dolabani's biography (Dere and Isik 2007: 83) contains a photograph which shows the orphans in the orphanage in Adana and to the right of them a blackboard on which is written in Syriac: '*Yatme d-Othuroye da b-Qiliqi…'* (Assyrian Orphans in Cilicia, 11 April 1920).*[530]* It is remarkable that even in Syriac language, instead of the commonly used name *Suryoye*, they presented themselves as *Othuroye* (Assyrians). This gives a clue to the way they identified themselves in that period at this school. Students from this school explained that 'Assyrian' functioned as the national name of their people, on the basis of the ideal of unity between the different Syriac churches. The late musician Gabriel Assad, who was one of the pupils at the school in Adana, is considered to be among the first who had already begun to compose secular music in the 1920s.[531] In an interview with Gabriel

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527 The pronunciation of the word *Savto* is *Sawto*, from the Arabic *saut*.

528 See further Trigona-Harany (2008: 49). Trigona-Harany (2009: 153) mentions that some decades later Balley referred to this magazine in his personal notes as *Savto d-Othuroye*. MARA has one magazine with this latter name.

529 See for the idea prevalent among the readers of *Mürşid-I Âsûriyûn* (1913) that the *Suryoye* are of Aramean descent also Trigona-Harany (2008: 90). See further about the idea that Suryoye are Aramean descent, Trigona-Harany (2009: 125-6).

530 See for various images of the orphanage, the cover of this book.

531 It is striking that around this time the same kind of patriotic songs were written, composed and sung among Assyrians/Syriacs in America. The three-page score *Assyrian Patriotic Songs* by Nimrud Ashur Hoyen (1924) is an indication of this (see further Donabed 2003 and 2006).

Afram for *Radio Qolo* in Sweden, he said that his *umthonoyutho* inspired him to make music:[532]

> In Adana, all our teachers taught us about the Assyrians; that we had a people, a country, a government, kings… and this influenced me. And, as you know, we were also cut down and slaughtered and we became refugees. This also left its mark on me. As soon as I had mastered music, I began to express my *umthonoye* ideas…[533]

Students who had studied at TMS dispersed worldwide and were among the first Assyrians/Syriacs to share *umthonoyutho* discourses, strongly based on a national belonging as Assyrians. This explains to a great extent the dominant identification as Assyrian before it became to be fought by community members who alternatively expressed identification with an Aramean ancestry.

To conclude this section, among others, Ashur Yausef and Naum Faik played a crucial role in the early twentieth-century *umthonoyutho*. Central to the ideas of *umthonoyutho* in this period was the national education of their people in order to awaken in them consciousness of their distinct ethno-national identity among other peoples. As Naum Faik's poem illustrates, the 'awakening' and education should be seen in the discursive field of that time: 'Awake and see how the world has become enlightened.' Later in this chapter I shall illustrate that present-day elites have built their identity discourses on early ideas of *umthonoyutho*. However, I shall show that the present-day antagonistic context has allowed space for elites to be selective in the elements which they chose to build on from early *umthonoyutho*, leading to the creation of particularistic discourses and paths.

6.2.2 The Idea of 'Unity'

The need to forge 'unity' among their people was a central *nodal point* around which the early discourses of *umthonoyutho* were organized and this has not changed. This is what the 'awakening' I pointed to in the section above referred to: the general development as a people, including the *unity* between

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[532] Interview received digitally from his son Sardanapal Asaad. It is also available in the Gabriel Asaad CD Collection 'An Assyrian Pioneer' (2006).

[533] Besides his own lyrics, he also used lyrics by Archbishop Yuhanon Dolabani and by the *umthonoyo* Yuhanon Salmaan.

the different Syriac churches[534] under the umbrella name 'Assyrian' which would represent their people's national identity in the new political arena emerging in the era of the crumbling Ottoman Empire. The denominational differences between the Syriac churches no longer mattered. Instead, they defined their shared cultural, religious, linguistic and ancestral background as the main characteristic of their *ethnie*. Keeping up with modern developments, they used the press to make their ideas known among the people. I shall illustrate further in this chapter that this primordialist approach has been picked up by the later generations.

The historian Trigona-Harany (2008: 86, 127 and 2009: 145-146), who studied primary sources by Ashur Yausef (*Mürşid-I Âsûriyûn*) and Naum Faik (*Kawkab Madenho*) in Ottoman Turkish, writes that (before 1915) when they used *unity* these authors limited the meaning to that between the Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic and Syriac Protestant Churches. In addition, he argues that the principal function of this *unity* would be to strengthen their own *millet* in relation to that of the Armenians. Trigona-Harany states that the idea of broader unity had come from the Assyrians/Syriacs who had settled in America, where they began to develop contacts with the Assyrian Church of the East[535] and with the Chaldean Church. According to him, this was the germ of ideas of creating unity between all the Syriac churches. Moreover, he argues that only after the *Seyfo* would Naum Faik's focus have broadened to include the Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Church and the Melkite Church.

Although I have not studied the works by these authors, which were published in Ottoman Turkish, I would question Trigona-Harany's hypothesis that, prior to 1915, *unity* to Ashur Yausef and Naum Faik meant that of only the three mentioned Syriac Churches. They might have mentioned these churches specifically for reasons deriving from their direct context and local urgent aims. In relation to this, questions might be raised about how Assyrian/Syriac elite members who identified with an Assyrian ancestry could limit the identification solely to the Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic and the Syriac Protestant Churches. If so, what role did the identification with an Assyrian ancestry play in the pre-*Seyfo* period? How can

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[534] The Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean, the Maronite, the Melkite, the Syriac Orthodox, the Syriac Catholic and the Syriac Protestant Churches. Although the further splits in the churches are not mentioned specifically, they are implied.

[535] Trigona refers to this church as the Nestorian church.

we explain that the children at the Assyrian/Syriac orphanage in Adana had already learned to identify with all the Syriac churches in the first three years after the *Seyfo?* And the same question can be asked about Naum Faik's mission statement for his magazine *Beth Nahrin* in 1916 (Çikki[536] 2004 in: Trigona-Harany 2008: 100), which reads:

> Our goal is not to show how learned we are, but to serve our vatan [motherland[537]]… for all brothers of the Süryani to come together under a single umbrella. These brothers are Nestorians, Chaldeans, Maronites, Catholics, Protestants… I remind these groups that their past, their race, their blood and flesh, their tongue, their vatan are all that of the Süryani… We must work to exalt the name of the Assyrians… Our primary goal is to secure the rights of the Assyrians.

Also Kiraz (2005: 9) indicates that the editorial of the fourth issue (1910) of Naum Faik's *Kawkab Madenho* lists the names of several Syriac Churches under one umbrella.

Ashur Yausef and Naum Faik have continued to play a central role among Assyrian/Syriac *umthonoye* in the diaspora to the present day. Their ideas of *unity* have reached 'the four corners of the world' through the natural dispersion of their people. About two decades after Naum Faik's death, the Golden Jubilee (1899-1949) publication of the *Assyrian National School Association* writes of him: 'He served as advisor to the nation; and held the rank of archdeacon in our Church.' This assumes his devotion to both the secular and religious aspects of the collective identity of their people. No doubt, the ideas of these two intellectuals have been reinterpreted and employed by the people in the different contexts (as I shall illustrate in the following chapters). At the one-year commemoration of Naum Faik's death in 1931, the *umthonoyo* David Barsaum Perley[538] gives his interpretation of Naum Faik's (in the quotation: Naoum Palak) *umthonoyutho* (Perley in Jakki 1936):

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536 In some literature his name is spelled as *Jakki*. His name is pronounced as Chëqqe.

537 The translation of *vatan* with 'motherland' is mine. Trigona-Harany translates it as 'fatherland'.

538 Perley was one of the founders of the *Assyrian American National Federation* in 1933. The Simele Massacre in Iraq in the same year had inspired Assyrians in America to found it. On its official website it states: 'The Assyrian American National Federation strives to unite the Assyrian Nation by protecting and promoting the progression of Assyrian culture, education, religion and humanitarian rights.'

> …The present five religious divisions of our nation may well be likened to the five fingers on one hand. Let each finger represent a single division of the nation. The fingers are not unrelated. They inter-depend and for forceful action they must be brought together into a unified whole that is called the 'fist'. If we could produce an army dedicated to the practice of this principle and consecrated in the doctrine – whose chief exponent was Naoum Palak – that freedom of conscience in the matter of religious worship, and true loyalty to nationalism are ideas not in conflict with one another, we shall be able to build a new emancipated and intellectual Assyrian commonwealth. True that by an accident of birth, he was a Jacobite, but in his heart of hearts, Naoum Palak was a true Assyrian, as well. His loyalty to his church [Syriac Orthodox] did not interfere with his loyalty to his nation. Such was the *philosophy of his nationalism* [emphasis mine]. His whole life was a solemn proclamation of these principles. It was a militant effort to uproot the old and to re-fashion our new ways and ultimately to arouse in us a sense of national unity. Religion is personal rather than institutional, ethical rather than ceremonial, democratic rather than patriotic.

Perley talks about Naum Faik's *umthonoyutho* in terms of 'nationalism'. It is unclear what connotation the word 'nationalism' had for Perley in the 1930s. He may have used it in the meaning of *umthonoyutho* (patriotism) or in a meaning closer to the contemporary interpretation of 'nationalism'. Otherwise, Perley's argumentation in this quotation speaks for itself. His idea of nationhood and that of ADO, which would arise in Syria approximately three decades later and establish itself in Europe in the 1970s, are fairly close. Central to the discussion is their cross-denominational approach for creating unity between the different Syriac churches in order to arrive at a national definition of their people. This proximity in discourse is an indication of the continuity of ideas from a historical perspective.

This idea of *unity* is also to be found in the writings of the *umthonoyo* journalist Farid Elias Nuzha (1895-1971) in Brazil. Born into a family which had migrated from Kharput (Turkey) to Hama in present-day Syria in 1760, he emigrated to Argentina at the age of seventeen in 1911 (Shapera 2003). In Buenos Aires he joined with other community members to found the *Centro Afremico Asirio* in August 1934. They also launched the publication of a monthly magazine *Asociacion Asiria*[539], of which he became the editor.[540]

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[539]It's Syriac title was *Hdonoyutho Suryoyto*, which I would translate with 'Unity of the *Suryoye'* or '*Suryoye* Association'. In Arabic it was called *Al Jami'ah Al Suryaniya.*

Examining the title of this magazine, it seems he uses *Suryoye* synonymously with 'Assyrians'. As Shapera (2003) notes, Nuzha had an inclusive approach to the denominational names used among the different Syriac churches. This reveals a rather tentative beginning to progress towards his goal: the unity of these churches. Therefore the inclusion of all the names of the different Syriac Churches and to call for *unity* could be interpreted as a strategic act. This situation is different from the present-day, more exclusive and particularistic approach taken by the majority of *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* activists in Sweden who choose for either *Assyrier* or *Syrianer* and reject the use of other names (although there are some changes and an increasing diversity in this).

I would like to refer to an article by Nuzha (1939[541]), written in reaction to a letter which he received from a member[542] of the Syriac Orthodox Community in Mosul, in which the latter objected to the use of the name *Asiria* (Assyria): [543]

> Once, one of our most honorable and ardent writers wrote to the editor of *Asociacion Asiria* saying: "Eliminate, correct or change the Spanish name of your magazine [*Asiria*], because this is an abhorrence to our country's government since it means Assyrian [*Al-Ashori*]"… He [Nuzha] said: "I would ask the honorable writer, even if your illustrious ruler dislikes the name Assyrian, does your nature and the dignity of your nation and church allow you to change this for something different, just for the sake of the gleam in your prince's eyes, to make him happy? What would you do if your dictatorial master said to you, tear down the cross from the door of your church and the Christian community is forbidden to ring the bells? What you would reply to him if tomorrow he were to say to you that Syriac teaching runs contrary to the official education system?" You are not expecting such disasters to happen! However, since you have submitted to him subserviently and in a cowardly manner that will encourage him to embrace immoderation in his oppression and absolutism. Tomorrow he will say to you "Hey you Syriacs[544] …if you are faithful to your country and government, the only way in which you can

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[540] Publication was initially only in Arabic. Later he included writings in Syriac and in Spanish.

[541] *Asiria*, 1939: 10, 5th year, No. 2.

[542] According to one of my respondents, this was Ne'mat-Allah Danno.

[543] The English translation from the original in Arabic is by Shapera (2003). Corrections for English style are added by me.

[544] Shapera has translated *Suryoye* as Syrians. Throughout this thesis, I have translated *Suryoye* as Syriacs and therefore also in this citation.

> show that you are loyal and obedient is to exchange your Syriac language for Arabic". Then, what will you reply to your government? If Syriac means nothing more than a religion or a denomination, I can truly state that we have no further need of it. You, as a "great master, expert and defender of Syriac", must say that Syriac is a nation and ethnicity not a religion and denomination. A religion or faith can be shared by many nations, as our status is shared with Copts and Ethiopians, but there is no sharing ethnicity. If we deprive our people of their ethnicity, what is left to them? I am sure you will say: "Religion". I say, they can obtain the same religion from somewhere else, from Egypt and Ethiopia and that what is happening is a consequence of your teachings. If we teach our people that Syriac is a real science, a name for our ancient nation and explain its historical nobility, you will see how much they will adhere to this name and they will be proud of it; no matter how critical the times and how deadly the conditions are.
>
> …However, if that choice of the name Assyrian refers to those who had rejected a merger with or coalescence with Arabism and resisted oppressive governments, so that they were consequently subjected to murder, persecution, looting and all kinds of injustice and horrors…[545] that is an exceptionally great honor for them. Future generations will often commemorate that martyrdom and will remember these disasters committed by the foes of God and humanity as long as there is still a human being on this earth.
>
> Syriac Writer [Farid Nuzha][546] (Buenos Aires, February 1939)

Nuzha's reaction to the 'honorable writer' from his community in Mosul as the editor of *Asiria* expresses several elements which are central to his ideas about the identity of his people. Nuzha strongly rejects an attitude of compliance to the request by the Iraqi authorities not to use the name 'Assyrian'. In his argumentation, he indicates his fear that such an attitude might lead to the Arabization of his people – which he clearly opposes. He then continues by rejecting the idea that ethnicity can be equated with religion and, following from this, that identification with his people's denomination alone is not sufficient to express a distinct collective identity, because it is not unique only to them as a group. He ends his letter by strongly advocating the use of the name Assyrian despite the danger of

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[545] This is a reference to the Simele Massacre in Iraq, 7 August 1933. See further Chapter 4.

[546] He did not sign his name to this piece, perhaps as an expression of humility.

persecution. He even goes as far as ascribing a heroic role to victims of such persecution. In short, he advocates a cross-denominational national identity, no matter whether the designation *Suryoye* or Assyrian is used. This indicates that he uses these names synonimously. In his eyes, the meaning imbued in these names is more important. The citation also demonstrates the involvement of Middle Eastern regimes – on which I shall elabourate in the next chapter.

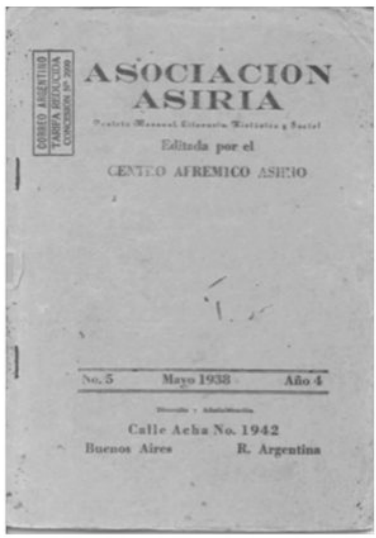



Illustration 9: The front and back cover of Farid Nuzha's *Asiria*.

The similarities between the ideas of the different elite members discussed are not accidental. There is a clear *continuity* in the *myth* of *unity* in order to survive as a people, which functions as a central *nodal point*. *Unification* assumes nation building. The dispersion of Assyrians/Syriacs from the territory of the former Ottoman Empire – both before and after the *Seyfo* – resulted in the natural dispersion of discourses of *umthonoyutho* and thus, the *myth* of the need for *unity*. It is possible to think specifically of the orphans at the orphanage school in Adana, but there were also other educated elite members who had absorbed ideas of *umthonoyutho* and settled elsewhere in the world and received each other's magazines. Another indication of the relationship between discourses of *umthonoyutho* at the beginning of the twentieth century and today is that new magazines which have been published in the diaspora are called after some of the magazines which were

published in the homeland.[547] Furthermore, early *umthonoye* are portrayed as the symbols of the Assyrian Movement or as the 'nation's men'.

6.2.3 The Decree of Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum about the 'Correct Name'

Despite the fact that there are still many gaps in the research into the early discourses of *umthonoyutho* and the 'name use', a strong preference for the designation 'Assyrian' in English is apparent until (at least) the beginning to the mid-twentieth century. That is, for example, expressed in the designation which was used to denote the official name of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Northern America at the beginning of the twentieth century. [548] Until the mid-1950s, the designation 'Assyrian' was used in the official name of the church and the community institutions (Aydin 2000, Donabed 2003: 8, Donabed and Makko 2009: 80). *The Shorter Catechism of the Assyrian Orthodox Church*, written by the then Archbishop of Syria and Lebanon, Ephrem Barsaum, in 1950 is another indication that the name 'Assyrian' was also used in the church (see Illustration 10).[549] Kiraz (2005: 11) notes that the reason for the use of 'Assyrian Orthodox' in the name of the Church was due to the fact that the name 'Syrian Orthodox' was already in use by the Greek Orthodox Church (*Rum*) from Syria. The latter could not use this name because there existed already a Greek Orthodox Community from Greece. This illustrates clearly the relational character of group identities. In the second half of the twentieth century, it was Archbishop Samuel who went to court, requesting the Greek Orthodox from Syria to change their

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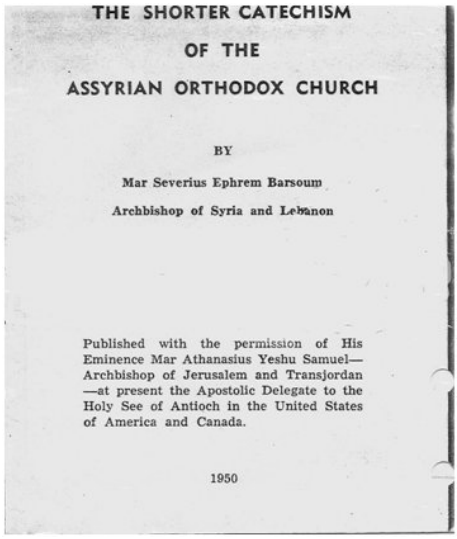
[547] Publication of *Al-Hikma* recommenced in Jerusalem (1927-1931) under the aegis of the brother of the first publisher, Murad Fuad Ceqqi. Its new sub-title was 'A religious, literary and historical monthly review'. The same title, but this time in Syriac *Mghaltho d-Hekhemtho* (Magazine of Wisdom), was used by Archbishop Yuhanon Dolabani in Mardin in 1952. Another example is the monthly *Hujâdâ* (published by the Assyrian Federation in Sweden) and named after Naum Faik's *Huyodo*.

[548] Aryo Makko (unpublished paper) mentions that the first Syriac Orthodox Church in America was established under the name *Assyrian Apostolic Church of the Virgin Mary* in 1907. Watson (1923) writes that in 1919 the Assyrian Jacobite Apostolic church was built in West Hoboken, NJ. See for an article about these events, the Quarterly magazine of the Assyrain Orthodox Church of Virgin Mary, winter 2011. In the abovementioned name from 1919, 'Assyrian' functions perhaps as the national name, 'Jacobite' refers to the denomination and 'Apostolic' to the historicity of this church.

[549] The cover of the publication mentions that it was published with the permission of Archbishop Yesuh Samuel. More research is needed to be able to say anything about the use of the other names, such as Syrian and Aramean in the American context in this period.


THE SHORTER CATECHISM
OF THE
ASSYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

BY

Mar Severius Ephrem Barsoum
Archbishop of Syria and Lebanon

Published with the permission of His Eminence Mar Athanasius Yeshu Samuel—Archbishop of Jerusalem and Transjordan —at present the Apostolic Delegate to the Holy See of Antioch in the United States of America and Canada.

1950

Illustration 10: Cover of 'The Shorter Catechism of the Assyrian Orthodox Church. Source: ARS.

name so that his community could make use of the name 'Syrian Orthodox' again.

Reading through the writings published in two booklets by the *Assyrian National School Association of America* on the occasion of its Golden Jubilee in 1949 reveals that the *emic* name *Suryoye* is translated throughout by Assyrian. Only in three cases did this diverge. The former Director of the TMS orphanage in Beirut, Fawlos Gabriel (who had studied at this orphanage himself) refers to his people as 'Aramean people', although one can find strong identification with an Assyrian past and identification as Assyrian in his poetry which he published in the magazine *Leshono d-Umtho* about two decades earlier in Beirut. This indicates a change in his ideas. In the series of the magazine *Leshono d-Umtho*, he published five poems and one article, in which he laments the great and glorious past of the Assyrian Empire and contrasts it with the present enfeebled position of his people. Nevertheless, he did not seem to have lost his faith that the situation of his people could be improved and urged them in his writings to unite and strengthen themselves in various ways. One example is taken from his article *Othur ethmol yaumono [u]lamhor* (Assyria, Yesterday, Today [and] Tomorrow) (Gabriel 1929):[550] O ye scattered sons of Assyria let us bind up the wound of fallen Assyria (*O bnayo zriqe d-Othur tau nehsub mhutho d-Othur tbirto*).

The two other cases concern the titles of the Archbishops who had sent in a message for publication: 'Youhanna Dolabani, The Syrian Metropolitan in Turkey' and 'Athanasius Yesuh Samuel, Syrian Archbishop of Jerusalem and Transjordan, Apostolic Delegate to the USA and Canada'. Nevertheless, in the texts which they wrote, they referred to the people as 'Assyrian'. These two examples give grounds for concluding that they used 'Syrian' in these two specific situations to refer to the church and that they use 'Assyrian' to

[550] My translation of the original in Syriac.

refer to the national identity of the people. In the other writings in this publication, the lay authors also refer to the church by the name Assyrian. The fact that Fawlos Gabriel specifically used Aramean in his text, whereas all the others used Assyrian, shows that there were elite members who used the designation Aramean as a national name in this period. Nevertheless, there does not seem to have been a strongly overt animosity between the two groups. This is another indication that early *umthonoyutho* had a far less antagonistic character, as is the case today among protagonists of both names.

In America and Canada especially, the use of the name 'Assyrian' began to be exchanged for 'Syrian' after a decree promulgated by Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum[551] on 2 December 1952.[552] Until 1952, there is no indication that Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum opposed the use of the name Assyrian.[553] Earlier in 1952 Archbishop Mor Athanasius Yesuh Samuel had settled in America and became the Archbishop for America and Canada. Following up this patriarchal decree, he became instrumental in the name change. To reinforce this decree, Ephrem Barsaum published the article *The Syrian Church of Antioch: Its Name and History* (1952). The introduction to the article is written by an anonymous community member in America who indicates that a disagreement about the name of the community had arisen around about 1951 and, as a consequence, Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum was approached to 'shed light on the path' of his church members:

> …We had never thought that the day would come when we would have to prove to ourselves that our name is authentic and valid. However, it is fortunate that this proof has actually become necessary for our Syrian followers in a foreign land where they were isolated, and so not well-furnished with true and well-based information about their own Church and community, its language and its history…

The author of the introduction writes: '…he [Patriarch] is the authority and the only heir to possess the right to talk about his own Church.' This

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551 On January 30, 1933, he was formally elected Patriarch of Antioch, assuming the ecclesiastical name of Mor Ignatius Ephrem I. Barsaum.

552 At present, with the exception of the Assyrian Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary in Paramus (New Jersey), the names of all the churches have been changed.

553 See further for the several occasions on which he had used the name 'Assyrian', the article by William Warda 'Assyrian Heritage of The Syrian Orthodox Church', available at: http://www.christiansofiraq.com/joseph/reply2.html

anonymous author approaches his community as a church in contrast to those community members identifying as Assyrian and whose starting point is a cross-denominational identity. Moreover, he clearly appeals to the Patriarch's position or authority in the use of his preferential name for his people.

In this article, Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum commences with the sentence: 'The Syrian Community was known from its beginning as the Aramean Community.' It is striking that he makes his main antagonistic standpoint in relation to the use of the name 'Assyrian' at the very beginning of the article. He begins his argumentation by referring to different sources (Biblical, Syriac Orthodox, Assyrian Church of the East and Western). In his argumentation, his principal focus is on sources which equate 'Syrian' to 'Aramean'. In short, his thesis is that the ethnic descent of the *'amo Suryoyo* can be traced to the Arameans and not to the Assyrians.

Following Ephrem Barsaum's decree in 1952, the names of the churches in North America were changed from 'Assyrian' to 'Syrian' in the years thereafter and, since the American census of 2000, 'Syrian' has begun to be changed into 'Syriac'.[554] It draws the attention that the 'name change intervention' was limited to the USA and Canada. For example, the marriage certificate of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the quarter Karaköy of Istanbul, continued to use in English 'Old Assyrian Church' until at least 1979.[555] This first church intervention is one example which shows how important the role of the clergy has been in the debate about the name of the people. Representing the most institutionalized discourse among Assyrians/Syriacs, by this 'decree' the Syriac Orthodox Church made a studied hegemonic intervention and dislocated the dominant cross-denominational discourse about the identity of the people. Understanding the role of the Church or the clergy in the 'name debate' therefore constitutes a key element in reaching a deeper understanding of the identity of Assyrians/Syriacs as a *split subject*. In the next chapter I shall illustrate how the *Syrianska* elite has made use of this main initial intervention by the Church in the 'name debate' in Sweden.

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[554] Archbishop Clemis Eugene Kaplan and Archbishop Cyril Aphrem Karim directed a letter to their community members in the USA, informing them to spell the name of their people as Syriac and not as Syrian at the American census of 2000.

[555] This document is to be found in Beth Sawoce (2001, section in Turkish). See further for the use of the name 'Assyrian' in English in the Syriac Orthodox church context in Istanbul in the 19th century, Illustration 3 – 'Pera the Assyrian Church of the Holy Virgin'.

While in the USA and Canada the name 'Assyrian' lost space to the use of the name 'Syrian' in the 1950s, in the same decade in Syria, the process was reverse. 'Assyrian' began to gain a symbolic political meaning in the healing process of the *split subject* after socio-political changes in the discursive field in Syria. In the next section I shall process with a discussion of the emergence of ADO in this new discursive field.

6.3 The Emergence of the Assyrian Democratic Organization

In any discussion about *umthonoyutho* it is impossible to overlook the role of ADO in the revitalization of *umthonoyutho* in the homeland and its consequent emergence in the diaspora. I shall begin with an overview of the emergence of ADO in *Qamishlo* in Syria. In many respects, *Qamishlo* is an important place which aptly illustrates the continuity of discourses of *umthonoyutho* after the genocide during the First World War. Originally, *Qamishlo* was founded as a refugee camp under the rule of France for those who had escaped persecution (see further Chapters 3 and 4). My respondents describe *Qamishlo* as an empty, desert-like area with only a few scattered houses when they moved there in larger numbers after the *Seyfo* at the beginning of the twentieth century.[556] They explain proudly how since their settlement they have managed to develop this once barren area into a lively town. Under French mandate, elite members from such towns as Diyarbakır, Adana and Mardin took the initiative and established Assyrian/Syriac schools and churches.[557] A central figure among them was Shikri Çarmukli (originating from the village of Çarmukli near Diyarbakır) who had graduated from a university in Istanbul. He was also one of the people who took the

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[556] *Qamishlo* used to be the outskirts of the town of *Nsibin* which is located in present-day Turkey.

[557] The people who had emigrated from the villages in *Tur 'Abdin* had never had any experience of the setting up of modern institutions. Consequently they played a less crucial role in the foundation of these modern institutions. Respondents mention that at a certain period there were about fifteen schools teaching the curriculum up to the grammar school level (*baccaloria*). Besides the common national curriculum, they taught the Syriac language and religious classes. A song written by the late Archbishop Dolabani that was sung in the classes at that time was *En shofron l-nosh sobrotho li, lo shofron akh madrashto* (no matter how beautiful castles are, they will never equal the beauty of the school). I remember I also learned it in the *madrashto* (church school) in *Mzizah*. This song is recently published by the *Assyriska Kvinnoförbundet* (2008).

initiative for the foundation of the association *Rafidayn* in 1934.[558] After having been shut down for some years, the *Rafidayn* association was re-established in 1944.

My respondents speak with pride about the success of this association through the diversity of activities it established, for which it won a high reputation throughout Syria at that time: scouts, orchestra, sports club and others. The character of the early *umthonoyutho* in the *Gozarto* (which was expressed among other things in the activities above) changed when the French mandate of Syria ended in 1946. In this post Second World War era, many colonized countries became independent, either by waging a war of independence or through the withdrawal of the colonial powers. This process of de-colonization aroused an ethnic or national awareness, often expressed by discourses of nationalism. To speak in terms of discourse theory, de-colonization caused a dislocation and created an *empty space* for the emergence of new subjects. For Assyrians/Syriacs, just as it happened in the *dislocation* after settling in Syria itself, this meant a new *dislocation* and therefore a new orientation in the socio-political context in which the different groups and ideologies could begin to compete for new positions in the social field.

Consequently, while *umthonoyutho* was expressed in cultural and educational terms at the beginning of their settlement in Syria, about four decades later (1960s) *umthonoyutho* begins to develop a political character with the foundation of ADO as an underground organization whose goal was the representation of Assyrians/Syriacs' national aims.[559] Given the political context, ADO might be designated a political organization. The circumstances would weight more heavily than its concrete activities, because the latter assumed rather a cultural character. In this discursive field, the Baath party which was founded on April 7, 1947 (one year after Syria's

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[558] *Rafidayn* is the Arabic term for *Beth Nahrin* in *Suryoyo* and *Mesopotamia* in Greek. The choice of the Arabic version might be an indication that the Arabic language had not yet assumed an antagonistic status in relation to the *Suryoyo* language.

[559] At its website ADO states:

'The Assyrian Democratic Organization is a national, political and democratic movement having for objectives the safeguard of the existence of the Assyrian people and the realization of its legitimate national aspirations (political, cultural, and administrative) in its historic homeland. The Assyrian people is the living and uninterrupted continuity of the people and the civilization of Mesopotamia (Beth Nahrin) under its multiple denominations and through all of its historical periods: Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Chaldean, Assyrian, Aramean and Syriaque [Syriac]. All of these denominations are national denominations under which our people were known in Mesopotamia in the historical context peculiar to each one of these denominations.'

independence, April 17, 1946) gained representation in the Parliamentary elections in 1954. After it became a member of the government in 1956, it had an instrumental function in merging Syria with Nasser's Egypt in the United Arab Republic in 1958 (which came to an end already in 1961).

Discourses of Pan-Arabism and the politics of Arabization have increased, especially since 1963 under the rule of the Baath Party. In this policy, the Arabic language was accorded a central role. President Nasser of Egypt defined an Arab as anyone whose mother tongue is Arabic. Pan-Arabism can be analysed as a new hegemonic articulation of nationalism in the post-colonial period. In practical terms, this could mean that, within a relatively short period of Arabization politics, all inhabitants in Syria could begin to be defined theoretically as Arabs. The hegemonic articulation of Pan-Arabism was based on the idea of the unity of these 'Arabs' (within a *chain of difference*) and of the exclusion of those who did not identify themselves as 'Arabs' (within the *chain of equivalence*). This new approach has exerted an extensive influence on the political, social and cultural life of Syria. Among other minority groups, Assyrians/Syriacs (as far as they opposed the assimilation politics) also found themselves caught in the constitutive outside and began to fear for their existence as a distinct group of people. The fact that in the three preceding decades (under French mandate) they had enjoyed a period in which they managed to flourish socially, culturally and religiously, they were now confronted rather abruptly with having to destroy what they had built up. Meanwhile, they were expected to begin identifying as Arabs. Aho, who was a young boy at that time, recounts his experiences:

> After 1957, when Syria and Egypt developed a close co-operation, the pressure on the *Suryoye* increased. Little by little we grew more afraid. *Non-Suryoye* began to adhere strictly to their Muslim religion and their Arab-ness... I was young, but I noticed at home, for example, that my family began to be afraid. They said: "If they [*Mukhabarat*] hear this, they will come and take us. The system of the *Mukhabarat* had just then been established. They [Assyrians/Syriacs] also became afraid for their language, religion and identity. At this point, thoughts that we should not forget our language and identity began to stir...

In 1955, a year after the Baath Party gained representation in Parliament, a group of *umthonoye* founded the *Committee for the Love of Church and Language*

(*Si'tho d-Rehmath 'Ito u Leshono*).[560] Several respondents mentioned that initially *motho*[561] (motherland) was also included in the name of this committee.[562] But, for reasons of safety they excluded *motho* from the name because by 'motherland' they obviously meant a geographical territory different to Syria. Sharro, who was involved, mentions that the committee was actually founded as a political activity but it was connected to the church in order to keep its character and principal aim secret. The patriotic poetry and songs which emerged from the activities of this committee in co-operation with other *umthonoye* supporters had a visible influence on the literature and music of Assyrians/Syriacs and their social life.

The struggle for hegemony between different political parties in the 1950s also created the goal among Assyrian/Syriac students of doing something for their people to safeguard their existence in this new antagonistic field. This resulted in the foundation of ADO in *Qamishlo* on 15 July 1957.[563] The emergence of ADO can therefore be seen as a response to the hegemonic articulation of Pan-Arabism.[564] A second-generation activist of ADO reflects:

> The first group consisted of about twelve youngsters who used to meet together. And there was also Shikri Çarmukli. We call him the "spiritual father of the *umthonoyutho* in the Gozarto" [*babo ruhonoyo du renyo umthonoyo bi Gozarto*]. Youngsters discussed their need for a party [*gabo*] with him and with one another...

As a consequence of the vacuum in the form of any political organization of its own, ADO became known as *The Organization* (*i Mtakasto*).[565] Among its

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[560] Among them were the poet Shabo Bahe and Yuhanon Qashisho, the composer Paul Mikhael, Hanna Ablahad and others.

[561] Some respondents said that it was the word *umtho* (nation) which they excluded from the title of this committee. The reason might have been that *motho* is no longer used very often today. Instead, the term *umtho* is much more commonly heard.

[562] Based on this initiative, the poet Yuhanon Qashisho wrote the song of which the first stanza is as follows: '…Eras will come and go, all three will remain there until the end. / The church, the language and *Beth Nahrin* will be on the lips of children.' (*O rehmath 'itan tobtho / Wam'alyath l-darkho tobtho / Kmo d-hobrien d dore o-ethen / Tlothe l-'olam kayomien. / 'Ito, leshono u Beth Nahrin, / 'Al sefotho dabnayo ho d-khirien*).

[563] It set up branches in the cities *Hasake*, Aleppo and Damascus, and across the border in Lebanon and Turkey.

[564] See for an elaboration BarAbraham (1997).

[565] The fact that ADO gained the informal status of *The Organization* indicates that it did not

founders there were members of the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church. This was in acceptance with the aim to function as a national, hence cross-denominational organization. Although Assyrians/Syriacs had already established several educational, cultural and religious institutions of their own, these were not represented in a political discourse. In its 50th anniversary booklet ADO states (2007: 26):[566]

> The establishment of ADO in July 1957 was a response to a national necessity imposed by the political, intellectual and cultural activism prevailing among our people, and also as a logical development in the context of the national movement striven for by the Assyrian people, driven by the inspiration of the first pioneers [such as Ashur Yausef, Naum Faik and Farid Nuzha], who cultivated the idea of nationalism. Moreover, belief in the national unity of our people as well as the attainment of their national rights in the homeland has constituted the basic stimulus for the establishment of ADO.

The explicit statement of the need for national awareness and existence has remained a *nodal point* around which ADO has continued its work. Central to its ideology is the reconciliation of the schism which developed in the Syriac-speaking Christian community in the fifth century (see further Appendix 1). This is based on the concept that the members of the different Syriac churches can be considered the same people ethnically, or to put it a different way, that they share the 'same roots'. *Ethnicity* refers to relationships between groups whose members consider themselves distinctive (Eriksen 1993: 6). Taking this starting point of a shared ethnicity, ADO aims to 'awaken' the members of the various Syriac churches so as to realize national unity and to struggle for the existence of their people's distinctive identity and national rights in the new political arena bristling with antagonistic discourses. This builds on the assumption that the unity of the nation has been historically interrupted. Reflecting on the status quo so far among the ordinary people, one of the Syriac Orthodox archbishops in Lebanon said to me: 'We as a people *did* have an *umtho* (nation), but the people were not bothered about it. They were more religious and spiritual.' Similar to ADO, this clergyman speaks about the *umtho* in primordial terms. To 'awaken' the

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have many Assyrian/Syriac competitor organizations. This could be explained by the underground character and the political field in which it functioned.

566 ADO explained its ideas in the booklet *Iddihat l-fikriye*. Unfortunately I have not had access to this publication.

ordinary people would mean to plant in them the seeds of the idea of a shared 'primordial essence' with members of the other Syriac churches. It is the first step for a further objectification of their national identity. Similarly, Gellner (1964: 169) refers to the awakening of nations to self-consciousness as the invention of nations where they do not exist.

After the *Rafidayn* association was closed down by the authorities in 1962 and the same fate befell the primary and secondary Assyrian/Syriac schools in 1967, fear of what was going to happen in the future mounted.[567] These institutions symbolized the development of Assyrians/Syriacs on a secular basis, something which early *umthonoye* and the ADO had been advocating for. My respondent Aho says:

> ...fear that the authorities would harm us and that we were likely to be deprived of our rights. Why? Because we placed our hope in the church. When the leadership of the church obeys the authorities and bows its head to them, our hope vanishes.

From about the mid-1960s (in order to accommodate the new political situation), *umthonoye* began to assume the form of more intensive co-operation under the aegis of the church to legitimize activities which were otherwise forbidden and formerly organized by the *Rafidayn* association. The church board had established several committees in different fields.[568]

As already indicated, although ADO considers itself a political organization and has employed a politically motivated discourse, especially in the first decades its activities have been rather of cultural character. One of the reasons for this may have been that, until the beginning of the 1990s, it worked underground, forced to do so by its illegal status. Since then it has not considered itself an underground organization; but neither is it a recognized organization by the authorities. A former member of ADO who now lives in Germany reflects about its character in the early years:

> At that time we did not know who the leaders of ADO were; there was a secret committee [*si'tho rozonayto*]... When I was about 13 years old, around

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567 At the beginning of the 1990s, Assyrians/Syriacs were permitted to open some primary schools and after 2003 some secondary schools. But in Damascus no schools have been re-opened after they were shut down in 1967.

568 Among them were: Committee *Mautbo Umthonoyo* (Patriotic Board), Committee *Sefro d-Had Bshabo* for teaching Syriac, Committee *Ahutho* for organizing cultural activities in the hall of the church, Committee for the Scouts, Committee for the Poor, Women Committee and others.

> about 1964, I joined ADO. Each group of five people working together were grouped in a *krulto*[569]. This was safer than working in a big group, since ADO was illegal. I remember that we were very afraid… hahahaha [laughs], I don't know why we were so afraid; we were young! They probably taught us to keep it top secret. What we learned in these groups was about such people as Naum Faik, about our Mesopotamian history, about our language. They made us proud of our people. Until that time, we probably identified ourselves predominantly as Christians. But they [ADO leadership] taught us who Ahiqar, Hammurabi and other kings were.

Despite the difficulties arising from its illegal status, ADO managed to continue contributing to the cultural awareness activities (including the encouragement of art and language) and education: people began to teach Syriac more explicitly, invested in the development of modern secular music,[570] poetry, theatre[571] and folk dances (which they learned from the members of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church in the *Khabur* area at the beginning of the 1970s resulting from the closer cooperation following from a shared ideology), installed new national days, such as the celebration[572] of the Assyrian New Year on 1 April (*Ha b-Nison*) and the commemoration of the 'nation's distinguished men', such as Naum Faik on 5 February. The efforts of ADO resulted in the first recording of folk songs, which in fact meant love songs, in the year 1968. Until then, the secular songs produced since the 1920s by Gabriel Asaad had been in Syriac and were of a rather classical and patriotic character. Gabriel Asaad was the only one producing music until his student, Paul Michael, joined him in the 1950s. The people learned these patriotic songs during events taking place in churches, associations and schools. At the end of the 1950s they began to be recorded by Yusef Shamun and Evelin Dawud. Also the folk songs began to

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569 *Krulto* in *Suryoyo* means 'circle'. A *krulto* is a committee and in the case of ADO it consisted of five people.

570 Until then it was very limited. Not much research has been conducted into the reasons for this. In modern times, it was common knowledge among Assyrians/Syriacs that it was 'not done' to sing secular songs in *Suryoyo* or Syriac because of its 'holy, religious' status derived from Christianity. For this reason, they had been inviting local singers from different backgrounds to sing at their weddings in languages other than *Suryoyo*.

571 George Farag, today a theatre and film director, poet and singer, began to write the first plays in the *Suryoyo* language.

572 The first celebration of *Ha b-Nison* in modern times was in Urmia (Iran) in 1956. See further about this tradition, Paulissian (1999a, 1999b).

be recorded in this period. In order to make them accessible to the ordinary people the initiators decided that they had to be sung in *Suryoyo* (instead of Syriac which was less accessible for the ordinary people). Habib Mousa was then a young boy who sang in the church choir where he was believed to have the best voice. Therefore he was chosen by ADO activists to sing the songs of their first musical production. Today he is referred to as the 'King of the *Suryoyto* Song' (*U malko di zmarto Suryoyto*) because of his influence in the field of secular music.

Some of my respondents also mention that besides identification as Assyrian there were also individuals who identified themselves as Aramean in the *Gozarto* in the middle of the last century.[573] One of the early members of ADO (who lives in America today), explains about the initial process of building up this organization and about negotiating the name of their people and ancestry with different individual activists:

> I remember that when I was a member of ADO, we had a meeting with some people who had not yet become members. Nevertheless, we tried to attract them. They did not want to [join]. They said they wanted to establish an Aramean organization. They did not know that we were members of ADO. We even helped them to establish an Aramean organization. We replaced the name Assyrian with Aramean in the papers we had. We began to work with them. At least it was better than allowing them to be Arabized. A couple of years later, these people came to us and told us: "We are *Othurmoye*." They combined both names, arguing: "We are both *Othuroye* and *Oromoye*, since we [*Suryoye*] are mixed and we are not able to say whether we are solely *Othuroye* or *Oromoye*." After a while, once the activities [*fulhono*] became more politicized, those who called themselves *Othurmoye* became active in ADO. You can see that they went through different phases. But there were also people in ADO who had personal problems with some other members and left it for those reasons. They founded new *Suryoye* organizations. Others remained and continued

[573] One of the members of ADO remembers, for example, that the two Chaldean Archbishops – Augin Manna and Tuma Audo – thought differently about this: the first identified with an Aramean ancestry, the latter with an Assyrian ancestry. Usually, those adhering to the name Assyrian were identified as the followers of the school of Shikri Çarmukli, while those who tended to identify with the Aramean name had organized themselves around the church of Mor Paulus. Although I have tried to gain more insight into the ideas of the people organized around Mor Paulus Church, I have not been successful. This might be a consequence of the fact that it was a smaller group or less well organized and determined. It certainly requires further investigation. Respondents mention that individuals adhering to the Aramean name emerged more visibly from the beginning of the 1980s, at the instigation of the Syrian authorities in opposition to those who identified as Assyrians.

> to call themselves *Oromoye*. The *Suri Qawmi* party [Syrian Social Nationalist Party] made use of this and tried to convince people that *Suryoye* are of Aramean descent, because the Arameans used to inhabit Syria...

Although ADO worked underground in Syria, it managed to open branches first in Lebanon[574] (1960s) and later in Turkey (1970s), where the socio-political context also had a highly antagonistic character. In Turkey, the discourses of *umthonoyutho* were drastically dislocated during the genocide of the First World War. Thereafter, the period until the 1960s could be defined as a period of 'silence' in political and socio-cultural terms. The discourses of *umthonoyutho* (at cultural level) were lived, expressed and articulated at the individual level, mostly under the roofs of monasteries. This changed in the 1960s. The direct link with *Qamishlo* and the impact of the 1960s leftist movement in general encouraged Assyrian/Syriac students who were studying in the big cities in Turkey to organize themselves. More specifically, the institutionalized forms of *umthonoyutho* in Turkey were made visible after Assyrian/Syriac students in Istanbul had become members of ADO in Syria at the beginning of the 1970s. *MED*[575] *Kültür Derneği* (their first association in the Turkish Republic), which had been founded as early as 1962, had functioned until then just as a social club. After ADO's involvement, their activities were based on the idea of cross-denominational unity and the promotion of Assyrian/Syriac culture.[576] After the *coup d'état* of 1980, it was shut down by the authorities.

As mentioned above, another group which would play a dominant role in the 'collective identity debate' of their people in the diaspora is formed by students from monasteries in *Tur 'Abdin* and Mardin. Although as students in the monasteries they had less space in which to organize socio-cultural activities, they did have access to the political debates taking place in society through the media. Moreover, they were among the few who had access to both the ancient Syriac manuscripts and modern literature which functioned

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574 *Jem'iye Athuriye Thaqafiye* (Assyrian Cultural Association) was the first association founded by ADO in Lebanon in the 1960s.

575 See further about this association, Oussi (1998: 13, 14), Akdemir (2009: 150, 151).

576 They organized, for example, activities in the different Syriac churches in Istanbul to induce some exchange and awareness of unity among its members. Students who returned to *Midyad* from Istanbul founded the *Midyat Kültür Derneği* in 1970. Although it was shut down by the authorities after two years, its members had been influenced by ideas of *umthonoyutho*. One of its members published the magazine *Qolo d-Tur Abdin* (Voice of *Tur 'Abdin*). He stopped it after receiving political threats and migrated to Sweden.

as a source of their inspiration in developing ideas of a distinct nationhood. Among their teachers were those who studied at Syriac Orthodox monasteries in Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s. Although it was not part of the regular curriculum, secular folk songs also began to be taught and sung alongside the hymns. Ilyas Shahin, a former student of the Zafaran Monastery and assistant to Archbishop Dolabani during 1952/3, remembers the students singing these songs, especially at each reception of the Archbishop Yuhanon Dolabani in the beginning of the 1950s:

> We did not learn anything [explicitly] about *umthonoyutho*. But we sang: *Beth Nahrin at ithaik mothan*, [*Beth Nahrin*, you are our motherland], *ett'ir bar Othur ett'ir* [Awake son of Assyria, awake]... We sang them but, because we were young, we remained unaware of their precise meaning. When Archbishop Hanna and the church board arrived [at the monastery], we sang to welcome them... At the end of the reception, with [the later] Archbishop Çiçek and another friend who had a very good voice and lives in Australia now, each of us stood on either side and sang antiphonally: *ett'ir bar Othur ett'ir*. The second person would answer him: *ett'ir bar Othur et'ir*.[577]

A great number of these students at the monasteries and at universities in the Middle East settled in Western countries and became the intellectual elites of their people in the diaspora. Considering the rather relatively low educational level of the ordinary people (especially those in Turkey), their role as teachers, clergymen, university graduates or professionals became even more central. They were those who had had access to earlier writings of the *umthonoye* which I discussed earlier in this chapter. And thus, they were the ones who interpreted and disseminated ideas about the identity of their people.

6.4 Discourses of *Umthonoyutho* in Sweden

I shall commence this section with a discussion of the emergence of *umthonoyutho* in the European diaspora which has been closely modeled on earlier *umthonoyutho* in the homeland. This discussion is also important for the analysis of the antagonistic discourses which developed as a reaction to these earlier discourses of *umthonoyutho* – which will be dealt with further in the

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[577] See further for this poem by Naum Faik, Section 6.1.1.

next chapter.

In the light of the initial function of the first Assyrian/Syriac association (*Assyriska föreningen i Södertälje*) (see further Chapter 5), the majority of the individuals on the board were relatively young, had developed a rapid command of the Swedish language and often worked as interpreters.[578] As board members, they functioned as the representatives of their people in dealings with the authorities. Considering the central role of the name debate in this group, their role has been crucial indeed to the development of it. In their position as interpreters, they commonly translated the *emic* term *Suryoye* as the Swedish *Assyrier* (Assyrians).[579] Among the translators there were individuals who were members of or sympathizers with ADO; some of them were already members in the Middle East and some were new members. The dislocation which occurred after emigration and the inevitable changes it incurred necessitated the finding of new identifications in their presentation of themselves to the new others. Moreover, it was the right moment to introduce new ideas to the ordinary Assyrian/Syriac people. The commonly used term *'amo* (people, *ethnie*) began to be defined more broadly and to be used interchangeably with *umtho* (nation), fitting a more political discourse in the broader context after dislocation. [580]

They presented themselves to the Swedes as a 'stateless people' and the introduction of the designation *Assyrier* to represent this 'stateless people' involved the 'teaching' of a whole programme of rethinking their denominational approach to their collective identity (differently from what they were used to and from what they were supposed to in the Middle East). In Europe, besides the elite, also the ordinary people were actively included in this process. As discussed in the previous chapter, identification as Christians could not function as a viable boundary between themselves and the new 'others' in Western countries. A secularly based national ideology

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[578] Up to the present day, there is no mistaking that individuals who were among the first interpreters have continued to play a central role in the community life.

[579] But, before them, as discussed in Chapter 4, the first group which arrived in Sweden was presented to the Swedish authorities as 'Stateless Assyrians' by Mr Sims (Acting Chief of the Resettlement Section, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees) in July 1966.

[580] In everyday life, the term *'amo* in *Suryoyo* is used with the meaning of people or *ethnie*. The term *umtho* implies more explicitly defined boundaries than the term *'amo*; it has a more political connotation. As a newly introduced idea among the ordinary people, speaking about the *umtho*, people will have to make explicit what the boundaries of this *umtho* are (see further Chapter 9).

was needed to develop a new boundary of distinction between them and the Westerners among whom they began to live. This could be found in the cross-denominational Assyrian ideology (which had already had that function in Syria where it was a counterbalance to Arabism): in which the different Syriac churches are seen as daughters of an ancient nation. The purpose of their activism is to reverse the split which occurred about 1400 years ago in order to heal their nation which they firmly place in *Beth Nahrin* (Mesopotamia), a geographical area to which the first *umthonoye* had referred at the beginning of the twentieth century. This allows space for their claim to be a different people from the current majority populations who identify with the nation states in the Middle East. Thus, also in Europe the name 'Assyrian' continued to function as a way to seek recognition as a people.[581] On its website, the *Assyriska riksförbundet* explicitly states that it strives to safeguard the use of the designation 'Assyrian' and that it works for the ethnic recognition of this people by Sweden and the United Nations. Scholar and ex-activist Marauge reflects about how he has been using the designation 'Assyrian' – expressing both hope and disappointment:

> Therefore I use the designation *Othuroyo* [Assyrian] as a political name... as an umbrella name for the dispersed and separated people who call themselves by different names, such as Chaldeans, Nestorians, *Suryoye* and so forth. The idea was that the institution which would organize these people would be secular ['*amonoyto*] and not religious.[582] As soon as the chosen designation cannot cope with this function, there is no longer any need for me to use it...

Marauge's last remark is a reference to his disappointment in the success of the project of *umthonoyutho* among the people. Later in this thesis I shall illustrate the background to this disappointment.

6.4.1 Establishing Associations

Above I mentioned that some of the youngsters on the board of the *Assyriska föreningen i Södertälje* were members of ADO, whose aim was to 'awaken' the people and give them some comprehension of a distinct national identity and help them to accommodate to the new society in such a

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[581] The Assyrian Universal Alliance is member of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO).

[582] See further Chapter 10 where I have discussed this idea.

way that they do not run the risk of assimilation. They made use of the Swedish integration policy which is based on *equality*, *partnership* and *freedom of choice* – a structure which offered immigrants the opportunities to find own institutions that would meet in their needs (see further Chapter 5). In order to realize this, ADO has founded associations to educate and 'raise' the people – paying special attention to the younger generations.[583] ADO members travelled especially through Sweden but also through Europe to establish institutions and develop a structure for the implementation of their ideology. But these institutions never became legal members of ADO. The members of ADO existed of individuals. In Sweden, all the institutions founded became members of the *Assyriska riksförbundet,* which was also founded by the ADO. Because of ADO's illegal status in Syria, it also kept a low profile (and retained a mysterious character) for a long time in Sweden and it was even not registered until the 1990s. ADO began to recruit members secretly, not because it had anything to hide from the countries in which they established themselves, but as a reflex reaction because it had had to work as an underground organization in Syria until the beginning of the 1990s. This may have been an important reason for why the established institutions were not strictly bound to the influence sphere of ADO.

A look at the kinds of organizations which they have established since their settlement in Sweden, leads to the inevitable conclusion that there is now an increasing diversity: *Assyriska föreningen i Södärtälje* (1971), *Ninves sport club Assyriska* (1974), *Assyriska riksförbundet i Sverige*[584] (ARS) (1977), the magazine *Hujådå*[585] (1978), *Assyriska Ungdomsförbundet i Sverige* (AUF, Assyrian Youth Federation 1991) and *Assyriska Kvinnoförbundet* (AKF, Assyrian Women's Federation).[586] In time, many new institutions with more specific or broader aims were founded, each enjoying a longer or shorter life. In 2010, the Assyrian Federation has twenty-five member organizations and two sister organizations (AUF and AKF). In its statutes (2009), it explicitly states that it is politically and religiously independent. Furthermore, it is

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583 Its bi-monthly magazine DARBO (Road) which was published between 1984 and somewhere in the 1990s appeared in reality far less regularly and does not seem to have had the role which its name suggests.

584 ARS is a member of SIOS (*Samarbetsorgan för etniska organisationer i Sverige*; the Co-operative Group for Ethnic Organizations in Sweden). According to the website of SIOS, it has 9221 members.

585 *Hujådå* (Swedish spelling) is pronounced as *Huyodo* ('unity' in Syriac).

586 See further for the Swedish context in relation to the right to found institutions Chapter 3.

adamant that it stands for a combination of community, national societal (Swedish) and European-related goals.

In contrast to favouring an illegal status as was common among the founders of ADO in Syria, many of its members in Europe could not agree that they should continue to work underground in the diaspora. As they saw matters, they had not done anything wrong and Assyrians/Syriacs from Turkey especially did not see why they had to fear the Syrian authorities if they were living in Europe. Because of this disagreement in combination with the abstract ideas and aims of ADO which were exhorted in strong rhetoric but with relatively little activity, many of its members in Europe cancelled their membership. Nevertheless, the European context was also a reason for ADO to develop a more concrete programme with which to work. Despite distancing themselves from ADO, ex-members often continued their activism, either within the *Assyriska* associations or at individual level. Therefore, the role which ADO played in the foundation of the Assyrian associations and the activities which evolved within these associations in Europe has been of great importance.

With emigration, ADO developed into a transnational political organization (although it has always taken a stand against the migration). This has allowed it to build up a mobile, ambitious and idealistic network, ready to dedicate time to the needs of its people. In Europe its members began to translate the rather abstract goals which were formulated in Syria into the European context and form more concrete aims to work with among the ordinary people. The *Assyriska* Odom reflects retrospectively on the shortcomings which he experienced:

> As you know, we came from a background with a very low level in any aspect of life: education, politics and so forth. We came together in associations with the level which we had achieved and ended in a crisis. There was such a need for the work [*fulhono*]... People who were politicians should have shouldered the responsibility. Real writers should have become the writers of the people and real teachers should have become the teachers of the people. Initially this did not happen. It was as if one had heard an SOS message [*hawaryo*[587]] and anyone went to help out with anything [which was to hand] – without even knowing how to help.

[587] *Hawaryo* is screamed by someone in need of direct help, for example, when his life is endangered by drowning or when caught in a burning house.

> Instead of help, sometimes it transpired that it [the work] was destructive. Despite of this, something was created.

In the first place, the *logic of umthonoyutho* has attracted the (relatively more highly[588]) educated and the younger people; it has offered an ideology to people in need of answers to many questions in a new society. In the first instance, this made it an attractive ideology. Individuals who had arrived from different areas in the Middle East had plenty of time to reconnect with each other.[589] Discussions about their identity and the new society took place in these new networks in the different European countries. While *umthonoye* activities which were organized by ADO in Syria were mainly underground of necessity, in Europe its members could work openly and hence more effectively. Odom, a teacher of Syriac, had lived in Germany for a few years before he settled in Sweden in the second half of the 1970s. In Germany he was involved in similar processes of 'awakening' and awareness, leading to a redefinition of the collective identity of his people. In the citation below, he gives an example of these early networks of *umthonoye* elite members who inspired each other and imbued their new experiences with meaning. For Odom as a person, this indicates the individual process he went through and what this meant to him:

> After I left the monastery [Mor Gabriel in *Tur 'Abdin*] for Gemany, I encountered the Assyrian ideology [*renyo umthonoyo*] for the first time in the 1970s. I came into contact with the monk Jesu' [the later archbishop for Central Europe, Julius Jesu' Çiçek] and the children of the Poli family [who later settled in Sweden]. At that time, the monk Jesu' was studying in a monastery in Würzburg… He was on friendly terms with the Poli family. One day he came to me and told me that they would soon learn more about the history of the *Suryoye* [*makthabzabno d-Suryoye*]. Apparently they had one book of [the series] *Mardutho d-Suryoye* which was published in Brazil.[590] Archbishop Jesu' wrote a [new] preface to it and it was

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588 As discussed in earlier chapters, the people who arrived from *Tur 'Abdin* and other agricultural areas in the Middle East were either illiterate or had a very low educational level. Only few had an academic background or had studied at a theological seminary in one of the monasteries in the Middle East.

589 This contrasts with places in which people have far less time for each other and where they have already developed a more individualistic lifestyle, especially in Sweden.

590 See further Zsaumo (1967).

> republished as an editon of about fifty books.[591] They presented it as: "This is our history; this is our *umtho"*. We began reading this book [and concluded]: "Oooh, we are Assyrians; we are from *Beth Nahrin*." We asked ourselves: "Where is *Beth Nahrin*?" We searched for it on the map and learned that Mor Gabriel [Monastery] could be found in the middle of *Beth Nahrin*. "Ahaaaa" – we were surprised: In Mor Gabriel we used to sing songs about *Beth Nahrin* and we did not know where it was! I can say [with certainty] that the youngsters [*'layme*] in Germany began learning about *umthonoyutho* in this period. We began by getting together at the weekends, staged theatre, and the youngsters from ADO, like Dr Sanharib, Dr Yacob Yallo and Dr Youkhanna visited us too.[592] They mingled with us and delivered lectures on "Who we are" [*ahna manna*]. Sem'an and Merado Poli were also there and discussed ways of developing the *Suryoyo* language with the monk Jesu'. They had the idea that if they did not do something we would become extinct as a people; that diaspora would lead to assimilation.
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> ...When we heard during the lectures [given by the students from Syria who were members of ADO] that we are a people, it felt really great: a people with a history, language, civilization and culture. Everything showed that we really are a people. Before that we had felt like orphans bereft of a family, but since then... It was as if an individual had been reborn and noticed that he had brothers, sisters and parents... It was fine to hear these things. Of course, the dream of a homeland [*athro*] is in everyone's mind. Even if one can live with it like a dream, it is good... We gave each other hope: we are a people; our motherland is *Beth Nahrin*...

Just as in Syria, ADO organized its members into *krulyotho* (committees). Together they were responsible for organizing such cultural and educational activities as folk dancing, Syriac language classes, lectures about the history of the Assyrians, Assyrian/Syriac music and other cultural matters. These *krulyotho* were organized in each city in which a considerable number of

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591 The preface *'Laymo Suryoyo* by Jesu' Çiçek (9 June 1975) is written in the form of a poem, consisting of seven stanzas. In the first stanza he praises the *'laymo Suryoyo* for being being 'awake' (conscious) and full of love for the Assyrians but asks also the question when he will begin to develop the Aramaic language. In the continuation of the poem he expresses his ideas about his love for and the importance of this language. In the final stanza he writes that he vocalized the text and reprinted the book. Later this brought confusion about the question as to who reprinted this book. According to Abdulmesih Barabraham (private correspondence, 2010) it was the Assyrian Cultural Group (led by Barabraham; among the members were Sem'an Poli and Zuheir Gewriye) in Würzburg that took the initiative to do so.

592 See further also Chapter 4 about the emigration of Assyrian/Syriac students from Syria to Germany.

Assyrians/Syriacs had settled. Even more important and central, were the associations which ADO established. But not every individual who was a member of such an association or who was active on its board was necessarily a member of ADO. In the beginning, it also focused heavily on spreading its ideas and recruiting members. Yausef talks about his early experiences with ADO and the work in associations. In this long citation he indicates the early path-shaping process he went though as a new member of an activist organization and how early disagreements resulted in the splitting off of new organizations with divergent ideas. Today Yausef is no longer a member of any of these institutions but continues working for his people educationally:

> When I began going to the association I heard people saying 'We are a people' [1976; *ahna 'amona*]. Many people were arriving in Sweden at that time. We made acquaintance with Gabriel Afram[593] and others... We cleaned and painted the new association in Ronna, which was in the cellar. At the end of 1976 they asked me to become a member of ADO; it was something for all people who were active… But I did not think the person who asked me was an upright man; he liked to talk but did not do much… The people from *Tur 'Abdin* worked with an open heart and were the driving force behind much work.[594] We opened associations for the *umtho*... In the end, after persistent entreaty I decided to become a member. I had to go to the house of one of the members... He brought me the statutes and requested me to promise in the name of *Othur* [*Ashur*], the land of Assyria – and I promised to work for my *umtho* and people... Soon discussions arose in ADO, because there were so many new members with different opinions and competition for power. Instead of a meeting every fortnight, the meetings were changed to every two months. At first we did not know what was going on at the top of ADO; it functioned top-down. As members we could not function properly as a result. Therefore, I resigned from ADO and began working intensively in the Assyrian association in Ronna [founded by ADO]. I launched a department of culture. I set up a section for the magazines of our people worldwide. Magazines created hope among those who happened to see them. In next to no time we attracted many young people to the association. We began publishing a magazine too and tried to get all the

[593] Gabriel Afram has played a pioneering role in Assyrian activism in Sweden.

[594] This respondent, Yausef, is from *Tur 'Abdin* himself. It is a common idea among people from *Tur 'Abdin* that their community members who grew up in Syria and Lebanon are more 'talkative' but far less dedicated to getting the work done.

> people who came to the association involved. I tried to develop a collective atmosphere. We encouraged emotions [*reghshe*] among the people. The top of ADO did not like this and accused me of being a communist…[595]

In the next chapter I shall elabourate in more detail on internal disagreements and their effects on the community life especially at institutional level.

6.4.2 Activities in the Associations

The *Assyriska* activists have tried to reach the ordinary people through different means and activities. Discussing the main activities which have evolved from the aims of the *Assyrier* is important for gaining an understanding of the aims and activities which have been developed later by the *Syrianska* organizations (see further the next chapter) and of the discursive character between the activities of these two elite groups. As already discussed, the central aims of the *Assyrier* have been the creation of national awareness among the people, so that they win recognition from outsiders as a nation and ensure national survival wherever they happen to reside. One of my respondents spoke of ways of survival, referring to an Assyrian/Syriac author in Brazil:

> One of our teachers, [Danho Ghattas] Maqsi-Elyas, who lives in Brazil said: "For us, the diaspora has assumed the character of rivers. If we let these rivers flow in their natural direction, one day they will dry up. But, if we manage to direct them all towards one big body of water, they will continue to stream. In Europe we can link activities to each other. We can create bridges in Europe [in order to survive].

As already indicated, in order to realize this, the *Assyriska* institutions have developed programs which have been devised especially with the younger generations in mind. In the local association, which brought them together as a family, they have been introduced to new ideas through lectures and seminars. Moreover, activists have taught each other and the ordinary people Assyrian/Syriac music and folk dances, classical Syriac and spoken *Suryoyo*, encouraged sports activities and begun publishing the magazine *Hujådå* (to be discussed in more detail below). The *Assyriska riksförbundet* organized a

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[595] At the time of the interview, about ten people were identified retrospectively as belonging to the core 'communists' by several respondents.

youth camp (*mashritho*) twice a year for children in the age group from 7 to 15.[596] These camps were places where the youngsters learned about Mesopotamian history, their history after conversion to Christianity and the new symbols of their people which had been introduced in modern times. Each morning they began by singing the national anthem *Deshte d-Baquba*.[597] The camps have also developed social cohesion between the youngsters of the same generation with shared experiences. Shabo, one of the founders of an association outside Södertälje, says about their initial aim:

> Our goal in the beginning was that we had to be able to take care of ourselves in the diaspora: language, culture, history, teaching the youth about the *renyo umthonoyo* and being instrumental in developing intellectual young people who would be proud of their past and who would continue their education.

Anything learned in these camps (*masheryotho*) was also taught in the local associations, for example most of the folk dances which were new to the ordinary people. Dances[598] which they saw as part of their culture began to be introduced among the people, just as the secular songs which they learned in their mother tongue (see further section below). Odom, a teacher of Syriac, reflects in more depth about the main function of the associations at that time:[599]

> We had come to a new country and, if we had not been conscious of it, we would have lost our language. We wanted them [the people] to be aware of their responsibility in this new country, so that they would educate themselves, learning more about the society, learning about what attitude to develop towards the society and our own culture [*mardutho*]. In

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[596] Nowadays these youth camps are organized by the Assyrian Youth Federation and its member organizations.

[597] I also experienced this at a study camp which was organized by the Assyrian Women Federation in Sweden in 2006. They had invited me to lecture to them about my research topic. In the mornings they commenced by raising the Assyrian Flag accompanied by singing *Deshte d-Baquba*. See further for the lyrics the publication by *Assyriska Kvinnoförbundet* (2008). *Deshte d-Baquba* is the Baquba valley near Baghdad, where the Assyrian refugees from Hakkari and Urmia fled to in 1918.

[598] In section 6.3 I mentioned that they had learned these from the members of the Assyrian Church of the East and the members of the Chaldean Church.

[599] In relation to their function, card-playing by men who wanted to spend their time in the association was forbidden in the *Assyriska* associations at that time. Later, the board of the association could not stop this development. Therefore, during daytime, the big hall of the *Assyriska föreningen* in Södertälje is often full of men who play cards, have a drink and socialize.

> the first period of the establishment of our associations, you could find more love than in monasteries! When an ideology [*renyo*] is new, it is common [for people] to be enthusiastic about it; it was sacred, something amazingly good. Our goal was: our language, church, people, *athro* and culture. We were a great people [*'amo rabo*]; we left everything behind and came here. We should like each other more than we do now [referring to internal antagonisms]. We have no one else except each other. We suffered nostalgia for the *athro*. We satisfied the emptiness we felt from the loss of the *athro* by being together. We did not talk about achieving our own country [*athro*], but what we did say was: "One day we shall need our *athro*, our villages again".[600] ...but is it really possible to go back? Despite this, we believed that we should not forget it [*athro*]. We might have to leave these countries one day and that it is impossible to become part of them [to be fully accepted]. We have used the Jewish people who suffered to the bitter end as an example. We should be careful that something similar does not happen to us [here] too.

As Odom's citation illustrates, associations have been important, formative platforms for ethnic awareness. The logic of associations is based on building a community, gathering and organizing individuals around certain goals and aims. The establishment of civil organizations alongside the church institutions is an important step towards modernity. The concept of the 'imagined community' was formed, reinforced and implemented through these associations.

6.4.3 National Symbolism

Another dimension of the discourses of *umthonoyutho* is expressed at the symbolic level. Ethnic symbols have played a discursive role in the construction of contemporary Assyrian national identity. Despite setbacks, ADO has worked steadily on building a cross-denominational national identity in co-operation with activists, especially those recruited from the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church. ADO became a member of the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA, umbrella organization for Assyrian organizations worldwide, founded in 1968) and, working in close co-operation with it, the organization introduced national symbols, heroes and above all myths, focused on aspects of a secular history in the present

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[600] Here again, the concept of *athro* is a region without clear boundaries; it is an open concept to be filled with meaning.

and for the future. Although I do not wish to digress into too much detail on the introduction of national symbolism into the discursive field, it is impossible to pass it over in silence, but I shall concentrate principally on the Assyrian flag.

It is striking that those Assyrian/Syriac individuals who have played a central role in the formation of a national identity or those who have defended it in the modern historical period have afterwards been elevated to the status of symbolizing the nation.[601] They have become national figures and myths. For example, Naum Faik is commemorated worldwide on 5 February. He symbolizes the value of *umthonoyutho* for the people and, by commemorating him, all those who have contributed to the people are esteemed. Another way this is expressed is through the Naum Faik Prize which the Assyrian Federation in Sweden or one of its member organizations grants annually to an Assyrian/Syriac who has achieved a great deal for the community (the voluntary aspect is often important). A similar idea of appreciation is expressed with the 'Assyrian of the Year' Prize which is awarded to individuals who have devoted themselves to their people.

The celebration of the Assyrian New Year on 1 April (*Ha b-Nison*) is another national symbol in which the distinctiveness of Assyrians/Syriacs is expressed, with the strong implication of building on an ancient tradition (see further also Chapter 8). On this day, the revival and renewal of nature was celebrated in ancient Mesopotamia. Nowadays, Assyrians/Syriacs have espoused this idea – communicating a primordial relationship with their past and revitalize this tradition to strengthen their people's sense of nationhood. In the homeland (especially Iraq and Syria), Assyrians/Syriacs hold joint parties *en masse* in some place of natural beauty. In the diaspora, Assyrian organizations arrange parties and often it is an occasion on which a political statement is made concerning their people's situation. A national day which allows space for sorrow and expressions of grief is Martyr's Day (*Yaumo d-Sohde*). It has been commemorated on two different dates: 7 August and 24 April. The first is based on the *Simele Massacre* in Iraq (1933); the second date refers to the first killings of Christian members of the elite in the *Seyfo*.[602] As their national anthem, the *Assyrier* in Sweden have used the song *Deshte d-*

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[601] Examples are Naum Faik, Ashur Yausef, Farid Nuzha, Mor Shamoun Benjamin, Tuma Audo, Hanna Salman and others.

[602] They have taken over the commemoration of the genocide on 24 April from the Armenians.

Baquba, of which the first stanza is in Western and the second in Eastern *Suryoyo*. Nevertheless, this anthem has not become a *nodal point*, since there are other elite members who propose the use of other songs.[603]

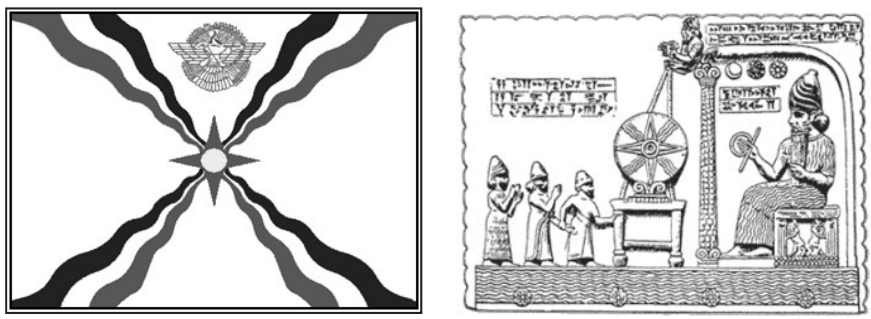

Illustration 11: The Assyrian flag (left) and the Sun God *Shamash* (right).

A symbol which incorporates elements from the past and today is the Assyrian national flag which was introduced in 1974 (see illustration 11).[604] Before that, other symbols or flags were used for shorter periods.[605] I shall base the interpretation of the symbols on the description provided by Homer Ashurian (1999).[606] To a very large extent it is based on the Mesopotamian image of the Sun God, *Shamash* (see Illustration 11), and on the insignia used by the Assyrian King Sargon II, signifying the might and great civilization achieved by the Assyrians. The ancient Assyrian God Ashur is portrayed in this insignia. The centre of the four-pointed blue star (which stands for happiness and tranquility) is a golden circle which represents the

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603 Among them there has been for example *Lekh men dil shlomo o ar'o d-sobay* (I send you my *shlomo* oh ancestral land) by the author Abdulmesih Qarabashi.

604 The flag which is used now was designed by the artist George Bit Atanus from Iran. AUA approved it at its sixth congress in Yonkers, New York in 1974.

605 An example is the flag which is used by Assyrians marching in the 4 July parade in 1922, as displayed in a picture on the cover of Donabed's book (2003). This flag consists of three horizontal stripes in the colors blue, yellow and red. It draws the attention that these are the same colors as that of the Armenian flag but in a different order (Red, Blue and Yellow). Many among the group of Assyrians walking in the parade were from Kharput (Turkey) where they had been living among an Armenian majority. It is therefore probably not accidental that they used the same colors. Another example is the 'Ashur' flag which has been used in the *Rafidayn* association in *Qamishlo* until the present day. But since the introduction of the new Assyrian flag in the diaspora (see Illustration 11) it has been used alongside this flag.

606 There are slightly different interpretations of the meaning of the symbols. See, for instance, Pauline Jasim's at: http://www.aina.org/aol/flag.htm.

Assyrian sun-god, Shamash. The wavy stripes symbolize the three major rivers flowing through Assyria: the blue Euphrates denoting abundance; the white Zab in the middle portraying peace; and Tigris coloured red representing Assyrian national pride. The stripes symbolize both the worldwide dispersion of Assyrians and express the hope of an eventual return to their homeland – represented by the centre of the star.

It is this flag which the *Assyrier* use as their cross-denominational symbol.[607] It is remarkable that the artist has not included any symbol representing Christianity. Probably this is the result of an attempt to stress a cross-denominational national identity of the people. Since approximately 2000, I have come across new designs by (mainly) *Assyriska* youngsters who have combined this flag or some of its elements with the cross or this flag with the Aramean Flag (see the next chapter for the latter). These were meant for personal use, expressions of artistic, patriotic thoughts and ideals of re-unification after the split among the people resulting from the 'name debate'. The *myth* of unity is also expressed in the use of both flags but as two separate images on a poster; attempting to appeal to both followers of the *Assyriska* and the *Syrianska* ideology.

When activities are organized the Assyrian flag is the central symbol – representing the ideology communicated. In the first three decades of its existence, it was a favorite pendant worn around the neck of activists or worn as a button stuck into a lapel, stamped on a tie or T-shirt at cultural and political activities or drawn on a face (as a football fan of the soccer team *Assyriska FF*). A tattooed flag has also been popular among the youngsters. In activities related to the broader society, the use of the presence of both the Assyrian and the Swedish flag can be observed in the room where the meeting is held. In the Assyrian association in Gütersloh (Germany), I observed the Assyrian flag was stuck to a world map among the flags of the world; the expression of an idealized situation in the hope of seeing this happen one day – the *myth* for the salvation of their people.

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[607] In some of the versions used, the symbol of the Sun God, Shamash, and the God Ashur are missing at the top of the flag; perhaps to keep the flag more abstract. See, for example, the Assyrian flag used on the cover of the magazine *Hujådå* and on the website of the *Assyriska riksförbundet*.

6.4.4 The Magazine *Hujådå*

In 1978, a year after the *Assyriska riksförbundet* was established, it began to publish the monthly magazine *Hujådå* and since then it has been its main mouthpiece. In the early 1990s the editorial page of *Hujådå* stated that it was a continuation of the magazine *Huyodo* which was published in America by Naum Faik. Probably this was to stress yet one more time that their ideas were in line with those of the *umthonoyo* Naum Faik, whom they consider to be one of the inspirators for their movement. *Hujådå* carries articles discussing cultural, societal and political issues and it appears in Swedish, English and Syriac (formerly also in Arabic and Turkish). At its peak it had worldwide one thousand subscribers.[608] In the 1980s especially, it was of considerable importance to those elite members who lived dispersed worldwide and who were interested in keeping up with news and developments pertaining to their people. Today the new media have pushed it in its original monthly version into the background and since 2006 a digital but different version of *Hujådå* has been appearing on Internet.[609] It publishes daily news concerning the Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden and international news which might be of some interest to their people.

I shall limit myself to discussing a few central points relating to the paper version. Three main periods can be roughly distinguished in the focus of the topics discussed: 1978-1985; 1985-1990 and 1990 up to 2009[610]. In the first period, the language used revealed an engaged leftist discourse and rhetoric. The first edition was published on 1 May 1978; a day which at that time was imbued with a symbolic meaning in leftist discourse. *Assyrier* actively participated in the 1 May demonstrations, making a statement about what they stood for. The topics in *Hujådå* covered matters related to the identity discourse of the *Assyriska* Movement. Historical and cultural articles about the history of the Assyrians and Mesopotamia have had an educational role in the process of teaching its readers to identify with ancient Mesopotamian history (which was a closed book to the majority).[611] The

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608 It was sent to thirty-five countries but the majority of its members were Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden and native Swedes.

609 http://www.hujada.com/. Two earlier attempts were made to produce a digital version (1998 and 2000) but the people in charge could not keep up with updating it.

610 The publication of the paper editon stopped after a decision taken at the annual meeting. In 2009 a quarterly paper version of *Hujådå* with longer articles appeared four times.

611 In the first number of *Hujådå* (1 May 1978), the poet, author and activist Yuhanon Qashisho articulated his discourse about the identity of his people in the article *Vi är Assyrier*

importance of the Syriac language and the necessity of teaching it were given ample coverage. Lists of words in Syriac were published with a translation into Swedish and a transcription of the Syriac to make it accessible to the ordinary reader. This has been one of the many attempts of the *Assyrier* to teach Syriac to the ordinary people. *Hujådå* also published short articles about Syriac literature, in an attempt to raise the intellectual level of its readers. Nevertheless, such daily social problems as matters pertaining to seeking asylum (often on the front cover) were also paid important attention.

In the second period of its publication, its most outstanding characteristic is the disappearance of the hegemonic discourse of the *Assyrier*. This is also expressed in the articles which tend to deal mainly with internal issues relating to the *Assyriska* Movement and its activities. This introverted approach has changed in the third period, after the First Gulf War in 1991. The disruption of the status quo in Iraq made the *Assyriska* Movement think about negotiating new opportunities for its people.[612] Ever since, this theme has been continued, including calling attention to the situation of its people in Turkey, especially those caught up by the struggle between the Turkish army and the Kurdish guerrilla, and recognition of the *Seyfo*.[613] This internationalization of political interests among *Assyriska* activists has also been expressed at other institutional levels. Although initially attention tended to concentrate heavily on the creation of an institutional life and culture in the diaspora so as to sustain the 'dispersed community', later the *athro* and the emigration countries were also put on the agendas of *Assyriska* associations. One such initiative resulted in the foundation of *Beth Nahrin Solidarity Committee* and the publication of the magazine *Saubo* (meaning both 'university' and 'direction'). One of the founders argues: 'These people are faced with a national question which cannot be solved in Sweden but in the *athro*. Therefore I thought that the bulk of our activities should be undertaken for the people in the *athro*.' Another example of these initiatives

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historiskt, geografiskt, språkligt och kulturellt (We are Assyrians historically, geographically, linguistically and culturally).

612 In October 1991, a special edition of *Hujådå* was published entitled *Världen tiger om Irak – den Assyriska tragedin* (The world is silent about Iraq – the Assyrian tragedy). A long article in this issue bears the title *A unified Assyrian government*.

613 Drawing attention to the problems faced by their people in Turkey, the articles have mirrored political activities relating to this. These include an article about a one-day school strike, the occupation of the office of Amnesty International in Stockholm, the hunger strike in Södertälje in an attempt to request recognition of the *Seyfo* and so forth.

is the aid organization *Assyrier Utan Gränser* (2007, Assyrians Without Borders, based in Sweden).

6.4.5 'Our Culture'

The approach taken to 'their culture' by the *Assyrier* is strongly motivated by their aim to 'retain' and create a distinct culture and identity in order to stave off assimilation. They have built on the approach to culture which was initiated by ADO in Syria in which Assyrian/Syriac songs and folk dances were promoted. This seeking of cultural roots has been accompanied by the development of both classical Syriac and the spoken mother tongue, *Suryoyo*. Music and dances have played an important role in the creation of a sense of living a distinct culture and thereby group cohesion. As discussed earlier, to a great extent, in modern times Assyrian/Syriac secular music still had to be developed and be introduced to the people.[614] On 8 December 1979, more than forty Assyrian musicians gathered in response to a call from the *Assyriska riksförbundet* to set up a working group to improve conditions for the development of art and music which would engender a cultural revival and create better conditions for the development of new Assyrian artists.[615] On the foundation of these aims, the federation suggested to its local member associations (*hudre*) that they establish a section which could take up this cause. This initiative resulted in the *Union of Artists* in 1980. Coincidentally, the need for such music grew because of the increased numbers of Assyrians/Syriacs to be found across Europe by the early 1980s. The *Nineveh Music Group* (NMG, *Gudo d-Ninwe*) was among the few first groups which toured through Europe to fulfil in this need. The process through which NMG passed so as to be able to fulfil the need for music was fairly brief. Nowadays a scholar and activist, Sabro Garis reflects on how he and other family members learned Assyrian/Syriac folk dances and played music as youngsters newly arrived in Sweden:

> In Gothenburg we founded a dance group and I began to learn how to play music... At that time opportunities were few and far between. There was one music group – *Ishtar* – and such individual musicians as Habib Mousa and Joseph Malke who performed at parties. During their

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614 This does not mean that there was no secular music in earlier centuries. It is rather an indication that there had been a break up with this music.

615 See further the editorial article *Bättre och Bättre* (Better and better) in the magazine *Hujådå* (01 January 1980).

> performances I developed an interest in playing music myself... Afterwards, I learned some and rehearsed at home; my brother Fikri did the same... My sister Nahrin took up singing. And my cousins and Shikri began to play too… Slowly we transformed the folk dance group into a music group... This was an essential move at the time because there was only one other group and there were many parties... In the beginning, as representatives of our people, our performances tended to be for the Swedish people… This commenced in about 1981 – our first performance... I remember that the people [*Suryoye*] were astonished when my sister began singing. We were severely criticized in the Netherlands, because many *Botoye*[616] were living there. They told us that it was inappropriate to make music. It suffered from the same image as theatre; it had overtones of prostitution and so forth.[617] This was a wrong picture, but it stemmed their innocence and they were not well educated; therefore they simply did not comprehend... After a while they understood that it was not a bad thing...

In this quotation, Sabro Garis illustrates that dancing, singing and playing secular music were not self-evident activities and that it took some time to overcome ideas of sin and shame among the ordinary people. In fact, elite members had to create new space for cultural elements which had no longer had been given any room in Assyrian/Syriac culture. Departing from the cross-denominational concept of ADO that all Syriac churches belong to the same people, Assyrians/Syriacs in the *Gozarto* copied the folk dance costumes from the Assyrians (here: members of the Assyrian Church of the East) and the Chaldeans in the villages of the *Khabur* area in Syria. An important part of this ideology is the secular aspect, including secular songs and dances, as part of the group's identity. In the modern period in the homeland, many clergymen objected to dances and the singing of secular songs in *Suryoyo* and Syriac. As a reaction to this, the idea of *Assyrier* activists has been to re-introduce these activities among Assyrians/Syriacs, to round off the identity of the nation. Stressing the ancient character of Syriac Church melodies, such elite members as Sabro Garis emphasize their value

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616 People from Garis' village *Bote* in *Tur 'Abdin*.

617 In the traditional societies of the Middle East, 'theatre' has to struggle against this image and status. When I worked for the theatre company *ZT Hollandia* in the Netherlands, I had to start up the project with musicians in Aleppo (Syria) in 2002. When an older generation Assyrian/Syriac man asked me what work I was doing in Syria, I explained my job for the theatre company. Then he whispered to me: 'Do not tell others you are working for the theatre; it has a bad image'.

in the continuation of their use in the production of secular music (*malushinanne lbusho 'amoyo*):

> ...At last we would have something that we could be proud of and that we can also use outside the church. We and others with us have tried this in different projects. The project with Nuri Iskandar was one of them.[618] He is steeped in the melodies of the church and he has the talent to imbue them with a secular character. What had actually happened earlier [at the time of Christianization] was that the melodies of the people were introduced into the church and assumed a religious character...

This illustrates how elite members have endeavoured to develop secular music as a new alternative to church music. Ascribing an ancient heritage to their church music, these elites find it a useful vehicle to stress their distinct culture in society. The repertoire which NMG gradually built up illustrates that it was not just making music for fun. Its primary objective in playing to the people was to influence them through its music and lyrics. Its members launched themselves with their first cassette *Hubo d-umtho* ('Love of the Nation', 1984) which consisted of patriotic, folk and love songs. The bandleader Sabro Garis says:

> We expressed our love for the *umtho*. At that time we were still on a quest. Singing was a way to reach the people with our ideas; singing was a sort of method of schooling; the people could be taught things. The same could be said of the children's songs; we wanted to teach the children [*Suryoyo*] vocabulary…

The attention paid to the language was two-dimensional. One of the goals of NMG was certainly to teach children the spoken *Suryoyo* language and elements of their culture through children's songs.[619] However, it also introduced the mature audience to the Eastern *Suryoyo* dialect (besides singing in their Western *Suryoyo* dialect). Singing in both dialects has been an attempt to overcome language differences in the process of raising awareness for the unity of the people. And singing itself has become a means to promote the *Suryoyo* language among the people; Sabro Garis says:

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618 The Assyrian/Syriac composer Nuri Iskandar was brought over from Aleppo to co-operate. In 1991, this co-operation resulted in the release of the cassette *Modern Songs, Church Music and Hymns*.

619 NMG released three cassettes with children songs, *Nineveh Zmirotho d-shabre* (1986, 1987 and 1994).

> However, our principle was that we wanted to sing in *Suryoyo* only... They will be able to hear other languages by listening to other music. However, if we do not sing in *Suryoyo* [both dialects are assumed], they will not be able to hear it anywhere else...

This indicates that they saw themselves as saviours of a language on the brink of extinction. Sabro Garis recalls that for the ordinary people, *Sureth*, the Eastern dialect in which they had begun singing alongside their own Western dialect, was new:

> …Once I sang a song in *Madenhoyo* [*Sureth*] and people began dancing the shoulder dance to its music. I remember that someone came to me and said: "You sing very well in *Kurmanji*."...I told him that it was *Madenhoyo* and not *Kurmanji*...[620]

The production and release of songs in *Suryoyo* meant that Assyrians/Syriacs who had learned to dance the Assyrian folk dances (among them *shekhane*, *bagiye* and *juniye*) to the songs in the Eastern dialect *Sureth* could now dance them to newly introduced songs in Western *Suryoyo* (*Surayt*), their own dialect.

Determined to increase their repertoire and reach out to more people, Sabro Garis took the initiative to release a cassette (*Assyrian Boys, 'Layme Bethnahrinoye,* 1992) with rap songs, a compilation of patriotic and folk songs.[621] This cassette demonstrates that the discourses of the elite are being continuously expressed through the medium of their songs. By including the song *Ha 'Amona*[622] (We are One People), Sabro Garis aimed to bring the message in this song to the attention of the people: 'No matter what name for the people is used, all these names are related to one people... if we do not unite [*mihaydina*], we do not have any chance [of survival].'

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[620] *Kurmanji* is a Kurdish dialect which is spoken in Turkey, Syria and some parts of northern Iraq. This confusion illustrates that *Sureth*, the Eastern *Suryoyo* spoken dialect, had become foreign to many Assyrians/Syriacs who spoke the Western dialect (*Surayt,* to which I also have referred in this thesis as *Suryoyo*).

[621] Initially he wrote and arranged the music for the song *Ahna Tre Kutlena*, which was performed at an Assyrian Youth Festival in Sweden. Because it was so well received by the young people, he came up with the idea of releasing a cassette. This is about a decade earlier than most of the rap songs produced in the last few years. In Germany especially, various youngsters have begun to sing a combination of *Suryoyo* and German rap songs. Among these rappers are: Noble M, Levent Acar, Ninjos de Dios, Mc Gabro & Salo, and Ben E, Svenji, Flo & Matai.

[622] The lyrics of this song are by the poet Tuma Nahroyo (1936-2002).

6.4.6 The Language Project

From what has been said above, it is more than obvious that language has received an enormous amount of attention from the *Assyrier*. This project fits into the broader idea that this people is a nation with its own language which should be respected at all times; if not the language will vanish. Moreover, there is probably less likelihood that a people without a distinct language will be recognized as a distinct people. Besides their efforts to stimulate the people to continue speaking their mother tongue and to teach classical Syriac, they have also attempted to teach the ordinary people and each other to 'cleanse' (*madenfi*) their spoken language of 'foreign' terminology in order to 'purify' it. In their attempts, they have introduced either classical Syriac words into the spoken *Suryoyo* or they have coined new words in *Suryoyo*, eradicating the former 'foreign' loanwords from other languages or introducing new terminology to express modern aspects in daily life. In the long term, this 'language innovation' is very evident in language use among Assyrians/Syriacs.[623]

Specific language use among Assyrians/Syriacs says something about a person's ideas concerning language, often related to a certain ideology – *Assyrisk* or *Syriansk*. To give an example of this, on one occasion in Södertälje when a young man asked me where I was from, I answered from *Tur 'Abdin* (as I knew he was from *Qamishlo* in Syria). Upon hearing my answer, he jokingly said: 'Ah, you are one of those who says *masa*, *'araba*…' and he mentioned a few more loanwords which we were used to employ.[624] He then went on to tell me what had happened to him while he was waiting at a bus stop in Södertälje:

> …I asked an elderly *Suryoyo* man who was at the bus stop if he had a *sho'tho* [watch] and if he knew the time. The man replied: "First you should speak *Suryoyo* and say *sa'a* [watch] and only then shall I tell you the time." No matter how much I tried, the man would not tell me what time it was. He was angry with me because I did not use the words he had been used to employ and could not understand that I was talking better *Suryoyo* than he did…

Sho'tho is the Syriac word for watch, whereas *sa'a* is the Arabic word to denote the same. This old man had been used to the word *sa'a* and had only

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[623] See further about dilossia and neologisms in *Suryoyo*, Tezel (2011: 18-19).

[624] *Masa* is Arabic for table and *'araba* is Turkish for car.

come into contact with *sho'tho* through the Assyrian ideology expressed in the language use of my respondent, whom he considered to be the antagonistic other among his people. The language use of the young man has therefore also come to represent an ideology and may therefore be rejected for that reason. In the field I observed that those adhering to the Assyrian ideology have preserved their *Suryoyo* language use more than those who have been opposed to the Assyrian ideology, as opposition meant inherently also a stand against projects of the *Assyrier*.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the purpose with which I set out was to illustrate the discourses of *umthonoyutho* from a historical perspective in order to reach an understanding of the formation and antagonistic character of identity discourses among Assyrians/Syriacs in the present-day. More specifically I have aimed at an illustration of the emergence and development of ideas of *umthonoyutho*.

Looking at the breaking points in the development of the discourses of *umthonoyutho*, the reasons for the split in the collective identity of Assyrians/Syriacs are more readily understandable. The rise of *umthonoyutho* was grievously interrupted by the *Seyfo* during the First World War. Between this genocide and the 1960s, there was no *umthonoyutho* movement in Turkey (with the exception of a few individuals). In Iraq, discourses of *umthonoyutho* were dislocated by the Simele Massacre (1933) and in Syria the greatest impediment was the rise of Pan-Arabism in the 1950s. The impacts of these dislocations are a topic for further research. What is important to my study is that the discourses of *umthonoyutho* have also been continuously dislocated in the diaspora. This dislocation has been one of the main sources of the emergence of yet another split among Assyrians/Syriacs. In the USA and Canada, the decree promulgated by Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum in 1952 stipulating the 'correct name' of the people led to a split which has continued up to the present. In Europe, the split occurred directly after the commencement of mass emigration in the mid-1970s.

As an introduction to the next chapter, the *umthonoyutho* of the early twentieth century differs from that of today in its inclusive approach to the unity of the people. In addition, it tended to be more inclusive of the different names by which the Syriac churches were known and exhibited less

of a dichotomous character (which is characteristic of the *umthonoyutho* among *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* in Sweden as will be discussed in the next chapter). The early period was characterized by the raising of an awareness of a shared historical background and the need for a cross-denominational approach among the people. In time, this *myth* for the unity of the people grew more politicized and reached out to more people. It no longer remained a topic discussed only among a few intellectuals who lived scattered in different areas and disseminated their ideas through the magazines which they published. Inherent in this process has been its antagonistic character. A plausible analysis of this historicity might be that while the discourses of *umthonoyutho* place strong emphasis on the 'unity' of the people, the counter-discourses have exacerbated the differences and caused a rift in the community using the name-debate as a tool. I shall discuss this topic in more depth in the next chapter.

7 THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ANTAGONISTIC DISCOURSES

In the previous chapters I discussed the settlement of Assyrians/Syriacs from two perspectives. Unquestionably, the Swedish authorities have accommodated their settlement and certainly they have personally made strenuous efforts to establish themselves as fast as possible. The pace and extent of their institutionalization process have attracted a great deal of attention. The upshot of this process has been a specific discursive dynamic in the Assyrian/Syriac community and between it and the Swedish authorities. Outsiders have asked questions about how and why this immigrant group, the majority from an agricultural background and with on average a very low educational level, has managed to found so many institutions within such a space of time. This is related to one of the central questions in this chapter: 'How is it that in the first decade of their settlement in Europe, Assyrians/Syriacs already developed strong, antagonistic discourses about their collective identity?'

One answer is to be found in the extent of their dislocation after emigration which produced an internal crisis among them. Although ideas of *umthonoyutho* and identity were discussed among the limited group of the educated elite in the homeland, in Europe these ideas reached the ordinary people too. This is the reason that, since the mid-1970s, the discussion about the 'correct name' of the *'amo Suryoyo* in the Swedish language has taken place within each family and wherever Assyrians/Syriacs have assembled. Matay, who was a teenager at that time, says: 'We asked any source we could find what we were and why we had this discussion.'

The 'name conflict' incorporates different aspects of Assyrian/Syriac societal life in Sweden and outside Sweden. The choice of a certain name for their people in Western languages is not simply a product of a certain ideology. If it is to be understood properly, it is necessary to pay attention to the antagonistic formation of relationships between elite groups. In addition, such elements as the difference between town and village, the generational gap, the competition between the clergy (as a religious elite group) and secular elites and the competition between lay elites with different ideologies and orientations must also not be overlooked. Assyrians/Syriacs refer to 'the

side of *Syrianska* and the side of *Assyriska*' (*i khasra d-Syrianska u i khasra d-Assyriska*). I have approached these two sides as representatives of two different ideologies.[625] In their antagonistic relationship, they have placed each other in the constitutive outside. The symbolic expression of antagonism is visible at all levels in the discursive field. Especially in the early period (until about 1990), antagonistic ideas were fought out in places where they gathered – at soccer fields, in cafés, in the church and on the street. At certain moments, hegemonic struggle and triumph is symbolically expressed and consequently augments. For instance, this emerges quite clearly in momentous political activities, such as at the foundation of the two satellite TVs[626] in Södertälje and the soccer derby between the competing teams *Assyriska FF* and *Syrianska FC*. To exemplify this, when *Syrianska FC* won against *Assyriska FF* in 2007, the *Syrianska FC* fans rang the church bells of the Mor Ephrem Church in Södertälje to express their triumph; everybody had to be informed about the victory of *Syrianska FC* over *Assyriska FF*.

In the rest of this chapter, I shall first discuss (Section 7.1) the storyline of the 'name debate'. In Section 7.2, I shall analyse the emergence of the *Syrianska* Movement. Discursive strategies devised by it to weaken the *Assyriska* Movement will be dealt with in Section 7.3. In Section 7.4, I shall discuss the logic of '*ashirto* (extended family) and its role in the discursive field. The 'name conflict' cannot be understood if the involvement of Middle Eastern regimes is ignored and this will be discussed in Section 7.5. In the final section, I shall explore the emergence of the discourses about the *unity* of Assyrians/Syriacs.

7.1 The Storyline of the 'Name Debate'

For a better understanding of the present-day antagonistic discourses among Assyrians/Syriacs, I have studied the emergence and the development of the 'name conflict' by examining the main formative dislocatory moments in their short history in Sweden. My aim was to identify the moments at which the old status quo has broken down and a new status quo has developed. I have defined six periods in the storyline of the *split subject*; each constituting a breaking point and a formative moment in itself:

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[625] *Khasra* (side) is also used interchangeably with *gabo* (party).

[626] *Suroyo TV* and *Suryoyo SAT* were founded in the years 2004 and 2006 respectively.

- 1967–1976: The hegemonic use of the designation *Assyrier*;
- 1976–1980: the hegemonic intervention of the Syriac Orthodox Church and layelite members and the emergence of the name *Syrianer;*
- 1980: The *Noyan* Affair – a dislocatory moment for the *Assyriska* Movement;
- 1981–1983: The threat of excommunication of the *Assyrier*;
- 1983–1996: Challenging the hegemony of the Archbishops;
- 1996–Present: The establishment of a new status quo.

7.1.1 The Hegemonic Use of the Name *Assyrier*: 1967-1976

From their settlement in Sweden in 1967 to the beginning of the extensive 'name debate' in 1976-77, the name by which Assyrians/Syriacs referred to themselves in Swedish was predominantly *Assyrier*. The Swedish authorities also mainly used this designation.[627] Consequently, their first secular institutions founded in the first half of the 1970s bore this name too. The fact that all interpreters initially adhered to the Assyrian ideology is important in understanding the initial mass use of this name in the Swedish language. When the newly arrived Assyrians/Syriacs applied for asylum in Sweden, they received help from young Assyrian/Syriac interpreters who were already living in Sweden and at least knew the Swedish language. They had also had time to acquire some social, cultural and political knowledge of Swedish society. These interpreters translated the *emic* name *Suryoye*[628] into the Swedish *Assyrier*. Until about 1978, the majority continued to use the name *Assyrier* in daily life, without any vociferous opposition to its use. This does not mean that there were no stirrings of discontentment in the group.[629]

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[627] In the written communication about the idea to invite 'Stateless Assyrians' to settle in Sweden, the name 'Assyrians' was already used (see Appendix 7).

[628] Most probably the *Suryoye* from Turkey used *Suroye* instead of *Suryoye*. See further the glossary.

[629] Carragher (1978) mentions that, until his publication, the following designations were used by Assyrian/Syriac institutions: *Assyrier*, *Araméer*, *Suryoyo*, *Syrianer* and *Süryanier*. The Swedish authorities had also been using a diversity of names: *Assyrier*, "Assyrier", s.k. [so-called]

Nevertheless, most of this discontent remained latent and did not lead to any strongly marked antagonisms. The opposition to the name *Assyrier* only began to be articulated with the introduction of alternative names at the height of the mass emigration, in the mid-1970s.

7.1.2 The Emergence of an Oppositional Organization: 1976-1980

In 1976, the first serious opposition came from a church-based organization – the *Suryoyiska kyrkoförsamlingen* (Syriac Church Assembly); this church board was founded for the *Syrisk-ortodoxa kyrkan i Södertälje* where Chorbishop Gabriel Aydin (Bar Yawno) had been consecrated in 1975. The *Svensk-Suryoyo föreningen*[630] (Södertälje, 1976[631]) was founded a year later and eventually it was to play an important role in the future antagonism created in the discursive field. Various reasons have been adduced for the foundation of this organization. Present-day *Syrianska* elite members hasten to explain that it was primarily the outcome of a disagreement about what the name of their people should be in Swedish. My informant Mousa Afram[632] – a firm advocate of the use of the name *Araméer* – gives also this reason for his departure from the *Hudro d-Suryoye b-Södertälje* (*Assyriska föreningen i Södertälje*), which was founded in Ronna in 1971. After he left the former association, he decided to establish the first *Arameiska föreningen* (Södertälje) in Sweden. He revealed that he had difficulty in convincing many other Assyrians/Syriacs to use the name *Arameiska* because they found it

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Assyrier, *Syrianer* and *Syrianer-Assyrier*. Carragher was the Project Leader of *Projekt för vissa flyktingar från Libanon, Syrien och Turkiet* (Project for Some Refugees from Lebanon, Syria and Turkey) on behalf of the Federation KFUK-KFUM (Kristliga föreningen av Unga Kvinnor – Kristliga föreningen av Unga Män; The Swedish YWCA and YMCA). He wrote several pro-memoranda (PM) about the 'name conflict' and influenced the Swedish authorities' policy towards the group. Note that the name of the project is descriptive, and does not mention any name of the group because of sensitivities within the group about the name of their people.

630 Carragher (1978) and Beth Sawoce (2007) mention that the term *Ortodoxa* was included in this name and that hence the name was *Svensk-Suryoyo Ortodoxa föreningen*. Several of my *Syrianska* respondents have said that *Ortodoxa* was not included.

631 Beth Sawoce (2007) mentions that *Svensk-Suryoyo föreningen* was established in 1977.

632 Mousa Afram was among the first Assyrians/Syriacs from Lebanon who settled in Sweden in 1967. His parents were originally from *Tur 'Abdin*. He was raised in *Qamishlo* (Syria) and worked for some years in Lebanon before he settled in Sweden. In *Qamishlo* he was active in the Rafidayn Association and was therefore known by the Aramean name, which was used among some of the activists.

awkward on the tongue, largely because they were unfamiliar with it.[633] Afram mentioned that in his attempts to convince the people to use the name *Arameiska* instead of any of the other versions which the opposition to *Assyriska* began to use, he encountered resistance and was the recipient of such remarks as the following: 'Arameans were pagans, what does this name have to do with us?' After Mousa Afram moved from Södertälje to Motala, the people who took over the association changed its name to *Syrianska föreningen* (see also Nilsson 1981: 29). In Motala, Afram also founded an association with the name *Arameiska föreningen* (1986/7-1990) and as had happened on the previous occasion, after he moved back to Södertälje three years later, the people who took over the association in Motala changed its name to *Syrianska föreningen.* In short, the name Araméer and (its adjective *Arameiska*) failed to raise much support among Assyrians/Syriacs in the Swedish context.

In contrast to the *Syrianer*, the *Assyrier* argue that the principal reason for the split within *Assyriska föreningen i Södertälje* was the competition for influence between the younger people and the more traditional (mostly) older members. Later, this struggle was articulated in the 'name disagreement'. The *Assyriska* activist Shabo says:

> The conflict was about the fact that the older generation was unable to accept that the young people were taking over the board of the organizatoin [after new elections]. The older people left and wanted to establish a new association in which they could take their seat on the board and be influential... The name itself was of secondary importance to them.

Something similar is stated by the editor of the magazine *Hujådå* (September 1980), in the article *En presentation av Assyriska riksförbundet*. He claims that the representatives of extended families played a relatively dominant role on the first board of *Assyriska föreningen* in Södertälje, despite the fact that the board did not have the required skills (such as command of the Swedish language) to meet the needs which the mass emigration of 1975 brought in its train. This is how the elections in the summer of 1975 were instrumental in initiating the change in the influence of mostly older, lay elite members after the younger elites had taken over the board.[634] Apparently, traditional elite

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633 The fact that none of my respondents mentioned *Arameiska föreningen* perhaps says something about the little space and influence it had in the discursive field at that time.

634 See further about this also Nilsson (1981: 28).

members did not accept this change and founded their own organization.

Another factor which may have played a role in the initial 'name debate' is the role of Chorbishop Aziz Günel (based in Turkey) during his 40-days visit to Sweden. Jan Beth Sawoce informed me that he had a talk with the late Sabri Dbe Tumaki[635] (one of the former presidents of the *Syrianska riksförbundet*) after he had become non-active.[636] Sabri informed him that he had joined Chorbishop Aziz often to the Turkish Consulate in Stockholm in 1977. According to Sabri, the Chorbishop expressed to the Turkish consul that he would prevent anyone from talking negatively about Turkey. Subsequently, the consul suggested Chorbishop Aziz to try to understand what the *Assyrier* aimed at and asking him to help to fight them. And in order to fight them, he proposed to found similar organizations which could fight the *Assyrier*. Sabri explained that Chorbishop Aziz liked the idea and that this resulted in the foundation of the *Svensk-Suryoyo föreningen* in 1977 and that they began to collect the names of the members of *Assyriska föreningen* which they provided to the Turkish Consultate.

Although the 1975 change of the board of the *Assyriska föreningen* constituted one of the main reasons for the emergence of antagonisms within the community, it does not seem to have been the only one. At the beginning of the 1970s, disagreements had already arisen about the appointment of priests for the community. At the end of 1972, Patriarch Jacob III visited Sweden for the purpose of negotiating between his community members. Negotiations during this visit resulted in Father Yusef Said being relegated to a non-active position (originally from Iraq; had begun to serve in Sweden since 1970). My respondents said that among the *Midyoye*,[637] there were families[638] who opposed him.[639] In 1975, these families welcomed the Patriarch's appointment of Chorbishop Gabriel Aydin from *Midyad* warmly. Both Andersson (1983a: 91) and Nilsson (1981:30) mention that the internal relations between community members worsened with

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635 Sabri Dbe Tumaki emigrated to the USA where he died due to a sickness. This is the reason why I could not communicate with him about this matter.

636 Beth Sawoce is planning to publish the communication he had with Dbe Tumaki in the future.

637 People originating from *Midyad*.

638 I have made their names anonymous. Among them were board members who had been dismissed from the board of the *Assyriska föreningen* in 1975.

639 Without elaborating on it, some respondents mentioned that they believed Assyrians/Syriacs from *Tur 'Abdin* as mostly illiterate former farmers did not understand Father Yusef Said, who himself was a high educated cleric and poet from Iraq.

Father Gabriel's appointment. My respondents mentioned that the *Assyriska* activists requested from him strong and fast modernist reforms in order to bring about a strong secularization process within the community in Sweden. Apparently Father Gabriel thought that their requests were too high to meet at the pace they required from him when considering the whole congregation. This allowed a group of lay elite members to strengthen their position with Father Gabriel at their side in the opposition to the *Assyriska föreningen*. The activist Shabo reflects on the seemingly paradoxical relationship of the clergy with the *umthonoyutho* of the *Assyrier*:

> It is necessary to understand that at the time the laymen did not know anything about *umthonoyutho*, the clergy discussed and propagated it.[640] But, when the laymen tried to develop it, they [clergy] distanced themselves from this movement... This fight against the Assyrian ideology [in Sweden] began in about 1976. Initially it began among the priests. As far as I know, it commenced with the opposition led by Father Gabriel Aydin. Actually at first he was supportive of the Assyrian ideology, but he opposed it later. The same could be said of Archbishop Aboodi… But now, after opposing it for a while, Father Gabriel Aydin is supporting the Assyrian ideology again.[641]

It was in the year 1976 that the number of new Assyrian/Syriac immigrants reached its peak. Their primary requirement was a space to pray. Some *Syrianska* respondents mentioned to me that the moment *Assyriska* activists put a board bearing the name *Assyriska Kyrkan* (instead of *Syriska Kyrkan*) on the church building of Mor Ephrem in the Geneta quarter in Södertälje in 1977, those who opposed the name *Assyrier* pulled the board down and smashed it. And, that strong opposition to the *Assyriska föreningen* had commenced. In reality, *Assyriska* activists only discussed among themselves that the name of the church should not have been *Syriska* but instead *Assyriska,* in coherence with how they thought their national identity should be expressed. Nevertheless, they never changed the board with the name of the church, *Syriska Kyrkan*.

The tense atmosphere in this period resulted in several clashes; of which

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640 Several *Assyrier* activists mentioned that they learned first about *umthonoyutho* at the *madrashto* (church school) in *Midyad*, where they had been taught Syriac by Father Gabriel Aydin (Bar Yawno).

641 During my fieldwork, I visited Chorbishop Gabriel Aydin. Unfortunately his health did not allow him to discuss this subject.

the main one was in June 1976. A few months afterwards, Chamoun Ganno was dismissed from the board of the *Assyriska föreningen*. In that same year (1976) he founded the church board *Suryoyiska Kyrkoförsamlingen* together with others who opposed the *Assyriska föreningen* and became its first president (Andersson 1983a: 91). Both *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* respondents confirm that when the representatives of this second organization arrived at the municipality to register it, they did not yet have a name for it. In an effort to help them, a civil servant at the Labour Market Board (*Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen,* AMS) suggested the use of the name *Suryoyo.* This is also noted by Nilsson (1981: 13-14):[642]

> A civil servant at the Labour Market Board whom I contacted mentioned that, to a certain extent, she was responsible for the fact that one of the groups was given the name *Suryoyo*... The actual situation at that time was that one of the groups... definitely objected to being called *Assyrier*. At the same time there was no alternative suggestion for a name...

This is how the name of the *Suryoyiska Kyrkoförsamlingen* was chosen.[643] Several of this people in the church board (*Suryoyiska Kyrkoförsamlingen*) were also on the board of the *Svensk-Suryoyo föreningen* which was founded in 1977. The naming of the latter secular organization has been crucial because of its function as a *nodal point* around which an antagonistic discourse has developed in relation to *Assyriska föreningen* as the first secular organization. It is evident that disagreements about the name were born of the politics of difference within the group. In about the same period, the *Syrian föreningen* in Motala was founded, using the name *Syrianer*.[644] Thereafter many organizations which called themselves *Süryani* and *Süryanier* were founded.[645]

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642 My translation of the Swedish original.

643 A journalist who followed this period from close by, Stefan Andersson (*Hujådå,* 1999), discusses the difficulty they experienced in choosing a name which could easily be adopted to Swedish grammar. The fact that this name changed several times in the years thereafter is partly attributable to this reason.

644 Nilsson (1981) mentions that in Motala this association was founded by families who had moved to this town from Södertälje and who had founded the *Arameiska föreningen* in opposition to *Assyriska föreningen* in Södertälje already in 1975.

645 These names were based on the reference to this group in Turkish language. According to my respondents, they chose these names because the 'outsiders' in Turkey referred to the group as *Süryani* and *Süryaniler*. In a letter which was sent to the Synod of 1990 by the *Syrianska riksförbundet*, it is stated that the present use of *Syrianer* is based on the English translation of *Suryoye* into *Syrian*. This statement can be seen as a retrospective rationalization.

The *Syrian föreningen* in Motala initiated a working group for the foundation of a federation. At their meeting in Norrköping (26 November 1977), eighteen *Süriani* organizations participated with the main aim of changing the name of their people in Swedish from *Assyrier*, which had been predominantly used in the Swedish public sphere (Carragher 1978). These organizations and clergymen stated in a letter to the Swedish authorities and media that it was wrong to use the name *Assyrier* to refer to their people, because 90-95 per cent of those who were referred to as *Assyrier* were *Suryoyo*, *Syrianer* or *Süryanier* (Ibid.). They argued that the name *Assyrier* applied to the members of the 'Nestorian Church', and that some people[646] consciously translated their name *Suryoye* into the Swedish language wrongly as *Assyrier*. These statements illustrate that this oppositional group identified at the denominational level and that they searched for a name which could represent them as members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. In an attempt to enforce their ideas about the 'correct name' of their people, this oppositional group requested the authorities to intervene by means of a governmental decree prohibiting the use of the name *Assyrier* (Carragher 1978). This did not happen. Instead, the Swedish authorities attempted to solve this conflict through compromises. However, none of the groups was open to a compromise, because in the eyes of each of them a compromise was equal to a 'defeat'. As the authorities were unprepared for the mass migration of Assyrians/Syriacs, they were not ready to deal with their internal problems.

What does the existence of the secular organization *Svensk-Suryoyo föreningen* signify? In a nutshell, a new antagonistic path was created at the institutional level with consequences which reached worldwide for community members. This institution now represents a new ideology in relation to the collective identity of the people. The increasing opposition to the *Assyrier* by the *Svensk-Suryoyo föreningen* in co-operation with the church board *Suryoyiska Kyrkoförsamlingen* can be considered a historical event, stirring up strong antagonism in the social field. Retrospectively, the years 1975/6 can be seen as a central moment for dislocation: At Father Gabriel Aydin's (Bar Yawno) installation, lay elite members organized themselves around him and founded the *Suryoyiska Kyrkoförsamlingen* (1976) from where organized opposition was initiated. In the same year Mor Themotheos Aphram Aboodi was installed as the first Syriac Orthodox Archbishop in Sweden. One of his

[646] Here *Assyrier* interpreters are implied; they assisted the newcomers in the asylum process they went through.

aims was to resolve the existing conflicts as quickly as possible.[647] These developments were certainly not coincidences; they were interrelated. In the same year of his appointment as Archbishop in Sweden, Aboodi made no bones about his disapproval of the use of the name *Assyrier* for his community, arguing that the Assyrian Church of the East already used that name and therefore the Syriac Orthodox Church should not adopt it. Note that he argues at denominational level. Father Aday, in those days a strong lay activist among the *Assyrier*, expresses his astonishment at the Archbishop's stand:

> Archbishop Aphram Aboodi came here in 1969... I still have his cassette[648] [recording of the sermon] on which he said: "My blood, name and all else are *Othuroyo* [Assyrian]"...In 1976 he came here and stirred up a strong opposition to Assyrians; he almost excommunicated them at the altar of the church. My main question is: "How did these people [clergy] develop an anti-Assyrian attitude?"

The *Assyriska riksförbundet* reacted strongly when Archbishop Aboodi tried to change the name of the people from *Assyrier* to *Syrier*. In the local daily newspaper, *Länstidningen* (henceforth, LT), the conflict between the groups was discussed and the president of the *Assyriska Riksförbundent,* Besim Soysal (Aho), accused the Archbishop of being an instrument of the Syrian regime (Hultkvist 1976).[649]

In 1977 the crisis resulting from the 'name conflict' heightened and reached such extremes that Patriarch Jacob III made a second visit to Sweden, attempting to negotiate among the different parties concerned. Most importantly, he tried to force the *Assyrier* to stop using the designation *Assyrier* and to stop promoting a national secular identity. Nilsson (1981: 29) mentions that a year earlier, in November 1976, the church had requested that secular organizations should stop all their activities and instead, anything organized should take place under the aegis of the church. This indicates an attempt to enforce the hegemony of the church within the community. It

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[647] Aphram Aboodi had been visiting Sweden since the mid-1950s, representing the Syriac Orthodox Church at Ecumenical Church meetings, after it had become a member of the World Council of Churches in 1955.

[648] Archbishop Aphram Aboodi's speech was held in Arabic in the Mor Yacob Church in Södertälje. It is available at the archive of *Radio Qolo* in Sweden (http://www.sr.se/rs/red/ind_ass.html) and at www.bethsuryoyo.com.

[649] See further Section 7.5.

can also be seen as an attempt to stop the process of secularization at the institutional level. Upon arrival, Patriarch Jacob III sent a letter (20 June 1977) to the director of *Statens Invandrarverk* (SIV, Swedish Immigration Board), Kjell Öberg, in which he expresses his ideas about the collective identity of his community:[650]

> There have been some discussions about the name of the church. Some say Syriac Orthodox [*Syrisk Orthodox* in Swedish][651], others say Assyrian Orthodox [*Assyrisk Orthodox* in Swedish]. The correct name of the church is Syriac Orthodox. This is the name both of the church and of the community, because our church does not belong to any specific nation, but to many nations…

This ecclesiastical intervention in the 'name conflict' was not limited to Sweden. It happened throughout Europe although at different levels, but the centre of the conflict was Sweden.[652] Returning to the visit of the Patriarch to Sweden in 1977, at one of the meetings he had in Sweden, the Patriarch threatened sixty members of the *Assyriska föreningen* with reporting their names to the Syrian Intelligence Service (*Mukhabarat*) and with excommunication if they were to continue to use the name Assyrian (Andersson 1983a: 93).[653] My respondent, Eliyo claims that the Patriarch also expressed this threat of excommunication in Mor Ephrem Church in Södertälje and in a church in Tumba[654] at the Sunday mass. Furthermore, the Patriarch required that they explicitly continue to identify at the denominational level. In an attempt to end this threat with excommunication, the *Assyriska* activists asked the Swedish authorities and the *Frikyrkoråd* (Free Church Council) to mediate between them and the Patriarch. Consequently, the *Frikyrkoråd* informed the Patriarch that a clerical threat like excommunication did not exist in Sweden and that it would harm the position of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden if it were to be pronounced. Eliyo mentions that at the same point they decided to translate

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650 My translation of the Swedish original. This letter is available at SIV archive (Ddnr. 174-7714732).

651 'Syriac' is my translation of the Swedish *Syrisk*.

652 In the 1950s, as discussed in the previous chapter, Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum made a similar intervention in relation to the 'name question' in the USA and Canada.

653 In the American context Patriarch Jacob III had excommunicated reverend Elias Sugar (who served for the Syriac Orthodox congregation in West New York (NJ) for using the designation 'Assyrian' (Makko 2010: 71, 86). See for this declaration MARA.

654 They gathered in a church which they hired from the Swedish church.

the introduction of Patriarch Jacob III's book, *History of the Syrian Church of Antioch* (1953), in which he wrote the introduction in Syriac:[655]

> As a nation among the civilized nations of the first centuries, we were supreme. The ancestors of the Syriac Church were the Assyrians and the Arameans. They were the first who taught humanity art…

In order to confront the Patriarch with his own written work from 1953, in which he referred to both the Assyrians and the Arameans as the ancestors of his church, they left a copy of his original introduction in his hotel room, accompanied by a letter in which they requested him not to excommunicate them. My respondent, Eliyo, believes that these interventions were the reason for the Patriarch's relatively mild sermon during the Mass in Stockholm in 1977, in which he stressed 'love and unity' and stopped threatening the *Assyrier* with excommunication.

To conclude the period 1976-1980 – I have demonstrated that an antagonistic group emerged in what is known today as the *Syrianska* Movement. Although the Syriac Orthodox Church intervened decisively, the *Assyriska* Movement remained strong and continued to enjoy legitimacy in this period. As idealistic young people, the *Assyrier* believed that one day they would convince the clergy and the ordinary people of their ideology. Characteristic of this period is that the identity discourses of the *Syrianska* elite stress their church affiliation and through this, their identification at denominational level. They base themselves on the denominational schism which occurred in the Syriac Church in the fifth century, which is what led to the creation of a Western and an Eastern Syriac Church.[656] The competition between these two main discourses in the social field continued with great hopes on both sides until the Noyan Affair pushed the leading role of the *Assyriska Movement* in this process into a decline.

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[655] My translation of the Syriac original. He wrote this book as Severius Jacob, Archbishop of Beirut and Damascus. Interestingly, the citation with reference to the ancestors of his church is missing in the English translation of the introduction of both publications (1953 and 1989).

[656] See further Appendix 1.

7.1.3 The Noyan Affair: A Turning Point for the *Assyriska* Movement

Towards the 1980s, the tension between the two groups reached its highest level. In 1980 Nilsson (1981: 34) wrote about this tension: [657]

> ...The internal conflict among Assyrians/Syriacs flared up again in the spring of 1980. A fight about leadership at organizational level ended up in open, armed violence in Södertälje, in which some people were injured. A severe beating with a wooden stick led to the death of an individual [Aslan Noyan] in Botkyrka in September 1980...

The killing of Aslan Noyan[658] by members of *Assyriska föreningen* in Botkyrka (Stokholm) in September 1980 constituted a dislocation of the *Assyriska* Movement in Sweden and marked the beginning of its decline.[659] The victim, Noyan, was an active member of ADO until 1977 and had held the position of president of the board of the *Assyriska föreningen* in Botkyrka for two years. After he left ADO, he became a member of VPK (Swedish Communist Party) and the newly founded *Progressiva ungdomsrådet* (1980, Progressive Youth Council; later its name was changed into *Progressiva ungdomsföreningen*, Progressive Youth Association). This association had about 150 members, of which about ten were former members of ADO who became critical of its policy. Noyan also began to publish the magazine *Hirutho* (Freedom), which was heavily influenced by leftist discourses. In *Suryoyo,* the members of the *Progressiva Ungdoms föreningen* (*Progressive Young People*) became known by the name *Shushotoye*. My respondent, Matay (who nowadays identifies himself as *Syrianer*), was a member of this association when he was a teenager:

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[657] My translation of the Swedish original.

[658] His *Suryoyo* name is *Sham'en 'Abdiyo*. Because the media used the name 'Aslan Noyan', which was in his official papers, I have followed their example in order to avoid confusion.

[659] Fifteen *Assyrier* were prosecuted. Apparently, the aim of those who caused his death was not to kill him but to assault him to teach him a 'lesson' in relation to the disagreements about how the organization of *Assyriska föreningen* should be run (Katrineholms Kuriren, 9 December 1980; the name of the author not available in the digital archive which I used). After Noyan and his friends had been dismissed from the board of the *Assyriska föreningen* in Botkyrka, they regrouped in the same association and appointed a new board, two days before the killing. Meanwhile, they had requested police protection. The police closed the association after a fight between Noyan and his friends and the *Assyrier* members of this association. As a continuation of this conflict, the latter group decided to teach him and his friends a 'real lesson' or to punish them for their attitude as a warning to them. The provincial prosecutor reported that the *Assyrier* believed that nobody, neither the municipality and the police nor the Migration Board could resolve their internal problems. Therefore, they decided to take the law into their own hands.

> We saw the survival of the *Suryoye* through Communism and we were more communists than *umthonoye*. Portraits of Marx and Engels hung on the wall. There were no portraits of Naum Faik or any other of our people. But we had a big poster of a woman sitting at a hand-mill [*goresto*]. We had another poster of a girl carrying grain on her shoulders. On that poster was written [in English] 'An Assyrian girl'. After the association began to oppose the Assyrians, they cut that text off and left only the text in Syriac which read *'laymtho Suryoyto* [here: implying the meaning of 'Syriac girl' by the *Shushotoye*]…

Before Noyan was killed, both the *Shushotoye* and the *Assyrier* had several times reported the existing tension between them to the police but they were not taken seriously. The police did not intervene (Öste 1980). Only after Noyan's murder did the Swedish *rikskriminal* (State Police Department) investigate the *Assyrier-complex*, more specifically ADO, thoroughly. In this police investigation, the killing of Noyan produced another lead, namely the role of the so-called 'bank man' in the conflict. It was a common idea that someone who had been referred to as the 'bank man' in the Swedish National Police Report was the brains behind the *Shushotoye* association (Nilsson 1981: 90-92), although the association existed already and he became a member of it later. In about the second half of the 1980s, the *Shushotoye* ceased to exist. One of the theories is that the disturbances had commenced with the appearance of 'the bank man' in Sweden in 1977 (Andersson 1983a: 53). This mysterious man used to hold a high position in a bank in Syria. According to the same report, the 'bank man' was a former ADO member until he joined the Baath Party in Syria. After he was dismissed from ADO for this reason, he was among the founders of the *Suryoye Democratic Organization* (SDO) which became an oppositional organization to ADO in Syria. Complying with the Baath Party's ideology, the aim of SDO was to reach the full assimilation of Assyrians/Syriacs in Syria and Iraq. The activities of SDO stopped as soon as 'the bank man' arrived in Sweden, indicating his central role in this organization. The reason for the visit of the 'bank man' to Sweden was discussed in detail in this report. The *Assyrier* speculated that the man concerned had been sent to Sweden to cause a split among the *Assyrier* there (Ibid. 92).

The killing of *Noyan* was also discussed in the Swedish national media.

Many publications focused especially on the role of ADO in this affair.[660] It was alleged to be and portrayed as an 'illegal', 'terrorist' and 'fascist' organization which co-operated with the Maronite Phalanges, hence, Israel, in order to establish an 'Assyrian state' in the Middle East. All these publications robbed ADO and the *Assyrier* of a large slice of their legitimacy. *Assyriska* respondents mentioned to me that the media was not willing to present what they had to say. The killing of Noyan also meant that people no longer dared to say they were *Assyrier*. The majority of their activities stopped and they split up into different groups as a consequence of internal disagreements.[661] People tried to identify each other in an antagonistic field by asking each other the question: 'Are you an *Othuroyo*?' Meaning – 'do you adhere to the Assyrian ideology?'[662] Even Swedes started to joke: 'Be careful, there is an Assyrian behind you!'

7.1.4 The Threat of the Excommunication of the *Assyrier* in Sweden

Patriarch Jacob III died (June 26, 1980) without having solved the name conflict of his community in Europe. His successor, Patriarch Zakka I Iwas, inherited this problem and offered somewhat milder solutions. By the decree of the Synod of 29 November 1981, the Syriac Orthodox Church attempted another intervention to find a solution to this question.[663] In an Encyclical (29 November 1981, see Appendix 8) it made statements about which names could legitimately be used by the church members:

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[660] For example, the Swedish Communist Party (VPK) declared ADO a fascist organization and a murder clique; it interpreted the killing of Noyan as a conflict between 'socialists' and 'fascists' (Gysing 1980). The year after, Birgitta Bergmark produced a documentary about the 'Noyan Case' which was broadcast on the Swedish TV Channel 2 (LT, 18 March 1981). In January 1982, another documentary, *Klyftan* (The Gap) was broadcast on Swedish national TV. *Klyftan* caused a huge reaction among *Assyrier*. They considered the documentary an instrument to stigmatize the group, rather than being objective and informative. See, for example, the articles in the magazine *Hujådå* (March 1982) by Jakob T. (family name was anonimized in original) and Tezel. An updated version of the same documentary broadcasted on STV in January 2011.

[661] For example, a group of *Assyrier* left ADO and founded a new *hudro* with the name *Ha Nison***.** Its membership was composed predominantly of Assyrians/Syriacs from Syria. They focussed predominantly on theatre and music. It existed for only a few years.

[662] In this context, this is similar to asking someone whether she/he was a communist (during the Cold War in some countries). The answer would decide future contact and attitudes towards that person.

[663] See for a discussion of the first intervention in 1977 by Patriarch Jacob III, Section 7.1.2.

> The Holy Synod has paid special attention to the issue of the true name of our Church. The Synod is of the following opinion: …our Church is known as the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch (*'Idto Suryoyto Orthodoxoyto Dantiokh*), and its language is known as the Syriac language (*leshono Suryoyo*), and its people by the Syrian people (*'amo Suryoyo*)…[664] We do not accept any other name.
>
> What appeared and appears contrary to this name is not only alien and foreign, but also a distortion, falsification and forgery of the historical truth. We, in our Apostolic power, declare our distress and disapproval to the new names which have appeared lately and which have been attached to our Church and our people such as 'Assyrian', 'Aramaean' and the like. These names aim at distracting the existence of our Church, dividing its children, destroying the landmarks of its glories, and annihilating its civilization and its spiritual and humanitarian traditions…

In a nutshell, the decree accepted only the use of 'Syrian' for the names of the church and the people and 'Syriac' for the language. Although the decree states that the Synod disagreed with the use of both 'Assyrian' and 'Aramean', it is clear that the principal aim was to end the use of the first name. This postulation is supported by the process which followed, in which the name 'Aramean' and identification as such was dominant in the discourses of clergy. At the end of the decree (Ibid.), the clergy are addressed, mobilized and granted legitimacy to take the disciplinary actions needed to enforce the decision taken by the community members, explaining the forceful action taken by some clergy:

> …Therefore, we warn all the faithful of our Church, especially priests and deacons, regardless of their hierarchical offices, against adopting these ideologies which are in opposition to the Holy Church and its faith, and which are disgraceful to its reputation. We notify you that our Holy Synod granted power to the heads of archdioceses to take the appropriate ecclesiastical actions to deter those who entice so that they return to the path of truth, especially in archdioceses in which these ideologies have started to appear and have become dreadful, turning into grave danger for the Church.

Following this decree, Archbishop Aphram Aboodi asked the members in his archdiocese in Sweden to sign a document renouncing the use of both names 'Assyrian' and 'Aramean' in 1982. No time was lost putting this into

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[664] Text between squared brackets in original.

practice; in February 1982 the people were visited at home and requested to sign the declaration below: [665]

> Hereby I do solemnly swear to obey and abide by the statute, rules and orders of the Syriac Orthodox Church.
> I accept the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church [*Syrisk*, in Swedish] as the principal leader of the church and the decision of the Syriac Orthodox Synod of 03-11-1981 and of 15-11-1981 which refuses and forbids the *Syrianskt folk* (*Suryoye*)[666] any activity which might be organized under the designations *Assyrier* and *Araméer*. Herewith, I confirm by my signature that I do not belong to any of the above-mentioned *Assyriska* or *Arameiska* associations; or else I am aware that I can be excluded from the church for this reason and herewith lose my church membership…
> Hereby I do solemnly swear to obey and abide by the statute, rules and orders of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

It is remarkable that in this declaration, the church is referred to by the Swedish *Syrisk* and the people by *Syriansk* (here, in relation to the use of *Syrisk*, *Syriansk* assumes an ethno-national character). This can be seen as an attempt to hegemonize the name *Syrianer* in opposition to the name *Assyrier*. Later, also the Church is referred to as *Syriansk* by the discussed oppositional group (see further Section 7.1.7). The implementation of this decree in Sweden by Archbishop Aphram Aboodi was widely discussed in the Swedish public sphere and within the community. The decree was a direct threat of excommunication to all those who did not obey the Church rules about the use of the name of the church and of the people. In order to legitimize this act, the church declared to the Swedish authorities that this declaration was intended for its statistical administration (Andersson 1983a). People who refused to sign this document were not allowed to participate in the church rituals. Archishop Aboodi had requested his priests not to administer the sacraments to anyone who identified him or herself as *Assyrier*. This meant that the newborn were refused baptism, engaged couples were refused the solemnization of their marriage, the dead were refused a funeral service, deacons were no longer allowed to assist at the altar and even attendance at church sermons was obstructed. These are very strong symbolic moments in a discursive struggle. In this period, children of *Assyrier* were also turned away from the church schools (*madrashyotho*), where they had been taught the

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[665] My translation of the Swedish original (see Appendix 9).

[666] *Syrianskt folk* and *Suryoye* are used in the Swedish original.

Syriac language, hymns and liturgy, by the people in charge (often priests and teachers). Lucas, a *Syriansk* student, remembers such an occasion:

> We were in the *madrashto* [church school]... of the Mor Ephrem Church... When about six of our friends no longer showed up, we asked for the reason. They [teachers in charge] said: "We do not want them to come any longer because they are *Othuroye*." Apparently their parents had not signed the paper [to confirm their membership of the church]… It was as if the term *Othuroyo* was something highly disreputable and as if *Othuroye* were the enemy...

At a different level, depending on whether someone signed this document or not, the Syriac Orthodox community was divided into two groups; practically this split could mean that suddenly one part of a family had been thrown out of the church. This is very unique in the history of the Syriac Orthodox Church: people who are baptized in the church and who are considered members are still required to sign a paper in order to confirm their membership. In this case it has nothing to do with any theological matter; there is a political aspect involved.

As a protest to this measure, many who identified as *Assyrier* refused to sign it, because they never resigned or left the church. Instead, they continued to struggle for what they considered to be their right: to be allowed into the church again. Both the clergy and the *Syrianer* presented the rejection of signing this document as a conflict with the theology of the church, instead of relating it to a political dimension. The punishment of the *Assyrier* also affected a few priests[667] who recorded their objections to the decision of the Synod in a letter which they directed to the Patriarch. Consequently, Archbishop Aboodi dismissed them and replaced them with other priests; they were no longer allowed to serve their congregations. Despite their dismissal, these priests disobeyed the Archbishop Aboodi's order to stop administering the sacraments to the *Assyrier*. In their opinion, the *Assyrier* were still members of their church because they had not been excommunicated. They were convinced that the order to stop serving in the archdiocese did not come from the Patriarch. Therefore, they continued to

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667 These were the late Chorbishop Isa Nehman, Father Yusef Said and Chorbishop Munir Barbar. They wanted to stop administering them the rites if the Patriarch were to state that they were no longer members of the church which they served. In 2007, these three priests received a prize in appreciation of their stand from ADO on its fiftieth anniversary which was celebrated in Södertälje.

administer the rites to the *Assyrier* at home. This situation gave rise to a joke about the *Assyriska* activist and Deacon Ilyas Shahin told by *Syrianer*. It is said that people saw him with a baptismal tube over his shoulder, wandering along the houses of the *Assyrier* to baptize their children. The purpose of this joke was to ridicule the situation and with that, the *Assyrier*. At the same time, it was an attempt to weaken them by placing them in the constitutive outside. It is this context again to which people refer when they mention: 'That child is baptized but he/she is still unclean.' They did not accept the baptism as they regarded it as still illegitimate. There are cases of children who remained unbaptized for some years; formally they were not members of the church community and therefore in the constitutive outside.[668]

At the height of this conflict, the *Assyriska riksförbundet* appointed a 'Peace Committee' (*Si'tho du Shlomo*) to deal with this matter. This Peace Committee travelled to Damascus in an attempt to negotiate with the Patriarch being allowed to participate in church services again. In 1982, the Director of the *Statens Invandrarverk* (Swedish Migration Board), Thord Palmlund, also visited the Patriarch in Damascus to express his reservations about the Synodical decree of 1981 and its consequent implementation in Sweden. The explanation which the Patriarch gave him was that Archbishop Aboodi had misinterpreted the decree and had therefore implemented it incorrectly (Andersson 1982). Following this direct intervention in the internal matters of the community by the Swedish authorities, a special Synod was organized on 6 July 1982. The Synod stated in a letter to the archdiocese in Sweden that Archbishop Aboodi had interpreted the Synodical decree of 1981 incorrectly. Going into more detail, it explained that church members were not excluded from church services, but that this ban only meant that individuals who identified as Assyrian and Aramean were not allowed to hold a position on the church boards. Another letter which was written by the patriarchate of the Syriac Orthodox Church (2 April 1983) and directed to Archbishop Aphram Aboodi makes the same statements:[669]

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668 Another country in which the situation escalated was Germany, especially in the parish of Father Bedros Dbe Shushe (Ögünç) in Augsburg (at that time part of the Archdiocese of J. J. Çiçek). In other European countries, the antagonism had not yet developed to such an extent.

669 Citation is my translation from the original in Turkish, published in the *Patriarchal Magazine* (1983, No. 24).

> …The paper which you used in your archdiocese to collect the statistics [of the archdiocese] contradicts the decisions of the Holy Synod. Therefore, it is not valid. In its stead, in February 1983, a new document, which was decided on by the Synod… is the legal, valid document. You should be aware that this paper bears no relation to the name of the church, language and the *'amo Suryoyo*… Besides church membership, we recognize the freedom to be a member of a social organization (by whatever name and identity they have), unless this should contradict the laws of the church and the country they reside in…

It is striking that the tone of this letter is much more moderate and that it also refers to obeying the laws of the country of residence. This is an indication of the Swedish authorities' influence in the matter.

In several ways this period constitutes a turning point for the *Assyriska* Movement. Although the *Assyrier* again had access to church services, this process was besmirched by the killing of *Noyan,* which can be seen as a dislocatory event that considerably weakened the *Assyriska* Movement; it lost its relatively hegemonic position in Sweden and with that the organizational power which it had had in the 1970s. Its members had been put under great pressure and were subjected to intensive inflammatory propaganda. Many of its members resigned, including former leaders.[670] One impact of this dislocation has been that the representation level of the *Assyrier* was split and damaged. Since then it has attempted to heal itself but it never regained its initial strength.

7.1.5 The Position of the Swedish Authorities in the 'Name Conflict'

Whether or not they wanted it, the Swedish authorities were dragged into the 'name conflict'; although initially they defined this conflict as an 'internal group matter' for which solutions should be sought internally (see, for example, Carragher 1978). Nevertheless, especially in the first period of settlement, the authorities did take several initiatives to lessen the tension in the group. One initiative was the *Projekt för vissa flyktingar från Libanon, Syrien och Turkiet*, of which the purpose was to organize a meeting between the three groups concerned (*Assyrier*, *Syrianer* and the Church), but it failed to

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[670] For instance, one of the main leaders of the *Assyriska Movement* in Sweden, Gabriel Afram, resigned from his position as the President of the *Assyriska riksförbundet* (*Hujådå*, November 1980).

reconcile all the parties (Carragher 1978).[671] As discussed in the section above, the authorities intervened more directly when clergymen threatened the *Assyrier* with excommunication; a punishment which was presented as unacceptable in Swedish society. The authorities have also made use of academic research[672] and, in some cases, also of individuals[673] who were assumed to be knowledgeable about the group in order to find solutions to the 'name conflict'. This approach implies that historical and linguistic research would help to discover the historical 'truth' and that this could bring the groups concerned closer to a solution.

Throughout this thesis, I have aimed to show that the 'name debate' is not related to a 'truth' which is hovering out there, but that it is a cog in competing discourses which have developed different truths. The fact that the authorities later began to advise the use of a compound name indicates this too. Desmond Carragher (Project Leader of *Projekt för vissa flyktingar från Libanon, Syrien och Turkiet*) was the first to advise that the designation *Assyrier* (which is favoured by one group within the community) no longer be used but to adopt the compound name *Assyrier-Syrier* instead.[674] His compromise approach is particular to Swedish public discourses. In 1980, Thord Palmlund (Director of the Swedish Immigration Board) announced that, from that time, besides the compound name *Assyrier/Syrianer* his institution

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671 KFUK-KFUM began to co-operate with Assyrian/Syriac secular and religious institutions in 1971. The aim of the *Projekt för vissa flyktingar från Libanon, Syrien och Turkiet* (1976/77) was to help them with establishing themselves at the institutional level so as to represent their members' interests properly in Sweden.

672 Two examples of studies directly related to the name debate are by Knutsson (1982) and by the Department of Sociology at the University of Gothenburg (1977). The name debate is referred to both explicitly and implicitly in the first research publications about Assyrians/Syriacs. Ornbrant (1981: 6) defends her choice to use the designation *Assyrier* in her book, since until that time this designation had mainly been used in Sweden. Because it was problematized afterwards, she used the name between quotation marks in her work. Björklund (1981) solved the issue for himself by using the *emic* name *Suryoye* and Andersson (1983a) makes explicit that he had sympathy for the case of the *Assyrier* and for that reason he chose to use that name.

673 In the beginning of the 1980s, Ingmar Karlsson, who was working at the Swedish embassy in Damascus, had been asked for advice about different questions in relation to Assyrians/Syriacs, also in relation to the question about the 'correct name' for the group. His decision to reject any national identity of the people whom called themselves *Assyrier* resulted in heavy discussions between him and the group concerned. See further about his role, the article *Olle Wästberg blickar bakåt!* (Name of author was not mentioned. *Hujådå*, September 1999).

674 *Syrier* is the Swedish translation of Syrian. And *Syrianer*, which was later implemented as one part of the compound name, is a new name in Swedish for translating Syrian or Syriac.

would use the designation *Syrianer* specifically for those who identified themselves as such, specifically mentioning the *Suryoyo riksförbundet* and the Syriac Orthodox Church (*Ny i Sverige*, 1980).[675] He also recommended that other authorities and the media did the same. Since then, the local authorities in Södertälje have mainly used the compound name. Journalists have been using different names, depending on their personal contacts with the group. Initially, both *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* were dissatisfied with the authorities' decision to use the compound name and rejected its use. Although both groups have attempted to convince the authorities of their particularistic stands, they have not been successful.[676] Initially, the *Assyrier* saw the activities resulting from the authorities' attempts to solve the 'name conflict' as a way of driving a wedge into the community. However, in the 1990s, especially those identifying as *Assyrier* began to use it on some occasions. For instance, when writing official documents in which their purpose was to include all the people whom they consider to belong to the *'amo Suryoyo* or when they aimed at reaching all their people, no matter what ideology they have. The *Syrianer* continued to be dissatisfied and requested a 'governmental decision' which would forbid the use of the name *Assyrier*. Moreover, they still reject this alternative, seeking the use of the name *Syrianer* as the only solution.

7.1.6 Challenging the Hegemony of the Archbishops

The installation and dismissal of Syriac Orthodox Archbishops has been greatly influenced by the socio-political character of the social field; laymen, clergy, younger and older generations and activists have all been involved. It is therefore necessary to look more deeply into these processes. By the decree of 1983, the *Assyrier* regained access to church services, while the *Syrianer* began to negotiate their position in relation to that of the Archbishop(s).

The Dismissal of Archbishop Aphram Aboodi

Following the Synodical decision of 1983, Archbishop Aboodi allowed the *Assyrier* to participate in church services again and requested the members in his archdioceses no longer to discriminate against them. The church board in

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[675] See further about the use of the compound name by the Swedish authorities, Öste (16-12-1980).

[676] See further about this aspect, Carragher (1978).

his archdioceses did not accept this change in his attitude towards the *Assyrier* and dismissed him the same year. The contradictions rose to a level at which the opposing parties began to discuss this matter in the media. In an article in the Swedish daily *LT* (Andersson 1983b), Archbishop Aboodi claimed that the church board had not been democratically elected and demanded new elections. In response to these claims, Ilyas Urunveren (President of the Syriac Orthodox National Church Board in Sweden) said in the same article: 'He [Archbishop Aboodi] does not have the right to demand new elections. The board is democratically elected. We are his employer [*arbetsgivare*] and, since he disagrees with the board, we shall not pay his stipend.' Furthermore, the Archbishop was also accused of being despotic, embracing the *Assyrier* and of accepting support from the communists (in this instance the Progressive Young People or *Shushotoye*) (Kücükaslan 1983). This disagreement illustrates the initial competition between the hegemony of the clergy and that of the traditional *Syrianska* elite. These laymen made use of discourses of secularism to counter the claims and demands of Archbishop Aboodi. As a solution to the heightened tension, the Patriarch appointed Archbishop Aboodi to an archdiocese in Australia (1983) and installed the monk Brother Abdulahad Gallo Shabo as the new Archbishop Mor Julius Abdulahad Gallo Shabo for the archdiocese in Sweden (1987).

Archbishop Abdulahad Gallo Shabo: New Negotiations in the Discursive Field

The installation of Archbishop Abdulahad Gallo Shabo in 1987 seemed to show that the aim of the Patriarch was to solve the crisis in the Swedish-based Syriac Orthodox archdiocese. From the outset, Archbishop Gallo Shabo adopted an inclusive approach towards all the members of the archdiocese, be they *Assyrier* or *Syrianer*. This can be seen as his approach to heal his community in crisis – the *split subject*. In order to do so, he received several delegations from the secular organizations and church boards in Sweden. Apparently, some of these delegations complained to the Archbishop that the financial management of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden was not sufficiently transparent.[677] As soon as the Archbishop asked the church board for clarification, he was requested not to listen to those who asked these questions, because they were believed to be *Assyrier* whose

[677] It is not the aim of this study to discuss this claim in any detail.

purpose was to harm the church. Eventually, the Archbishop's interest in the financial aspects of the board was one of the major reasons one part of the community, the *Syrianska* representatives, no longer wanted him as their Archbishop. This reason was also broadcasted through the Swedish media. The church board claimed that the conflict began when the Archbishop wanted to establish his power over the church board and its financial affairs (Elworth 1990). In the same article, Elias Halef, the President of the National Church Board states:[678]

> …[Archbishop Gallo Shabo] is a person who wants to decide about everything. His position is costly for the church members. Therefore they should decide what sort of Archbishop they want… An Archbishop should adjust himself to Swedish law and culture…

It is obvious that the secular discourse which Halef employs has been used instrumentally in the competition for hegemony and that it delves deeper than what is being communicated superficially. Eventually, the church board dismissed the Archbishop on the basis of the contract they had signed with him at his installation. In this contract, it was stated that the church employed the Archbishop whose tasks were to be limited to the religious sphere. This implied that the financial aspect of the church was not part of his duties; a conclusion with which he did not agree. It is important to note that signing such a contract was something new in the Syriac Orthodox Church; it can be interpreted as an attempt by lay elites to share in the leadership of the people, by dividing the tasks according to the religious and the secular sphere.

Archbishop Gallo Shabo continued his archdiocese with those church members who accepted him. The majority of the members in his archdiocese identified themselves as *Assyrier*. Therefore, among the ordinary *Syrianer* he began to be identified as the Archbishop of the *Assyrier*. The fact that the *Assyrier* happened to be organized under the aegis of a church which accepted them, no matter how they identified themselves, increased their legitimacy among the ordinary people in relation to the earlier period in which their position had been more marginalized. They were no longer seen only as 'those who fight the church and who are against the church'. The focus changed to the allegations made about the assumed 'incorrect name' of their people. It is from this perspective that they began to be referred to in

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[678] My translation of the original in Swedish, Ibid.

terms such as 'false *Assyrier*'. The 'real *Assyrier*' are considered to be the members of the Assyrian Church of the East.

7.1.7 The Establishment of the New Status Quo: Two Archdioceses

After the dismissal of Archbishop Gallo Shabo by the established Syriac Orthodox National Church Board, the *Syrianska* elite requested the Patriarch to consecrate a new archbishop for those church members in Sweden who had distanced themselves from Archbishop Gallo Shabo.[679] After a long period of negotiations, the Patriarch agreed to their new candidate – Brother Benjamin Atas, a monk, – and consecrated him Archbishop Patriarchal Vicar Mor Dioscoros Benyamin Atas on 11 February 1996.[680] Since then, besides the existing separate structure of secular institutions along the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* ideology, there is a new dioscesan structure based on two archdioceses in Sweden; both based in Södertälje. Since this time, each town has had at least two churches, each of them connected to one of the Archbishops.[681] The new discursive status quo is based on the stabilization of the split within the community in Sweden. Each archdiocese has attempted to run its own affairs independently of the other and has based its activities on the politics of difference, which is strongly expressed at symbolic level.[682] It is important to note that community members identify each of the archbishops with a different ideology. Or, in other words, *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* have each organized themselves around one of the two Archbishops. The consequences of this process have been expressed in daily life, for instance, at soccer matches between the teams *Assyriska* FF and *Syrianska* FC. The two Archbishops attend mostly activities of the group they

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[679] In the period in which they had no Archbishop, hierarchically these church members were managed directly by Patriarch Zakka I Iwas in Damascus.

[680] In 2009, the Archdiocese of Archbishop Mor Dioscoros Benyamin Atas numbered twenty-two priests.

[681] The town Eskilstuna, which is located 100 kilometres west of Stockholm, is perhaps the only town with only one Syriac Orthodox Church. It does have two associations: one *Assyrier* and one *Syrianer*. But, as illustrated in this chapter, identification with a certain name is not the only reason for founding new institutions. It is also motivated by the interest of certain social networks, in which extended families (*'ashiryotho*) play a central role.

[682] Their independent position in relation to each other is expressed in the choices they make in the organization of their archdioceses. For instance, during my fieldwork I experienced a situation in which the two Archbishops decided differently about the 'exemption' from a fasting day. The members of the archdiocese complained about this difference, because it caused chaos and questions in relation to the matter of whether they had to fast or not.

represent. The relationship between the secular ideology of the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer* and the two archdioceses in Sweden evolved in the use of two different names in Swedish for the church: *Syriska Kyrkan* continued to be used by the archdiocese of Archbishop Gallo Shabo and the new archdiocese of Archbishop Benyamin Atas began to use *Syrianska Kyrkan*. The latter is clearly the result of the institutionalized translation of *Suryoye* into *Syrianer* by one part of the community.

To conclude this section, it is obvious that the *Syrianska* elite members have taken a lead in running affairs in relation to the dismissal and installation of Archbishops for the Swedish-based Syriac Orthodox archdiocese. Although this elite gained its hegemony (initially in competition with the *Assyrier*) in co-operation with the church, over time the space which the church offered the same elite group became an advantage for its position, from which they began to compete with the clergy for hegemony. At the same time, this space has enabled them to continue the competition with the *Assyriska* Movement from a stronger position.

7.2 The *Syrianska* Movement

As illustrated in the storyline, the development of the *Syrianska* Movement passes through four main periods. The foundation of the church board *Suryoyiska Kyrkoförsamlingen* (1976) and the *Svensk-Suryoyo föreningen* (1977) marked the start of the *first period* which continued until approximately 1980. In this period, a group of lay people launched an opposition to the *Assyrier* in close co-operation with the clergy and fought against a national identification as *Assyrier* on the basis of a cross-denominational definition.[683] What bound these laymen and clergy is that they opposed the *Assyriska* Movement (for partly different reasons).[684] In their preferred identification, they based themselves on a religiously defined identity and thereby defined the group as

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[683] It is worth mentioning that from the earliest period some individuals, such as the late *malfono* Esmer Al-Khouri, expressed identification as Arameans, but this did not arouse much interest from people outside a small circle around him. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the influence of this circle has remained visible, for instance, in the St Peter and St Paul Church in Norsborg. In this respect, one can also mention the *Arameiska föreningen* (Södertälje, 1975).

[684] For instance, Archbishop Aboodi and the President of the *Suryoyo riksförbundet* signed a letter addressed to the Swedish authorities in which they requested them not to use the name *Assyrier* when referring to their people and language (*Bahro Suryoyo*, November 1979; see Appendix 10).

a church community. The *second* period (1980-83) was relatively short. The *Syrianer* gained relatively more space as the hegemony of the *Assyrier* declined. In the *third* period (1983-1996), the *Syrianska* elite opposition gradually developed into a movement with ethno-national aspirations. In the *fourth* period (1996-present), commencing with the installation of Archbishop Benjamin Atas, the *Syrianska* Movement gained its present hegemonic status in relation to the Church and the *Assyrier*. It is crucial to identify the *nodal points* around which the discourses of the *Syrianska* Movement have established and developed. Although these features (*nodal points*) have a core value, they are not static, as the different phases the *Syrianska* Movement went through illustrate.

The *Syrianska* Movement developed its present name, ideology and institutional structure gradually and in strong opposition to the *Assyriska* Movement. The character of the relationship between the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer* can be explained from the perspective that the first group already had a cross-denominational national ideology from the beginning of their establishment in Sweden. *Assyrier* took the lead and promoted the concept of *umthonoyutho* among Assyrians/Syriacs. In contrast, the ideology of the *Syrianska* Movement developed after an initial confrontation with and consequent opposition to the *Assyrier* and thereafter, in relation to the ideology of the *Assyrier*. Consequently, in the first place the necessity for an alternative ideology evolved from the need for an ideology to compete with that of the *Assyrier* (who had a federation with thirteen associations in 1977). The oppositional character meant not simply the denial of what the 'others' have presented as the 'truth', but it also needed to develop an essential space for an alternative 'truth'. This has taken concrete form in the foundation of *Syrianska* institutions, publications, socio-cultural and political activities. The *Syrianska* Movement began to intervene in all spheres of the community and made symbolic interventions in an attempt to position itself as an alternative ideology to the *Assyriska* Movement. In one of his latest presentations in 2009,[685] Johnny Messo (President of the Syriac Universal Alliance, SUA) spoke about *Oromoyutho, der Schlüssel zur unserer nationalen Einigung und fortbestand* (*Oromoyutho*, the key to our national unity and survival). As does *Othuroyutho* (Assyrian ideology), *Oromoyutho* (Aramean ideology) offers an ideology for the unity and the survival of their people. The title of Messo's

[685] 'Vortrags abend über das Aramäertum und die syrisch-aramäischen Identität', organized by SUA, 13 December 2009, Gütersloh, Germany.

presentation indicates very explicitly the development of the *Syrianer* from identification at denominational level in the 1970s, to identification at cross-denominational level in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The foundation of the first main *Syrianska* organization in 1977 – the *Svensk-Suryoyo föreningen* therefore had a pioneering function, resulting in a rapid increase in *Syrianska* institutions. In the same year, the soccer club *Suryoyo SK* was founded. In 1986 its name was changed to *Syrianska SK* and since 2002 it is known by the name *Syrianska FC*. In 1978, the *Suryoyo riksförbundet* (SRF) was founded. The youth board of the *Syrianska riksförbundet* (established in 1982) was transformed into a youth federation – the *Syrianska Ungdomsförbundet* (SUF, in 2010 its name was changed to *Syrianska-Arameiska Ungdomsförbundet - SAUF*) in the year 1992. In its statutes, SRF is defined as an independent and democratic umbrella organization with thirty-four *Syrianska* associations and a total of 18,923 members in Sweden. The main aim of SRF is described as 'the protection and representation of the interests of the *Syrianska* people in Sweden ethnically, culturally, linguistically and socially.'[686] At the international level, SRF is represented by the Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA[687]) and it is a member of the Swedish-based *Co-operative Group for Ethnic Associations* (SIOS). The *Syrianska* young people also run a church-related national organization, *Syrisk Ortodoxa Kyrkans Ungdomsförbund* (SOKU – the Syriac Orthodox Church Youth Union), which was founded in 1996 by youth members of the churches in the archdiocese of Archbishop Benjamin Atas.[688] Recently, in 2006, the *Syrianska* Movement founded the satellite TV channel *Suryoyo SAT*; two years after the TV channel *Suroyo* TV[689] was founded.[690] The aim for the

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[686] The other articles in its statutes are more or less similar to those of other civil organizations founded on the basis of the Swedish legal rulings and dominant discourse (such as equality between men and women, the emphasis on democracy and so forth).

[687] The Syriac Federations worldwide have been organized under the umbrella organization of the *Syriac Universal Alliance* (SUA) since its foundation in New Jersey on 16 June 1983. At the moment, it has its headquarters in Södertälje. In 1998, a daughter organization of SUA was founded: the Syriac Aramaic European Youth Committee (SAEYC). Its purpose is to attract the young people. In 1999, SUA was formally recognized by ECOSOC (the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations) as an NGO and was granted a special consultative status.

[688] In 2007, it had 25 member associations throughout Sweden, with a total membership of 9596. It aims to reach out to *Syrianska* youngsters religiously, culturally and socially.

[689] The satellite TV channel, *Suroyo TV*, was founded in Södertälje by the *Dauronoye* (*Gabo d-Hirutho d-Bethnahrin*, GHB, Mesopotamia Freedom Party) in 2004. The channel broadcasts 16 hours a day and can be watched in 85 countries.

establishment of a second TV channel for Assyrians/Syriacs has been explained by its founders in terms of the need for the production of programmes from a specific perspective, which is seen as the 'correct one'. At the introduction of this channel to the audience, the founders stressed that it is a TV 'for the *'amo Suryoyo* and from the *'amo Suryoyo*'. This implies the idea that the earlier channel was not 'from the people', as they thought it included some 'foreign elements' such as the inclusion of the designation 'Assyrian', which did not fit in with their ideology. It is important to note that the existence of both channels has created another public sphere for an exacerbation and growth of antagonisms. This is similar to the antagonistic space which was created by the existence of the two soccer teams (*Assyriska FF* and *Syrianska FC*) in the same town in the 1970s.



Illustration 12: The *Syrianska* flag on the flagpole of the St Peter and St Paul Church in Norsborg. Photo: Naures Atto.

690 Earlier, *Assyria TV* had been founded by GFA (*Furqono*, Assyria Liberation Party) in 2000, but it did not last long because of a lack of financial resources and it closed down in the same year. All three channels have been financed mainly by donations from community members worldwide.

In the process of institutionalization, the *Syrianska* institutions have developed a specific relationship to the church. In their antagonistic relationship with the *Assyrier*, initially the *Syrianer* made use of the hegemonic position of the church to strengthen their position in the discursive field. Only later have the *Syrianska* institutions sought to develop a more independent position from the church organization. Nevertheless, a continued close relationship between the latter and the church can still be observed.[691]

The change in the relationship to the church can also be observed in the name changes which the *Syrianska* institutions have undergone. The name of one of their first associations, the *Svensk-Suryoyo föreningen*, (1977), was changed to the *Syrianska föreningen* in 1981. Their federation, the *Suryoyo riksförbundet*[692] (1978), was changed to the current name *Syrianska riksförbundet* during a congress of the federation in 1981.[693] At the time of writing in 2009, although the board on the building reads *Syrianska/Arameiska riksförbundet*, in the statutes its name has remained *Syrianska riksförbundet*. The inclusion of *Arameiska* in its name on the board indicates the stress on a cross-denominational national identity, even though the name *Syrianska* is supposed to send the same message. In the process of developing a secular national identity, the *Syrianska* Movement has followed a process similar to that of any other national movement: the re-invention of a *past* and the construction of symbols (flag, martyrs, heroes, national days and so forth). This process is also expressed in the discursive rhetoric used in the *Syrianska riksförbundet*'s monthly magazine, *Bahro Suryoyo*.[694]

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691 Another indication of the initially closer relationship between the *Syrianska* associations and the church is that they have often been physically located either in one of the rooms or halls of the church, or beside it. Today, the *Syrianska riksförbundet* has a physically independent office in the centre of Södertälje. This is in contrast to the associations of the *Assyrier* which have had their independent locations throughout Europe from the beginning.

692 In *Suryoyo*, the name of the federation was *Qentronutho d-hudre Suryoye b-Eswed*. The choice not to call it *huyodo* (another word for 'federation') may have had something to do with the name of the *Assyrier* magazine *Hujådå* (pronounced as *Huyodo*) and the already existing Assyrian Federation – *Huyodo Othuroyo*.

693 The *Syrianska* activist Benjamin remembers that they also had a discussion among themselves about the name of the Federation: 'Those who came from *Tur 'Abdin* wanted to use *Suryoye* and those who came from *Qamishlo* wanted to use *Syriani* [Arabic for *Suryoye*]. Finally it became *Suryoyo riksförbundet*.'

694 For instance, in 1994, SRF announced a competition for a national anthem (*Bahro Suryoyo*, April 1994). In the article *Kyrkan behöver ändra riktning*, the *Syrianska riksförbundet* urged the



Illustration 13: The folkloristic dance group of *Arameiska föreningen* in Södertälje (1975). The *Arameiska* flag which hangs on the wall was inspired by the flag which was used in the association Rafidayn in *Qamishlo* (Syria). Source: Mousa Afram.

7.2.1 The *Syrianska* Movement and the Aramean Heritage

The *Syrianska* ideology builds on the idea that *Suryoye* are of Aramean descent (see further Chapter 8). In the process of the antagonism with the *Assyrier*, this ideology about an Aramean heritage has grown more pronounced over time and has been increasingly put into words in the discourses employed. This process can be traced in the articles about the history of the *'amo Suryoyo* which have been published in *Bahro Suryoyo*. In the first numbers (1979), the series of articles *Historia*, approached the history from a religious perspective; firmly placing the ancestral history of the Arameans in the genealogy of Adam and Eve. Later, as Nordgren (2006: 82-90) also noted, the emphasis turned to the more recent pre-Christian history of the Arameans.[695]

In need of books about 'the history of their people' in order to raise new generations with this consciousness, the *Syrianska riksförbundet* has begun

church to be more transparent (*Bahro Suryoyo,* November 2002). The *Seyfo* question has featured prominently in *Bahro Suryoyo* since the mid-1990s (see further also Nordgren 2006). The article *Våra Syrianska martyrer – våra hjältar utmanade livet och döden* (*Bahro Suryoyo*, August 1998) focuses on their martyrs who are referred to as heroes.

695 An example is the series of articles *Arameisk gren* [Aramean Roots] (Anonymous, *Bahro Suryoyo* 1986, No. 1).

to translate[696] and produce books about the Aramean heritage of the people. In 1983, a point at which the name debate was intense, the *Syrian Organisation in Middle Europe and Sweden* re-published Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum's (1952) article *The Syrian Church of Antioch: Its Name and History* in which he assumes Aramean and not Assyrian ancestry for the '*amo Suryoyo*. He had published this in the American context in 1952 and accompanied it by an admonition to stop using the designation 'Assyrian' and to adopt instead the use of the name 'Syrian'. His clarion call was to identify with an Aramean ancestry. About thirty years afterwards, in addition to the English translation (and the Syriac and Arabic original), the article was also translated into German and Turkish. A new introduction was added by the late Archbishop Julius J. Çiçek (the Netherlands), written from a new perspective in the discursive field of the 1980s but with the same message (see Appendix 11). At that time he fiercely opposed the Assyrian Movement. Çiçek explains the crisis which had arisen among the people, which he ascribes to the rise of the Assyrian political Movement. He accuses the latter of corrupting the name of the people. Furthermore, he encourages the reader to consult the book personally to lean about the history of the names *Suryoye* and *Oromoye* without being led astray by any specious argument.

One publication which is presented with pride by the *Syrianska* Movement is 'The Hidden Pearl: The Syrian Orthodox Church and its Ancient Aramaic Heritage' (Brock et al., 2001). The *Syriac Universal Alliance*, in co-operation with the Syriac Orthodox Church in Europe, financed this project. Consisting of three volumes and three videos, it focuses on the Aramaic-speaking culture of the Syriac Orthodox Church. This exclusive focus has been a point of vociferous controversy, especially after Assyrian activists complained about church involvement in the financing and the publishing of such a project, which excludes other elements of pre-Christianity, such as the Assyrian culture. In the light of the present-day, it meant that the Assyrian identification among Assyrians/Syriacs was ignored in this publication; the identification as Arameans taking pride of place.

Although the *Syrianska* ideology assumes an Aramean heritage, this is not expressed in its name. The early path-shaping discourse of being *Syrianer* and not *Assyrier* also partly explains why the name 'Aramean', as introduced by a few *Syrianska* members, was not adhered to among the ordinary *Syrianer*

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[696] An example is Dupont-Sommer's *Les Araméens* (1949), which has been translated into Swedish.

(see also Section 7.1.2). The academic activist Nahir reflects about the time he was the president of the *Syrianska* Youth Board:

> ...At that time I was a strong believer in the Aramean ideology... We tried to change the name of the *Syrianska riksförbundet* to *Arameiska*. To some extent we were successful but, from the very outset the designation *Suryoyo* was spread among the people, it [*Arameiska*] was not adopted because it did not find wide acceptance among the ordinary people.

One explanation for the rejection of the adoption of the name *Arameiska* is that identification as *Syrianer* has been reinforced by its antagonism to the name *Assyrier*.[697] In fact, this reinforcement was carried to such heights that, the moment *Syrianska* activists introduced the name *Arameiska* among their members, the majority of them refused to accept it and its use remained therefore limited to a small circle of people. The *Syrianer* might consider the use of different names as a way of yielding space to the *Assyrier*. Any such weakness could lead to a weakening of their hegemony by undermining the name *Syrianer*; the symbol for the main antagonism in relation to the *Assyriska* Movement. That is why the name has always been used in a very strict sense in the discourses of the *Syrianska* Movement.[698]

7.2.2 The *Syrianska* Flag

The present-day *Syrianska* (*Arameiska*) flag (see Illustration 15) has gone through different stages of design on the initiative of people in Sweden. The flag which *Arameiska föreningen* in Södertälje has used since 1975 (see Illustration 14, centre) was based on the flag of the *Rafidayn* association in *Qamishlo* (Syria, see Illustration 14, left). The *Rafidayn* logo seems to have

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[697] Retrospectively, the use of the designation *Syrianer* is argued to have been for other reasons, namely, that the *Syrianska riksförbundet* followed the orders of the Synod of 1981, in which the use of both of the names 'Assyrian' and 'Aramean' was forbidden to Syriac Orthodox Church members. This argument is stated in the letter which the *Syrianska riksförbundet* sent to the Patriarch and the Synod of 1990: *Kadasetli Antakya Kürsüsü'nün Saygıdeğer Lideri Mor Ignatiyos Zakka I Iwas ve Muhterem Sen Sinod Meclisi Üyeleri* (*Bahro Suryoyo*, August 1990). This letter was written in the context of the conflict between Archbishop Gallo Shabo and the church board. The Archbishop was accused of favouring the *Assyrier* at the cost of the *Syrianer*. The argument for not having used the designation 'Aramean' can therefore be understood as a way to win the sympathy of the Synod for the *Syrianska* Movement.

[698] The strict identification as *Syrianer* also differs from those who identify themselves as 'Aramean' in other European countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands.

been inspired by an image of the ancient Assyrian God Ashur (see Illustration 11, right).

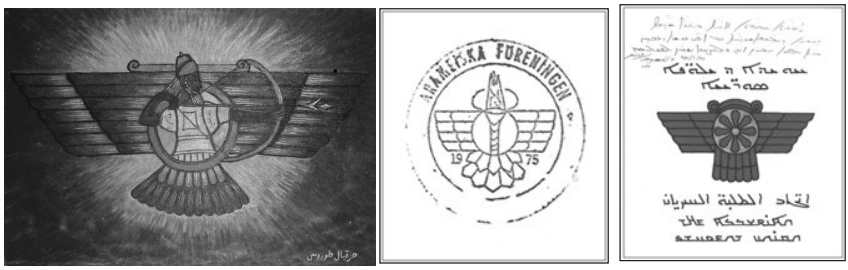

Illustration 14: The *Rafidayn* logo in Qamishlo (left) painted by Hazqiyal Toros (1961). Source: MARA. The stamp of *Arameiska föreningen* (centre). Source: Mousa Afram. The logo of *the Assyrians Students Union in Lebanon (1974)* (right).[699] Source: Archive Hanna Hajjar

Different variations of the *Rafidayn* symbol (all with short wings) have been used by Assyrians/Syriacs both in the Middle East[700] and in the diaspora[701]. Although *Arameiska föreningen* introduced the torch logo already in 1975 in the Swedish context, this design was not used by the *Svensk-Suryoyo föreningen* and *the Suryoyo riksförbundet* (1978) (the later *Syrianska riksförbundet*). Instead, representatives of the *Svensk-Suryoyo föreningen* asked the artist Hanna Al-Haek (Södertälje) to develop a symbol – two hands holding a flame aloft – to be used on the cover of the magazine *Bahro Suryoyo*, published for the first time in January 1979 (see Section 7.2.3, Illustration 16, left). A year later (January

699 In the handwriting above the logo, Archbishop Athanasius Ephrem in Lebanon congratulates the students with their association, wishes them much luck and blesses their work.

700 See for instance the symbol (the circle between the wings has been left empty) on the back cover of the book Qoruyo 2 by Yuhanon Qashisho (1956); the symbol used in Qamishlo during music festivals such as the Syriac Song Festival where a harp is situated in between the wings; the symbol used in Lebanon where often a cedar tree has been placed between the wings (for example that of the the Syrian League, 1977 and that of the Hudro d-Suryoye b-Lebnon); the logo of the Assyrian Students Union in Lebanon (in Syriac it was named Hudro d-yolufe Suryoye, 1974) used the symbol which Qashisho (1956) placed on the back cover of his book but this time with a flower in the circle (see Illustration 14).

701 Besides the version of the flag with the flame which *Syrianska* organizations have used, there are several logos where instead of the flame, a torch in between the wings has been used. Nevertheless, commonly, people see it as the same symbol and refer to it as the *nuro* (fire) or *bahro* (light). Examples where the torch has been placed between the wings are the logo of the *Syrianska-Assyriska föreningen* (2005) in Linköping, the logo of the *Suryoyo Trollhätten föreningen,* and the logo of the *Suryoyo föreningen* in Norsborg *(later renamed Arameiska-Syrianska föreningen* in Norsborg). It has also been placed on the cover of the music cassette of Fuat Ispir (1986) and that of Samaan Zakaria (1986).

1980), a new symbol was added on the back cover of *Bahro Suryoyo*: two wings with a circle in the middle, in which the letter 'S' (representing the name of the people, *Suryoye*) was placed (see Illustration 16, right). The wings used are longer than those of the logo as used by *Arameiska föreningen* and this is the symbol which became the basis of the future *Syrianska* flag (Illustration 15, left).

In January 1981 this symbol was placed in the upper left corner of the cover page of *Bahro Suryoyo*, in combination with the 'two hands holding the flame' (still in the centre of the cover). In January 1982 these two symbols were replaced by a new symbol, the present-day *Syrianska* flag, which was designed by Abdulmesih Hanna (originally from *Qamishlo*). Since 1983 it has been used by the Syriac Universal Alliance and all its member institutions worldwide.[702]



Illustration 15: The *Syrianska* (Aramean) flag (left) and Gilgamesh between two Bull-men who support a winged disk, representing the sun (right).

The *Syrianska* flag has been based on a relief which was excavated at Tell Halaf, Syria (see Illustration 15, right).[703] It represents 'Gilgamesh between Two Bull-men' who supports a winged disk, representing the sun. In the *Syrianska* flag, the sun (as the symbol of the pagan god) is replaced by a flame which symbolizes the Holy Ghost (see Illustration 15). This change has transformed the identity of this symbol into a Christian one. The red background represents the blood spilled in the *Seyfo* during the First World

[702] In practice some member organizations may use the symbol with the shortwings and the torch in its centre, because of assigning the same meaning to both symbols.

[703] This description is based on the information provided by the folder *Syrianer; en nation i förskingring* (*Syrianska riksförbundet*, 2004).

War. Yellow was chosen to express the hope of achieving their own country.[704] The *Syrianska* flag plays a central symbolic function at discursive moments, representing the *Syrianska* ideology. In a similar manner to the use of the *Assyriska* flag, it has been used as a tattoo on the shoulder, as a print on t-shirts, as a lapel-pin on suits and it has also become an object of art. On the Internet, it is possible to find images which are the result of creative expressions of living the *Syrianska* flag. It is used intertwined in images of the people, their past and in their hope for the future. It has come to represent an ideology with a path-shaping character for their people.

7.2.3 The Magazine Bahro Suryoyo

The first three numbers of the magazine *Bahro Suryoyo* (*Suryoyo* Light)[705] were published by the *Suryoyo föreningen* in 1979 before SRF took over the responsibility for its publication in the period thereafter. When plans developed to found the TV channel *Suryoyo SAT* as a new medium of communication SRF stopped its printed version in the beginning of 2006.[706] Since March 2009, *Bahro Suryoyo* appears as an Internet magazine, of which the purpose is to reflect the development of the *Syrianska* people in society and to act as a platform for its members to air their views on socio-political issues.[707] Until recently, *Bahro Suryoyo* functioned as the main mouthpiece of the *Syrianska* Movement; playing a role similar to that of *Hujådå* in the

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[704] It is remarkable that the colours of the *Syrianska* flag are also those which are used in the logo representing the Syriac Orthodox Church. Retrospectively, it will be hard to find out whether this is a coincidence. As already mentioned, the *Syrianska* flag is inspired by the flag of the *Rafidayn* association in *Qamishlo*. The pictures (from mid-1970s) of the first soccer teams, both *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* in Södertälje, reveal that the colours used for their uniforms were also in different combinations of red and yellow (*Syrianska* combined also the colour black with red and yellow). In the same period, these colours dominated also in the folkloristic costumes of the dance group of *Arameiska föreningen* (see Illustration 13). The commonly used colours red and yellow indicates at least that they had been inspired by the same sources at the beginning of their establishment. Another plausible explanation is that they started off in the same organization and that only after they distanced from each other, they began to choose for different colours which began to express their existence at symbolic level.

[705] *Bahro Suryoyo* can also be translated as 'Light of the *Suryoye*'.

[706] The first numbers were written mainly in Turkish with some articles in Swedish, Syriac and Arabic. In the 1990s, articles in English were added and the number of Swedish articles increased. Nordgren (2006: 78) also noted this increase. He compared the language use in *Bahro Suryoyo* and *Hujådå* and concluded that the use of the Swedish language had increased in both cases: *Bahro Suryoyo* shows an increase from 6 per cent in 1979 to 41 per cent in 2004. *Hujådå* showed an increase from 15 per cent in 1979 to 35 per cent in 2004.

[707] See further www.bahro.nu

Assyriska Movement. It communicated its particular ideology about the identity of their people to the dispersed community worldwide. For instance, in the first publication of *Bahro Suryoyo* (January 1979), the editor writes about the aims of this magazine (Appendix 12): [708]

> …to develop solidarity, love and unity within the community, to put forward the aims and responsibilities of the Suryoye and at the same time to reveal the truth…

Since then, the discursive 'truth' has begun to be communicated to its readers, but first and foremost to the *Assyrier*.

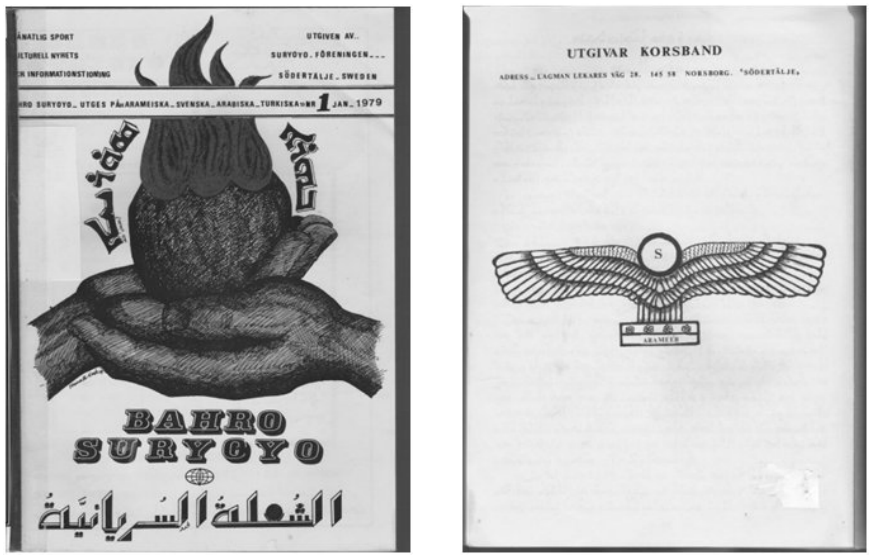

Illustration 16: The front and back cover of the first issue of *Bahro Suryoyo* (1979) and the back cover of the first issue in January 1980.

From the beginning, in almost all numbers of *Bahro Suryoyo*, at least one article has appeared which has been related to the 'name debate'.[709] Articles

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[708] My translation of the original in Turkish.

[709] A selection of examples are: *Antakya Süryani Kilisesi Adı ve Tarihi* by Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum (summary of his book from 1952, October 1982); *Syrianerna/Assyrierna, Kaldeerna och Nestorianerna är Araméer till härkomst,* article series by Aram Baryamo, February 1996; *Benämningen Syrianer i Arabiska källor – Syrianska studier*, article series by Assad Assad, April 1989; *Begreppet "Assyrier" förr och nu* by Bertil Persson, October 1991; *Vårt namn, vår historia,*

or ideas which have been considered central to the ideology of the *Syrianska* Movement have been published several times throughout the years. The present-day digital version of *Bahro Suryoyo* also devotes a special section to the identity and the name of the people.

7.2.4 The Antagonistic Orientation of the *Syrianska* Movement

The fact that both *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* have designated the magazine of the 'others' with an antonym indicates their image of each other. The *Assyriska* Father Aday remembers that *Assyriska* activists used to refer to *Bahro Suryoyo* as *'Utmo Suryoyo* (*Suryoyo* Darkness), because of (what he calls) the 'curses' called down on the *Assyrier* in its articles. In their turn, the *Syrianer* have been known to refer to *Hujådå* (meaning 'unity') as the magazine of *flighutho* (disunity). In an interview in *Bahro Suryoyo* (1983, No. 1), the President of SRF argued along the same lines and called upon every Assyrian/Syriac to fight actively against the *Assyriska* Movement:[710]

> …Actually the term *Hujådå* is the Syriac word for *unity*. The magazine *Hujådå* is an instrument of an organization which is the reason for the fragmentation and separation among our people and the church and its goal is to eradicate *Suryoyutho* [*Süryanilik*, in Turkish, meaning '*Suryoye* way of life']… To fight against such kinds of organizations is the task of everyone who has noble Syriac blood in his veins…

This perception of the *Assyriska* Movement as the main antagonistic other and as the main danger to the *'amo Suryoyo* is expressed in many of the articles and statements produced by the *Syrianska* Movement. To take another example, in a letter from the *Syrianska riksförbundet* to Patriarch Zakka I Iwas and the members of the Synod, the first request from the Synod was to take an active stand against and to punish the followers of the Assyrian ideology. In the first place, the letter was concerned with the problem between Archbishop Abdulahad Gallo Shabo and the Church Board (*Bahro Suryoyo*, August 1990):[711]

Ephrem Barsaum (summary of his book from 1952), January 1981; *Les Araméens* article series by Dupont-Sommer, November 1991; *Den Syrianska nationens namn,* article series by Barsaum (summary of his book from 1952), September 2003.

[710] My translation of the original in Turkish.

[711] My translation of the original in Turkish.

> …In order to solve the Assyrian problem and cleanse the Assyrian ideology within the Syriac Orthodox Church, the decisions taken by the Holy Synod so far should be implemented…

Nahir, an ex-member of the board of the *Syrianska Ungdomsförbundet*, notes that initially he did not realize that the antagonistic aspect played such a central role in the organization he represented:

> …Finally, I understood that the present-day *Syrianska Movement* is not based on *umthonoyutho* but that its stance is oppositional… When I learned this, I asked myself: where are we going? And the [Assyrian/Syriac] young people with whom I worked did not refer to themselves as either *Othuroye* or *Suryoye*. They felt lost. We [*Syrianer*] were so busy with our opposition that we did not pay heed to the fact that the young people seeking oblivion in drugs, alcohol and so forth. What was my gain? I noticed that there were no young people joining the movement. We could not even manage to convince them join our [*Syrianska*] ideology. What had we achieved? What I did notice was that we had developed a *karaha* [hostility] against the *Assyrier*...

In contrast to Nahir, who experienced the internal antagonism purely in negative terms, several *Syrianska* elite members who do recognize the antagonistic character of their movement take pains to stress what it had produced. Benjamin, a former board member of the *Syrianska riksförbundet*, says:

> ...In a way I think that it was good that the problem which arose was about the name and not about anything else. Competition about the question of who we are has been good, because it has pushed people to search for their own history. If this had not been so, we would probably have end up in competitions between the different villages… The question about who we are brought us closer to the questions which concerned our people as a whole: we began to ask about the rights of our people in Turkey...

Benjamin implies that 'competition' within the community is inherent in its character and that the internal struggle has indeed tended to favour the question of the people. The assumption is that if Assyrians/Syriacs had not have had the name discussion, they would have found something else to disagree about. In Chapter 10, I mention that it is a common idea among

Assyrians/Syriacs that each of them likes to be in charge of a 'chair' (for reasons of personal gain) and that this is the reason for disunity.[712]

The antagonistic relationship between the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer* is also visible in the cultural field. The right to exhibit one's culture in Sweden also developed into a space for giving voice to lived antagonisms. For instance, *Syrianska* elite members have forbidden the dances which the *Assyrier* have begun to perform since their settlement in Sweden.[713] The *Syrianska* elite have attempted to stop this process because anything which is related to the cross-denominational ideology which the *Assyrier* developed is considered to be 'foreign'. Especially in Sweden – more than anywhere else – such dances as the *bagiye, sheikhane* and the *khasade* have been forbidden by the organizers of *Syrianska* parties.

The same can be said of music and songs; whereas the *Assyrier* have tried to introduce the singing in the other dialects of the Syriac churches (besides their own), the *Syrianer* have opposed this development. The upshot of this antagonistic relationship is a process in which *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* have developed different music repertoires and dances; a fact which is visible at their weddings and parties. *Assyrier* invite specific singers who are ideologically close to their parties; the *Syrianer* do exactly the same thing with those who support their ideology. Artists have therefore played a central role in the shaping of culture as the expression of the cultural entertainment of an ideology. This starting point has assumed that artists protect 'this culture', whichever it might be. *Syrianska* and *Assyriska* artists have produced songs in which they express their particular discourse about the identity of their people. Music is used to express a specific discourse and has functioned as an identity marker.

An *Assyrisk* respondent gave me an example of this political dimension of culture. Saro, who had not often attended *Syrianska* parties, experienced what she thought was the 'censorship' of music and dances at the two *Syrianska* weddings which she attended. Although the band did not play and

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712 See further the discussion in Chapter 2 for different views of *ethnicity*. For instance, countering the primordialist view, Brass (1991) presents a theory of ethnic identity formation and mobilization in terms of elite competition. Brass (1991: 15) writes: 'The cultural forms, values and practices of ethnic groups become political resources for elites in competition for political power and economic advantage'. The problem with this view is that it takes elites as givens, rather than attempting to analyse their formation process. For a fruitful discussion about the power aspect in the ethnic identity formation, see further Wilmsen and McAllister (eds. 1996).

713 See further the previous chapter about these dances.

sing the music which she favoured to dance the dances of her choice, she nevertheless managed to dance a few dances to the melody of the music being played. When the singer noticed she was dancing *Assyriska* dances, he changed to new songs several times and finally he asked her explicitly to stop these dances. To take another example, Habib Mousa, the singer who is considered to have been the most important musician in Assyrian/Syriac music in the second half of the twentieth century, has experienced how both groups have tried to link him exclusively to its own ideology. This competition in relation to Habib Mousa especially marked the 1980s. He believes that his unwillingness to align exclusively with one group or the other made them 'punish' him by not inviting him to their parties; he was no longer perceived within their *chain of difference*, the in-group. Instead, he began to be approached as a member of the 'others', the antagonistic *chain of equivalence* (here: either *Assyrier* or *Syrianer*):

> Neither side accepted me because of my stance… I told them: I am an *umthonoyo*. I did not want to take sides here… An *umthonoyo* to me means that I accept the history of this people and all these names of our people. I did not want to make a difference between people.

In an attempt at negotiation, he introduced the song *Aykone a gabore d-nafiqi me Beth Nahrin?* (Where are the heroes who have come from Mesopotamia?). Because the name *Assyrian* did not intrude in this song, it was also accepted by the *Syrianer*. Nonetheless, usually *Syrianer* do not invite him to perform at their festivities because he is identified as an *Assyrier*.

A similar competition has taken place over Assyrian/Syriac individuals who are appreciated for their work and ideas and who have been transformed into symbolic figures. Two examples are Archbishop Yuhanon Dolabani and Naum Faik. For a long time, the *Assyriska* Movement has assumed they were closer to its ideology, especially because Naum Faik functions as one of its founding fathers. Especially in the last decade, the *Syrianska* Movement has also begun to refer to the importance of these figures to its ideology. For instance, in the article *Den arameiska journalistiken och dess högaktade principer*, the author Bar Daysan writes (*Bahro Suryoyo*, August 1999): 'Naum Fayeq should be celebrated as *Aramean*, not as an *Assyrian*. The national ideology of Naum Fayeq is *Arameanism*.' With this demand by *Syrianska* activists, the symbolism of Naum Faik for the *Assyrier* is contested and assumes a *floating* character. The contestation of such symbolism can be seen as the antagonistic struggle over the hegemony of national symbolism.

To conclude, although in the course of the last thirty years the ideology of the *Syrianer* has developed a notion of collective identity where it adheres to a cross-denominational definition of their people, in their institutional policy and in their daily practices this has been given little space. In the process of establishing their organizations in the discursive field, both the relationship to the church and to the *Assyriska* organizations has changed. In the relationship of the *Syrianer* with the church, over time they have attempted to function independently of the church. If the *Syrianer* began merely as an oppositional movement, it is important to understand how it has been possible for a movement to gain the hegemony which it has today. This can be explained by the different discursive stages it passed through. Although initially it purely and simply represented opposition; later it acquired other reasons for its existence. Noting this is of importance to understanding its antagonistic character and to understanding what it stands for today.

7.3 Discursive Strategies in the Weakening of the *Assyriska* Movement

In order to arrive at a deeper understanding of how the *Assyriska* Movement has been weakened by the alliance between the Church and the *Syrianer*, I shall examine this relationship and the discursive strategies which were used. As discussed in the storyline, in the mid-1970s the Church combined forces with a group of lay elite members and began to use its influence to dislocate the hegemony of the *Assyriska* Movement. Since then, this coalition has attempted to fix the name of the *'amo Suryoyo* in Swedish through a different discourse. In this oppositional discourse, the name of the 'people' has functioned as a *nodal point*; socio-political life and frontiers have been organized around it. The initial starting point for fighting the discourses of the *Assyriska* Movement was based on the discourse that *Suryoye* are not *Othuroye* (Assyrian). The main antagonism has therefore been built on the use of the designation *Assyrier* by the *Assyriska* Movement. Initially, what other name the antagonistic group would choose was less of an issue, because it did not yet have a project of national identity for the healing of the *split subject*. At this stage, it merely disagreed to the strategy which the *Assyrier* brought to the healing of the *split subject*. This explains why the *Syrianska* elite members introduced and used different names before the present one (*Syrianer*) gained its particular hegemony after some time. The *Syrianska* elite

working with the clergy managed to mobilize the majority of the Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden against those people who identified as *Assyrier*. Since then, they have placed the *Assyrier* in the constitutive outside.

It can be assumed that the church could not have succeeded in opposing the ideology of the *Assyrier* if it had not received help from lay elite members. Unquestionably, it is through the channel of the church that the *Syrianska* elite members have managed to consolidate their hegemony among the ordinary people, for instance, through their presence on church boards.[714] The aegis of the church has functioned as an instrument for legitimating their oppositional ideology against the *Assyrier*. Therefore, the involvement of the clergy in the secular sphere cannot be ascribed solely to their own efforts.[715] The antagonistic relationships between lay elites play a role in the specific position of clergy in the social field. Realizing that the clergy have continued to have a major influence on the ordinary people, secular elites – both *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* – have attempted to mobilize clergy for their main aims.

At this point I shall proceed with the main strategies which the clergy and the *Syrianska* elite used in their attempt to weaken the *Assyriska* Movement by looking at two dimensions of the discursive strategies used. First, I shall deconstruct the *negative attributions* used for defining the 'others'. This deconstruction will provide insights into the self-ascription of the *Syrianer* and the clergy. After this I shall discuss the religious dimension of the strategies used. As I shall demonstrate below, these discursive strategies have been used to ascribe a distorted image to the *Assyrier* and to diminish their legitimacy among the people.

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[714] In Europe, especially in Sweden, positions on church boards began to be taken by men most of whom belonged to extended or influential families. Often, to be a member of an extended family also means to have influence. Consequently, people without such a network would not have a chance or would have been voted off the board at the next possible opportunity, despite the fact that they would have been more experienced or more highly educated. Although the functioning of church boards (as traditional, conservative and non-democratic) has increasingly become a matter of criticism during the last forty years of settlement in Europe, the community has not managed to achieve any drastic changes. These boards have not managed to attract younger, especially highly educated people, on to the boards. While the younger generation denigrate the functioning of such church boards as backward, I have heard individual members of these boards expressing with pride that they have served on the church board for twenty or twenty-five years.

[715] See further also Chapter 10 about leadership in which I have shown that people experience a vacuum in leadership positions. A natural consequence of this is that it makes it easier for the clergy to retain their 'leadership role'.

7.3.1 Labelling the Others

The labelling of the 'others' is essential to achieving the definition of the 'inside'. Inherent in this process is the attempt to strengthen the *chain of difference* ('us') and to weaken the 'others' who have been assigned to the *chain of equivalence*. An early example of a negative attribution of the *Assyrier* was the reference to them as *Taudikat* – the *Suryoyo* diminutive for the Syriac word *taudi* for 'thank you'.[716] This requires a more detailed explanation. The *umthonoyutho* of the *Suryoye* with the Assyrian ideology implies among other matters the care and preservation of their mother tongue. Therefore, in their activism they have attempted to replace loanwords from other languages which are used in their mother tongue, *Suryoyo,* with terminology from their classical Syriac language; an action which is the product of the idea that their mother tongue has suffered from its minority position. In the 1970s, for instance, *Assyriska* activists began to replace the loanwords for 'thank you' in Turkish, in Arabic or in Kurdish (respectively *teşşekürler, shukran* and *sahatkhuash*) with the classical Syriac *taudi* in their spoken mother tongue *Suryoyo*.

The ordinary people's reference to the *Assyrier* as *Taudikat* indicated a new-ness or a dislocation in terms of their language use. For the *Assyrier*, the use of *taudi* was part of their project in the healing of the *split subject*. For those opposing them, the reference *Taudikat* was one way to express disagreement with their 'project of healing' and a way to ridicule them, showing that they did not take them seriously. Nevertheless, the *Assyrier* were considered to be a 'disturbing element' among them – saying and doing things which were strange to the ordinary people. Their attribution as *Taudikat* was also an instrument to isolate them and to weaken their influence in the social field. This attribution as *Taudikat* continued to be used until about the mid-1990s, the time when all Assyrians/Syriacs began to use the term *taudi* for 'thank you'. At that juncture, *Taudikat* stopped to exist as a specific reference to a group of people among Assyrians/Syriacs.

Father Aday also remembers other references to them from the time he was a lay *assyrisk* activist. Two such remarks were 'orphans of the monasteries' (*yatume da dayre*) and 'who are these [people] from the villages who give us orders?' (*mannani da qeryawotho d-ko m-amri a'layna?*). Both

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[716] This was already the case in Istanbul, when the oppositional group referred to the students of the association *MED Kültür Derneği* as *Taudikat*.

references have a derogatory connotation. The reference to 'orphans' implies that historically orphans often ended up in monasteries. It is a direct reference to the present-day activists who have been educated in these monasteries. Hence, in this usage, living in a monastery assumes a person who has no home and therefore a lower social status. In reality, students who have graduated from monasteries in the last few decades were often the sons of well-to-do families who could either afford to send their sons to the monastery for their education or who were born to parents who valued education highly. The reference to the 'village people' implies that those using it were from urban areas; in this case from *Midyad*. This visibility of villagers among activists who managed to pick up social roles in the discursive field explains the remarks of the *Syrianska* elite members who referred to *Assyrier* as 'village people'. Inherent to this remark is the fact that they do not accept the hegemony of villagers; their rejection of the *Assyrier* implies class competition.

The first *Assyriska* elite members were also referred to as *devils* (*shide*), especially by the older generation: 'those who studied in the monasteries have all become devils'.[717] Usually they had studied at one of the monasteries in the Middle East and in contrast to the ordinary people, they had enjoyed a higher education.[718] The reference to *devils* implies the idea that *Assyrier* constitute a danger to their people, especially because the *Assyrier* were fairly actively attempting to convince the community members of their ideology which they perceived to be a national necessity. An ex-member of the *Syrianska Ungdomsförbundet* confirmed this hypothesis. He explained this as a consequence of a low self-esteem on the part of the *Syrianer* and that therefore their strategy was to avoid debates or discussions with the *Assyrier*. Above all that they should not co-operate in common activities:

> When I was on the board of the *Syrianska* Youth Section, I tried to organize a meeting with the *Assyrier* party, but the *Syrianska* Federation did not allow me to do this. One of them said: "...they will convince you, they are like devils." This lifts the tip of the veil on their complex... one reason for not entering into a discussion with the side of the *Assyrier* was that they

[717] The reference to an intelligent or smart person in terms of 'devil' is also common in other contexts, using the expression: *Shidoyo, adnee ko remshie* (He is a devil, his ears are moving).

[718] This explains why most of the teachers (*malfone*) in the early period adhered to the Assyrian ideology. The late *Malfono* Esmer Al-Khouri (from Syria) was among the few teachers who actively opposed the *Assyrier* and was also among the first to express an explicit alternative national identification as Aramean.

> felt weak in relation to them… I said: "You do not believe that we can convince and change them? He said: "No"...

In their relationship with the *Syrianer*, the *Assyrier* have been far less in opposition and much more on the defensive right from the beginning of their life as a movement in Europe. The former *Syrianska* activist Lucas mentioned that, when he visited the *Assyrier* in their *hudro* in the 1990s, he learned that they had developed a set of ideas about the *Syrianer*: hard-headed, not learned, aggressive in their communication, conservative, religious and so forth. In contrast, *Assyrier* perceived themselves as: modern, learned, secular and civilized. This attitude, which many of the earlier generation *Assyrier* characterize as 'arrogant', is said to have been present from the beginning. The *Assyrier* activist Aho who was raised in Syria says:

> As Assyrian youngsters [*'layme Othuroye*] we developed arrogance; that we were intellectuals and knew better than all the others of our people. That we should stand with other oppressed people against oppression and that we should, with other minorities, try to develop democracy in the counties of the Middle East we lived in.

The Assyrian Movement (as discussed in the earlier chapter) began as an elite movement among the students and highly educated people in Syria. Their top-down approach lengthened the already existing distance between them and the ordinary people. In the long term, this elitist attitude was used against them. To take one example, the *Assyrier* have been very explicit about the idea that, besides the existing religious leadership, Assyrians/Syriacs should have a secular leadership (see further Chapter 10). This idea implies the need for the distinction between religious and secular spheres of influence and that religious tasks should be the province of the clergy and secular tasks that of the laity. Besides stressing this distinction, *Assyriska* activists have openly criticized the clergy at moments of disagreement about the way they have handled the religious affairs of their people. This critical attitude towards the clergy was something very unusual and uncommon among the ordinary people.[719] Therefore, the *Assyriska* activists gained the image of being 'anti-church' (*mqabel di 'ito*). In the mobilization of the ordinary people against them, the clergy utilized this critical attitude against the *Assyrier*.

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[719] In the present-day it has become very common among all generations and ideologies to criticize the clergy openly.

This conflict can be analysed in terms of power relations. The church did not accept the stand of the *Assyrier* and therefore explained it in different terms in the discursive field. In reality, the Assyrian ideology was not an alternative at a theological level, but at the secular, political level and with that an attempt was made to take over the leadership of the people in representing Assyrians/Syriacs to the new 'others' from the church. This discourse has been presented in both the media of the *Assyrier* and their everyday discourse. Although the present-day *Syrianska* Movement has developed a similar stand in relation to the position of the church, it has retained a relatively closer relationship with the clergy than the *Assyrier* have done. This is because since the opposition to the *Assyrier* began, the majority of the clergy have commonly favoured identification as Arameans to identification as Assyrians.[720] I shall now examine how religious discourses have been employed in the discursive struggle.

7.3.2 The Instrument of Excommunication

In the storyline I have broadly discussed how the *Assyrier* had been threatened with excommunication if they did not obey the stipulation of Archbishop Aboodi that they stop using the designation *Assyrier*. The purpose of this discursive strategy was to put a full stop to the *Assyriska* ideology. 'Excommunication' is formulated as one of, if not the direst punishment in religious discourses. It assumes the exclusion of the person or the group concerned not only from the Eucharist but also from salvation. Consequently, as an instrument it is mostly used to threaten the 'inside' by excluding them from all their former social ties, and positioning them in the constitutive outside; a severe form of dislocation. Since the clergy and the *Syrianska* elite were well aware of the deep religiosity of their people, they used this instrument to isolate the *Assyrier* from the community. However, the extreme implementation by Archbishop Aboodi returned on him like a boomerang.

The intervention of the Swedish authorities was most probably the reason for the decision of the Synod on July 1982 to withdraw this threat of excommunication. Another reason was that this instrument of

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[720] For instance, the St Peter and St Paul Church in Norsborg uses the *Syrianska* flag alongside the amblem of the Syriac Orthodox Church on the flagpoles at its front door. The same flag decorates one of the inner walls of the church hall which is located on the same premises, despite the Synod's decision that 'political' symbols are not permitted to be used within the church (see illustration 12).

excommunication was not very effective because the ordinary people considered it fairly harsh, despite the fact that many of the older generation did not understand the logic of *umthonoyutho* among the *Assyrier*. The outspoken opposition of the church confronted the people with a new experience – the exclusion of church members from church rituals. The activist Shushan explains:

> ...when the clergy refused to hold a funeral service [*lewoyo*] for one of the members of an *Assyrisk* family, it therefore had to ask a Swedish clergyman officiate. Many of our elderly people were disappointed with our clergy and distanced themselves from the church.[721] ...The older people thought that the church had gone too far in opposing the Assyrians. After these kinds of incidents, the older people [in Shushan's direct social environment] no longer criticized us for our Assyrian ideology.

At the present time, clergymen have continued to make use of excommunication as an act of power by which to secure their hegemony. During my fieldwork, I attended a Sunday Mass in the area of Södertälje. At the sermon, I took some pictures until I heard the hundreds of people in the church murmuring. Since I was concentrating on taking pictures, I missed what the priest had said. The lady next to me looked at me her eyes wide with horror and, putting her hand in front of her mouth, she whispered in my ear: 'He says that there are people spreading gossip that the church board has misappropriated large amounts of money which was meant for the building of the church. From now on, anyone keeps spreading this rumour will be excommunicated!' During breakfast, the people I visited that day expressed their disagreement with the priest's pronouncement. They thought it was as way to stop his community from thinking and to make them acquiesce in any mistakes he and the church board might make. No matter how seriously people take the threat of excommunication, the fact that this threat is used shows the degree of the problem experienced.[722]

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[721] The person had died in a car accident. The family held the funeral service in a Swedish church. An *Assyrier* activist who refused to be thrown out of the Syriac Orthodox Church managed to convince one of the priests who did not oppose the *Assyrier* to attend the service.

[722] Excommunication became reality when the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop in Belgium pronounced it on a member in the community who had a disagreement about the way he was running the affairs of the Church community in Belgium. This drew the attention of Assyrians/Syriacs worldwide after it had been discussed in several TV programmes on the community channels. The common reaction was to reject the act of excommunication. In

7.3.3 The Religious Argument

As a starting point, besides leaning on the legitimacy of the clergy among the ordinary people, those opposing the *Assyrier* had played another gambit. The cross-denominational approach of the *Assyrier* was fairly new to the ordinary people. In reaching out to the ordinary people and developing antagonism against the *Assyrier*, the clergy presented the designation Assyrian (which *Assyrier* used as an umbrella name at the cross-denominational level) as the name related to the Nestorian Church (Assyrian Church of the East) from which their church had distanced itself at the Synod of Ephesus in 431.[723] In other words, the clergy's point of departure was identification at the denominational level. This was also the common identification among the ordinary people; consequently the church and the *Syrianer* had an advantage in the competition with the *Assyrier* among this group. Moreover, by connecting the name Assyrian to the Nestorians,[724] they assumed this would be effective in their strategy of fighting the *Assyriska* Movement, because historically there has been 'theological disagreement' and friction between the two churches.[725] The *Syrianska* student Matay remembers how *Syrianer* talked about the cross-denominational approach of the *Assyrier*:

2008, Jakob Ruhyo and Özcan Kaldoyo discussed it extensively in their TV programme *Qolo Hiro* (Free Voice). *Suryoyo Sat* and *Suroyo TV* also paid attention to this. The general criticism was that the Archbishop used excommunication as a means to shut critical community members up and that this was not a democratic method to be used in a modern society.

723 This argument was also explained to the journalist Andersson (1983a: 100) when he visited Patriarch Jacob III in Damascus and asked him about his opposition to the use of the designation 'Assyrian'.

724 I remember that, in *Tur 'Abdin*, the term *Nasturnoyo* was used to curse someone. Not necessarily because there was a specifically antagonistic relationship with the *Nasturnoye* at that moment, but it was probably a remnant from earlier times. It could also have been used by analogy; to call someone a *Nasturnoyo* might have meant to excommunicate someone (here in a less literal sense but nevertheless with the meaning of a bad wish 'may you be excommunicated' – *howat mahermo!*).

725 When Chorbishop Aziz Günel (from Istanbul) visited the community in Germany (Augsburg, 1977), he devoted his sermon to refraining from identification as Assyrian. He also used the argument that the Assyrian ideology would strengthen the Nestorians who had been declared heretical by the Syriac Orthodox Church (earlier in the history) (see further section 7.5). Much earlier, already in 1947, Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum used the argument that '…The Nestorians are followers of a heretical sect excommunicated by all Christian communities of the East and the West…' in order to convince his community members in America to refrain from the use of the desgination Assyrian (Makko 2010: 69). The strong reaction of Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum against the use of the designation 'Assyrian' draws very much the attention because a few decades earlier he used this designation himself in certain contexts (see further Chapter 3). Another example of the friendly relationships between two Patriarchs of these churches is given by his predecessor, Patriarch Elias III, who seems to have enjoyed good

> …There were ideas such as: "Their goal is different; there is the issue of *Beth Nahrin,* they want a country, they collect money for that aim and they send it to Chicago where they have their party [AUA] and so forth. Chicago had developed a very negative image. Some of these older people did even not know that Chicago is the name of a city in America. Some of them thought that it was a bad man who could come and destroy the church...

These ideas about Chicago[726] – as some kind of Assyrian centre – were confirmed by a respondent who was a former member in the church board of Mor Ephrem, who explained the difference between themselves (*Syrianer*) and the *Assyriska* activists at that time as follows:

> ...The people in Sweden were divided into *Assyrisk* and *Syriansk*. *Syrisk* Orthodox worked for their church and the *Assyriska* people had a case. They worked together with those in Chicago and sent their money to Chicago. The *Suryoye* built many churches, because we do not have a *qawmiye* ['nationality' in Arabic[727]]. Our *qawmiye* is the church, the language and the people altogether – it is one. *Assyrier* say: "We are Assyrians but our church is Syriac Orthodox."

Another element which the church used and which became popular among the ordinary people was the argument that the Assyrians (in BCE) were pagans. A question uppermost in the minds of the ordinary, devout Christians, was therefore: 'How could we ever refer to ourselves as Assyrians?' Speaking about this, the *Syrianska* student Matay explains the process he went through in opposing the use of the name Assyrian in the early 1980s:

> …So, in the beginning we called ourselves *Assyrier*. After sometime had passed, the question was raised of whether this was the correct translation of the designation *Suroye* or *Suryoye*… Personally it began to dawn on me

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contacts with Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun of the Assyrian Church of the East. According to Patriarch Elias' secretary, Zakaria Shakir (1972), during the time the Patriarch spent in Mosul (1927-1930), he was visited regularly by Mar Eshai Shimun and his aunt, Lady Surma d-beth Mar Shimun. During these meetings, Patriarch Elias used to stimulate him to see to the benefit of his church community.

726 Chicago is home to a great number of Assyrians (here: mainly members of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church) and the office of AUA is based in Chicago.

727 This respondent was raised in Lebanon and used some Arabic loanwords when speaking in *Suryoyo*. By *qawmiye,* perhaps in this context he meant a national identity; in this case the lack of a distinct national identity which is represented by a distinct nationality.

> that *Assyrier* is the translation of Nestorian. I probably had this idea because I was influenced by the church. At that time, I often went to church. Our teacher ... probably explained it to us this way. We asked him questions about it. He explained to us who Nestorius and the Nestorians were... Also that he [Nestorius] was declared heretical. Therefore I concluded that the name *Assyrier* refers to the followers of Nestorius. Therefore we should not call ourselves by that name… If we changed our name, we would have had to change our church too. This is how we understood it initially. We thought that *they* worshipped winged bulls and so forth and that *we* worshipped God. They had necklaces with the winged bull around their necks and we had the cross around our necks. I know someone who said: "I would rather become a Muslim and pray to Muhammed[728] than become an *Othuroyo* and pray to an animal." This is how he understood the issue. Later I learned more about this question and understood that they [*Assyrier*] were not members of a different church at all and that they also did not worship winged bulls.

The scholar Shushan was a young girl and among the most active young people in one of the *Assyriska* associations. She explains how her parents were influenced by their social environment and questioned their adherence to the *Assyriska* ideology:

> They [parents] did not know what it was all about. They heard others saying that we were worshipping the winged bull. My cousin made a copy of the [Assyrian] sculpture of a winged bull which we all had in our houses. My mother told them that she did not see us worshipping the winged bull. The older people told her: "They worship the bull when you are not at home." Therefore both of my parents were afraid that we had become pagans and consequently we often had discussions about this. We told them that this was not true. My father believed us but my mother was still too much influenced by other people...

Shushan indicates that her parents could not understand the new approach to their identity and their identification with and appreciation of a cultural historical past predating Christianity. In the eyes of the *Assyrier*, the winged bull expressed the height in their pre-Christian cultural civilization. Despite all, the children continued to do their work. The parents seemed to have accepted the activities of their children passively. The *Assyriska* Odom, a

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[728] In that context, the comparison with Muhammad was the most antagonistic there could be and therefore the strongest metaphor for antagonism he could use in explaining his stand.

teacher of Syriac, reflects on the relationship of this older generation to the name:

> The older people found it very hard to accept the designation *Otuoroyo*. Their acceptance of this designation was compelled by necessity [*mi majburiye*]. They just could not understand why we should call ourselves *Othuroye*. They said: "We are *Suroye Mshihoye*" [*Suroye* Christians] that is how we know ourselves'. "What does *Othuroye* mean?" they asked. Many could just not accept it. [Of] those who did accept it... It was often because their children were active in the association... They did not have the heart to begin to fight it after all that their children's work... It did not help, no matter what reason you put forward. When we mentioned the *umtho* [nation] or *Beth Nahrin*, they did not know what we were talking about. It was difficult for the elderly to grasp. Those who liked us did not comment about us when we said we are Assyrians. But those who did not like us told us that we had become Nestorians. They constantly confronted us with that. Or they said that we worshipped winged bulls.

Odom mentioned an anecdote, which illustrates that many of those who opposed the designation Assyrian had indeed not understood what the Assyrian ideology was about. Some of these prejudices have continued to exist among the people up to the present-day. One of the reasons might be that the ordinary people did not learn about this issue in a social field free of antagonism. The discussion of those who objected to the designation Assyrian often did not include what the ideology was really about. Instead, the discussion was filled with arguments of rejection, full of prejudices which were not apposite. In Odom's citation below, he illustrates the prejudice and myth about worshipping the winged bull:[729]

> There was a time we had a couple of elderly people; among them Father Aho. They often visited me at home, but nevertheless he [the priest] did not like me. One day his wife went through the house and even checked the bedrooms, going as far as to investigate the walls. She asked: "Where is it?" I said: "What?" She said: "He!" I said: "Who is he?" She said: "The

[729] The controversy about images of animals also reached Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin*. When I visited the Mor Gabriel Monastery in 2005, I observed the new wrought iron gate that was decorated with the image of two lions on each side of the gate. A nun remarked that some people from Sweden had criticized the inmates of the monastery for having embraced the Assyrian ideology because of the two lions on the gates. Rejecting their criticism, the nun said that the inmates of the monastery wanted to honour the lions because they guarded the monastery in the times at which it had been emptied of nuns and monks.

> one you are worshipping!" I said: "Who do we worship?" She said: "The one whom you worship as Assyrians." I could not believe my ears! I went back to the sitting room and asked her husband: "Father, do you think the same way as your wife does?" He said: "Yes, I do." Then I said: "So, you believe that I would leave Jesus and worship a winged bull instead? He said: "Yes." Then I said: "If you share her opinion and really believe that we [Assyrians] worship winged bulls, we are in difficulties. If you think this way, who has the role of enlightening his people?"... When our less well-educated [*buree*] people heard things like this about us, they began to dislike us intensely… And they influenced the younger generations.

The rejection of the winged bull as a cultural symbol of an Assyrian civilization by the *Syrianer* has come to symbolize the fight against the *Assyriska* ideology. The artist Hanna Al Hayek mentioned to me that *Syrianska* elite members objected to the choice of the municipality of Södertälje to hang one of his paintings portraying a winged bull in the council hall. For the moment, their objection resulted in the exchange of a painting for one with a more 'neutral image'. Such actions can be seen as expressions of the struggle for hegemony in the discursive field.

To conclude, these discursive strategies have contributed to the weakening of the hegemony of the *Assyrier*, to their isolation and to their marginalization. Simultaneously, they have set an antagonistic path for the discourses of the *Syrianska* Movement and its institutional life.

7.4 The Logic of *'Ashirto*

During my fieldwork respondents often referred to the role of the *'ashirto* (extended family, lineage or clan)[730] in decisions taken at community level, invariably in a negative sense: 'Oh, well, it is all the work of the *'ashirto*!' An Assyrian/Syriac politician who resides outside Södertälje reflects on the situation of his people in this town and points to what he considers a structural problem:

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730 The primordial relationship between the members of a *'ashirto* is implied by the use of 'dbe' between the first name and the family name, such as in Nisho dbe Atto. 'Dbe' is the shortened form of 'from the home of' (*d-beth*) which is commonly used in *Suryoyo* when identifying family members. Here 'home' is used as an equivalent for 'family' or 'extended family'. But, not every family is identified as a *'ashirto*. As indicated in the text, a family must possess some kind of power which it uses in order somehow to dominate in society, more specifically in the community.

> ...A second problem is that the *'ashiryotho* [extended families] rule in Södertälje. They do not accept foreigners [here: non-*'ashirto* members] intervening in and joining the institutions. In the first place, they are known as a *'ashirto*, they are extended families, they have plenty of money. And money gives them enormous influence [*hekm*]… The *'ashirto* can ally themselves with others to consolidate and expand their influence. They try to grab the majority of the votes. This is how it works…

Several such statements attracted my attention to this aspect, which is also expressed in the 'informal names' which developed among the ordinary people for two of the churches in Södertälje. These churches are sometimes called after the *'ashiryotho* (extended families) who are believed to wield considerable influence in the church organization. For example, the church of Mor Ephrem is called after family *X* and the church of Mor Gabriel is called after family *Y*.[731] This designation need not necessarily be used in a negative sense; broadly speaking it expresses a strong relationship or the involvement of a certain family in a certain church.

One day I sat in on a meeting with Assyrian/Syriac entrepreneurs (whom I had never met before) when one of them asked me what my research was about. In my answer I also explained that 'I am interested in expanding my knowledge of the functioning and the influence of the *'ashirto* in the community in Sweden.' Unaware that the concept of *'ashirto* had developed such a negative image, I was surprised when the man sitting next to me turned to me angrily, surprise written all over his face, and said: 'Which *'ashirto*! Is there a *'ashirto*?' Carefully, I answered: 'Well, I heard that there are different '*ashiryotho* in Sweden which play a role among the people.' The man opposite me enjoyed this unexpected dialogue and explained with a smile (to make the atmosphere friendlier and to inform me about where the former remark had come from): 'Naures, he is a member of the *'ashirto X*.' Doing my best to hide my 'panic' about the reaction of the '*ashirto*-member, I introduced a new topic. Since then I have become conscious that the term *'ashirto* is much more 'value-loaded' than I had expected.[732] This confrontation with a member of a *'ashirto* was an even greater incentive to delve deeper into this aspect. I no longer assumed that all members of a

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[731] I have kept the names of these families anonymous for reasons of confidentiality.

[732] This is perhaps because I grew up in the Netherlands where the *'ashirto* has played a far less dominant role than in Sweden. In the Netherlands, there is a bigger diversity of people from different villages in *Tur 'Abdin* and different areas in the Middle East. This differs from the situation especially in Södertälje where extended families from *Midyad* dominate in numbers.

'ashirto wanted to be associated with it.

It is essential to discuss the background of the concept *'ashirto* so as not to confuse it with its equivalents in Arabic and Kurdish.[733] Although linguistically the term *'ashirto* in *Suryoyo* is the equivalent of the Kurdish *'ashirat*[734] and the Arabic *'ashira* (tribe), there is a difference between the traditional concept of *'ashira(t)* as used among Arabs and Kurds and the concept of *'ashirto* as it is used in Sweden by Assyrians/Syriacs. Van Bruinessen (1992: 51) notes that the Kurdish *'ashirat* (lineage) is based on kinship through the same ancestors along the patrilineal line. Over time, real kinship has become less important than actual political allegiance to a lineage. Political alliances with non-lineage members were essential in the tribal part of the society in the Middle East, where people in a certain area had to ally themselves with any of the ruling *aghas*. By doing so, they became part of a tribe or *'ashirat*. To maintain itself successfully, the *'ashirat* wielded a whole system of rewards and punishments to control the people who were allied with it. At the local political level, people were organized through at least two oppositional tribes. Assyrians/Syriacs were forced to participate in this structure (as were other inhabitants of the area) and hence also took oppositional stands with one another. When referring to the *'ashirat* in a local political context, people in *Tur 'Abdin* also used the term 'band' (something similar to the concept of 'political party'). The term *band* refers to the oppositional aspect in relation to another *band*. In *Tur 'Abdin*, each *band* is dominated by a certain lineage or clan.

It is this oppositional character to which my respondents refer when talking about the negative role of the *'ashirto* among Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe. It is assumed that members of large families manage to hegemonize their interests by mobilizing their large network in opposition to other large families; for example, by creating places for the *'ashirto* in the main Assyrian/Syriac institutions and exerting influence through these places. To reach this goal, they compete with each other by making use of *berberiye*[735] (informal, internal local politics). Now, the concept *'ashirto* has assumed a negative connotation. It refers to the dominance of a certain family in the

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[733] See further about the traditional concept of *'ashirat*, Van Bruinessen (1992: 50, 51, 59-64).

[734] Van Bruinessen (1992: 62) notes that the term *'ashirat* refers primarily to the warrior aspect of the tribesmen. Only later did it refer to the units into which the tribesmen were organized.

[735] *Berberiye* can be defined as an antagonistic relationship between two or more involved individuals or parties. Consequently, people who are *berber* are in a competitive relationship with each other.

discursive field. The *berberiye* can engineer the consecration of a new priest, the building of a new church, the foundation of a new association, soccer club, music band and so forth. For example, the recent history of Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe has shown that an individual who wants to become a priest needs people behind him if he is to be consecrated. Those who stand behind a candidate and request his consecration must be strong, because there is usually not a perceived need to have a second, third, fourth or fifth priest in the same town. It is a remarkable fact that priests are often ordained at times of strong antagonism between competing groups, rather than being ordained as a result of a communal need at that specific moment. Often, the ordination of each priest therefore has a very specific history in the discursive field of the church community.

Despite the fact that conceptually the term *'ashirto* differs from the Kurdish *'ashirat*, Assyrians/Syriacs have no new term for the new concept of *'ashirto* as they use it in Europe. Provisionally, I propose the following definition: A *'ashirto* is a network of extended family members who are believed to use their influence undemocratically or unfavourably in relation to other Assyrians/Syriacs or in relation to the common needs of the people. The reference to large influential families as *'ashirto* is a metaphorical reference to some forceful or undemocratic aspects which they associate with the traditional Kurdish *'ashirat* in *Tur 'Abdin*. It is this condemnation of influence which developed the new concept of the *'ashirto* among Assyrians/Syriacs. Hence, it now means something different to the Kurdish *'ashirat*. Assyrians/Syriacs have begun to refer to the influence of large families as 'the *'ashirto* at work', since the undemocratic aspect often implies the 'existence' or influence of the *'ashirto*. Extended families with no such influence are not referred to in terms of *'ashirto*.

The concept of *'ashirto* as used among Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe is probably based on the structure of family relations in *Midyad* (before heading to Europe), when the majority population of this city consisted of Assyrians/Syriacs. They developed a specific social structure in which the dominant families in *Midyad* competed with each other for influence. Nevertheless, these family relations cannot be spoken of in terms of '*ashiryotho* (plural form) in the classical sense as these exist among the Kurds. As a consequence of their affiliation with Islam, the Kurdish *'ashirat* were in the position to use coercion in order to rule. For Assyrians/Syriacs as Christians in a Muslim majority society, it would not have been legitimate to hold a dominant position in relation to Muslims and likewise they were not

in the position to enforce power, especially not in relation to Muslims. With the emigration of many Assyrian/Syriac families from *Midyad* to Sweden, especially to Södertälje, they have continued specific relationships which are built on their former relationships in *Midyad*. Often, families who were influential in *Midyad* also developed an influential role among Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden.[736]

The extent of the influence of the *'ashirto* is a question beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the influence of extended families in the institutionalizing process of Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden is undeniable and, as a consequence, their voices are very much to the forefront in the 'name debate'. People who are critical of the influence of extended family networks, criticize their activities as backward, undemocratic and as something alien to the 'Assyrian/Syriac culture' (*mardutho Suryoyto*). Wielding these arguments, elite members who do not belong to a *'ashirto* or who do not use its network pro-actively attempt to weaken their influence and criticize them openly. This is also understandable as an element in the competition for hegemony. For instance, ADO claim to want to put an end to the influence of extended families and to increase the influence of young intellectual *umthonoye*, independent of their background or status in society. It is presented as an attempt to promote democracy among Assyrians/Syriacs. This critical discourse, which began principally among the educated elite, has been taken over by the ordinary people. In 1979, the theatre director and actor George Farag wrote the theatre play *Darbo d-kubo* (The Thorny Path) in which he criticizes the influence of the *'ashirto*.

7.5 The Role of Middle Eastern Regimes in the Name Conflict

The 'name conflict' cannot be understood without studying the involvement of Middle Eastern regimes which seem to have had a significant interest and involvement in this question; a claim which is backed up by official reports and studies. My respondents also expressed fear of the involvement of these

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[736] The reports and studies conducted by the Swedish authorities and scholars also emphasize the role of the family system among Assyrians/Syriacs. For instance, in his PM, Carragher (1978) points out that this family system is well preserved in Sweden and sees this as an active driving-force behind the conflicts during 1976-1978. The extended family networks also drew the attention of the Swedish authorities (National Police Report, 1981).

regimes.[737] In 1978, on the occasion of the 11th World Congress of the *Assyrian Universal Alliance* (AUA) in Sydney, the Iraqi regime was accused of being responsible for the poisoning of nine of the forty participants.[738] In 1979 it became public that a high-ranking Swedish policeman had spied on Iraqi immigrants for the Iraqi Intelligence Service. As I discussed in the storyline, the Swedish National Police Report of 1981 assumed a relationship between the 'bank man' and the Syrian Baath regime and consequently of the role which the 'bank man' played in the 'name debate'. More recently, the Swedish radio station *Ekot* revealed a new case of espionage after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003.[739] At least six people in Sweden spied on Assyrians/Syriacs and their movements in Sweden.

Both in the previous chapter and earlier in this chapter, I showed that high-ranking clergymen who had identified as Assyrians earlier in their lives began to repudiate this identification later in their careers. The change in the discourses of the last three Patriarchs of the Syriac Orthodox Church (Ephrem Barsaum, Jacob III and Zakka I Iwas) has especially drawn the attention of *Assyriska* activists: while they were Archbishops, they also expressed their identification as 'Assyrian'. Only after their consecration as Patriarch did they vehemently begin to oppose this identification.[740] The present Patriarch Zakka I Iwas has gone as far as to make a very explicit political statement about the identity of his community, which he referred to as part of the 'Arab nation' in his presentation at a conference held in Damascus on 24 January 2000:[741]

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[737] Andersson (1983a: 84) already indicated that Assyrians/Syriacs had feared the Iraqi intelligence services since the arrival of Archbishop Aphram Aboodi in Södertälje. They had the idea that they danced to the tune of the regimes in the Middle East. See further also Hultkvist (1976).

[738] AUA website (www.aua.net) mentions that the five-member delegation from Iraq had brought sweets poisoned with mustard gas which were offered to the other delegates of the Congress.

[739] Report by the journalists Boström, Kino and Nordberg. Documents found in one of the buildings of the regime reveal detailed espionage information about Assyrian individuals in Sweden and that one of their main tasks was to cause a split in the community.

[740] Compare, for instance, the publications of Patriarch Jacob III from 1953 (*History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*) and 1974 (*The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch,* [1974] 1985), a lecture which he delivered at Göttingen University in 1971. In this lecture he implied Aramean ancestry (1985: 1-2), while in the publication of 1953 he refers to both Assyrian and Aramean ancestry.

[741] On the basis of this presentation, Patriarch Zakka I Iwas published the article 'Islam and Christianity are the two elements which complete each other in the formation of Arab civilization' in the Patriarchal Magazine, Nr. 191-193, January-March 2000. Gabriel Afram

> Today, as Muslims and Christians we should take our Muslim and Christian ancestors who fought together against intruders as an example in order to rescue the Arab homeland and boundaries, in order to spread national awareness... We are thus one and the same Arab nation. We should strengthen our national unity in the Arab homeland in order to hold the flag of Arabism fly high.

An obvious explanation for the change in the attitude of these high-ranking clergymen and their strong opposition to the identification of their church members as 'Assyrian' is related to the change in their position in the religiously organized community in the countries of the Middle East. Historically they have been accounted responsible for the 'correct attitude' of their flock. Although statements like the citation made by high-ranking clergy in the Middle East are explained by Assyrians/Syriacs in terms of keeping the authorities satisfied in order *not* to arouse animosity towards Assyrians/Syriacs as a minority residing in those countries, these statements are still very critically received and discussed among themselves as basically unacceptable acts. Being critical of this development himself, one of the Archbishops in Lebanon expressed his anger:

> When Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum was an Archbishop, he represented the AssyroChaldeans in demanding the rights of the *Suryoye*. After he became Patriarch, he began opposing the *Othuroyutho* [Assyrian ideology] and the designation Assyrian. What happened here? Did he receive a message from God? No, this [what he did] was not very wise. He, whom we respect very highly, did this. He is just like any other human being...

Statements such as that of Patriarch Zakka I Iwas have also given rise to ideas among the Assyrian/Syriac elite in the diaspora to remove the Patriarchate of their church to a Western country in order to free its clergy from the pressure to identify according to the wishes of Middle Eastern regimes.

The involvement of Middle Eastern regimes sometimes happens directly and sometimes through individuals within the community (often clergymen) who have had an influential role in their community. For instance, I mentioned earlier the example of Chorbishop Aziz Günel (Istanbul). On the

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discussed this article in *Hujådå* (September 2000) in his article *Açık Mektup* ('Open Letter'; translation of this article into Turkish by Said Yildiz).

basis of his own diary and letters and of my respondents' accounts, it seems that he had 'good' relations with high-ranking officials in Turkey. Moreover, it is very obvious that he articulated official Turkish arguments in the context of the 'name debate'. At the height of the wave of emigration, he made two long trips to several European countries in which Assyrians/Syriacs had established themselves and remained in Sweden and Germany for a particularly long time during his 1977 trip. In one of his recorded sermons in the Syriac Orthodox Church in Augsburg[742] (Germany) in 1977, he focused on what he considered to be the disturbing work of Assyrian activists. After a short introduction about the regular religious administrative aspects, he continued with the main topic of his sermon in which he explained how historically the Syriac Orthodox Church had been weakened because its members had begun to join other churches. He then arrived at the point which he really wanted to discuss more in-depth:[743]

> Eventually, a sickness for which there is no cure... cancer; again, they want to make another group [within the Syriac Orthodox Church] join the Assyrian Church... The question is 'What are the gains and losses if we say we are Assyrians?'... When the cat sleeps, it dreams of eating mice... in their dreams our young people conquer Mesopotamia... They do not pause to think about the wide swathe of the politics which the use of the term *Assyrianism* [*Othuroyutho*] among the people [around them] brings in its train... Mesopotamia does lie in the centre of its boundaries with Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan, Syria and Turkey... how are they going to achieve this? ...A person like Erbakan [Necmetin Erbakan[744]] can give the order "Go and kill them" and within an hour this might happen... If you [Assyrian activist] are such stalwart [*gawro*], why did he [you] flee here from Turkey? That is where he should go; the cock should crow on his own dunghill and not on the dunghills of others. If they are truly startwarts [*gawre*], they should go there and proclaim their message!.. you have no idea of the difficulties in which we live. Our young people [Assyrian activists in Europe] are the reason we have lost what little strength we had... The *Suryoye* community may encounter difficulties and lose a huge amount because of the senseless ideas [of Assyrian activists]... If God permits [*Alobo d-sobe*], I am planning to visit the Patriarch and inform him about

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742 At that time Augsburg was one of the main centers of Assyrian activism in Germany.

743 This is my translation of the original in *Suryoyo*, published by Beth Sawoce (2001).

744 In the 1970s, N. Erbakan was leader of the National Salvation Party (MSP) which took several times part in coalition governments. The party was well known for its Islamist political agenda.

> the situation you are in. And there is another place which should be informed about your situation; about which I cannot tell you...

However, what is the main reason for the interest of these countries in the name question? Why have they opposed identification as 'Assyrian'? In the first place, the use of 'Assyrian' in the modern historical context implies a national awareness and a distinct national identity, not just identification at denominational level. Furthermore, it has assumed a political connotation because under this name Assyrian activists have begun to demand their cultural and political rights as a people in the Middle East since the First World War. This process is considered by Middle Eastern regimes as a threat to their national existence and defined as such. On the basis of this discourse, the 'Assyrian question' is securitized. The discourse itself functions as a legitimation for measures taken by these regimes, no matter whether the threat is real or not.[745]

Another question which I would like to address is why Middle Eastern regimes have continued to be interested in this group despite the fact that the majority has continued to live in the diaspora. A very explicit example of this interest (besides the examples earlier in this section) was given by an Assyrian/Syriac reader in Mosul of Farid Nuzha's magazine *Asiria* (published in Argentina and dispersed among the Assyrian/Syriac educated elite worldwide). This reader touched upon this aspect in the letter (1939) which he sent to Nuzha: [746]

> …Eliminate, correct or change the Spanish name of your magazine [*Asiria*], because this name does not please the government of our country because it means Assyrian [*Al-Ashori*]…

It also draws the attention that the author Fuat Çikki (1936) removed the term 'Assyrian' or changed it into 'Aramean' in the writings of Naum Faiq already in 1936, three years after the Simele massacre in Iraq.[747]

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[745] See further about the securitization theory, Waever (1995).

[746] See further about Farid Nuzha and his magazine *Asiria*, Chapter 6.

[747] Kiraz (2005: 12) mentions for example Faik's writing 'It is necessity that enticed us to publish this national Assyrian newspapers' which was changed by Çikki into '… publish this newspaper'. Çikki also changed Faik's 'We began this project because of… national Assyrian racial passion' into '… racial passion.' Also Hanna Hajjar observed changes between the poems of Naum Faik which Hanna Hajjar's father (Yaacoub Hajjar, 1923-2005) scribed in his handwriting at TMS in Beirut after learning them, and which later appeared in a changed

Middle Eastern regimes are aware that Assyrians/Syriacs, although the great majority live today in the diaspora, are not cut off from their community members who have continued to live in the Middle East. The latest technology has increased their interconnectedness. Ideas developed in the new countries of residence are fairly pertinently related to the position of their people in the Middle East. Although the Western diaspora has resulted in a more extensive dispersion of Assyrians/Syriacs geographically, it has simultaneously also made them more visible. In contrast to their subordinated status as a non-recognized group of people in their homelands, Assyrians/Syriacs have made use of the opportunities offered them in the diaspora. This role of the diaspora explains why these regimes have continued to influence Assyrian/Syriac discourses of identification in the diaspora.

7.6 New Discursive Attempts for Unity

Around 1990, the conflict between the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer* reached its height. There are three factors which prevented a further escalation of this conflict. First and foremost, both groups have been living in the same public space, speak the same language, have close family relations and intermarry. Altogether, this has enabled continuous social interactions and has functioned as a counter-balance to the negative consequences of the antagonism between the groups. In this period, people also began their own businesses and new family problems appeared which required attention. Secondly, the attention of activists was drawn more than ever before to the international issues of their people, especially in the homeland. Thirdly, the 'name debate' has been paid less attention because both the ordinary people and many former activists in both competing groups have become weary of the level of discussion, which had not brought them much farther forward towards a solution.

As I discussed in the storyline, the 1990s in Sweden was the era in which the 'politics of difference' among Assyrians/Syriacs became more institutionalized and constituted a discursive status quo. Besides the early split at secular level, since 1996 (with the installation of Archbishop

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version published by Çikki (1936). See further for Yaacoub Hajjar's scribed documents of Naum Faik's poetry in Ottoman Turkish:
http://www.cavemanart.com/osroene/turkoassyrian.htm.

Benyamin Atas) it has also been possible to speak of a split in the archdiocese of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden: The *Syrianer* are found mainly in the archdiocese of Archbishop Benyamin Atas and the *Assyrier* mainly in the archdiocese of Archbishop Gallo Shabo. This deeper institutionalization forged along the 'politics of difference' has reinforced the alienation between the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer*, and the deadlock in the 'name conflict' has yielded space for the articulation of new political discourses.[748] Under these circumstances, the idea that neither the *Assyriska* nor the *Syrianska* Movement has been successful in the healing of the *split subject*, has gradually taken hold among the ordinary people and hence their legitimacy began to be questioned. For instance, an elite member informed me about an older man who believed that he had communicated with Jesus about the crisis his people were experiencing as a result of the name matter, because he believed it had reached unacceptable proportions:

> One day I said to Jesus: "Please come down and preach to this people since they are doing very bad things." Jesus answered to me: "I came down once and they crucified me. I shall not do that for a second time. You should go and preach to them yourself. I shall not come down again."

More than ever, the state of *disunity* which the 'name debate' caused began to be seen as the main problem affecting the people. This was the moment at which discourses of *unity* began to be articulated more visibly in the field of discursivity. From discourse analytical perspective, *unity* as an *empty signifier* has no content of its own. Its meaning is constructed in relation to a state of *disunity*. Therefore, its emptiness (or its *mythical* space) allows space for the hegemonic articulations of political discourses.

Although outsiders tend to see Assyrians/Syriacs as a strong collectively organized group rich in institutions, Assyrians/Syriacs themselves generally think that the high number of institutions illustrates their internal *disunity* and consequently, their weakness rather than their strength. For example, this is expressed in the commonly used expression: 'We have only a few people and we do not leave each other alone' (*Kulan arb'o prite na u khilan qar'e dehdode*). It is a reference to the idea that they are in a miserable situation: although they are few, nevertheless they are not united and compete with each other for

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[748] For instance, the emergence of the *Dauronoye* and GFA (*Furqono*) can be explained by the political vacuum in the European context. Because of the limitations of this study, I shall not deal with this furthering depth here.

the representation of the people.

They are convinced that this does not contribute; indeed it detracts, from their strength in society. Commonly used expressions among themselves illustrate that Assyrians/Syriacs assume they have a weak position in relation to other people in society. The following saying conveys this sense strongly: 'In relation to each other we are like wolves, but in relation to the outside world we are like sheep' (*lehdode khda dewena u laf larwal khda 'wonena*).[749] Using these sayings, they criticize their internal disagreements about different issues affecting their people, assuming that hitherto they have suffered greatly from being *disunited*. People who are critical of this disunity often point out the negative consequences to their common aims as a people at the local,[750] national and international level. At national and international levels, they believe that they could come closer to achieving their socio-political claims as an unrecognized group seeking recognition and enjoying certain rights. This is why the *unity* of the *'amo Suryoyo* has assumed a central position in the public discourses and has become a popular and common demand of the ordinary people, as in the case of the 'name debate'. This basic demand is expressed in terms of: 'We are all the same; there is no difference between us!' (*Kulan 'aynina, layt furshono baynothayna!*). Furthermore, they usually express themselves in normative terms: 'We *should* unify!' (*Glozem mihaydina!*) and 'Our leaders *should* co-operate to achieve the common goals of the people' (*A rishonaydan glozem felhi 'am hdode lu nisho du 'amo*). It is assumed that certain future aims of their people will be realized as soon as the people 'unite'.

Inspired by the articulation of the need for the 'unity of the people' (*i hdoyutho du 'amo*), several discursive attempts to achieve *unity* have been initiated to heal the *split subject* which resulted from the 'name conflict'. Some of the *Assyriska* activists especially began to approach the discussion about the name differently in an attempt to find new grounds for *unity*. They began

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749 This saying first began to be used in a Muslim majority society in the Middle East where the 'others' were the Muslims. In the diaspora, the 'others' have become a diversity of groups in society. At least two other versions of this saying exist: 'Towards the outside world we are like chickens and towards each other we are like cocks' (*laf larwal khda gyothena, u lehdode khda dike na*) and 'Among ourselves we are like wolves but when we are with foreigners we become like small locusts' (*bayne hdode khda dewena u inaqlo dkowina 'am nukhroye kowina khda qamse*).

750 Some of my respondents mentioned that the municipality of Södertälje has sometimes used the name conflict to make certain decisions in its own favour. Before making a decision, the municipality usually requests the agreement of both groups. Because of the antagonism between both groups, they usually fail to come to an internal agreement.

to build on and refer to the discourse about the collective identity of the *'amo Suryoyo* among the Assyrian/Syriac elite in the beginning of the twentieth century, which included both Assyrian and Aramean ancestry.[751] This developed less particularistic and more relative stands about the 'name question'. Elite members, who have played a central role in both groups, have appeared in public and expressed the need for co-operation and unity. As the monk Hanna Aydin[752] said in a TV programme on *Suroyo TV* (2005): 'I am very happy to attend this meeting with my 'Assyrian brothers' (*ahunonaydi a Othuroye*) who I have been opposing for a long time.' The ordinary people have usually received such messages positively. Nevertheless, in the new attempts at 'negotiations', *Syrianska* elite members have generally rejected any connection with the name *Assyrian*. The *Syrianska* activist Shlemun, on the board of the *Syrianska riksförbundet*, confirms that in the annual meeting of 2005 there were indeed only a couple of individuals who thought that the name *Assyrier* should be tolerated. The general idea has continued to be that co-operation with those identifying as *Assyrier* should be avoided. Shlemun mentioned only one project so far in which the *Syrianska riksförbundet* had invited the *Assyrier* to participate, because it did not want to lose face with the Swedish authorities.[753] There, they presented themselves as the representatives of one people.

In contrast to the *Syrianer*, besides continuing the use of the name *Assyrier*, the *Assyrier* have generally shown more willingness to accept the use of the name *Syrianer* in some form. Several attempts have been undertaken to negotiate and find compromises for the introduction of new names (in Western languages) by which to refer to the '*amo Suryoyo*. One example from the beginning of the 1990s is, for instance, that in an open letter the *Assyriska Ungdomsförbundet* (AUF) invited the youth section of the *Syrianska* riksförbundet (SRFUS) to enter into a dialogue (*Hujådå*, December 1991):[754]

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751 An example is a group of people from Germany, who mainly split from the Aramean organizations in Germany and founded the *Föderation Suryoye Deutschland* in 2007 (*Huyodo Suryoye d-Almanya*, HAS, with 22 member organizations). On their website they indicate that they embrace the diversity of names in use among their people and they make use of both the Assyrian and the Aramean flag.

752 On 18 February 2007, he was consecrated Patriarchal Vicar Mor Julius Hanna Aydin for the Syriac Orthodox Church in Germany.

753 The project concerned is SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency); it grants money to poor countries.

754 My translation of the Swedish original.

> ...The aim of the meeting with SRFUS is not to solve the name conflict. This can only be resolved by those who created this problem or after the generation which created this problem is gone. The primary purpose of the meeting is to break down the meaningless isolation among the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* youth movements in Sweden and to discuss what can be done about the mounting youth and assimilation problems in Sweden...

It is remarkable that, despite the big gap between both groups, AUF tried to bridge it in the first year of its foundation by focusing on what it perceived to be 'the common need of the people' – urgent problems which were essential to solve if the *split subject* were to be healed. Attempts to achieve unity were also initiated at highest organizational level. The *Assyriska* activist Abgar reflects on such an attempt:

> At the beginning of 1996, I was one of the representatives of the *Assyriska riksförbundet* who met the representatives of the *Syrianska riksförbundet*. The goal was to reach an agreement about establishing a Con-Federation with the name *Huyodo d-Beth Nahrin* which would cover both federations. All the different denominations would be the 'sons' of this federation. Each of us would continue to use the designation of our choice. I was surprised to see something so positive emerge during this meeting. After a couple of weeks, they replied in a letter that they did not wish to co-operate with us as long as we used the name *Assyrian*... This showed me that there are people who want to nurture this division and that it is not only the designation which they cannot agree upon. We had the meeting with the most responsible people on the *Syrianska* side. In the first instance, they showed plenty of interest in unity within a new Federation. I do not believe that they really want unity...

Furthermore, Abgar explained that at other moments he had proposed that activists learn from the Jewish example. They call their language *Hebrew*, their religion *Jewish* and their country *Israel*. Abgar proposed: 'Like them, we can call the language *Aramaic*, the people *Assyrian* and the church *Syriac*. The negative answer to this proposal signified to Abgar that the *Syrianer* just do not want to unite – as in the earlier example.

Students especially have attempted to find new compromise names to bridge the internal disagreements. But, they could not always reach all the students. *Syrianska* students who could not agree on the inclusion of the name *Assyrier* rejected the new alternatives. One example of such a rejection is the students in Örebro at the end of the 1990s, among whom there were

some who wanted to use the compound name *Assyrier/Syrianer*. This did not come to fruition because *Syrianska* students rejected the name and did not do so lightly. Leaving the *Assyriska* students on the outside, they established a student organization with the name *Syrianska/Arameiska Nationen*. Although a similar discussion took place among the students in the area of Stockholm, they could nevertheless find enough members to found the *Syrianska Assyriska Akademiker i Sverige* (September 2001). The debate was about both the use of a compound name and which name should be mentioned first. As a compromise, those *Syrianer* who wanted to co-operate with the *Assyrier* requested that 'their name' – *Syrianska* – should be mentioned first. This is how both groups compromised on the foundation of this organization. Those *Syrianska* students, who did not want to compromise on the name, founded their own student organization in 2002: the *Syrianska/Arameiska Akademiker föreningen* (SAAF).[755] Another initiative was taken by the Assyrian/Syriac students in the medical sciences. Some of them took the initiative to find a compromise name and proposed *Assyrianska Läkarsällskapet* – combining *Assyriska* and *Syrianska*. Nevertheless, some of the *Syrianska* students objected to the name because of the first two letters and did not become members. Another example is the *Syrianska-Assyriska föreningen* (2005) in Linköping which existed only for a short period.

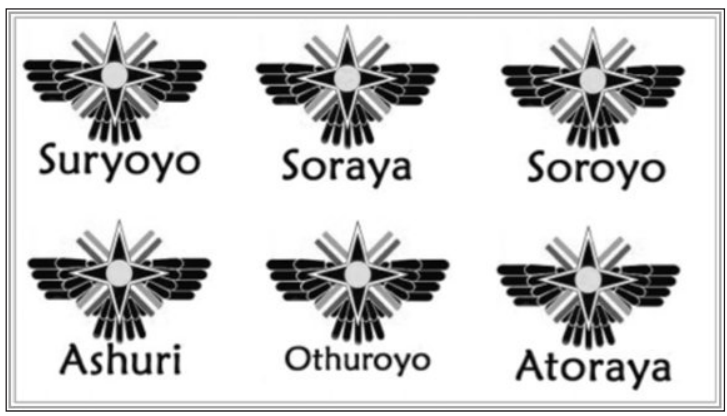

Illustration 17: An expression of a discourse of 'unity'. Source: www.auf.nu

[755] Mid-2009, the members of both organizations numbered about 1300 each. SAAF is no longer a *föreningen* but a *förbundet*.

To conclude, a relatively small group of activists, intellectuals and clergymen have dominated the 'name debate' at institutional level and have continued to compete for hegemony among their people. Despite several attempts by individuals who have articulated discourses of *unity*, there is still relatively little co-operation to be seen between them. Meanwhile, as indicated, this theme does no longer occupy the ordinary people on a daily basis. A common discourse among *Assyrier* activists is that *Syrianska* activists do not want to unite because they fear losing their influence among the people rather than having anything to do with the 'name issue'.

7.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the conditions under which the 'name conflict' emerged among Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden from a historical perspective. I have explained how an antagonistic relationship between different political discourses has developed and institutionalized around the 'correct name' of their people in Western languages. Two main ethno-national discourses (*Assyrier* and *Syrianer* with some internal variations) have been identified and one religious discourse, represented by the Syriac Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, this third discourse has not succeeded in imposing itself on the community; it has not institutionalized after it was expressed by the Synod in Damascus. The reason for expressing this discourse may have been a formal or symbolic act and based on requirements from Middle Eastern regimes to identify as a religious community instead of an ethno-national group.

The clergy have played a very central role in the 'name debate'. I have illustrated that the majority of the clergy has shared the discourse of the *Syrianer*, throughout the process of change to which it was subjected. A minority of the clergy has stood with the *Assyrier* and at certain times, especially in the present-day, some clergymen have softened their attitude in favour of a more neutral stance. However, the most important conclusion to be drawn here is that the formal stance of the Syriac Orthodox Church has opposed national secular identification and proposed instead identification at the denominational level. Therefore, in the discursive field, the *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* identity discourses have represented the national identification of the people, whereas the church has stood for identification at the denominational level.

In its competition for hegemony, each political discourse has endeavoured to hegemonize the 'naming' of its people, which has functioned as a central *nodal point*. This is how the name of the people (as a *nodal point*) became contested and transformed into a *floating signifier*. Similarly, in their attempts to hegemonize the 'naming' they have also aimed to fix the meaning of such elements as symbolic and cultural capital around particular *nodal points* (such as the *Assyriska* or *Syrianska* culture and the *Assyriska* or *Syrianska* history). Although since the mid-1990s new discursive attempts (based on the discourse of the need for unity) have been initiated in order to heal the split among the people, these have so far not been realized by a long chalk. Instead, antagonistic relationships, especially at the institutional level, have grown farther apart.

My conclusion is that the 'name conflict' should be understood in relation to the changes which occurred as a consequence of the *dislocation* after emigration and the emergence of the *split subject* in the diaspora. In the healing process of the *split subject* which resulted from the identification crisis, different elite groups have been competing for hegemony and have made use of the socio-political vacuum they encountered. The process of identification is inherently antagonistic. From discourse theoretical perspective, identification processes are the result of hegemonic struggles between different political discourses. In the diaspora context, some elite groups have had to cede space to new elite groups which have emerged. Clergymen and informal traditional leaders (often referred to as *'ashirto*) have often stood opposed to secular, young and educated elite members.

Upon its settlement, the goal of the *Assyriska* Movement was the healing of the crisis of identification which the *split subject* experienced. It tried this by adopting a cross-denominational approach upon which it based the national identity of its people as *Assyrier*. Joining with the clergy, lay elite members (later to be known as representatives of the *Syrianska* Movement) fought this approach and initially offered a denominational alternative, identifying as members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. Thereafter, in the discourses of the *Syrianska* Movement, the *Assyrier* have been identified by their 'non-being' in a pure-particularistic way. In opposition to the name *Assyrier*, after several name changes, the name *Syrianer* was established as an alternative in the discursive field. In the beginning, the opposition focused on the dis-identification as *Assyrier* and the cross-denominational ideology which this name assumed. The Aramean ancestry, which the oppositional ideology of the *Syrianer* assumed for its people, played a background role. More recently,

this ancestral alternative to the Assyrian option has played a role at content level and not only at the level of the representation of names. Another change in the oppositional ideology of the *Syrianer* is that, in a period of approximately three decades, it has developed into what I have called the *Syriansk*a Movement with an alternative cross-denominational national identity as an alternative to that of the *Assyriska* Movement. Nevertheless, this approach has remained mainly at the ideological level and has been far less visible in practice.

In explaining the character and the extent of the antagonism between the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer*, I have argued that the involvement of Middle Eastern regimes should be considered. Without the interests of the latter in the identification of Assyrians/Syriacs, the position of clergymen (or the church) and their identity discourses might possibly have been different. The same can be said about the level of antagonism shown by those opposing identification as *Assyrier*. This would have allowed less space for the opposition to the Assyrian ideology which has been represented by the *Syriansk*a Movement. In contrast to the role of Middle Eastern regimes, the Swedish authorities have indirectly played a unifying role in the 'name conflict'. Their compromise stance in deciding not to choose one of the competing names but to introduce the compound name *Assyrier/Syrianer* instead has offered an alternative since the beginning of 1980s.

8 THE LOGIC OF NAMING

It is a known fact that elites – representing different political discourses – have functioned as the vanguard of their groups in taking upon themselves the duty of translating the varied experiences of their people into general terms. And the vanguard is never unified or of one mind. While this may be so, the very fact that a clash of discourses is experienced presupposes there must also be some common ground. Therefore this chapter will focus on the discourses adduced by the Assyrian/Syriac elites about the 'correct name' of their people in Western languages and, as an inevitable corollary of this, the discourses explaining their ancestry and their collective identity from a present-day perspective. On a cautionary note, it should be borne in mind that these discourses have been abstracted from interviews which I conducted in 2004/2005 and that they should be studied in their context. Respondents mentioned that, since about the end of the 1990s, they have had enough of the name discussion and wish to seek compromises in order to develop more unity among the various ideologies by accepting the different names in use among their people. Nevertheless, this chapter also inexorably demonstrates that there are still elite members who refuse to abandon their exclusivist approach and show this by rejecting the idea of the use of a diversity of names. They can be considered as the gatekeepers of the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* ideologies in times in which they want their particular ideology to win itself some recognized space in the status quo. The very existence and the employment of the arguments which they use should be understood in relation to the competition between the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* organizations (as explained in Chapter 7). When arguing about the 'correct name' of their people, they are very aware of the external environment in which the designation concerned is employed – although this is not often mentioned explicitly. The main point they consider to be important in the context of the external environment is that other people should learn about who the Assyrians/Syriacs are and recognize them as a distinct people. This can also be taken as one of the main reasons for why the discussion about the 'correct name' of their people actually commenced.

In analysing the arguments employed in the politics of naming of the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* elites, I shall demonstrate that these are not

monolithic constructions but are actually internally diverse. To render the pattern of internal diversity more discernible, I make a distinction between *primordially* and *situationally* used arguments as a framework to analyze the deployed discourses. In doing so, it is important to bear in mind that these are not 'the laws of the Medes and Persians' but that different political discourses often make use of both types of arguments (although they may not be aware of their conflated approach). The study of ethnicity distinguishes between two main approaches: *primordialism* and *situationalism* (and a diversity of other groups). As discussed in the theoretical Chapter 2, *primordialist* approach to ethnicity assumes primordial ties (such as culture, religion, language, bloodline and so forth). All these elements are viewed as deep-rooted phenomena in society. The essentialist attitude inherent to the *primordialist* approach gives a large space to a 'static' and 'naturalistic' view of ethnicity. And, thus, it leaves little space for the changes in identities, the overlapping character of identity formations and the role of power relationships. As has just been touched upon, the discourses about the choice of a certain name imply underlying discourses about the ancestry of the *'amo Suryoyo*. This approach as represented by the elites is of itself primordial. Their premise is that their name should reflect their primordial ancestral ties. Nevertheless, I have made a distinction between primordial and situational arguments from the perspectives of those employing the arguments. By *primordial* I mean to say that my respondents believe that they have a primordial relationship to the ancient Assyrians or Arameans, be this genealogically, culturally, or linguistically. It could therefore be said that the idea of objectivity is also inherent in the use of the primordial argument.

Unlike the primordial approach, the *situationalists* understand ethnicity as 'a social, cultural and political resource for different interest- and status groups' (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 8-9). Hence, the formation of identities is associated with the logic of 'elite competition for resources' and with the manipulation of symbols (Brass 1991, Cohen 1974). In the case of situational arguments, the elite members are aware that they are employing the argument on the basis of temporality to attain the 'improvement' of the situation of their people at the moment they are using it, although they may not express this explicitly. The early constructivist Frederick Barth (1969) focuses on the 'relational' and 'processual' aspect of ethnicity. Barth's approach constitutes a shift from the 'content-based' approaches of ethnicity to a 'relational' understanding of 'ethnic boundaries'. That is why Barth defines ethnic identities as a category of 'ascription', namely an empty space

which is formed in relation to another group. This contrasts the primordialist approach to ethnicity, which reifies 'culture'. At this point, it is important to mention the critique of Berger and Luckman ([1966] 1991: 106-107) as two early constructivists about the reification of social reality:

> ...reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity *as if* they were something other than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and, further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness...

Adopting this perspective, primordially based arguments used in the negotiation of the collective identity of their people by a contemporary group produce the reification of this same collective identity. 'The collective identity' is institutionalized within the boundaries of the 'collective' and presented as the objective truth, 'born' of past and the present (and ought to survive in the future). In other words, a 'collective identity' can be born and can die. It is 'naturalized' as something supernatural, attained without the interaction of the human intervention of the elite members. Berger and Luckman ask the valid question of whether man, as the producer of this 'objectivation' of social reality, is aware that he is the author of it and whether he is aware that it can be remade. At the moment elites resort to the use of *situational* arguments, they must be aware of this process of defining the collective identity of their people. The source of legitimacy for the chosen names is usually derived from the history. However, it is still the reinterpretation of history according to specific discourses. Nevertheless, from a certain collection of elements they choose those which they still consider to be primordial to their identity. In their efforts they allow themselves the freedom to reframe the arguments on the basis of which their identity is built. They do this in the present-day context and they are conscious of what they are doing.

In discourse analytical terms, the name of a people is a *nodal point* around which other elements are organized. From discourse theoretical perspective the 'naming' of a people is a relational, contextual and processual phenomenon. *Naming* is an identification process in which the constitution of the *self* is formed in relation to the *others,* resulting in the *temporary* fixation of meaning. Thus, naming is a political act and cannot be researched without taking into account the power relationships. Through *naming* one charges

something with a particular meaning, something to be understood in its socio-historical context. As I illustrated in the two previous chapters, in the Assyrian/Syriac case, the meaning and the name of the *'amo Suryoyo* has not been fixed by a hegemonic identity discourse. The meaning of it, whether ethno-national or ethno-religious has not gained a hegemonic fixation. It continues to be questioned by both insiders and outsiders. Unlike the situation of Assyrians/Syriacs, in the present-day for instance, we do not discuss and question the national name of Swedish or Dutch people. Rather, we accept the names of these 'imagined communities' as something which have always been out there and as something 'natural'. However, the majority of the minority groups who have not been recognized as a national group, but who have attempted to gain this status have been questioned. Since these minority groups lack an institutionalized and hegemonized form of a national identity, the act of naming for these people assumes enormous significance. *Naming* is a political act and a decision in itself: it is a gesture of defiance and a way of historicizing their experiences. This step is a way of telling the world and themselves who they are, who they are not, what they have experienced, and what they want. The Assyrians/Syriacs are no exception. Importantly, the fact that I use a compound instead of a single name to speak about *one* people is indicative that *naming* is not an unequivocal matter.

Among the *Syrianer*, there are relatively fewer people who are actively involved in the 'name debate' than among the *Assyrier*. Except for adopting a uniform position against the use of the designation 'Assyrian', they are not actively involved in living and expressing the broader (theoretical) ideology of their stance. Rather, it is a latent position which is expressed only at certain times, as a response to the external environment (for instance, Swedish institutions) or to the *Assyrier*. To exemplify, in the eyes of the *Syriansk* scholar Rabi 'the discussion between the *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* has become an academic question; it is a conflict about the interpretation of [their] history by the same people'. And his attitude reveals that he is not greatly bothered by it. An important reason for his stance and that of other *Syrianer* for whom this issue remains 'an academic question' at a distance might be that theirs was not an active decision to adopt this position. In contrast to them, the first generation *Assyrier* did make a conscious decision to adhere to the Assyrian ideology. The position the scholar Rabi takes is comparable to that of the second generation *Assyrier* who have been born

into an *Assyrisk* family. Depending on the depth of their interest, they may or may not decide to take an active role.

In what follows, I shall commence by giving a *thick description* of the *primordial* arguments (etymological, geographical, genealogical, cultural continuity and linguistic) and shall continue by examining the *situationally* used arguments in the 'name debate' between the two groups.

8.1 Primordial Arguments

8.1.1 Etymological Argument

Most frequently, *Assyrier* field an etymological argument to argue the case for the designation Assyrian.[756] Two theories have been devised to argue that the term *Suroyo* (and indeed *Suryoyo*, which is perceived as a synonym of *Suroyo*) is etymologically derived from the term *Asuroyo* (Assyrian). In the eyes of these elite members, the term *Suroyo* is the historical continuation of the term *Asuroyo* and hence a new living reality of which they have grown aware and which fulfils their need. It should be said that the names *Suroyo* and *Suryoyo* have traditionally been used in respectively *Suryoyo* (also known as *Surayt* or *Turoyo*)[757] and in classical Syriac. Among the *Assyrier*, the academic elite especially refer to such scholars as the Finnish Assyriologist Simo Parpola[758] and the German Semitist scholar Theodor Nöldeke[759] whom they consider defenders of this theory. Nevertheless, often they do not mention names of specific authors when they employ this etymological argument. One reason might be that they have only heard that there are authors who argue this without having read them personally. Another reason might be that they feel they do not have any detailed knowledge to sustain their arguments and that they only referred to these authors to vindicate their stance.

The argument adduced by elite members is that when the Greeks began to rule the Assyrians/Syriacs, they commenced calling them 'Syrios' instead of '**A**ssyrios'. The reason they had done so was that the *alpha* 'A' in '**A**ssyrios' disappeared and resulted in the new term *Syrios* (Syrian). This Greek use is

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[756]See further for a critical approach of any relationship between present-day Assyrians and the ancient Assyrians (Fiey 1965).

[757] See further for the use of the terms *Surayt* and *Turoyo*, Appendix 2.

[758] See further Parpola (1999, 2004).

[759] See further Nöldeke (1881: 443–68).

said to have been taken over by the Assyrians/Syriacs themselves, when speaking their mother tongue *Suryoyo*. Hence, *Asuroye* (Assyrians) was changed into *Suroye* (Syrians – today: Syriacs) and *Assyria* into *Syria*. Parpola (2004) has a different theory; he mentions that the Assyrians themselves dropped the A and not the Greeks.

Among those who have espoused the primordial point of view, there is a constant need to find new arguments to bolster their perceived truth. Let me furnish an illustration. In 2007, after I had completed my interviews, from several respondents I received a new article, *The Terms 'Assyria' and 'Syria' Again*, by Robert Rollinger (2006) in which this issue is discussed. Rollinger argues that the Luwian inscription found in Çineköy (Turkey) proves that Luwians used to pronounce 'Assyria' without the initial *aleph*. He argues that this is evidence that this abbreviated form was already current in the eight century BCE and that the original linguistic and historical context was neither Greek nor Assyrian, but the multi-lingual milieu of southern Anatolia and northern Syria at the beginning of the Iron Age. Among the *Assyriska* elite who learned about this article, this new insight was the ultimate evidence of their Assyrian descent; it strengthened their conviction that the contemporary reference to their people using the term *Syrian* is merely an abbreviation of the term *Assyrian*. As an aside, I must add that, in relation to this argument, in this context a few *Assyriska* elite members mentioned that an etymological relationship between the terms *Suryoye* and *Oromoye* (Arameans) is absent and hence the *Suryoye* are less probably of Aramean descent.

Some elite members also mentioned that the etymology of the *Suryoyo* language supports the claim that the term *Suroye* is a shortened version of the term *Asuroye*. This theory is mostly fielded by those elite members who have been educated in the classical Syriac language. They assert that the omission of the *olaf* **A** in ***A****suroyo* produced *Suroyo*. An *olaf* which is not followed by a vocal character is voiceless in Syriac, and consequently has no function.[760] To strengthen their argument, they mention examples of this use in personal names in which the *olaf* has been dropped as in Ahiqar which changed to Hiqar or Esrael which changed to Srael.

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[760] Some mention that because of this, the *olaf* has a low significance; no matter which vowel is used in combination with it, the *olaf* will assimilate that sound. Besides the *olaf*, two other characters are referred to as 'sick' characters (*othwotho krihotho*), namely the *yuth* and the *waw*.

Commonly, the *Syrianska* elite reject the etymological argument of the *Assyrier* who aver that the terms *Suroye* and *Suryoye* are derived from *Asuroye* (Assyrians). For instance, the *Syrianska* student Matay does not place much value on the etymological argument on which the *Assyrier* focus. He mentions examples of other people which demonstrate that being called after a certain people does not necessarily mean that there is a historical relationship to those people:

> This may be [etymologically] correct with regard to the name but it does not mean that the *Suryoye* are descendants of the ancient Assyrians. There are etymological examples of other people. Romanians are called after Rome and the Indians in America are called after India. But it does not mean that present-day Rumanians are of Roman descent or that the Indians are originally from India.

Matay did not feel obliged to provide an alternative explanation for the relationship between *Suryoye* and *Asuroye*. Nonetheless many other *Syrianska* elite members did find this an important item for discussion.[761] Attempting to undermine the etymological argument of the *Assyrier*, the scholar George says that the terms *Suroye* and *Suryoye* are not related at all. He says that *Suroye* should be written with the Syriac letter *sode* and *Suryoye* with the letter *semkad*.[762] Having established this, George defends the alternative theory that the term *Suroye* developed from the name of the city *Sur* (Tyre) in Lebanon:

> It is said in the Bible that the disciples of Jesus went there to preach. And that after the people there converted to Christianity they were called *Suroye*. The assumption is that the city *Sur* takes its name from this religion. Jerome is the first to have stated this in the fifth century.

A third theory which *Syrianska* elite members often use when opposing any relationship between *Suryoye* and *Asuroye* is that which argues that *Suryoye* is derived from the Persian King Cyrus. The *Assyriska* opponents of this theory state that this cannot be valid since the name of King Cyrus is pronounced Kurosh in Syriac and that therefore, no etymological relationship can be

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761 In the mid-1980s, Assad Sauma wrote a series of articles in *Bahro Suryoyo* (published by the *Syrianska riksförbundet*) in which he discussed the different theories under the title *Syriac Studies*. The title implicitly seeks legitimation because it assumes a scholarly approach.

762 Grammatically what he is stating is not correct in relation to the historical spelling of the terms; both should be written with the character *semkad*. But the present-day pronunciation of this name in (spoken) *Suryoyo* allows space for the spelling of *Suroye* with the letter *sode*. See further Tezel (2003: 24, note 13).

drawn between *Suryoye* and *Kurosh*. Father Ishaq explains why he personally finds this theory the most convincing:

> Most of the authors say that *Suryoye* is derived from Cyrus the King. Bar Salibi[763] who wrote Bible commentaries, says that we are called after Cyrus... They [*Suryoye*] had to call themselves after Cyrus. The Assyrian Kingdom collapsed and the Arameans had very little power left to maintain their kingdoms. [In the rest of his argumentation, he seems to mix his theory with a different Syrus or Suros who is also mentioned by Melek; see below]. This was about 700 years before [after] Moses. King Syros was one of the three brothers: Syros, Punicus and Kilikos. Their father was an Aramean king. When their father died, the three brothers fought as the Assyrians, Arameans and Chaldeans [do now]. [He projects the current name discussion among the people today onto the history]. Each of them wanted to secure the leadership… Finally, the three brothers decided to divide the land of their father into three pieces and each of them would rule one piece. Such authors as Michael the Great and others say that Syros commenced ruling the land Syria, here meaning the *Suryoyto* land or that the designation *Suryoye* is derived from Syros. Kilikos began to rule Cilicia [in Turkey]. And Punicus went to the area which we know today as Lebanon. The Phoenicians are called after him.

Somewhere else in the interview, Father Ishaq contradicts himself in relation to his first argument, stating that the term *Suryoyo* already existed but that it became more widely known through Cyrus:

> We also know the name *Suryoyo* from Nehman Suryoyo, one of the military leaders of an Aramean king in Damascus who was suffering from a sickness and went to the Prophet Elisha to be cured. The term *Suryoyo* was known at that time, but not yet very well. But, after they [*Suryoye*] were called after Cyrus, its fame began to spread.

A fourth theory which the *Syrianska* elite employ in the etymological argument is that the name *Suryoye* derives from King Suros or Sauros. Melek locates this king in one of the central areas in which the Assyrians/Syriacs have been living the last few centuries:

> Historical accounts write about an Aramean king who lived in the area of *Nsibin* [Nusaybin], Mardin and *Tur 'Abdin*. His name was Suros or Sauros.

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763 Bishop Dionysius Bar Salibi lived in the twelfth century (d. 1171). Bar Salibi mentions a mythical King Syros or Suros and not the Persian King Cyrus.

> A *Suroyo* [assuming *Suroyo* and *Suryoyo* are synonyms] is someone from the kingdom of Suros. [Interviewer: Are you referring here to the Persian King Cyrus?] No, Cyrus is a different person, a Persian who came about 500 years after him [Syros]... He lived in about 1600 BCE. This name was used among the people. When the Greeks came into our area… they learned that these people called themselves *Suroye*. Therefore they called the area in which we lived the land of Suri.

All these arguments are characterized by a strong temporal dimension. Unquestionably, elites use different etymological explanations in order to historicize the name *Suryoye* from their discourse about the descent of their people. With this, they attempt to construct the 'truth' and prove their distinctive arguments. Consequently these etymological explanations transcend the history of the words; they attempt to re-write the history from the present-day context.

8.1.2 Linguistic Argument

Historically, language has been a central *nodal point* in the formation of identity discourses. This is not strange, as it is through language that individuals communicate and form social links and so produce groups of people. Not being able to communicate keeps individuals at a distance from each other. Despite the central role of language, it does not mean that it is something static and unchangeable. People may begin to speak other languages because of several reasons.[764]

The *Assyriska* elite, in contrast to the *Syrianer*, do not accord a central role to language in constructing arguments about their descent at the level of the discussion about the 'correct designation' of their people. They assume that it is obvious that the shared language(s) of the Syriac churches has been *Syriac* and *Suryoyo*. Instead, their focus tends to emphasize the closeness of the different dialects of Syriac; implying the historical unity of 'their people' (although in a state of dispersion today). Several elite members mentioned that the existence and use of the terms *Madenhoyo* (Eastern) and *Ma'erboyo* (Western) in Syriac – in reference to the two dialects of Syriac language – are proof that the dialects have one foundation and so consequently do the

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764 As a group of people, Syriac-speaking Christians (especially Melkites, Maronites but also Chaldeans and members of the Syriac Orthodox Church) whose mother tongue became Arabic (partly as a consequence of assimilation politics and partly perhaps because of other processes) began, for example, to be referred to as Arabs. See for the role of language in the Middle East also Masters (2001: 189-199).

people who speak these dialects.[765] This idea fits well into the more general argument of the *Assyrier* that all the Syriac churches are part of one family which should be re-united under one umbrella name Assyrian. The historical existence of the terms *Madenhoye* (Easterners) and *Ma'erboye* (Westerners) – leaving out *Suryoye* (as in *Suryoye Ma'erboye*) – in itself is used as an argument that it concerns the same group of people. Father Aday says: 'The spoken dialect is called *Sureth* by the *Madenhoye* and Chaldeans and *Surayt* by the *Ma'erboye*.' Only the pronunciation differs slightly, he argues:

> In the monastery we read the Bible in both *Madenhoyo* and *Ma'erboyo*. We even made jokes about also being able to read the Bible in *Madenhoyo*. *Furqon*o for salvation became *purqana*. Often we changed only the 'o' at the end of a substantive into an 'a'.

Assyrians/Syriacs generally consider the *Suryoyo* language to be one of the Aramaic dialects. The difference in relating to it is expressed by a focus on certain aspects. Today, *Assyrier* who like to refer to the language they speak as *Assyriska* are keen to assert that *Suryoyo* is an Aramaic dialect and, in the first place, the dialect which is specific to the Assyrians/Syriacs. By doing so, they tend to keep its Aramaic aspect in the background and therefore consciously refer to the language as *Suryoyo*. This might be a reaction to the use of the 'Aramaic language' argument by the *Syrianer* when they seek to identify with an Aramean past. In contrast to those Assyrians/Syriacs who believe they are of Aramean descent, the *Assyriska* elite argue that speaking an Aramaic dialect does not mean that Assyrians/Syriacs are of Aramean descent or that speaking this language has changed their Assyrian descent. They take pains to point out that, besides Aramaic, the ancient Assyrians continued to use their own Assyrian Akkadian language. In this way, the ancient Assyrian language is used by some as an element which connects present-day Assyrians/Syriacs with the ancient Assyrians.

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[765] The distinction *Suryoye Madenhoye* and *Suryoye Ma'erboye* is used when referring to the members of respectively the Assyrian Church of the East (East Syriacs, as the term conveys, or Nestorians in some sources) and to the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church (West Syriacs or Jacobites in some sources), mostly by activists or elites who have been educated in classical Syriac. Historically, West *Suryoye* sources have referred to the East *Suryoye* as both *Nasturnoye* and as *Suryoye Madenhoye*. The ordinary people among the West *Suryoye*, especially the elderly, tended to refer to the *Suryoye Madenhoye* as *Nasturnoye* and *khalat* (especially in *Tur 'Abdin*) and *Ashuriye* in the Arabic-speaking countries (where they lived in a more mixed environment). In the present-day in Europe, this group also refers to them as *Ashuriye* in their mother tongue, *Suryoyo*. For some West *Suryoye*, this is an ideological distinction made to distance themselves from them. It is not clear where the reference *khalat* comes from.

Even assuming that Assyrians did not continue to speak their own language but adopted an Aramaic dialect, many *Assyrier* still believe that Assyrians/Syriacs have retained many loanwords from ancient Assyrian into the new Aramaic dialect which they have continued to speak. This is another reason for them to call the language they speak today – Assyrian. 'The fall of Nineveh and Babylon leads to a gap in knowledge of about 400 years', Father Aday says. Nevertheless, he points out that many Assyrian words are still to be found in the Syriac language. Besides academic articles[766] written about this aspect, proponents of these arguments place lists of words on the Internet which can be found in either Assyrian or Akkadian and in Syriac.[767] This idea is also reflected in the title of the dictionary compiled by Gabriel Afram (2005): *Svensk - Assyrisk* ordbok (Swedish – Assyrian dictionary).[768] In the first instance, the reader is given the impression that the language concerned is ancient Assyrian. This idea is strengthened by the use of cuneiform script on the cover (instead of using the Syriac Aramaic script which corresponds to the language used in the dictionary). Only after opening the dictionary does it become clear that it is a dictionary of what has traditionally been called Syriac (*Suryoyo*). The fact that Gabriel Afram paid particular attention in the introduction of his dictionary to his conscious choice of the way he wanted to refer to the Syriac by the designation *Assyrian* shows that he was aware that such a discussion was very probably bound to flare up between the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer* on publication.[769] The latter group opposed the reference to Syriac under the name Assyrian. Gabriel Afram has defended his choice with the argument that he identifies his people as Assyrians. Consequently, he believes that he has the right to refer to the language they speak by the name Assyrian; independent of the question as to whether the language which the people speak today is the same as the ancient Assyrian language.

Among the *Syrianska* elite, it is a commonly accepted idea that 'Aramaic' – as the mother tongue of the Assyrians/Syriacs – is proof of their Aramean

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766 See for example Khan (2008).

767 See for example: http://www.aina.org/articles/akkadianwords.html.

768 Among the *Syrianska* opponents of the Assyrian ideology, there has been heavy criticism since the publication of this dictionary. Although this disagreement is not new, it becomes more serious when it is expressed in serious works. In the primary schools in Sweden where Syriac is being taught, this discussion about the name has also taken places. And it is not solved yet.

769 See for a discussion, for example, the article by Messo (2006) who argued strongly against Afram's reference to the language.

descent. 'The language *proves* what roots a people have. Therefore, the most important characteristic of a people is the language that they speak' says the *Syrianska* academic activist Melek. Although they refer to this argument, respondents do not elabourate on it. Perhaps because it is assumed it is obvious that the linguistic argument is on their side and not on the side of the *Assyrier*. 'Aramaic, the language of Jesus', functions as an instrument to make themselves known to outsiders as Father Bedros explains:

> If we use the term *Syrisk*, they won't understand us. When we tell them about the language of Jesus – that I talk *Arameiska*, they will understand us. Therefore I shall have to go back to the time of Jesus when they called the *Suryoyo* language Aramaic, shan't I?

In this approach the focus is the Aramaic aspect of their mother tongue, not its *Suryoyo* aspect; namely, *Suryoyo* as a dialect of Aramaic. It can be said that, in the process of positioning themselves in relation to the 'others', not only did a shift take place in the use of the designation for the people (from *Suryoye* to *Oromoye*). This was accompanied by a shift of focus in the name of the language: Syriac (*Suryoyo*) was more frequently referred to as Aramaic (*Oromoyo*). Father Bedros already mentioned, outsiders are better acquainted with the term *Aramaic* than *Syriac*. Another reason is that Aramaic is perceived to enjoy an important and respected status as an ancient language. Furthermore, for many Assyrians/Syriacs it exudes a Christian character, especially through its connection with Jesus, because He spoke an Aramaic dialect.[770] Language becomes a *nodal point* of the deployed identity discourse; the institutionalization of a particularity. Approaching 'language' as a primordial quality ignores changes in language use.

8.1.3 Geographical Argument

The geographical argument is related to the formation of an 'imagined community' in time and space. Geographical boundaries can change or be constructed in the identity discourses either according to the historical past or to the present-day needs. The concept of 'homeland' is often taken as a pre-given geography that has fixed boundaries. Nonetheless, as I shall illustrate below the boundaries of the homeland depend on the discourses deployed.

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[770] Among some of the older generations Assyrians/Syriacs there is the idea that in the Hereafter people will be speaking Syriac with each other.

'Even though we are not asking for an *athro* (here: state), the name we choose to use represents the name of the *athro*. Therefore, we have chosen the designation Assyrian,' says the *Assyriska* Odom, a teacher of Syriac. The politician Ken'an says: 'Because we need roots.' Such roots are located in the Golden Age of the Assyrians, the time they wielded enormous political power and ruled the vast Assyrian Empire. Modern Assyrians/Syriacs are juxtaposed with a group of people in the history of Mesopotamia and with the geographical core these people once ruled. The strength of the geographical argument for the *Assyriska* elite is derived from the historical strength of the Assyrian Empire, the Golden Age when this Empire held sway over a vast, far-flung territory.

Forty-five year old Shabo (a graduate of the Zafaran monastery in Mardin) states that, in its distance of a mere 50 kilometres, *Tur 'Abdin* is much closer to the Assyrian capital city Nineveh than it is to the Aramean Kingdom in Damascus 1000 kilometres away. The assumption is that the closer the present-day Assyrians/Syriacs live to the Assyrian heartland, the greater the chance that they are related to the ancient Assyrians and not to the Arameans. It is striking that a starting point for this argument is the present-day geographical area *Tur 'Abdin*, one of the last populated centres of the Assyrians/Syriacs in the Middle East, and not any of the other areas once populated over the last 2000 years. They fail to consider the geographical mobility of the people through centuries.

The geographical argument was discussed extensively by two prominent members of the *Assyriska* and the *Syrianska* elites in Sweden: respectively, Yuhanon Qashisho and Alchouri Asmar in the magazines *Hujådå* and *Bahro Suryoyo*. In my interview with the *Syrianska* Father Ishaq, he referred to the writings of Yuhanon Qashisho, saying that he thinks that the author duped his readers by what he wrote, namely: 'That *Tur 'Abdin* is much farther away from the kingdom of Aram in Damascus than it is from Nineveh.' Again, it is important to note that *Tur 'Abdin* is one of the central geographical areas in which Assyrians/Syriacs continued to live into modern times. Damascus and Nineveh are respectively identified as Aramean and Assyrian areas. Father Ishaq continues with his argument as follows:

> The closest Aramean kingdom to *Tur 'Abdin* was the Kingdom of Khozane in present-day Ras El'Ain [in Syria]. It is also called *Aram Al Nahrain*; Aram of the Rivers *Khabur* and Euphrates. This kingdom is in the vicinity of Mardin [in Turkey]. In *Omid* [Diyarbakır, Turkey] and other areas, there were also Aramean Kingdoms: in *Nsibin* [Nusaybin],

> Karkamish, *Urhoy* [Urfa], Zinçirli, and so on. In *Beth Nahrin* [Mesopotamia], between *Urhoy* and *Tur 'Abdin*, there were five Aramean kingdoms… The capital of the Arameans was Damascus. The cities Hama, Homs and Aleppo were also Aramean.

The *Syrianska* Melek locates the history of the Arameans in the area of *Beth Nahrawotho* (literally: [land] between the rivers). As is a common practice among the elites, when Melek locates the ancestors of the *'amo Suryoyo* in *Tur 'Abdin*, he fails to take into account any geographical mobility of the people in the area to which he is referring. Moreover, in his attempt to strengthen his argument that the inhabitants of *Tur 'Abdin* were Arameans, he argues that the surviving Assyrians were assimilated among the Arameans:

> Assyrian [historical] sources have proved that there were Arameans living in the area of *Tur 'Abdin* and Syria. Tiglatpilesar I lived – if I am not mistaken – in about 1162-1126 BCE. In one of his clay tablets in the British Museum, he says: "I waged war against the Akhlamu people twenty-eight times." The Akhlamu were an Aramean tribe… "Twice, did I cause them to flee unto the other side of the Euphrates, until they reached Qarkamesh," – which is near Raqa in Syria. And they fled as far as Tadmur and unto Babylon. Therefore we can prove that at that time the area of *Beth Nahrawotho* [land between the rivers] was inhabited by Arameans… But the Arameans could not exercise strong rule. The Assyrians became a strong power in about the seventh and eighth centuries BCE, but this does not prove that they were there in great multitudes. History proves that the Assyrians decreased in number... Therefore they lost; they were assimilated among the Arameans. We cannot say that they became extinct… The Arameans lived in the large Kingdoms of Damascus, Gozane [*Tur 'Abdin*], in Hama(t) and in Apad [Syria]. In Turkey, there was the Kingdom of Shamal. In the Torah, the Arameans are mentioned as the people living in Paddan Aram…

Although it is a putative hypothesis, the argument that ancient Assyrians were assimilated among the Arameans has assumed a central role in defence of the argument of *not* being of Assyrian descent. The starting point of the collective identity of the *Syrianska* elite is the presumed moment the Assyrians had already been assimilated among the Arameans – not earlier; since this is the moment that Assyrians are assumed to have become extinct. This assumption allows those elite members who share this idea to adopt an exclusionary approach. But, only when they are discussing the 'right' descent of the *'amo Suryoyo*. Otherwise, they may refer to other periods of the

Aramean past, the time in which the Arameans lived in Aramean kingdoms and 'fought with the Assyrians' as some elite members state. In this latter case, the differences in the historical past are used to express the perceived contemporary differences between (as *Syrianska* elites sometimes tend to refer to them) the 'real *Ashuriye*' (meaning members of the Assyrian church of the East), and the *Suryoye* (here: members of the Syriac Orthodox Church). I shall discuss the construction of the boundaries of the 'people' in the following chapter.

8.1.4 Genealogical Argument

Assyrian/Syriac elites who have been educated in the West do not use the genealogical argument explicitly in arguing their historical continuation. Often, they have made explicit their idea that groups of people have mixed, making it difficult to prove genealogical continuity. Besides this, they have demurred that it is racist to talk about genetics. Consequently, in their current discourse they think it is less important to focus on the genealogical element. Instead, they believe that it is their right as a group of people – (independent of their past) – to be recognized as a nation and to enjoy certain rights of which they are deprived at present.[771] Although they do not use the genealogical argument, it is still possible to detect traces of essentialism: 'We are mixed but we still know how to distinguish the *'amo Suryoyo*.' Here both continuity and change are implied; change from a historical perspective and continuity from a present-day context.

Assyriska elite members who were educated in the homeland and who had not been exposed to any high education in Western countries do use the genealogical argument more specifically. A popular idea among those who are fed up with the 'name debate' is that 'Ashur and Aram were brothers and the descendants of each of them developed into a distinct people': respectively, Assyrians and Arameans. They use this putative historical brotherhood of the sons of Shem to encourage closeness among the Assyrians/Syriacs essentially separated by the two different ideologies to restore the division which has been caused by the discussion about the right designation. They base themselves on *Genesis 10:22*: 'The descendants of Shem: Elam, Ashur, Arpachshad, Lud and Aram.' This historical example is

[771] See further a forthcoming article of mine about the *Seyfo*.

used to explain the disagreement about the name of their people and to resolve it by showing that in the end Ashur and Aram were brothers.

Among the mass of the Assyrians/Syriacs, the genealogical phenotypical closeness tends to be assumed implicitly and expressed by the metaphorical term *admo* (blood).[772] It is a concept which was already prevalent in the homeland. Such sentences as '*u admaydan ha yo'* (we share the same blood)[773] tend to be heard when elites criticize the various ideologies which are perceived to be the cause for disunity among the Assyrians/Syriacs. Or, when talking about the various Syriac churches: 'Although we have developed into different church communities, we are brothers (*ahunone*)' can often be heard. Another phrase which stresses the genealogical aspect and is used among the ordinary people is the phrase '*Suryoye abre da Suryoye*' (*Suryoye* sons of *Suryoye*).

The genealogical phenotype[774] is expressed in more informal settings in jokes about typical big 'Assyrian noses,' but not during the interviews with elites. Nevertheless, a couple of respondents did mention during their interview that the *gwino* (the bridge of the nose) of the Assyrians/Syriacs is typically Assyrian. In 2004, while attending the annual Assyrian convention, I joined an excursion of Assyrian/Syriac youngsters from Europe to the Mesopotamian Museum in Chicago.[775] I observed how eager they were to have their picture taken with the Assyrian sculptures as if they were standing

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[772] Genealogy was also implied in ideas of the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin*. When they saw a beautiful Kurdish girl with fair features, they would remark: '*Adma da Suryoyeyo; legshebbo la Taye*', (she looks like *Suryoye*, she does not look like a Muslim). Here, *Muslim* refers to the local Kurdish population. Implicitly they meant to say that her mother or grandmother must have been a *Suryoyto* who was kidnapped by Muslims. Since many beautiful Assyrian/Syriac girls and women were abducted by Kurds and Turks during the *Seyfo*, this reference implies especially a specific event. Assyrian/Syriac girls were often not protected against such kidnappings during the course of history, at a time in which they were in a powerless position in society. Socio-political boundaries were strongly maintained by such references. Even after a few generations people knew that a certain woman had been kidnapped and how that happened. Living in the same geographical area reinforced this.

[773] Literally: 'Our blood is one' or 'We share the same blood'.

[774] In the first part of the twentieth century, travellers and authors writing about the Middle East did write about the phenotypes of the people they met. Also Helga Anschütz (1985: 32) makes reference to authors who characterize the race of the Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin* as 'Assyrian', 'Oriental,' or 'Armenian'. See also Fletcher (1850: 188).

[775] This museum was an initiative of Dr Norman Solkhah, an (Eastern) Assyrian from Urmia. It has been under his management since its foundation.

beside their grandparents who had been resurrected from the dead.[776] Thirty-year-old Shlemun from Sweden could not wait to have his hooked nose immortalized in a picture beside a portrayal of the Assyrian King on the stone tablet so as to display the similarity between them with pride. In Germany, the Assyrian/Syriac singer Simon Kaplo did the same in a picture which he used for the cover of his CD *Haye d-Umtho* (Life of the Nation, 2001).

In contrast to the assertions of the *Assyriska* elite, none of their *Syrianska* counterparts mentioned the phenotype argument in attempts to stress their Aramean descent during the interviews. One reason for this was perhaps that there are far more Assyrian sculptures available than Aramean ones. It is therefore less easy for *Syrianer* to develop such an argument, although not impossible. It may also be surmised that it might not have been considered a core argument to contest with the *Assyrier*. All the arguments discussed here are basically used in relation to the 'others' – either *Assyrier* or *Syrianer*.

The *Syrianer* do stress a genealogical connection with the ancient Arameans. However, for the *Syrianska* academic activist Melek, what matters more are the aspects shared among 'present-day *Suryoye*.' The Aramean past plays a symbolic role only. Melek uses different sets of logic to include and exclude people from what he considers to be his people. He assumes Aramean roots for the *Suryoye*. Nevertheless, the (putative) division from other Arameans such as those in contemporary Malula (Syria) is thought to have happened too long ago for a proper connection to be sought with them today. He sees *Suryoye* as being distinct from other Arameans:

> Those who speak Aramaic in Syria are Arameans. Nevertheless, I cannot say they are *Suryoye* as we are. We should stare truth in the face. When a group of people splits from *mine*, we distance ourselves from each other. We become two different people.

Although Melek identifies himself as an Aramean, the role of the Aramean element has become latent; it is used at certain moments as a means to connect to 'a past' with a high symbolic value. As already mentioned, it is an aspect which is used in presenting the *Suryoye* to the external environment.

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[776] The historian Helga Anschütz (1985: 50) refers to the year 1966 when she visited the monastery Mor Gabriel in *Tur 'Abdin*. As abbot of the monastery at that time, the late Archbishop Julius Jesu' Çiçek, had asked her to look at his silhouette and whether it did not look the same as that on an Assyrian relief.

Moreover, it is used into the framework of the discussion with the *Assyrier*: *Suryoye* have distant historical roots and *Suryoye* are not of Assyrian but of Aramean descent. The first aspect is needed in the external environment and the second aspect ('*Suryoye* are *not* of Assyrian descent') in the internal *Suryoye* environment.

As shown before, the *Syrianska* teacher of the Syriac language Shem'un stated that people with a different background had joined the Christian church in the Syro-Mesopotamian area. Notwithstanding, he contradicts this statement in his quotation below, in which he remarks that *Suryoye* have Aramean roots. He defends his stance by his interpretation of the Bible and *Suryoye* sources. Referring to the church as *'ito barth Oromoye* (church, daughter of the Arameans), he clearly assumes a genealogical line between the church and the ancient Arameans:

> In all our [*Suryoye*] books it is said: "*ito Barth Armoye* or *Aramoye*" [church, daughter of the Arameans]. The disciples went out to preach in the lands of the *Oromoye* and the first church was composed of *Oromoye*. In the Biblical Book of Acts I, it says that the first Christians were in Antioch…

Referring to the Syriac Orthodox Church as the 'daughter of the Arameans' metaphorically suggests a genealogical link between the members of the church and 'Arameans.'

The *Syriansk*a Father Ishaq assumes such a link with the Chaldeans and the Assyrians only at the distant collective level of being Semites:

> As for our descent, we can trace it back to the time of Sem and therefore we can call ourselves Semites. We form part of one people with the Assyrians and Chaldeans. They were like brothers, and each brother had a family. Arameans are called after Aram, the Assyrians after Ashur and the Babylonians who later came to be known as Chaldeans. As Semites, I accept that the *Oromoye*, *Ashuriye,* Babylonians and Chaldeans are one people. But later, as we went further, each of these brothers developed their own family and their own people.

Although his starting point is similar to that taken by the scholar George (both imply an Aramean collective identity), he diverges from George's approach by saying that only the Assyrians (*Ashuriye*, here meaning members of the Assyrian Church of the East) have Assyrian descent. In his argument, George states that the *Ashuriye* are also of Aramean descent. Father Ishaq is using a genealogical argument to differentiate between 'the brothers' (as he calls them) and he proposes to continue this differentiation into the context

of the present. He goes back to a historical past in order to define his descent. But, although he identifies 'his brothers' – he does not claim one collective identity for them today. Whereas those *Assyriska* elite members who mention 'the brothers' use this genealogical argument in an attempt to unite the various groups today. This is a clear example of how elites wield certain arguments as their point of departure differs in the present-day context.

8.1.5 Historical Sources

To strengthen the arguments that their people are the lineal descendants of the ancient Assyrians or Arameans, elites who have (often) been educated in the *Syriac* language (frequently graduates of one of the monasteries in *Tur 'Abdin*) refer to commonly respected Assyrian/Syriac authors[777] as historical sources. The majority wrote some centuries ago. Rather than discussing the whole argument adduced by such an author, they select those passages which fit with their current discourse on the collective identity of their people, and studiously leave those which do not fit unmentioned. This 'filtering' of sources may not always be the result of a constant conscious process. Individuals may not invariably be aware of the whole set of ideas suggested by the author they are citing because the 'filtered' information may have already reached them in this form, from those who took the initial step.

Several *Assyriska* elite members referred to the twelfth-century *World Chronicle* by Patriarch Michael the Great.[778] Eliyo, graduate from one of the monasteries in *Tur 'Abdin* and teacher of Syriac, says:

> In his book Michael the Great mentions that the Romans [Byzantines] disdained us and told us we never had kings, we did not have an ancient civilization, and that no one knew about us. Therefore, Michael reacts to the Roman allegations and says: "Our kings were the Kings of the Assyrians: we ruled the Kingdoms of Babylon and Nineveh."

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[777] These authors were often churchmen and produced ecclesiastical literature. Relatively fewer purely secular works have been written, or if this were indeed the case, not many have survived to reach us. Debié (2009) writes that, after Jacob of Edessa (640-708), Syriac Orthodox scholars began writing history as large chronicles in two separate parts, one ecclesiastical and the other secular, either as two separate books or in two or three columns. An example is the *World Chronicle* by Michael the Great.

[778] Michael the Great (1126–1199) was a Syriac Orthodox Patriarch and historian who wrote the famous *World Chronicle*. For studies about this work see further Weltecke (2003) and Van Ginkel (forthcoming).

> Furthermore, he also mentions all our other achievements. He writes about these with pride. Another of our writers, Severus Sebokht,[779] writes: "If you say *Suryoyo* you mean Chaldean and Assyrian"...

Michael the Great and other authors in the tradition of the Assyrians/Syriacs are mentioned alongside Western scholars[780] to show that ancient Assyrians did continue to exist as a people after the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE, as shown by what Eliyo says:

> It is written in the history books that, when Babylon attacked Nineveh, the people of Nineveh fled into the mountains of *Izlo*. If the people of the area were not obliterated, why should only this people have been extirpated? …The people of Nineveh were scattered throughout the area and reached the *Izlo* Mountains.

Most *Syrianska* elites refer to Assyrian/Syriac authors as historical sources when arguing their standpoint that the *'amo Suryoyo* are not of Assyrian but of Aramean descent and that, historically, they have been known by the name *Suryoye*. The scholar of Syriac Studies, George, also resorts to the status of academic research to give his viewpoint more weight:

> I base myself on academic research… The majority of the *Suryoye* have not read the books by Bar Hebraeus, Bar Salibi, and others. Therefore they are unaware of their contents and what they [authors] called their *umtho* [nation]. Therefore they [*Suryoye* who do not read these authors and who hold different opinions to George] also devise other truths when they think about their identity. But the truth can be found in the books.

As George sees it, the collective identity of their people is a matter which can be decided upon objectively. Although he refers to what he calls academic research, he still uses sources by filtering what tallies with his ideology from the present-day perspective. It is his interpretation of what these authors wrote – doing the same as any other elite member. George continues his argument saying:

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779 Severus Sebokht was Bishop of *Qenneshrin* (d. in 667). He is regarded as one of the most important precursors and teachers of Jacob of Edessa.

780 They refer for example to the work of the Assyriologist Simo Parpola (1999).

> What have the *Suryoye* [authors] called themselves up to the present day? They have referred to themselves as *Suryoye* and sometimes *Suryoye Oromoye* or *Oromoye*. Until 400 years ago, the different churches of our people, also the *Rum* [Melkites, Greek Orthodox], the Maronites, the Chaldeans and the *Madenhoye* [members of the Assyrian Church of the East] called themselves *Suryoye*. After that, it [term *Suryoye*] began to be used less frequently. The reason was conversions to new churches…

George's line of argument is that the different Syriac churches share one *Suryoye* past. Following from his approach that the name *Suryoye* can be used synonymously with the name *Arameans*, he places the roots of all these churches in an Aramean past. In their interpretation of the historical sources, some *Syrianska* elite members who are active in the *Syrianska* organizations attempt to distance the ancient Assyrians and Arameans from each other. The active creation of a distance between them functions as an instrument to reinforce the assumption that the *'amo Suryoyo* is of Aramean descent. In their reading of history, they focus on and especially ascribe negative characteristics to the Assyrians and other more positive (from the modern perspective) characteristics to the ancient Arameans, as does Father Ishaq:

> The Assyrians desired to conquer the Aramean kingdoms… And generally the Assyrians liked to fight and were very fond of waging war… The Arameans were not very keen on venturing into war; they only wanted to protect themselves. Therefore they did not squander time on wars. They spent their time on education, trade, arts, music, and architecture; there are still many of their castles and buildings in the kingdoms they ruled.

Above I have illustrated that one can read history from different perspectives. Antagonistic narratives are applied to the history in order to prove the present-day arguments. Hence, history becomes a resource for different discourses. For instance, if the 'unity' is popular in the present-day context, both the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer* choose selectively historical narratives that demonstrate 'unity'.

8.1.6 Cultural Continuity Argument

> We wanted to check whether or not those [*Suryoye*] who call themselves *Othuroye* [Assyrians] are correct. We went to libraries to study the history of Mesopotamia. We became convinced that we belonged to these [Assyrian] people... When we read about Ishtar,[781] and other Assyrian myths, we recalled that many of our older people had told us similar stories and had used similar sayings. After studying the history, we strengthened the Assyrian ideology which we had begun to cultivate as soon as we arrived in Sweden.
>
> Martha, an *Assyrisk* scholar

Martha is among the young educated people who began to study her Mesopotamian past 'in search of her true roots'. Educated *Assyriska* elite members especially tend to focus on the cultural continuity between them and the ancient Assyrians in their argument that their people are of Assyrian descent. Elite members were eager to tell me about the similarities they found between their contemporary culture and the Mesopotamian culture they had read about. The academic Na'im, born in *Qamishlo* and studied in Lebanon, gave me various examples of this cultural continuity which are also used by other *Assyriska* elite members:

> When the *Suryoye* converted to Christianity in the first centuries of the CE, we introduced different rituals into the Syriac Orthodox Church and imbued them with a Christian meaning. An example is fasting… there was a time in which the kings of Nineveh had no grain left in the silos. Nor were there many animals they could consume. Therefore the kings made the people fast for three days. Since that time, they have continued to fast for three days so that the reserves would not be exhausted. The Nineveh fast[782] which we observe each year dates back to that time…
>
> We also continued using the sacerdotal clothes used in Mesopotamia in the CE… The [pre-Christian] priests of Babylon wore clothes which resemble those of our priests today. The same can be said about the kings of those times… And we have continued to use the same type of altar as was used in Babylon. We also had rituals to exorcise evil spirits. The *sensele,* flabella [used at the altar], has existed since pagan times.[783] We also

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[781] The myth of the Assyrian Goddess Ishtar is based on the Sumerian version of the Goddess Inanna. See further about this *myth*, Wolkstein and Kramer (1983).

[782] The Nineveh Fast (three days) starts twenty days before Great Lent.

[783] See for a recent study on flabella, Snelders (2010).

believed in one supreme God. In the CE we have continued to believe that there is one God.

We also still celebrate on 1 *Tammuz*, July… This celebration of *resheesh*[784] in July is actually when we want to re-welcome Tammuz to the Upper World… We break jars [*sharbe*] and plates [*sahne*] outside to exorcise the evil spirits [*tawrina u shar*]. *Suryoye* have also incorporated this ritual into their wedding ceremony; after the solemnization in the church, the bride is escorted to her new home. Family members throw a *sharbo* [jar] before her on the ground to break it. The *shar* is everything which is not good; the machinations of Satan. Breaking the piece of pottery symbolically represents the shattering of the evil spirits, the *shar*. This should be understood in the belief in the difference between good and evil, white and black, *kher* [positive news[785]] and *shar* [bad tidings]. Therefore breaking the *shar* will allow Tammuz[786] and [his lover] Isthtar to find happiness together, to rejoice together until December… In December he has to go back to the Underworld again.

In the current era, in that same month [December], we have continued to celebrate the *hasho,* the Passion Week in which Jesus was crucified and buried. When we were Christianized we drew a comparison between the Passion Week of Jesus and the departure of *Tammuz* to the Underworld. This is because in that week of December, we usually experience a period of sadness: we grow melancholic anticipating about the departure of Tammuz; our whole world is swathed in black. The king was not happy, no one was allowed to get married and so forth. Even today, we still retain that ritual, which we have incorporated into our Christian tradition. The logic they used was that in December everything grew very somber, the days grew very short and cold. This signified that Tammuz no longer had a role in December. Tammuz is the one who brings the light, the warmth and happiness with him back when he emerges from the Underworld. Therefore, in December, when he is sent back to the Underworld, we mourn him; the *hasho* [Passion Week] starts,

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784 The celebration of Pentecost, 50 days after Easter: commemoration of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles. On this Sunday people splash each other with water. Among the members of the Assyrian Church of the East, this ritual is referred to as *Nusardil* and is celebrated on the seventh Sunday after Pentecost. Although the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church celebrate it as a Christian feast, those of the Assyrian Church of the East has kept it as a celebration outside the church.

785 Today, when *Suryoye* pick up the phone, they ask the caller: '*Ma kher yo?*', asking whether he/she has positive news or at least it expresses the hope that it is positive news. It is a polite way of asking why the person is calling.

786 After the Sumerian deity Dumuzi, the God of fertility and new life. See Wolkstein and Kramer (1983) for the myth on Inanna and Dumuzi.

> until he comes back in *Tammuz*, July, when we begin to celebrate his emergence from the Underworld…
>
> The preparation of the *rozune*[787] is also a pagan tradition which we have continued as a Christian tradition in our church… This shows the links we have with our ancient history…
>
> At the beginning of April, we all used to go into the fields and we washed our faces with the dew there. April was the month in which the new season commenced: the spring…

The exchange of these ideas and knowledge often takes place among friends but it is also published in such *Assyriska* magazines as the Sweden-based *Hujådå* and on the internet. In daily life, the recognition of this argument for cultural continuity has developed a more generalized interest in studying Mesopotamian history. This is evolving in both new academic publications by people who have begun to study Assyriology or Semitic languages and in the implementation of certain symbols and rituals from the past. One example is the celebration of the Assyrian New Year on 1 April. In modern times, as far as is known today, before the foundation of the Assyrian Movement in modern times, this celebration was not common among Assyrians/Syriacs. In *Tur ʿAbdin*, the Assyrian/Syriac farming population did accord a special meaning to this day in their agricultural life. My respondents who are not acquainted with the modern 1 April celebration of the Assyrian New Year did, however, affirm that in *Tur ʿAbdin* the girls went into the fields and bathed their faces with the dew. They believed that the dew of 1 April was blessed and was therefore supposed to endow them with a beautiful countenance. Moreover, on this day they also used the dew as coagulant for making yoghurt.

During my fieldwork, I observed that it has become kind of a sport among the *Assyrier* to spot and to lay down new relations between their contemporary culture and that of the Mesopotamian past. One day, I was given a lift by the young academic professional Ninos to attend a seminar about the proposed membership of the EU of Turkey which had been organized in Södertälje. After he asked me a question, I answered '*asher lo kud'ono*' ('*asher* I do not know'). Ninos grew very excited and said: 'Do you realize that we still use the name of the God Ashur in our *Suryoyo* language even today?' 'What do you mean Ninos?' I asked. Ninos continued

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787 In the Syriac Orthodox Church today, the tradition of the *Rozune* is related to the Forty Martyrs of St Sebastian.

explaining 'We use the term *asher* instead of the term *aloho* (god) which stands for the Christian God; it is out of respect for the Christian God that we do not want to use His name when we say something 'in the name of God' (*koyomina b-Aloho*).'

I took a moment to reflect on the way I had used the term *asher*. In my family it was indeed the tradition not to use the name of God in ordinary conversation, since His name is considered sacred. Instead, we had learned to use '*haimen*' ('believe [me]') or to use the term *asher*. The latter utterance is also used in a similar sense as '*haimen*'. It is a way of telling the listener that he should be confident that I was speaking to him honestly. I remember that, when I visited people from my village *Mzizah* living in Germany and they heard me using the term '*asher*', they grew nostalgic and reminded me with a smile that from my language they could hear I was a daughter of the Atto family, since our family never used the name of God 'disrespectfully' in our communications, in contrast to the Assyrians/Syriacs in the *shwitho da Suroye* (quarter of the *Suroye*) in Mzizah who often used the term *b-Aloho* (in the name of God) and *bu-Slibo* (in the name of the Cross). After this quick reflection, I answered Ninos that the term *asher* could have some connection with the God Ashur. Nonetheless, to avoid jumping to any over-hasty conclusion, it was important to learn more about all its different meanings.

The linguist Aziz Tezel says that the relation Ninos draws is a folk-etymology.[788] Narratives seeking to connect the past with the present-day are more common among the *Assyrier*. This is related to their strong emphasis on the importance of national awareness in the formation of a national identity. From this perspective 'national awareness' can only be achieved through the knowledge about one's own history. Therefore, an increasing interest for the history, archaeology, mythology, culture and traditions and the re-invention of the past become more central in their identity discourses.

Before continuing with the *situational* arguments used among the elites, I shall first outline more specifically the strong line of argumentation among the *Syrianska* elite members for being *Suryoye*.

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[788] In a personal correspondence, the linguist Aziz Tezel writes: ' ... *ashir* is related to *shrolo*, itself from Classical Syriac *shroro* by dissimilation. However, to a greater degree than 'shrolo' and 'shroro', the term 'ashir' is to be related to the verbal stem ma:shir- for example 'lo-ko-ma:shir-no', 'I do not believe.' And 'ashir' is an imperative of this verbal stem ma:shir-, with the meaning 'to believe,' that is 'ashir,' which became "a filler" in the spoken language with the meaning of 'believe!,' and in classical Syriac 'ashar(r).' See further also Tezel (2003: 81). The Free Online Dictionary indicates that *Ashir* is a chief god of the Assyrians.

8.1.7 'Suryoye' for 2000 years…

Some *Syrianer* regard the designation *Suryoye* as an ethno-national term. Others use it as an ethno-religious term in which the point of departure for the collective identity of the *'amo Suryoyo* is the Christianization of the people. A brief examination of the ethno-national use of the term *Suryoye* reveals that a very small minority among the *Syrianer* perceives this term to be an ethno-national term dating back to the time before the current era. In contrast to them, Ken'an (educated in one of the monasteries in *Tur 'Abdin*) does date this name back to those times. When explaining how he uses the designation *Suryoye*, he acted as if he represented the ideology of the *Syrianer* as a collective:

> Among us [*Syrianer*], the designation *Suryoye* is a *hiyutho* [identity] – [here, implying collective identity]; it is a nationality, the name of a *'amo* [people]. The term *Suryoyo* existed before the Syriac Orthodox Church was founded… Since we did not have a country, it [term *Suryoye*] did not develop into an ethno-national name.

In Ken'an's eyes the designation *Suryoye* defines a *'amo* (people), not just a church, since it was already in existence before the current era. In his perception, the translation of the term *Suryoye* (with an ethno-national meaning) is *Syrianer* in Swedish. Nevertheless, when dealing with the argument which the *Assyrier* defend, he takes the position that the *'amo Suryoyo* has Aramean roots:

> Our authors: Mor Ephrem who lived in the fourth century, Mor Yacob d-Urhoy in the seventh century, Bar Salibi in the tenth [twelfth] century and Bar Hebreaus in the thirteenth century always used *Suryoyo* or *Oromoyo*. They all mention the term *Suryoyo Oromoyo*. Some of them do this in the introduction to their works. Mor Yacob d-Urhoy and Bar Hebreaus specifically discuss the assumption that the roots of the *Suryoye* go back to the Arameans.

Ken'an's example reveals the latent role the Aramean descent plays in his life. It might have been expected that there was no need to refer to the Arameans, since Ken'an uses the designation *Suryoye* as an ethno-national name. One explanation for this anomaly might be that the reference to putative Aramean ancestry should be understood in relation to the discussion about Ken'an's implied idea that the designation *Assyrier* is wrongly used. From the stance he has adopted, he refers to the Arameans as

the true roots of his people.

The second way in which the term *Suryoye* is used is as an ethno-religious designation in which the starting point for a collective ethnic identity is found within the bounds of the *'ito Suryoyto* (Syriac Church). Traditionally, this has been the main method of collective identification adopted in the Middle East – a society in which religious affiliations played a dominant role in demarcating collective identifications. As I shall show in this section, individuals may use different arguments to defend their espousal of this approach. The first example is that of the student Matay. When he was in his early twenties, he tried to go as far back as possible in the history of his people in order to identify a collective group who might be identified as *Suryoye*. His point of departure was the modern concept of nation or people. Matay expounds on his ideas:

> I asked myself "When did the *'amo Suryoyo* develop a collective identity?"…I read our *Suryoye* authors and tried to understand what they say about our identity… I looked, for example, through the whole book of Bar Hebreaus. I could not understand what stance he had adopted in this matter. I looked into Michael the Great's [*Kthobo*] *Makethbonuth Zabno*, in which he does talk about geographical areas, but I could not find an answer to my question. Moreover, we have such other writers as Eusebius, who lived in about 300 in the CE. He wrote *makethbonuth d-zabno*... It is a very interesting book, but I did not find anything which could help me in my quest… I also looked into Josephus, Strabo, Herodotus and others. I could not find an answer, but I did begin to think in a certain direction. I concluded that it is a real conundrum. What I wanted to do then was to go back into the historical roots of the *Suryoye* and see where I would end. The authors of the *Suryoyto* church trace its roots back to the very beginning of Christianity. However, such an authority as Ephrem Barsaum writes in his book, *Berule Bdire*[789], that our roots go back to the Arameans.[790] But this book is recent. If he had written that this had been an idea of our [early] Church Fathers, I would have been convinced. This omission shows that it is his personal modern idea.

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[789] The late Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum's *al-Lulu al-Manthur* (1943) was translated into Syriac under the title *Berule Bthire* by Mor Philoxinos Yohanna Dolabani and published in *Qamishlo* in 1967. It has been translated into English by Matti Moosa (2003) under the title: *The Scattered Pearls: History of Syriac Literature and Sciences*. The Patriarch's name in the English edition is spelled as Aphram I. Barsoum.

[790] In the position of Archbishop, Ephrem Barsaum had also produced writings in which he referred to an Assyrian past of his people. See, for example, the Memorandum presented at the Paris Peace Conference, dated 2 April 1920.

> As a consequence, I changed my question**.** Asking about the roots of the people will lead us nowhere. Therefore I have now focused on the geographical area from which the people come... Syro-Mesopotamia. When we look at the history of the geography, we learn more… Which people lived in the area? The Persians. Outside the agricultural area, there are references to the *Saraqoye* [people living in tents] in Syriac; by whom they meant the Arabs. The Jews were known as a distinct cultural community. And there were the Greeks. No one talks about the existence of the *Suryoye*, *Oromoye* or *Othuroye* as a distinct group of people. What they do say is that the locals spoke different dialects of Aramaic… Hence, there were peoples who were known as collective identities and the rest was the mass of 'Aramaic-speaking peasants.' They had more localized identities, linked to their villages. I wanted to find writings which demonstrate that: 'Here is the *'amo Suryoyo*'. Maybe they called themselves *Suryoye*, *Othuroye* or *Oromoye*, or maybe all three at the same time. But I did not find any evidence of this… Certainly, we are the descendents of those local peasants. Since I did not manage to identify a collective group of a separate people, with the exception of those whom I mentioned, the inference has to be that there were no *Suryoye* people, in the sense of a collective group of people who were known by other people as such. If there were indeed people with such a collective identity, they may not have been able to have themselves recognized as such by other people…
>
> What point in time then marks the starting point of the formation of a *'amo* [people] in the sense of an ethnicity, ethnic category and later ethnic group? In the era after Christ, a group of people called themselves by the name *Suryoye* and were also known by others as *Suryoye*. They are known because of their institution of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch… People from different backgrounds were included in this category, among them Persians, Greeks, and Jews.

Matay is among the few who has searched for the historical collective identity of his people and has still attempted to preserve a certain distance. He adduces a more elabourate, personal idea about the history of his people – something which does not interest many elite members to bother to delve into or who are perhaps incapable of undertaking such research. The layman Shem'un, who has had a career as a teacher of Syriac, argues along the same lines (but somewhere else he states that the *'amo Suryoyo* is of Aramean descent). Shem'un's reason for not using the designations Arameans or Assyrians is that his people do not have a country; hence he is satisfied with continuing to use the designation *Suryoye*, of which the meaning for him extends beyond that of his church:

> When the Arameans accepted Christianity, they even burnt their pagan books and when they converted to Christianity they accepted themselves as *Suryoye*. The Assyrian Empire fell in 612 BC. With its collapse, the position of its people [Assyrians] was drastically weakened. After they converted to Christianity, they no longer called themselves *Oromoye* or *Othuroye*, but *Suryoye*. There were also many Jews who became members of the [Christian] church. Mor Esa'jo is said to have baptised 1200 Jewish people on the feast of the Pentecost… And other people who lived in Mesopotamia also converted to our church… They all became members of the *'ito Suryoyto* [Syriac Church]. Nevertheless, they [*Suryoye*] did not become a State... Had they had a country, they would probably have chosen one of those pre-Christian names. But [today] I have only a church.

It is a cause of great satisfaction to many *Syrianska* elite members to be able to commence their history '2000' years ago. This is the time in which they assume the designation *Suryoye* began to be used. Symbolically, '2000 years' stands for the existence of Christianity and, consequently, for indicating that they were among the first people to convert to the new religion. They express their strong connection to this period in several ways. As mentioned earlier, the politician Hobel has opted for the use of the designation *Suryoye*. Although somewhere else in the interview he defends the stand that the *'amo Suryoyo* is of Aramean descent, below he explains that it is impossible to know truly whether they are of Aramean or Assyrian descent:

> We have already been living as *Suryoye* for 2000 years and for 2000 years our priests have taught us we are *Suryoye*! It would be like saying that I had not been touched by the *Seyfo* and to conclude that it never took place. But my grandfather experienced it and got hurt!.. How else can I better prove it to him than telling him that we have been using the designation *Suryoye* for 2000 years already?

Hobil's metaphorical reference to the *Seyfo* is heavily impregnated with symbolism. He is conscious that the *Seyfo* is accepted as an unequivocal fact among his people. For many *Syrianska* elite members, to have been raised as *Suryoye* and their connection with *Suryoyutho* (Assyrian/Syriac way of life) is of the utmost importance. They talk about it with tremendous engagement, as for example the female *Syrianska* activist Warde who is in her thirties: 'I am a *Suryoyto*; I have grown up in the *Suryoyto* church. At the same time, I know that my roots are *Oromoye*.' Although the identification and focus is clearly the church, she assumes Aramean roots. Being raised in the Syriac church

legitimizes the use of the designation *Suryoye* for her. She is against the use of the designation Aramean only, because 'This would mean I am leaving my church which I do not want to do.' Since her point of departure for the national identity of her people is the church, the adoption of the pre-Christian *Aramean* name would mean that she is not loyal to her church. Perhaps she connects the *Aramean* name with paganism which does not fit in with her identification as a Christian. Meanwhile, she is demonstrating that she is not identifying with an Assyrian but rather with an Aramean past. This latter aspect should be understood in relation to the environment in which she was raised and in relation to the Assyrian Movement which was opposed by the same environment in which she grew up. The academic young professional Yacob who was born in Lebanon has a similar attitude: 'I call myself a *Suryoyo*. Aramean was the name of our people BCE. Right now, I am not an Aramean but a *Suryoyo*'.

8.2 Situational Arguments

At this point in my account of the situational arguments, I shall illustrate more specifically that the 'name debate' depends heavily on the contextual elements of time and space. As I illustrated in the previous chapter, the discursive arguments deployed have had different characteristics in different periods of their settlement in Sweden. Some arguments frequently employed in the 1970s are no longer in use today. Initially, Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe chose whether or not to adhere to the Assyrian ideology. Today, the children of the first group are born into a family which adheres to the Assyrian ideology. Consequently, they identify as Assyrians, without necessarily having made a conscious individual decision. This is perhaps comparable to a situation in which someone is born into a specific religious family. Only when they are older they may develop a different discourse and take a different discursive position.

Elite members who have been raised in an 'Assyrian family' and who identify themselves as Assyrian attribute less importance to their 'true' historical descent – as they refer to it. Their dominant idea is that they are not sure whether their ancestors were Assyrians, Arameans, Babylonians or Chaldeans. The *Assyriska* Ninos says: 'Maybe those who call themselves 'Arameans' today are actually the descendents of the ancient 'Assyrians' or the other way around.' This approach often ends with the conclusion: 'No matter what designation we use, we are all the same people.' It is an inclusive

approach which attempts to 'heal the wounds' resulting from the discussion about the 'right designation' of their people. The 'wounds' refer to the divisions among the people. Therefore, among the *Assyrier*, over the last few years there has been a tendency to shift towards more *situational* based arguments in favour of the designation Assyrian. They now contend that *primordial* arguments are of secondary importance. In the new strategy towards building unity, two main approaches stand central: (1) the use of the compound name *Assyrier/Syrianer* (in Sweden); (2) The use of the designation *Assyrian* as an umbrella name, covering all other designations used by the members of the *umtho Suryoyto* (Assyrian/Syriac nation).

Among the *Syrianer*, the recognition of a mixed descent allows them space to distance themselves from identification as 'Assyrian'. Educated *Syrianska* elite members especially stress the mixture of the *Suryoye* past and concomitantly the impossibility of proving Assyrian descent. Nahir, theologian and activist says: 'The *Suryoye* are a mixture of the peoples of Mesopotamia and hence we cannot say that we are genealogically Assyrian. When the Empire of the Assyrians fell in 612 BC, the Assyrians were dispersed. Therefore it is impossible to prove anything about Assyrian descent.' The politician Hobel adds: 'Even if we are *Othuroye* [genealogically], for the last 2000 years I know for sure that I have been *Suryoyo*; I have [at least] this historical knowledge [that I am *Suryoyo*]. We have no real knowledge of what our background was before 2000 years ago.' Earlier I discussed the fact that somewhere else in his interview he defends the position that the historical roots of the *Suryoye* are Aramean. Many *Syrianska* elites share Hobel's idea. The way they express themselves is as if they, as individuals, have been alive for two thousand years already: 'I know myself to have been a *Suryoyo* for 2000 years.' This implies individual connection with the 'collective *Suryoye* past' and through that collective they feel part of today. This example shows very clearly how an individual's discourse about his identity connects him to the 'historical past of a group of people' – as if the individual today represents the collective past. The main *situational* argument adduced is that it is impossible to prove whether *Suryoye* have Aramean or Assyrian roots. Even the *Syrianska* politician Hobel no longer finds it hard to say: 'We cannot check the DNA of people and say who is an *Othuroyo* and who is an *Oromoyo*. What we can do is to use the designation *Suryoye*, which is inclusive of both names, for the current era. And we can exclude the designations *Oromoyo* and *Othuroyo* from before the current era.' Hence they opt for the use of the designation *Suryoye* (in Swedish *Syrianer*) as

mentioned earlier. Many of the respondents who stated this also expressed a stronger assumption of their people's Aramean descent. Probably because they adhere to the *Syrianska* ideology. From their position one can learn that, in the first place, *Suryoye* are not of Assyrian descent. Secondly, if they have to mention distant roots these are stated to be *Aramean*. This position is not a matter expressed very openly or in passing. It is stated only after a more profound conversation. I hazard a guess that people with the *Syrianska* ideology would not have expressed this idea fifteen years ago – a time when both the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer* had assumed very rigid oppositional stands.

The political situation of the Assyrians/Syriacs today is discussed more explicitly in the context of the situational-based argument; it has become the point of departure. Perhaps the most dominant *situational* argument is the one mentioned by the twenty-five year old student Yauno:

> I think that it is very hard to go back 4000 years into history and say that we are genetically Assyrian. The people are Assyrian, Babylonian, Chaldean and Aramean. Assuredly we are a mixture of all these peoples, but the last empire which ruled these people was the Assyrian Empire into which all these people assimilated and were called Assyrian.

In his choice of one of the names of this people, Yauno selects the name which carries the most political significance for his people from present-day perspective on the classification and recognition of people. Today, people who have their own State are recognized as a people; they usually take the name of their State and are guaranteed a say in the political arena. If others are to be recognized, they may need to attract attention by other means. Hence, the choice for the name Assyrian, and not for the other names existing among their people, is thought to be the most functional at present. They copy the modern Western concept of nation and apply it to their people with the 'ingredients' available to them. This is very characteristic for the *situationalist* approach in which ethnicity is seen as a 'resource'. Consequently, although some Assyrians/Syriacs do say that they are probably a mixture of the ancient Mesopotamian population, they believe that the use of the designation Assyrian is more legitimate in contemporary society, which is based on political entities. The counter-argument to the use of the designation Aramean or the focus on the Aramean past in this respect is that the Arameans had only small kingdoms and lived a nomadic life devoid of political significance compared to the influence exerted by the Assyrian Empire. They state that, if the Arameans left their mark on the

Assyrian Empire, this is also valued, but as part of the Assyrian Empire instead of a distinct political entity of Arameans.

In short, the use of the designation 'Assyrian' is believed to be a solution to their recognition as an ethno-national group of people who should be granted certain rights today. Assyrians/Syriacs upholding the Assyrian ideology do not believe that the use of the designation *Syrianer* in Sweden will be of much help to them in obtaining such rights. The reasons they reject this designation will be discussed later. A very common idea among *Assyriska* activists is that the authorities in Syria reinforced the use of the designation *Aramean* among Assyrians/Syriacs as a means to combat the Assyrian Movement which strove for recognition and rights as a people in Syria. Although the name *Aramean* is a secular concept of a collective identity, especially initially it was not a politicized term and bore a closer relationship to the stance of Assyrian/Syriac religious leaders who fought the designation Assyrian and concomitantly the political concept it implied. Therefore, introducing an alternative name for their people which had not yet been politicized, served as a means to deny them ethno-national rights.

A more practical argument fielded by the *Assyriska* elite in favour of the use of the designation Assyrian is that it is much more familiar to Westerners. The use of the other (lesser known) designations which are current among their people is believed to raise too many questions and confusion. For instance, the Swedish term *Syrian* to refer to the *'amo Suryoyo* would confuse them with the modern inhabitants of Syria. The use of the compound name *Assyrier/Syrianer* is unique to Swedish society.[791] As shown in the preceding chapter, this was born of the 'name discussion' among the *'amo Suryoyo* in Sweden. Many elite members who share the *Assyriska* ideology have no problem using the compound name *Assyrier/Syrianer* in Swedish. It is an attempt to regain unity, bringing together those who choose to use *Assyrier* and those who choose to use *Syrianer*. The compound name functions as a unifying concept. This clearly shows how the use of designations can be understood from a situational point of view – here with the goal of unity. Among the *Assyrier*, an alternative to the use of the inclusive approach of the compound name *Assyrier/Syrianer* is the use of 'Assyrian' as an umbrella designation for the different *Syriac* churches. The intention is to replace the different designations which the Assyrians/Syriacs

[791] In France, it is mainly the members of the Assyrian Church of the East and the members of the Chaldean church who use the compound designation *Assyro-Chaldeans*.

use. This 'new'[792] approach and interpretation of the designation Assyrian in Europe stresses the present reactive consequence of the increasing dichotomy between the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer*. Father Aday ascribes his use of this name and his Assyrian ideology (*renyo Othuroyo*) in connection with Naum Faik and to the *Mtakasto* (ADO):

> The *renyo* [here: 'ideology'] of the *Mtakasto* [ADO] is a blessed *renyo* in my eyes. It has given the designations of our people equal weight and importance. We have different names, among them Babylonian, Chaldean, Aramean, Assyrian, Syriac, Syrian and Phoenician. All these names are part of our civilization; each of them is a *margonitho* [diamond] for us. We should not insist on choosing one name only. In modern times, the use of the designation *Oromoyo* [Aramean] has appeared on the scene in opposition to the designation *Othuroyo* [Assyrian]. It is this [oppositional] aspect what I do not like about it [the Aramean approach]. Otherwise, I accord both of them the same value. It is wrong to use these names in competition. Each should be respected. We should do this until we are finally able to choose one of them, or when we have our own country one day. Until that time, we can use all these names. They are all ours… This means that when we say *Suryoyo*, we mean also *Othuroyo* [Assyrian] and *Kaldoyo* [Chaldean]. And if we say *Kaldoyo*, we also mean *Suryoyo* and *Othuroyo*. It is one people, one *umtho* [nation]...

Although assuming primordiality, Father Aday stresses the possibility to make use of different names for his people, clearly departing from a context in which the agreement about their use has caused divisions. Similarly, *umthonoye* Assyrians/Syriacs search in what their authors have written as well as in other publications about the 'true identity' of their people, combined with its strength in present-day society. An example is the *Assyriska* Jacob:

> Anyone who asserts that the *Umtho Suryoyto*, *Othuroyto*, *Kaldoyto* is one [united], is considered by us to be an author who expresses our ideology. Those authors that do not express this ideology in their books are not thought of as *umthonoye* by us. We are looking for sources which can help us furthering our quest. If Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum states that we are *Othuroye*, this is not a minor matter – despite the fact that he changed his mind afterwards. The norm is our own current ideology. If we find the same ideology in certain books written 800 years ago, we feel satisfied.

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[792] It was a new approach in Europe, building on the Assyrian Movement which was initiated by the ADO in Syria; see further Chapter 6.

In his citation, Jacob shows that the choice of a designation depends heavily on the presumed political strength for realizing the unity of the imagined Assyrian/Syriac nation (*umtho Suryoyto*). The importance of this approach is a matter the *Assyrier* especially stress. Jacob continues:

> In my opinion, a political name for our people under the designation Assyrian is better. In the course of time the *'amo* [*Suryoyo*] became divided and used different names. For our people who live in different countries, the designation Assyrian is more inclusive [*maletmono*]. The names *Turoyo*, Jacobite, Nestorian and the like are not unifying enough. They refer to one part of our people only. Depending on the success of the designation, we should choose one particular designation to use. If the Chaldeans were to collect the people in a certain place and be able to manage all the other people under their political ideology, or if the *Oromoye* or if the *Othuroye* should manage to do this, we could use any of these names. Today, all these names are in the process of creating an *umthonoyto*[793] movement. But, *Suryoye* who have been using the designation *Oromoye* [Arameans] have been active only in church circles. It is of no importance to me whether a person is religious or not. Religion should remain a matter between the individual and God. Therefore I have not been attracted to the designation *Oromoye*… I am convinced that the *'amo* is *Othuroyo* [Assyrian]. However, if the *Suryoye* who use the designation Chaldean or Arameans achieve greater success, I might agree to use one of those designations. If we unite, manage to put all our historical divisions aside and achieve a country, I do not mind using any name! The most important thing is the consumption of the fruits!

In such an inclusive approach, the assumed shared historical past and the recognition of church divisions among the *'amo Suryoyo* is used to legitimate the contemporary existence of a diversity of names. From this perspective, the diversity and existing disagreements about them are regarded as natural phenomena; attempting to put matters into perspective in the context of the 'name crises' among the Assyrians/Syriacs.

Situational arguments are also used among the *Syrianska* elite in order to put the meaning of the designations and their importance into a perspective for the people. Benjamin, a teacher of Syriac and activist in different *Syrianska* organizations, says:

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[793] See for the use of the term *umthonoyutho* Chapter 6.

> Historically the Arameans and the Assyrians also fought; they were two different peoples. But, in the end we are both the offspring of Adam and Eve and therefore brothers. All our problems are then solved. We have come here to Sweden and tomorrow our children will say they are Swedish.

Benjamin solves the problem by talking about an imagined shared past and future. By stating 'tomorrow our children will say they are Swedish', he minimizes both the importance of the discussion about his people's collective identity today and the meaning he gives to the descent of his people. This approach intimates that the meaning and importance of a designation can change and disappear relatively fast, depending on the circumstances. During my fieldwork, I observed that the ordinary people declared they had enough of the 'name debate' and that it is only fuelled by individuals who hold positions in *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* organizations. This often means that these individuals employ certain norms in their ideology and they expect their members to observe them. These relate to the norms in other Assyrian/Syriac ideologies in a certain way.

A final example which I want to discuss is the approach of the artist Michael (raised in Syria). He has developed different identifications with the cultural past of Mesopotamia. Michael expresses his identification through the cultural interests he has developed. He explains how he had interest in and felt identification with an assumed Assyrian past; how he moved away from this and began to focus on an Aramean past; and, finally, how he developed an inclusive approach and focus on the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia as a whole, through the use of the designation *Suryoye*. Michael thinks that the term *Suryoye* covers Assyrians, Arameans and more. In contrast to the *Assyrier*, he does not make vigorous attempts to show how the Aramean cultural past has continued until today. He has studied and used the Aramean cultural past at a cultural level and expressed it in theatre, songs and poems: 'I felt comfortable [*thniihoyo*] with the name *Oromoyo* and especially with the kingdom and the time of Tadmur and Queen Zenobia...' Michael developed this cultural interest specifically for the Aramean past because of a break with the Assyrian Movement. It can therefore be seen as a reaction to the Assyrian Movement. Meanwhile, he does not consider it a political stand or to be part of the *Syrianska* ideology. He says explicitly that he does not feel any sympathy for the present ideologies of either the *Syrianer* or the *Assyrier*. He claims his interest is related only to the *Suryoye Oromoye*

cultural civilization and goes as far as to divide the geographical area of Mesopotamia into an Aramean and an Assyrian part:

> I feel close to the [assumed Aramean] civilization which developed on the banks of the Euphrates more than to the [assumed Assyrian] civilization which flourished along the banks of the Tigris. Why? I feel that these [Arameans] are closer to my roots. On the Tigris, the only civilization which evolved was Nineveh. But a number of Aramean kingdoms grew up along the Euphrates: Karkamish, Zinçirli, Çarablus, Urhoy, and when you go down into Syria, Mari – which was founded by both the Sumerians and the Amorites.

Since my attention was caught by Michael's reasoning, I asked him why he picked out only part of the Mesopotamian geographical area as his cultural interest and source of inspiration – specifically that part which he identifies today as Aramean. From his answer it becomes clear that a disappointment and conflict with the Assyrian Movement resulted in his disidentifiation with anything known as 'Assyrian':

> I tell you honestly. Probably it is the *Harake Othuroyto* [Assyrian Movement] itself which is the cause of this. When I was young, I did not regard it in this way; this is what I have reflected on it so far. In 1972 I was a young man and poet. I went to Nineveh in Mosul in the company of the present Archbishop Hanna[794] of Aleppo [who was a monk] at that time, Yacob Deresh who also used to be a monk, Yacob Gergis, the late singers Jan Karat and Jalil Ma'ilo, the present priest George Chachan who played the guitar[795] and a folkloristic dance group… We paid this visit to Nineveh on the occasion of the celebration of the cultural rights which were granted to the Syriac-speaking people by the Baath regime in 1972. We celebrated this during a two-day party in Mosul.
>
> We visited the door of Nergal, the God of Hell. There were two *taure* [winged bulls] at this door… One of the guards at the door of Nergal said: 'This was a civilization which had reached high levels and once ruled supreme, but it has gone now.' I replied to him: 'Hopefully it will rise again, since we are her sons.' That is what I said there. At that time our feelings were not as they are now [opposing Assyrian identification]. After reading the mythology of *Beth Nahrin* [Mesopotamia], I felt that it is all one and interrelated… Even later – at the time of the Arameans and later of

[794] Archbishop Mor Grigorios Hanna Ibrahim.

[795] George Chachan was known for playing the violin.

> the *Suryoye*, – I began to construct for myself the conclusion that they are all one. I brought aspects of the history and from our daily life together.
>
> [Interviewer: Can you give examples?] In the beginning I thought that *Ha b-Nison* [1 April, celebration of the Assyrian New Year] was something belonging only to the Assyrians. After I read about it, I felt that it was something which belonged to all these people of *Beth Nahrin*; from the Sumerians to the *Suryoye*. They all celebrated it but all in different ways.

His latest inclusive approach may have been heavily influenced by the inclusive approach of the channel *Suroyo TV*, where he has been working. From the perspective of *Suroyo TV*: the Syriac churches are composed of one people – *ha 'amo*. Moreover, often, especially in the first two or three years of broadcasting, they used the compound name *Suryoye/Othuroye/Kaldoye* (Syriacs/Assyrians/Chaldeans). The use of the compound name was a construction to keep the members of the three churches satisfied about the designation used. This approach is also found in the situational approaches of the *Assyrier*. Although Michael uses the designation *Suryoye* at the cultural level, he has nevertheless developed an inclusive approach:

> On television [here: *Suroyo TV*], I use only the designation *Suryoye*. There I am talking about the culture of the *Suryoye*, which entails Assyrian, Aramean and Chaldean elements... These people have appeared under different names. In the period before the current era, they bore the names Assyrian, Arameans and Chaldeans. In the current era, they were all known by the name *Suryoye* [at the beginning of the current era]. Both *Othuroye* and *Oromoye* adopted the designation *Suryoye*. We were united under one name *Suryoye*, for about 500 years. But, when [Archbishop] Nestorius appeared, we suffered a division and became known as *Suryoye Madenhoye* [Eastern] and *Ma'erboye* [Western]. However, the culture is called *mardutho Suryoyto* [*Suryoyo* culture].

The starting point for constructing a common ground in the current era has been the *mardutho Suryoyto*, assuming the combination of elements from before the time of Christ. Consequently, he sees *Suryoyutho* as the new denominator for the assumed ancestry of the Assyrians/Syriacs in the period before the current era.

As I have illustrated, characteristic for the *situationalist* arguments is that ethnicity is seen as a 'resource'. While elite members make use of different discursive arguments, they have also been affected by the changes in the employed arguments. Therefore, the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* elite groups

cannot be seen as 'static'. In the antagonistic field of discursivity they are continuously under the influence of change.

8.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have given an account of the oppositional arguments of the *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* about the 'correct name' of their people. It has clearly emerged that an elite member may use different arguments to defend the choice of a certain name. The choice of a designation has become part of the discussion of what the ancestry of the *'amo Suryoyo* is: Assyrian or Aramean? The discussion is not just about their ancestry; it concerns the historisization of a few thousand years of history. In their attempts, the collective identity of their people is put in relation to their history from their present-day perspective about their past. It is a whole composite of reading, publishing, re-reading, re-discussing and 'awakening' as elites refer to this process which they have been going through.

In this discussion, the *Syrianska* elite concentrate on the argument that *Suryoye* are *not* of Assyrian descent, more than on arguing that they are of Aramean descent. This point is important for understanding the development of the discourse about the 'right designation' among the *Syrianer*. I have argued that, initially, the rejection of the name *Assyrier* led to the establishment of a new name, *Syrianer*. In the discussion between the adherents of these two names, the *Syrianer* initially also questioned the necessity to refer to a pre-Christian past. That is an important reason the name *Syrianer* gained great support and developed a strong position among the majority of the *'amo Suryoyo* in Sweden. They had rather an ethno-religious understanding of identity in line with the discourse of the Syriac Orthodox Church. As shown in the previous chapter, they have gradually developed an ethno-national understanding of the identity of their people in the process of forming a competing alternative ideology. Only later in the process of the name discussion, did a serious interest in an alternative identification with a pre-Christian, namely an Aramean descent, evolve. Historically, the idea that *Suryoye* have Aramean ancestry is not new. However, the arguments negotiated in Sweden have been mobilized very much in the Swedish context.

Nevertheless, among the majority of the *Syrianer* the Aramean past plays a minimal, latent role in their lives, even among those people by whom the

Aramean past is implied. A relatively small group of *Syrianska* elite members in Sweden, especially people who are active in secular organizations and the majority of the clergy, make stronger statements, averring that the *'amo Suryoyo* has Aramean roots. They are convinced that an Aramean past has become relevant and this is especially urgent in relation to the use of the name Assyrian among members of their people and in professional communications with external institutions, for instance, when discussing their collective rights.

Assyrian/Syriac elite members espousing the Assyrian ideology are usually more aware that this is an ideology with an instrumental function rather than a solely primordial historical approach. They have a political discourse; the arguments they use are politically based and function as such in the modern discourses of the formation of a national identity. This will recur in Chapter 9 about the boundaries of the *'amo Suryoyo*. It is therefore not surprising that *Assyriska* elite members make use of both *primordial* and *situational* arguments with greater flexibility. *Syrianska* elite members tend to reject the name *Assyrier* and defend what they perceive as 'holy': *Syrianer* as the correct translation of their name *Suryoye*.

In the following chapter, I shall more specifically discuss the construction of the boundaries of the *'amo Suryoyo* in present-day discourses. This will illustrate how the boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' are constructed in the definition of the people (*'amo*) from the perspective of different discourses.

9 THE BOUNDARIES OF 'OUR PEOPLE'

Assyrians/Syriacs commonly lament the fact that they are now dispersed all over the world. To express their sorrow they use the term *mbarbezina* (we have become dispersed). This implies that this state of affairs is not how a people should be. It also explains why, despite their worldwide dispersion, Assyrian/Syriac individuals retain a strong self-identification with their own people, or to borrow Anderson's phrase, with their 'imagined community'. Who is this 'imagined community'? Ineluctably answers to this problem must include the discourses from which boundaries of 'sameness' (*chain of difference*) and 'otherness' (*chain of equivalence*) are defined. The presence of the 'imagined' aspect, the fact that they do not live in a clearly defined geographical area as a closed community (*Gemeinschaft*, in terms of Tönnies), strengthens the importance of their sense of belonging to this group even more. This still does not answer the question of who constitutes this 'imagined community'?

In daily life, they refer to themselves as a *'amo,* 'a people' and more specifically as the *'amo Suryoyo*. The word *'amo* does not carry the connotation of any specific boundary. In the *Tur 'Abdin* region before the mass emigration began, local people used the expression *u 'amaydan* (our people), especially if they wanted to convey implicitly that they were speaking about members of the Syriac Orthodox Church, (*'ito Suryoyto*).[796] Therefore, in *Tur 'Abdin,* the phrase *'amo Suryoyo* was imbued with an ethno-religious connotation. The term for a nation in the modern sense (*umtho*) was not part of the everyday vocabulary. Nevertheless, *umtho* is not a new term as it is already found in ancient Syriac manuscripts.[797] If it has had such a long history, what did it mean in those times? How is it used today? In order to understand more about the use of these concepts in daily life, it is necessary to deconstruct these terms. The rub is that, since we do not know how *umtho* was applied a few centuries ago and since the present definition of nation expresses a modern idea, our starting point must be that the Syriac term

[796] The educated elite (who could be found mainly in the churches and the monasteries) may have had a different, broader concept definition of the *'amo Suryoyo*.

[797] See further for an early example Debié (2009).

umtho as used in the past described a concept which differed from the present idea of *umtho* or nation. What we do know about the concept of *umtho* is that it is a reference to a collective, but how this collective was delineated has to remain an unanswered question, at least for the moment.

At this juncture I should reiterate that in the societies in which Assyrians/Syriacs lived in the Middle East, the *'amo* was defined along confessional lines. As a consequence, cultural differences between different groups of people were understood in religious terms. All an individual had to do to change his community affiliation, or his membership of the group of people to which he belonged, was to convert to another religion.[798] The same categories were used by both insiders and outsiders to define where they belonged. Language and cultural characteristics were relegated to a secondary role.

I discussed the diversity in designations in use among the Assyrians/Syriacs and how they have come to the conclusion that this is an unnatural situation, as Shem'un, the *Syrianska* teacher of Syriac explained:

Shem'un: To be honest, it saddens me greatly to see our church dispersed as it is now. Although they all have different names, I know in reality that they [the members of the different churches] are my brothers. I know that we share the same *ghenso* [ethnicity] and *tauditho* [religion]. It does not matter that they have now changed their names; I still regard them as brothers…

Interviewer: Do you perceive them as one *'amo*?

Shem'un: Indeed I do. I see them as one *umtho* [nation], *u haukhayoste* [and that is the truth]. We refer to the *Rum*[799] by the name *Malkoye* [followers of the king] because they changed their allegiance to the church of the king [of Byzantium]. But they are *Suryoye*. We

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798 Until a few decades ago, in *Tur 'Abdin,* Syriac Orthodox who had converted to the Syriac Protestant Church were no longer perceived as '*Suryoye'* by many members of either church and thus no longer considered to be part of the *chain of difference*, the inside. The Protestants began to look down on the Syriac Orthodox and set about building a strong identity with their new denomination. The Orthodox perceived the new converts as those who had caused the secession. The fact that family members began to be excluded from the definition of *Suryoye* or *Suroye* (as used most often in *Surayt* in those times in *Tur 'Abdin*) shows how the designations *Suroye* and *Suryoye* were interwoven with the Syriac Orthodox Church in daily use among the people. Over time, the change in religion could lead to a change in the language and cultural characteristics of the new group of affiliation.

799 The Syriac-speaking members of the Greek Orthodox Church who traditionally lived in the Syro-Mesopotamian area.

> have called them *Malkoye* because we were upset that they chose to adhere to the religion of the king. They do not call themselves *Malkoye*…

Shem'un stretched back to the early centuries of the *'ito Suryoyto* (Syriac Church); but did not go beyond the existence of the *'ito Suryoyto* into the Aramean pagan past, although somewhere else in the interview he did indicate that he assumed Assyrians/Syriacs were of Aramean descent. Apparently, what was more important to him was the shared background in the Syriac church of the early centuries in the CE.

In this chapter my objective is to illustrate that the definition of their people's boundaries has broadened after some decades of life in the secularly based societies in Europe. I shall map out the different boundaries used when the Assyrian/Syriac elites define 'our people' (*u 'amaydan*). My starting point is that boundaries are not hegemonically fixed, and that they are *empty signifiers* waiting to be defined in the discursive process with the 'others'. This results in the 'imagined map of boundaries' of the *'amo Suryoyo*, showing the variations in proximity and distance between different groups of people, all perhaps somehow related to each other or not, but definitely all part of the discourses about who 'our people' are. As I do so, I shall point out what characteristics are considered to be important to define the boundaries. In the process it will also become clear that the same designation can be used for setting different boundaries. As I discussed in the theoretical chapter, discourse theory put a particular emphasis on boundaries, namely on the relational formation of identities. Identities are formed, institutionalized and gain meaning in relation to the construction of a constitutive outside in the antagonistic field. This happens through the exclusion of a series of identities and meanings. This 'outside' is necessary for the construction of the identity of the 'inside'. But at the same time, the 'outside' constitutes a constant threat for the 'inside' and it prevents the full constitution of it. That is why Laclau and Mouffe (1985) define it as the symbol of *my non-being*. The 'outside' is inherently negatively attributed in terms of what the identity is 'not' or which groups are excluded and where the boundaries are drawn. For the analysis of the formation of these internal frontiers, DT makes use of the *logic of difference* and the *logic of equivalence*. While the logic of difference (sameness) aims to lessen the existing group differences by setting up alliances through the emphasis on commonalities, the *logic of equivalence* is the chain or space where the excluded identities are juxtaposed. In this chapter, I explain how the two logics are formed according to different discourses

deployed. This will also illustrate the boundaries between the excluded and included people.

To contextualize this chapter among the others in this thesis, it is necessary to remember that ethno-national identification has evolved among the ordinary Assyrians/Syriacs in the diaspora and not in the homeland. In this new context, identity discourses about the boundaries of their people, as is the topic of this chapter, are not autonomous but have been created discursively in relation to outsiders and different groups of insiders. Assyrians/Syriacs from different areas in the Middle East who have settled in Western Europe rethink their common traditional boundaries in this new antagonistic context within the already existing or newly emerged discourses. They reflect with a heightened awareness on their distant historical past which they date back to pre-Christian times, to the first era of Christianity and to the new confessional communities in the Middle East. Notwithstanding this most recent aspect, their life in different geographical areas in the Middle East, as discussed in earlier chapters, also caused to develop distance among Assyrians/Syriacs. Their mobility in a dispersed Western world today allows them space to negotiate the differences and commonalities between them from a modern perspective.

This chapter will also serve as an illustration that new forms of identification among the Assyrians/Syriacs in the *golutho* (as discussed in other chapters) have lead to the re-definition of the collective boundaries of the *'amo Suryoyo*. The 'imagined map of boundaries' which I illustrate here is the outcome of a patchwork of different identity discourses that have been articulated by elites. These are of course derived from the concepts to be found in the discourses of their social groups and observed in their media (TV, radio, magazines and Internet) and also in all kinds of material which they produce. In the first section I shall discuss the discourses of my respondents after I had posed my initial question: 'Who constitutes the *'amo Suryoyo*?' The answers to this question should not be taken as necessarily representing the boundaries used daily for defining this people. As will be revealed in my attempt to deconstruct their discourses, individuals are apt to take different aspects into consideration when defining these boundaries, which reveal an attempt to approach the complexity of negotiating these boundaries in everyday life. In order to contextualize their new boundary definitions, it is important to read the historical context of the groups discussed in Appendix 1.

In the second section I discuss the narrow definition of the *'amo Suryoyo;* the core of the *chain of difference*. In the last section I present the discourses about the potential enlargement or reduction of the boundaries of the *'amo* by looking at two groups which might be perceived as insiders or as outsiders, depending on the discourse applied. Looking at these two groups will help me to locate the outlines of this 'imagined map of boundaries' in the discursive process of the inclusion and exclusion of people from the collective definition of 'our people'. Inclusion of these groups would allow an expansion of the boundaries beyond the traditional confines and beyond those already discussed among the ordinary people. The first group consists of the *Mhalmoye*[800] Muslims who live in *Tur 'Abdin*. After their conversion to Islam, traditionally they have been regarded as belonging to the 'others'. From a traditional perspective, the second example I look at is composed of people who have been regarded as 'insiders': the members of the *Syriac Orthodox Church* in India. It is important to draw attention to the fact that, in this section, I have explicitly asked my respondents about these respective groups in order to learn more specifically about how they relate to them. Therefore, there may sometimes be parts which overlap with the first section in the discussion. It is important to note the differences between discourses before and after I asked specifically about the *Mhalmoye* and the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church in India. The first section illustrates their common discourses about these respective groups and in the second section I deal with more hypothetical cases, since I had to ask about them, instead of the elites themselves raising the subject.

9.1 Who is[801] the *'Amo Suryoyo*?

It is important to remember that the discourses presented in this section follow directly from the initial question: 'Who constitutes the *'amo Suryoyo* and which people do you include in this concept?'[802] When I asked this question, some elite members in turn asked me: 'Do you mean the *'ito*

[800] *Mhalmoye* are considered to be Assyrians/Syriacs who converted to Islam at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

[801] In *Suryoyo*, the word *'amo* for 'people' is singular. Therefore I have used the form 'is' instead of 'are'.

[802] During the interview, I used the term *'amo*, because it has a more general connotation which is open to interpretation as to whether I asked for a denominational or an ethno-national definition of the group.

(church[803]), or do you mean the *umtho* (nation)?' 'Use the definition you always use when you say *'amo Suryoyo',* I replied. Their question shows that even members of the elite continue to attribute a double meaning (religious and ethnic-secular) to the term *'amo*. Despite the fact that today the *Assyriska* elite has formed an ethnic concept of the designation *Suryoye*, there are still individuals among them who relate the designation *Suryoye* to the *'ito* (church, here: Syriac Orthodox Church) when they use it among themselves in daily life. This is the most traditional way of using it. When they choose to use *Suryoye* as a national name for the various Syriac Churches, they do so consciously as part of a political discourse. Consequently, the designation *Suryoye* can mean different things simultaneously. I shall illustrate this first by giving two examples in the use of designations discursively before I continue with and answer on this question based on the data from all my respondents. The first example is that of the *Assyriska* young professional Martha:

> When I use *Suryoye*, I refer to the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. When I use *Assyrier* in Swedish language, I include the *Madenhoye*[804] [members of the Assyrian Church of the East] and Chaldeans.

Besides this use, somewhere else in the interview Martha mentioned that she uses the designation *Othuroye* when communicating in *Suryoyo* to refer to the collective of the different Syriac Churches. As she says in the citation above, she reserves the term *Suryoye* to refer to the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church only. This latter use is the traditional use of the term *Suryoye* once found in the homeland. Martha believes that distinguishing between the terms *Suryoye* and *Othuroye* is a way to separate her denominational group from her national group. Her attitude fits in with the political activist discourse of the *Assyrier*.

Her approach is interesting for two reasons. Earlier in the interview, she had mentioned that as she saw it, the terms *Suryoye* and *Othuroye* were synonymous. Therefore, she translated the term *Suryoye* by using the Swedish term *Assyrier*. Nevertheless, when she uses the two terms *Suryoye* and *Othuroye* in her mother tongue *Suryoyo* in her daily life, she sometimes continues to attribute different meanings to them, despite the fact that she perceives them

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[803] By 'church' they mean the whole church community.

[804] *Madenhoye* is short for *Suryoye Madenhoye* (literally *Eastern Suryoye*, in contrast to the *Western Suryoye*). The latter are the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

as synonyms. This still leaves the question of why she chooses to translate the term *Suryoye* with the Swedish term *Assyrier*, since she uses different definitions when using both of these in *Suryoyo*. There is one possible explanation for her reason for translating the term *Suryoye* into Swedish as *Assyrier*. In her understanding, the *Suryoye* are a *'amo* (ethnie) or *umtho* (nation). The narrower definition implied by the term *Suryoye* today has a denominational connotation for her.

This means that she has to opt for the term *Othuroye* when speaking in *Suryoyo*, if she wants to express her ideas about the broader boundaries of her people. Therefore, it would appear that she translates the term *Suryoye* in her mother tongue into the Swedish term *Assyrier* so as to use the same broader definition of the term *Suryoye*; namely that which is used for the term *Othuroye* in *Suryoyo*. Furthermore, it is irrelevant to her that the term *Othuroye* is translated with the term *Assyrier*. The translation process simultaneously functions as a vehicle to transform ideas. Martha translates and transforms her concept of the *'amo Suryoyo* – and extends the boundaries she draws for this *'amo* –, by using the terms *Othuroye* in *Suryoyo* and *Assyrier* in Swedish. Since her concept of *'amo* extends beyond the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church, the term *Othuroye* is used as a national designation to express the discourse that Assyrians/Syriacs are an *umtho*. The Swedish language functions here as a mediating instrumental resource for the mobilization of her *Assyrian* ideology in a Swedish context. Language is not neutral. It bears ideas. Over time, ideas can influence linguistic expressions. Ideas (*signifier*) and language (*signified*) are interactive. The meaning given to names (*signified*) has a relational, contextual and processual character. And thus, they are not fixed. The meaning the *Assyriska* Martha gives to the term *Suryoye* should be understood in relation to her definition of the term *Othuroye*.

As the discussion in Martha's example reveals, generally the *Assyrier* use the terms *Suryoye* and *Othuroye* synonymously. Nevertheless, there is a (very) small minority who use a narrower notion of the term *Suryoye*; one example is the scholar Marauge. When he refers to the *'amo Suryoyo,* he is speaking about the members of the Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic and Syriac Protestant churches. Although he has used both terms (*Suryoye* and *Othuroye*) as synonyms in the past, after some disillusionment with the Assyrian Movement, he has had a change of heart. He now argues that 'the other churches of our people' (Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Church, Maronite Church and the Melkite Church) have distanced themselves from

the national identity of the *Suryoye,* especially from identification on the basis of the designation *Suryoye*. The churches he now excludes from the national identity of the *'amo Suryoyo*, he calls 'the other churches of our people.' This indicates that he does identify them as *Suryoye* if they identify themselves as such. Since he believes that this self-identification with his people is absent, he personally no longer feels it is correct to refer to them as *Suryoye*.[805] Since he took this decision, he now uses *Suryoye* as an ethno-national term referring to only three *Syriac* Churches. Marauge's present-day use of the term *Suryoye* differs from the use adopted by all the other *Assyrier* respondents. He represents the small minority among the *Assyrier* who opt for a narrower definition of the designation *Suryoye*, but still as an ethno-religious term. Moreover, he does use the ethno-national term *Othuroye* at the times at which he wants to make a statement about the ethno-national collective identity of the group. Marauge's use of the term *Suryoye* also shows the variation in the use of definitions of terms. This exemplifies how the choice of a certain designation can either expand or contract the boundaries of a group of people, depending on the meaning attached to it. This indicates that even among the *Assyrier* who have the most elabourated discourse on the *umtho,* there are variations in the delineation of the *umtho Suryoyto*. In contrast to the *Assyrier*, the *Syrianska* elite show less variation in the use of designations.

I shall now return to the answer to the central question ('Who is the *'amo Suryoyo?*') of this section in relation to all my respondents. In their answers to my question, almost all *Syrianska* and *Assyriska* elite members stated that they include all the '*Suryoye* churches' (*'itotho Suryoyotho*). The main difference between them was that the *Assyriska* elite often stipulated that those churches should first take the step of identifying themselves with the *'amo Suryoyo*, before they would include them. After observing that a few *Syrianska* elite members had never heard of the *Rum* [Melkites] and Maronites, and I had answered their question: 'Who are they?' with 'In the early centuries of Christianity they followed the same denomination' – they all replied positively about the inclusion of these two groups. This seems to indicate that, having shared an element in the history of the Syriac Church at some point in history seems to be sufficient grounds for inclusion today.

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[805] In reality the members of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church do use the names *Suryaye*, *Athuraye* and *Kaldaye* interchangeably when speaking in their mother tongue *Sureth*. When they speak a foreign language like English, they translate these into respectively Assyrian and Chaldean.

A larger number of the *Syrianska* than of the *Assyriska* elite refer more *explicitly* to the inclusion of the Maronites. This identification should be understood on the one hand against the background of the revival among a part of the Maronites of 'their Aramean ancestry', besides their interest for such shared elements in the Syriac church and cultural tradition as the language. And on the other hand the influence of religious discourses among *Syrianer* give space to the consideration of the active inclusion of Maronites within the *chain of difference* (sameness) as a potential alliance, sharing the same religion in the Middle East and roots in the same (early) Syriac church. Since the early 1990s, the official title of this church is '*Ito Suryoyto Marunoyto d-Antakya* (Syriac Maronite Patriarchal Church of Antioch).[806] Cogently, this interest in a shared *Suryoye* past functions as a way to distance its members from a putative Arab ethnicity as speakers of Arabic are commonly identified to be of Arab descent.[807] The message of the *Assyriska* elite seems to imply that the Maronites share a *Suryoye* past and that they ought to be included if they identify themselves with this history. [808] Therefore, among the *Assyrier*, the interest among Maronite elite members in an Aramean identification plays less of a role, in contrast to the *Syrianska* activists, for whom this is the main reason to pay great attention to some Maronites' identification with an Aramean past.

A few *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* include the Mandeans[809] in their concept of *'amo*, without any further explanation. This idea is frequently raised in cultural and political meetings called by Assyrians/Syriacs. The connection which is made is through an assumed common past or roots in Mesopotamia. This idea is kept at an abstract level and it does not seem to be felt necessary to go into details, as it has almost no practical consequences

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806 This name was introduced after the publication of the Code of Canon Law for Eastern Churches in the early 1990s.

807 In 2001, the Coalition of American Assyrians and Maronites sent a letter to the Arab-American Institution to protest about its reference to Assyrians and Maronites as Arabs (http://www.aina.org/releases/caamletter.htm): 'We the undersigned, speaking on behalf of over 2.2 million Assyrians, including Chaldeans and Syriacs, and Maronites living in America herewith assert that Assyrians and Maronites are not and have never been Arabs – contrary to the claims of the Arab American Institute.'

808 The former ADO representative Abgar Maloul was among the first Assyrians/Syriacs to establish relations with the Maronites in attempts to encourage their awakening to their *Suryoye* roots. On the basis of these contacts, the Maronite politician Imad Shamoun was invited to the US and later to Europe to give presentations about the Syriac roots of the Maronites.

809 See further about the Mandeans, Drower (1937); Mead (1900). See about the Mandaic language, Drower and Macuch (1963); Macuch (1965, 1989, 1993).

today; the Mandeans are of no political interest as their position in the homeland is considered to be weaker than that of themselves. The greatest significance of this identification is perhaps that it serves as a means to swell the numbers of their people by aligning to people with an assumed shared past; somehow or other. This indicates also the expansion of the *chain of difference* through putting forward the commonalities.

A few *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* acknowledge the *Mhalmoye* in their people's definition of *Suryoye*, and said so before I had the chance to ask them explicitly. I shall discuss this more thoroughly later in this chapter. Only two *Assyriska* activists to whom I talked included the Yezidi[810] (*Çalkoye*) people, since they believed that in the period BCE they were part of one *'amo* and that therefore, in the future, they can once again become part of the Assyrian/Syriac nation.[811]

I have identified three important elements in relation to the definition of the boundaries of their people, which I shall discuss further for a more in-depth understanding of the boundaries employed: (1) Name of 'our people', (2) Self-identification and (3) Discourses of *Suryoyutho*.

9.1.1 The Name of 'Our People'

As I illustrated especially in the previous two chapters, there is a significant divergence between the discourses of the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer* about the ancestry of the *'amo Suryoyo* and the way they negotiate their present-day boundaries in discourses about the origins of their ancestry. The *Assyrier* find their roots in an ancient Assyrian ancestry from before the Christian era. The *Syrianer* set their foundations in the *'ito Suryoyto,* which goes back to the first centuries of the current era. It is very usual for people to use the expression '2000 years' to refer to their Christian heritage. 'Two thousand years' has

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[810] See further about the Yezidi, Kreyenbroek (1995).

[811] In Sweden, this idea was mobilized especially by the the *Assyria Liberation Party* (*Furqono*). It developed good contacts with the Yezidi Prince Anwar Mahwya, who lives in Germany. After the fall of Saddam Hussein, he attended *The Amsterdam Conference* (organized by the AUA, 2003) with Assyrian/Syriac institutions from around the world in an attempt to redefine the political boundaries of the nation. There, Prince Anwar Mahwya was eager to show that he would like to be included in the Assyrian national identity. This desire was also coloured by the idea that someday an autonomous state would be established in northern Iraq for the Assyrians and that the wish of the Yezidi was to rather be included in this political geography than the Kurdish or Arab geographies. During the meeting the different ideas about the *umtho* and the different uses of designation became clear and subsequently loomed large as obstacles in the redefinition of the *umtho*.

become a symbol of their long history which they link with the name *Suryoye*. That is the 'time before the division of the churches,' as the *Syrianska* activist Melek states: 'Seven churches have their foundation in the *'ito Suryoyto*. These are the Syriac Orthodox, Nestorian, Chaldean, Maronite, *Rum* Catholic, Syriac Catholic, and Syriac Protestant. Therefore the roots of all these people are *Suryoye*.' Despite having argued that the true ancestry of the *Suryoye* is Aramean earlier in his interview, later Melek largely ignored the pre-Christian or pagan Aramean history. He made a distinction between present-day *Suryoye* and what he imagines to be a former collective identity of Arameans (See also Chapter 8). It seems that in his eyes, *Suryoye* are Arameans, but not all Arameans are *Suryoye*. Therefore, when he defines the *'amo Suryoyo,* his primary focus is on national identification as *Suryoye* and not as Arameans:

> The *Suryoye* are Arameans. However, there are also other peoples who are Arameans, among them the Canaanites and the Amorites… Those who speak Aramaic in Syria are Arameans. Nevertheless, I cannot say they are *Suryoye* as we are. We should stare truth in the face. When a group of people splits from *mine*, we distance ourselves from each other. We become two different people. In India, there are people who were originally *Suryoye* from *Urhoy* [present-day Urfa in Turkey]… In 1996 I met one of their scholars. He said: "I am a *Suryoyo*, just as you." I asked him for the proof. He said: "We know this because our ancestors recorded this and because of endogamous marriages afterwards." Therefore we know that they are *Suryoye* by origin, but because we have been separated for 1600 years, they are Indians and no longer *Suryoye*.

It is remarkable that he uses the term 'I' instead of 'we' when he is talking about the split from the members of the church in India. Apparently, he identifies himself fully with the collective of his people. Therefore the factor needed above all else is uniformity; in particular, one which suits his perspective. This is because of the very strong bond between him as an individual and the collective of which he senses he is part.

Although Melek states that all the members of the Syriac churches belong to the *'amo Suryoyo*, he excludes the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church in India. The reason seems to be the distance developed over the course of time and, consequently, the minimal interaction between them. Moreover, he rejects the strong self-identification of the members of the Syriac churches in India with the *Suryoye*. Nor does Melek attach any weight to the genealogical argument adduced by the Syriac Orthodox Church members in India who think of themselves as *Suryoye*. This is an important

difference with the *Assyrier* who accord great importance to self-identification. Melek's stand is remarkable because, when he discusses where the roots of the Assyrians/Syriacs lie, he strongly defends the idea that his people are of Aramean descent but *not* of Assyrian descent. In doing so, he places the roots of the contemporary collective identity of the *Suryoye* in the period BCE.

The importance of the Aramean past seems to loom most significantly in relation to the discussion with the *Assyrier*, who place the roots of the descent of the *Suryoye* in an Assyrian past. As soon as Melek defines the boundaries of the *umtho Suryoyto* today, he immediately excludes those Arameans (practically, the non-Christian Arameans) in Syria with whom he does not feel any great affinity. 'The division with them has existed too long,' he says. Instead, he commences the foundation of a new definition of the *umtho Suryoyto* in the first centuries of Christianity, when the *'ito Suryoyto* had 'not yet divided'. Moreover, he excludes the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church in India from the *'amo Suryoyo* for the same reason he excludes the (other) Arameans in Syria. Melek uses a definition of the *'amo Suryoyo* which is more practical than theoretical. It could be said that his definition of his people is relatively 'less imagined' (as far as possible) than that of the *Assyrier*. The latter employ a more theoretical definition founded on a more political ideology, in their attempt to regain a position among other peoples, by expanding their *chain of difference* in terms of nation building. As far as the *Syrianska* Melek is concerned, the link with these Arameans is one of the past, which is really only relevant to the political and symbolic concept of the *umtho*. Specifically claiming not to be of Assyrian descent, he refers to alternative Aramean roots of the *Suryoye*, the foundation on which he builds the ideology for the Aramean nation. 'Aramean' is thus used as a way to seek legitimation for defining the *'amo Suryoyo* as an *umtho*, instead of solely as a church community.

9.1.2 Self-identification

A second major difference between members of the *Assyriska* and the *Syrianska* elites (already alluded to above) is the role they permit self-identification in their definition of the *'amo Suryoyo*. The *Assyriska* elite give much more weight to self-identification. Aday, an *Assyrisk* university graduate activist says: 'If they have a "we" feeling, despite the fact that their mastery of the *Suryoyo* language is very poor, but they still feel part of us psychologically and emotionally, I shall think of them as *Suryoye*.' Among the

Syrianer, the student Matay was among the very few who ascribed a significant role to self-identification:

> Neither the *Suryoye* nor any other people are static as I see it. Secondly, my principle is to accept someone as a *Suryoyo* if he identifies himself as a *Suryoyo*. For very objective reasons, we could also accept someone as a *Suryoyo* even if he does not identify himself as such. However, we should give him the freedom not to identify with us and we should not identify him as a *Suryoyo*... We should be careful with sticking 'passports' on the heads of individuals.

The elite adduce different reasons for the importance of self-identification. In the first place, several, Matay for one, noted the *right* of individual self-identification. It is important to recognise that this is a value which has developed in the Western diaspora. It is the outcome of a burgeoning awareness and subsequent reflection about their group identity. This aspect also shows that different conceptions of and variations in group identification have begun to emerge among Assyrians/Syriacs in the diaspora. This is in sharp contrast to the 'static' group identity and membership of this people in the Middle East. Former *Assyriska* activist Barsaumo, now a university graduate, has objections to the meagre attention the Assyrian Movement (*harake Othuroyto*) paid to this aspect:

> The dominant opinion of the Assyrian Movement is that the *Rum* are also *Suryoye* but, since they [*Rum*] lived among the Arabs, they developed an Arab identity as well as [Arab] traditions. Since we expect that others will accept our self-identification, we should likewise accept the identity they [*Rum*] choose for themselves.

A second reason for the variations in self-identification is that this is considered to be an essential prerequisite to pave the way for a national identity. Therefore, the *Assyriska* student Yauno does not include every member of the Syriac Orthodox Church in his concept of *'amo Suryoyo*:

> However, those *Suroye* who are members of our church and believe they are Turks or Arabs are not *Suroye* in my opinion. Even if a person speaks *Suryoyo* but he thinks he is a Turk or an Arab, he is not a *Suroyo*…

Among the Assyrians/Syriacs in the urban areas of Iraq, there are people who have begun to identify themselves as Arabs. At the Syriac Symposium IX (Granada), during her presentation one of the scholars from the Chaldean

community in Baghdad presented herself as an Arab Christian. This aroused strenuous disagreement among other scholars in the Assyrian/Syriac community. A central question this scholar was asked was: 'Don't you know you are Assyrian and that you have been arabized? Therefore how can you identify as an Arab'? Her reaction showed that she had not expected these questions and that this discussion was new to her. This indicates that through her self-identification as an 'Arab Christian' she had objectified her collective belonging for herself.

9.1.3 Discourses of *Suryoyutho*

Self-identification is certainly not perceived as something abstract and autonomous. The elite relate it to *Suryoyutho,* the third important element in defining the boundaries of the *'amo Suryoyo*. The term *Suryoyutho* refers to a specific '*Suryoye* way of life'. The norm is to express *Suryoyutho* or to live *Suryoyutho* when people identify themselves as *Suryoye*. Simply saying, those who do not do so are not included in the definition of the *'amo Suryoyo*.

In negotiating the collective identity of the Assyrians/Syriacs, the elite relate different elements to each other. Unquestionably, it is the compilation of elements instead of one 'objective' element which is decisive in their decisions to include or exclude someone from the definition of the *'amo Suryoyo*. The elite, for instance, differ in the emphasis they put on certain elements. Indeed, when defining the Assyrians/Syriacs as a group, each identity discourse has its own compilation of elements, prioritizing some of them above the others. It is remarkable that when elite members talk about *Suryoyutho,* they present this as something stable and immutable. At least, they choose not to stress the changing aspects of *Suryoyutho* which have occurred over time. A few members of the elite who are eager to encourage change in the '*Suryoye* way of life' stress that certain cultural elements are alien to the *mardutho d-Suryoye* (*Suryoye* culture); that they are not part of *Suryoyutho*. The cultural elements concerned are those which are assumed to have been brought with them from the homeland. They ascribe them not to an Assyrian/Syriac but to a Muslim society. Consequently, one ought to distance oneself from them. Examples tend to preponderate on the position of women in society and the internal rivalry (*berberiye*) between individuals or social groups in the Assyrian/Syriac community. These elements are reflected upon to be backward and especially the latter is related to feudalism. Some elite members show that they are conscious that *Suryoyutho* undergoes changes. Nevertheless, there is still the idea of what

Assyrians/Syriacs at a certain time and place should live up to. This will always be coloured by an idea about what *Suryoyutho* entails. Hence, depending on the perspective of the elite members (*Assyrier*, *Syrianer*, old, young, level of education, and so forth), *Suryoyutho* will mean different things to different people.

For many of the *Assyriska* elite, it is important that Assyrians/Syriacs dare to express their *Suryoyutho* even if this means they run the risk of encountering hardships. Those who can meet these expectations acquire a symbolic heroism among the people.[812] For example, for this reason the *Assyriska* young professional Martha (who has never met but only heard about them) excludes the Assyrians/Syriacs who live in Istanbul from her concept *'amo Suryoyo*:

> Those [*Suryoye*] who live in Istanbul – I do not consider them as *Suryoye*, because they speak Turkish [as mother tongue] and live a certain way of life in which they do not express their *Suryoyutho*.[813] Perhaps this is because they are afraid. Here in Europe, we live much more as *Suryoye* than we did in the homeland. We can wear a crucifix around our neck in public. We have actually forgotten how hard it is to live in a Muslim country!

For many elites, the *Suryoyo* language is an important element of *Suryoyutho*. When we take this aspect into consideration, the *'amo Suryoyo* is composed of the people whose mother tongue is *Suryoyo*. They regard *Suryoyo* as the traditional mother tongue of the *Suryoye* and therefore they want to preserve its symbolic value by urging people to continue speaking it in their daily lives (besides their other languages). They believe that the language expresses and is the vehicle of *Suryoyutho*. The language connects the *Suryoye* as a collective;

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812 One example is Father Yusef Akbulut in Diyarbakır, who was imprisoned and sued for recognizing the genocide during the First World War in Ottoman Turkey. See further for a broader analysis of this case, Donef (2001).

813 In reality, the *Suryoye* who migrated to Istanbul from such cities as Mardin, Diyarbakır and Adiyaman either speak only Turkish or that in combination with Arabic. Those Assyrians/Syriacs who moved to Istanbul from the villages of *Tur 'Abdin* still do speak *Suryoyo* at home but Turkish outside. What Martha is referring to is probably their attitude that they do not express their appreciation of the *Suryoyo* language as much as Assyrians/Syriacs do in, for example, Europe. Generally, the Assyrians/Syriacs who established themselves in Istanbul tried to learn Turkish quickly, as part of the modernization process they were so eager to embrace. Moreover, Turkish was perceived as a means to be able to survive in Turkish society in Istanbul. It was a necessity to disguise their Assyrian/Syriac background to outsiders, avoiding the discrimination and disadvantages which were related to being non-Turkish and non-Muslim (See also the Chapters 3 and 4).

it functions as social glue between members when they communicate in it. Without sharing a common language, it is expected that individuals will become estranged from each other. The academic activist Na'im expressed this aspect quite clearly:

> It is very hard for me to understand, for example, how a *Mardelli*[814] can have a sense of *Suryoyutho* as a people, as a church and in the language... He cannot communicate with a *Suryoyo* from *Tur 'Abdin* who speaks *Suryoyo*. It is as if a *Suryoyo* and a Swedish person [are communicating]…

Discourses of *Suryoyutho* attempt to heal the *split subject* by aiming to preserve the language, culture and the sense of closeness within the community. Language constitutes a nodal point of the mentioned discourses. Elements of *Suryoyutho* function as a 'condition' for being included in the definition of the '*amo*. In more general terms, discourses of *Suryoyutho* react strongly against the assimilation of Assyrian/Syriacs in majority societies that they live in. At the same time, the meaning given to *Suryoyutho* vary depending on the discourse applied. *Suryoyutho* has therefore a floating character. Its floating character allows space for the definition of different and changing boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. In order to expand and capture all differences, there should be at least some commonalities or a common purpose. In the absence of this, as demonstrated in my examples, my respondents exclude those who do not fit into the concept of *Suryoyutho* from the definition of the *'amo*. Taking these elements into consideration, it is possible to arrive at a relatively narrow definition of the *'amo Suryoyo*.

9.2 Narrow Definition: Who Does Not Belong to the *'Amo*?

Very few of both the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer* adhere to a narrower definition of the *'amo Suryoyo* which embraces the members of the Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic and Syriac Protestant churches. Nevertheless, it is possible to affirm that the *Syrianska* elite members are far more likely to espouse this discourse than are the *Assyriska* elite. One central argument in forming a narrower definition of the *'amo Suryoyo* is that the historical differences between the various Syriac churches have shaped a reality which no longer

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[814] *Merdalli* refers to an inhabitant of the city Mardin. Here is it used for a *Suryoyo* from this city whose mother tongue is Arabic (dialect of Mardin) and not *Suryoyo*.

allows a unity to be presented among the various Syriac churches. For the *Syrianer*, another motivation for using a narrow definition is the fact that they dis-identify with the designation 'Assyrian' which has been adopted by the Assyrian Church of the East. They rather refer to them as *Suryoye Madenhoye* (Eastern Syriacs) or Nestorians.

At the same time, some *Syrianska* elite members tend to refer to them with 'real *Ashuriye*', to distinguish them from the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church who adhere to the Assyrian ideology. As far as they are concerned, the 'real *Ashuriye*' are not only a different church but also a different group of people. This group of *Syrianer* have continued to adopt a traditional definition of their people, remaining faithful to the definition they used in the Middle East, namely along denominational lines. In contrast to them, those *Syrianer* who have an idea of a shared commonality between the Syriac churches do include the 'real *Ashuriye*' in their definition of the *'amo Suryoyo*. The thirty-year-old female activist Warde says: 'The *Madenhoye* [(Eastern) [*Suryoye*] are actually also *Suryoye*. But, at the same time, they have more right to call themselves Assyrians than 'our brothers the Assyrians'.' In her reference to the latter, she means the *Suryoye Ma'erboye* (members of the Syriac Orthodox Church) who have adopted the Assyrian ideology. Nevertheless, these *Syrianer* accept and respect the self-definition of the 'real *Ashuriye*' when they refer to themselves as Assyrian, since they have not caused a division among the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. In Warde's identity discourse, the *'amo Suryoyo* includes only the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. In this context, she sees the 'real *Ashuriye*' as a different Syriac church and respects their decision to use a different national name. Meanwhile, *theoretically* she *does* include them in her concept of *'amo Suryoyo*.

Assyriska elite members who do adhere to the narrow definition of the *'amo Suryoyo* are mostly *umthonoye*, who used to be active in the Assyrian Movement and grew disappointed in the results they realized. They have been confronted with the historically developed differences and the subsequent difficulties these caused in the Assyrian Movement in attempts to diminish these differences so as to create an *umtho Suryoyto* out of the different 'Syriac churches'.[815] As already mentioned, the *Assyriska* scholar Marauge (who used to play a pioneering role in the Assyrian Movement in

[815] *'Itotho Suryoyotho* (Syriac Churches) were organized along denominational lines under the *millet* system in the Ottoman Empire. See further also Appendix 1.

Sweden, and who has since distanced himself from any cultural-political activity) thinks that the Assyrian Movement failed in its strategy of *umthonoyutho*:

> ADO was based on the ideas of Naum Faik: *ett'ir bar othur ett'ir* [Awake sons of Assyria, Awake!], Awake sons of Assyria you are all one! He nurtured an ideology, a dream. But a dream is different to reality. We have been separated from the [*Suryoye*] *Madenhoye*[816] for 1500 years… It is difficult for a people to re-unite as one people if we are so dispersed. As *umthonoye*, we took a very big step by saying that we are all *Suryoye* and that we should re-unite. If we had spent our time and energy on organizing ourselves [Syriac Orthodox Church members] internally, it would have been much more productive. We were the ones who awakened the [*Suryoye*] *Madenhoye* and Chaldeans to the *umthonoye* ideas – the *Suryoye* [*Ma'erboye*]. However, instead of doing that, we could have tried to focus on the *Suryoye Ma'erboye*.[817] Had we done so, we could have transformed our priests into strong *umthonoye*.

Marauge questions the strategy of the Assyrian Movement; blames it of not having reckoned with the differences between the *Suryoye Madenhoye* and the *Suryoye Ma'erboye,* which has grown throughout the history of separation. He opts for a stronger internal focus among the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church (*Suryoye Ma'erboye*), especially the clergy, who could be transformed into strong *umthonoye*. Implicitly, he is referring to the important role priests could play in the mobilization of the *umthonoyutho* among the ordinary people. Moreover, he is covertly suggesting that clergy today do not perform the role expected of them.

The *Syrianska* elite who prefer to accept this narrower definition of the *'amo Suryoyo* do so from a more 'traditional' perspective. They show that, in the past, the various Syriac churches were (or may have been) part of one group of people, but hasten to add that the past does not play a role in their life today – not any longer. The *Syrianska* elite tend to emphasise the historical differences which have developed between the Syriac churches. This is explicable when it is remembered that the *Syrianska* ideology developed as a reaction and in opposition to the Assyrian ideology, resulting from an antagonistic relationship. While Assyrian ideology stresses the

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[816] Assyrians or Members of the Assyrian Church of the East.

[817] Members of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

commonality of these 'churches of the same nation'; the *Syrianer* emphasize the differences which have grown up between the same churches. In both cases, the commonalities *and* differences have been developed discursively and are used instrumentally to feed the antagonistic ideologies. *Syriansk*a elites propose continuing to live with these differences as separate *'ame* (people). In fact, they have no intention of mobilising towards national unity, except for extending some contacts with Maronites. Nevertheless, a few *Syriansk*a elite do point to the requirements needed if they were to decide to achieve national unity among the different Syriac churches. The student Matay explains his argument:

> During the period that they [various Syriac churches] were separated, they evolved different identities for themselves… And these people grew up in a society which was based on religious grounds. Identity was based on religion… Historically, at times the *Suryoye* and the *Nasturnoye* [members of the Assyrian Church of the East] have declared each other heretic for hundreds of years...[818]

Departing from the differences developed among the *'amo Suryoyo*, Matay concludes that, as members of the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Assyrians/Syriacs are a different people from the members of the Assyrian Church of the East (*Nasturnoye*). Ironically, he even used the heretical term *Nasturnoye,* which has been used by the Syriac Orthodox Church to refer to them historically. Matay most probably used it not because he thinks they are heretical but because he is eager to stress the character of their historical relationship and its consequences for present-day attempts to unite. When discussing other aspects of the Assyrian Church of the East, he referred to them by the more neutral term *Madenhoye* (Eastern [*Suryoye*]). From his point of view, the issue of developing *unity* is a secondary one which is open to discussion and which may serve as a future goal. Before they are able to deal with the second, Assyrians/Syriacs should be aware of the first aspect: acknowledging the historically developed differences between them instead of denying them. Note that in his approach he does not use a 'myth of common ancestry,' which is common among ideas of creating *unity*. Instead, Matay opts for developing a new commonly shared ground:

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[818] See further for the relationship between these two churches after the Islamic conquest, Hage (1966: 81-83) and Kawerau (1955: 70-72).

> Indeed, we are 'begging' each other now to become one people… If we want to unite and we are well aware of the historical differences, it is of no interest to me at all whether we were one people three thousand years ago or not… *Othuroye* or *Oromoye*... Even if we were, this is unimportant to me. Christianity extinguished the pre-Christian history and therefore it is no longer visible.

In Chapter 8, I discussed the argument of the *Assyriska* elite who stress the continuation of the pre-Christian (Assyrian) culture through the Christian tradition, whereas the *Syrianer* are convinced that the pre-Christian Assyrian culture was completely extinguished and that the new culture of the *'amo Suryoyo* was developed solely on a new Christian foundation. Only when the discussion concerns the pre-Christian *roots*, do the *Syrianska* elite claim that *Suryoye* had Aramean ancestry.

The *Syrianska* Father Zakay also stresses the importance of *unity* between the churches. His approach is different from that of the other *Syrianer*, since he implies the necessity of theological unity or, at least, the acceptance of each other as churches before unity at any national level could be realized:

> All seven Patriarchs should discuss this together. They should agree on one line in theology and adhere to this. This way the people will be re-united... We cannot become one church and one people if the Patriarchs of both [all] churches do not agree on becoming one church theologically. Therefore, all the people should request the seven churches to unify again as one church: Eastern Syriacs, Chaldeans, Maronites, Syriac Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Protestants and the Melkites. They all should meet and agree on one theology, ideology and people. Whatever designation they want to give to the nation [*umtho*], I would agree with, as a priest in the church of Jesus.

In the last sentence, for a moment Father Zakay neglects the importance commonly given to 'the name of the nation', by stating that he would agree to 'whatever' name happened to be chosen. He identifies his stance with a reference to his position as a priest in the Church of Jesus. From this position he allows himself to 'distance' himself from the name discussion among his people. His adoption of this position in the interview may have been a 'temporary stop' to make a statement acceptable to me as a researcher who is simultaneously a member of his community – and also in the

assumption that his words would eventually become public, therefore expectations from him as a public figure should be taken into account.

His current stance – adhering to the *Syrianska* ideology – is therefore understandable in relation to his position as a priest in a complex discursive field of expectations in which he now finds himself. Since 1982 the official stand of the church has been that clergy should remain neutral towards both *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* ideologies. Nevertheless, for reasons which I discussed in Chapter 7, most clergy have stood at the side of the *Syrianer*. A remarkable point is that Father Zakay prioritises national unity over theological particularity – despite his position as a priest. This idea of his is unique for its theological perspective. He approaches national unity theologically; a new national church should be composed of the different Syriac Churches. This is a different concept to that held by the lay elites especially. They urge that national unity as a people to be constituted of the Syriac churches but do not assume any disappearance of these specific churches. It is clear that Father Zakay has not understood the use of the terminology of the *Assyrier* when they show a preference for the use of the designation 'Assyrian'. He assumes that this is a reference to the Assyrian Church of the East (*Madenhoye*), which is not the case.

A third example of how the historical differences between the churches are experienced and used in shaping the national identity of the Assyrians/Syriacs was given by the *Syrianska* scholar Adam. He revealed how he felt distanced from the *Suryoye Madenhoye* (*Assyrians*[819] and Chaldeans) in the *Gozarto* in Syria where he grew up and how he relates to them at group level from that perspective:

> I noticed that their traditions are also different. This is what I remembered from Syria. They also speak a different dialect. Moreover, our people [*Suryoye Ma'erboye*] were also better educated than they were [*Suryoye Madenhoye*]; they were to be found in different kinds of [lower paid] jobs too. Education is not appreciated as much as among the *Suryoye* [*Ma'erboye*]. They were less organized than we were. In our association, it was possible to see that there were all kinds of activities organized. However, they [*Suryoye Madenhoye*] had only the church… We called them *Ashuriye*[820] and we did not feel like [making a questioning gesture with his hands]… They did not speak Arabic very well... They lived in the villages

[819] Here, members of the Assyrian Church of the East.

[820] *Ashuriye* is Arabic for Assyrians.

> along the *Khabur* [River]. Sometimes we made trips to their villages which were organized by our association… The Chaldeans spoke only Arabic. I do not consider them members of my *'amo*, although I know that, historically, we are one people. Today, I no longer feel close to them.

Adam chose to indicate the cultural, social and class differences between the *Suryoye Ma'erboye* and the *Suryoye Madenhoye*. To his way of thinking, this is reason enough to exclude them from his concept of *'amo Suryoyo*, although if the truth be told he would have been able to identify the same differences among the *Suryoye Ma'erboye*. Two examples which he mentions are related to mastery of Arabic. He accuses the *Suryoye Madenhoye* of not being fluent enough in Arabic and the Chaldeans of knowing only Arabic and no *Suryoyo* at all. Adam himself grew up with Arabic besides speaking *Suryoyo* as his mother tongue. From his present perspective, he considers *Suryoyo* the language of his people. His citation shows the subtle and important role of language in sensing closeness, as well as revealing the role in status it plays when it is spoken well. One explanation for Adam's discourse is most probably that he grew up in a family which supported the *anti-Assyrian* ideology and opted to support the *Syrianer*. Hence, his point of departure in defining the *'amo Suryoyo* becomes first and foremost the choice of a certain ideology.

Here, Adam applies the *logic of difference* solely to the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. As I indicated in the introduction of this chapter, the *chain of difference* is the space in which commonalities between different sub-identities are brought together in order to create alliances based on a common purpose. And depending on the discourses 'at work' the *chain of difference* may change. For instance, in religious discourses 'religion' is the central *nodal point* and thus, are alliances chosen according to the religious affiliation. I have illustrated in Chapter 7 that this has been the main discourse of the Syriac Orthodox Church in its opposition to the Assyrian Movement. In the case of the latter, an assumed shared ethnic background functions as the main *nodal point* in the definition of a cross-denominational national identity. Consequently, the boundaries of the *chain of difference* are decided around this *nodal point*.

9.3 Broad Definition: Who May Belong to the Future *'Amo*?

In search of a better understanding of the broader boundaries which the elite use in their concept of *'amo*, I asked my respondents whether they include the members of the Syriac Orthodox church in India and the *Mhalmoye* (now Muslims) in *Tur 'Abdin* in their concept of *'amo Suryoyo*. As I stated in the first section, before I asked them this question, none of the respondents had mentioned the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church in India. In speaking about the *Mhalmoye*, only a few *Assyriska* respondents mentioned them at all in their definition, and only if the *Mhalmoye* personally identify as *Suryoye*.

9.3.1 '*Suryoye* Noses' in India

In his book *Cultural heritage of Knahnaya Syrian Christians*, Father Joseph Kulathramannil (2000: 42) attempts to set out the *Suryoye* roots of the *Kna'noye* in India:[821]

> The church in Kerala was in a state of disorder after the death of St. Thomas. They neither had a head nor a shepherd, to lead them. According to tradition, Thomas of Kana – Knai Thomman – a Syrian merchant visited Kerala in 345 A.D. He was disturbed by the, then pathetic, state of affairs of the St. Thomas Christians in Kerala. He reported this to the Catholicos of Seleucia. The church authorities there decided to send a bishop with a priest, deacons and a group of lay people, under the leadership of Thomas of Kana to help the St. Thomas Christians... The Catholicos commissioned Thomas of Kana to lead a group of people to settle in Kerala. He gathered a group of 400 Syrian Christians from Jerusalem, Baghdad and Nineveh. There were deacons, priests and the bishop of Urha [*Urhoy*, present-day Urfa in Turkey], Mor Joseph, among this group of settlers.

I also encountered the idea of a shared descent with the *Suryoye* during my visit to Kerala (India) in September 2006. While attending the Syriac Conference at the SEERI in Kottayam, several local members of the Syriac Orthodox Church tried to seek contact with the *Suryoye* conference participants from different parts of the world. The *Urhoye* or *Kna'noye*

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[821] See for this discourse also Lukose (2002: 169).

especially tried to make their claim that they belong to this group explicit, showing they felt a kindredness and wanted to have more contact. After one priest had introduced himself to me as *Kna'naya*, he continued our conversation by referring to the similarity of his 'big nose' with that of the *Suryoyo* Arbert Tarzi from Canada. The priest went on to say that his ancestors, just as Arbert Tarzi's, were originally from *Urhoy* and that Albert Tarzi ended up in Canada and he in India. And today they continue to have the same 'big noses'! This reveals how this priest and other *Kna'noye* with him in India think.



Illustration 18: Two *Urhoye Suryoye*, one living in Canada and one in India. Photo: Naures Atto.

But how do the Assyrian/Syriac elites relate to these *Kna'noye* in India? As mentioned earlier, in the first instance neither *Assyrier* nor *Syrianer* included members of the Syriac Orthodox Church in India in their concept of *'amo Suryoyo*. They identify them as Indians.[822] When I explicitly asked them 'Do you include the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church in India in the *'amo Suryoyo*?' Only the *Assyriska* Martha and the *Syrianska* Yacob (both academic young professionals) answered positively. As far as these two elite members

[822] Trigona-Harany (2009: 18-19) notes that Naum Faik and Ashur Yausef never suggested that the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church to be members of the same *millet* (here: people) but saw them as members of the same church.

are concerned, the *'amo Suryoyo* theoretically consists of the different Syriac churches. Hence, being a member of the Syriac Church in India means to be part of the *'amo Suryoyo*. In contrast to that of Martha and Yacob, the first reaction of the other elite members was that the members of the church in India are members of the same *'ito* (church), but not of the same *'amo* (people). Only a small group mentioned that the *Urhoye* or *Kna'noye* among them are of *Suryoye* descent. The elite base this argument on the idea that the *Suryoye* who migrated from Edessa (*Urhoy*, present-day Urfa in Turkey) to India did not mix with the 'non-*Suryoye'* members of the Syriac Orthodox Church because of the dual factors of their custom of endogamous marriages and the caste system. Only the older generation *Assyriska* Eliyo disagrees with this argument. He thinks that it is a racist rationale to include the *Urhoye Suryoye* in India just because they are believed not to have mixed with other Indians and to connect them through a blood relationship with the *Suryoye* from *Beth Nahrin*.

The main difference between the *Assyriska* and the *Syrianska* elite members who do not include the members of the *Syriac* church in India in the definition of the *'amo Suryoyo* is the following. Almost all the *Assyriska* elite found the self-identification of the *Urhoye* decisive. Raising the topic of self-identification, a few *Assyriska* elite members were even willing to include all the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church in India in their concept of *'amo Suryoyo*. Two academic *Assyrier* thought that the Assyrians/Syriacs have been distanced from the *Urhoye* for too long. Hence, they lack a sense of closeness with the *Urhoye*. They share the main idea prevalent among the *Syrianer*.

Contrary to the *Assyriska* elite, the majority of the *Syrianska* elite are not particularly bothered about whether the members of the Syriac Church in India include themselves in the *'amo Suryoyo* as a consequence of self-identification or whether they really are descendants of the Assyrians/Syriacs from *Urhoy*. They categorically exclude them from the concept of *'amo Suryoyo*. This divergence in views is remarkable since it might have been expected that the *Syrianska* elite would include the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church in India to a much greater extent than the *Assyrier* would have done. As illustrated in Chapter 8, in their identity discourses *Syrianer* focus more on the CE, the period during which they converted from paganism to Christianity. The period BCE has developed no more than a symbolic political function in the identity, thinking of the activists among the *Syrianer*. The *Assyrier,* on the other hand, have embraced a discourse which is

based on a collective and continued identity traceable back to BCE. Therefore, they are willing to identify the members of the Syriac church in India as *'amo Suryoyo* if they identify themselves with this *'amo*. The explanation of this apparent paradox might lie in the modern approach to the concept of the nation. The *Assyrier* allow much more room for self-identification in defining the identity of their people and they accord more space to the concept of the 'imagined nation'. It is a political concept that gives them more flexibility in defining their *umtho*. From the perspective of the *Syrianer* the strong sense of everyday closeness is much more important than self-identification by people whom they consider to be outsiders.

9.3.2 Suryoye Mhalmoye?

The inclusion of the *Mhalmoye* in the concept of the *'amo Suryoyo* is the consequence of a cross-denominational approach to the collective identity of Assyrians/Syriacs by a few members of the elite who are considered by the great majority to be exotic figures possessed of ideals which are far too unrealistic. Commonly, both historically and today the *Mhalmoye* have been approached as a group of people with *Suryoye* ancestry but who are no longer included in the same *chain of difference* of their people after their conversion to Islam.[823]

The idea of including the *Mhalmoye* in the concept of the *'amo Suryoyo* was first propagated by the *Assyriska* elite who saw a potential advantage in developing this consciousness among the *Mhalmoye* who are believed to be of *Suryoye* descent.[824] In terms of being a nascent nation, they believed that Assyrians/Syriacs should create the possibility to encompass different religions. It is from this perspective that *Mhalmoye* are occasionally included in the *umtho Suryoyto*. However, the most important requirement is that *Mhalmoye* personally begin to identify themselves with this people. The reasons for the elite to include specifically *Mhalmoye* who converted to Islam and not others who converted too is that they are believed to have retained a certain (regional) identity as *Mhalmoye,* and there is the belief that they have not mixed too much with such other Muslims as Kurds or Turks. Importantly, Assyrians/Syriacs identify certain rituals among the *Mhalmoye* as

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[823] See further also the introduction of this book and the Chapters 4 and 5.

[824] A few of these respondents are active on the website www.mhalmi.com, which has been set up to discuss the background of what they call *Süryani Muhalmiler* between the Assyrian/Syriac and the more highly educated *Mhalmoye* elites.

dating back to the Assyrian/Syriac culture.[825] The *Mhalmoyo* sociologist Ihsan Çetin (2006) mentions that, after their conversion to Islam, the *Mhalmoye* were forbidden to continue to observe Christian rituals. Consequently, they continued celebrating some of the Christian traditions under new names, as a cover. Therefore, the Christian *Siboro*[826] was later celebrated by the *Mhalmoye* as *Basembar*[827]; Easter continued to be celebrated as *Jumcut-ul Meryem* (Mary's Friday). Assyrian/Syriac activists who have had contacts with *Mhalmoye* say they sensed that many of them were conscious that their ancestors were *Süryani* (*Suryoye*). Çetin's (2006) research on the identification of the *Mhalmoye* reveals that among the seventy *Mhalmoye* which he interviewed in the area of *Midyad* (*Tur 'Abdin*), 53 per cent identified themselves as *Mhalmoye*, 36 per cent as Arabs and 11 per cent as Turks. Çetin (2006) states many *Mhalmoye* trace their roots to the Arab Beni Hilal tribe[828]. Explaining this identification, he concludes that their religious conversion to Islam led to a change in their collective memory about their roots.

Shabo, an *Assyrier* activist and teacher explains his main motivation for seeking rapprochement with the *Mhalmoye*:

> Our goal is not to convert them [*Mhalmoye*] to Christianity. That is not important to our concept of *umthonoyutho*. First and foremost, it is important that they become aware that they belong to these people [*Suryoye*] so they can work for them… We want to change their present hostile attitude to the Christians. If they can feel part of our nation they will not mind what religion people adhere to. This can exert a very positive influence, because they will work for the people as a whole.

In this quotation, Shabo's main reason for developing a consciousness of a common descent among the *Mhalmoye* seems to be his hope of an

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825 Examples are the first names they give their children or the symbol of the cross which *Mhalmoye* women make with their hand on the dough when baking bread.

826 *Siboro* is a ritual celebrating the annunciation to the Blessed Virgin on 25 March. After the Sunday Mass believers mix a red and white thread which they usually wear around the pulse in their wrist or around their neck until Easter Monday (*Thnahto*).

827 Some Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur 'Abdin* had taken over the use of the term *Basembar*, probably from the *Mhalmoye* (at least if it is indeed a new term and if it was not already used in this form by the *Suryoye* themselves besides the term *Siboro*). For example, in the village of *Mzizah* the Assyrian/Syriac community used the term *Basembar* instead of *Siboro*. As far as I know, no research has been conducted about this term.

828 It is common among people who have converted to Islam or who hold high religious positions (*Sheikh*, *Seyid*) to claim that they are genealogically related to the Muslim Prophet Muhammed's family.

improvement in the position of the Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey. He and other *Assyriska* elite members expect to encounter fewer difficulties in Turkish society if religion loses its dominant role. They expect that by cultivating *umthonoyutho*[829] among the *Mhalmoye,* the latter may begin to identify as Assyrians/Syriacs at the national (secular) level, instead of continuing to identify themselves at religious level only as Muslims. The politician and activist Abrohom says for example, 'I expect that they will be convinced to believe in secularism and that being Assyrian will be put first. Their Muslim religion will no longer play a major role in their identity.'[830] The elite hope that by diminishing the importance of the role of religion and launching a process of consciousness about their *Suryoye* roots among the *Mhalmoye*, the latter will eventually be able to identify as *Suryoye* at a national level*,* and that *Suryoye* will be able to include them in their concept of *'amo Suryoyo*.

Only few members of the *Assyriska* elite, but none among the *Syrianer*, included *Mhalmoye* in the *'amo Suryoyo* without having first been asked specifically about them. When I asked the respondents explicitly whether they would include the *Mhalmoye* in their concept of *'amo Suryoyo*, about one-third of the *Assyriska* elite was indeed willing to accept them if they identify themselves as *Suryoye*. Among the *Syrianska* elite there were only a few who thought this way. Two *Syrianska* respondents said that they could agree with the idea theoretically, since the *umtho* is a secular concept. The main divergence from the way the *Assyriska* elite adhere to this idea is that the *Syrianska* elite do not actively propagate it, nor does it play any role in their daily life such as in cultural and political activities. The *Syrianska* elite consider the *Mhalmoye* to be a part of the past, but not of the present and the future. Moreover, they would prefer to keep the status quo, because they are unable to give this idea a place in their current lives. Even among the *Assyriska* elite, there are only a few proponents who actively propagate this discourse. For them, the mobilization of these shared roots is considered to be especially important to the future.

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[829] I have translated *umthonoyutho* with 'love for the [Assyrian/Syriac] people'. See for a further discussion, Chapter 6.

[830] This idea is similar to that of the first Arab nationalists (Christians) who tried to develop an Arab identity based on the common use of the Arabic language. It was a way to change the focus from a religion-based ethno-national identity to a language-based one. The attempt to minimize the difference between them was a way to lessen the tension and play down dominance of the Muslim speakers of Arabic.

About two-thirds of the *Assyrier* and almost all *Syrianer* exclude the *Mhalmoye* from their concept of *'amo Suryoyo*, the main reason being that the *Mhalmoye* converted to Islam. This conversion has distanced them as far as it possibly could from the *'amo Suryoyo*. They explain this by citing the important role which religion has played in the creation of boundaries between the people in the Middle East. The *Assyriska* university graduate and young professional, Barsaumo explains: 'Since these people have changed their religious traditions, and with these their language, their identity and their sense of belonging to the *Suryoye*, I do not think that it is right to call them *Suryoye*. There is no longer anything which connects them to us.' Father Zakay, an older generation *Syrianer*, explains that in contrast to converts to Islam, converts to other Christian churches will retain their Assyrian/Syriac ethnicity. 'They will remain connected to our people as a *'amo*… They will keep their *ghensoyutho* (ethnicity),' he says. Father Zakay took pains to imply that conversion to the Islam led directly to a change in a person's ethnicity, whereas this ethnicity is retained if a person simply adheres to a different Christian church. He equates the Christian religion with one ethnicity. Effectively, religion takes over the function of ethnicity, in the way it used to function in the Middle East. By changing ethnicity, a person crosses the boundary of the *'amo Suryoyo* and is therefore excluded. Matay, a *Syriansk* student, refers to the importance of *Suryoyutho*: '*Suryoyutho does* have some meaning. It cannot be just anything. Christianity is a very important element of *Suryoyutho*.' The boundary of the *umtho Suryoyto* is, therefore, that at least one is *not* Muslim.

Among elite members who exclude *Mhalmoye* from the concept of their people, it is no longer important what genealogical relationship they assume to the *Mhalmoye*. What weights far more heavily is how the *Mhalmoye* relate to the *Suryoyutho* today. The *Assyriska* student Yauno explains:

> I do not think that if I were to say that someone is a *Suroyo*, that person is one. I believe that someone is a *Suroyo* when he acts accordingly. It is the *mardutho* [culture] which is important, not the blood relationship; otherwise my cousins would also call themselves *Suroye* and not Turkish. My father's aunt was kidnapped by a Turkish general at the age of twelve in the years after the *Seyfo*. I never tire of asking people like them questions about why they don't feel *Suroye*… Nevertheless, if in the future a *Mhalmoyo* stands up and says that he is a Muslim but also a *Suroyo* and that he wants to work for his [*Suroyo*] culture and develop it, I shall accept him… Even though I would not feel happy about my daughter marrying his son, because I have an aversion to Islam as a religion. As a religion it is

> backward and dictatorial. I find it hard to believe that an intellectual can adhere to a religion which resorts only to the sword [*seyfo*].

Yauno is quite explicit that his concept of the *'amo Suryoyo* is different from that of the majority of Assyrians/Syriacs, and that at two different levels. At the collective level, he is willing to include the *Mhalmoye* in the concept of *'amo Suryoyo* if they identify themselves as *Suryoye* and if they are willing to work to build up the *Suryoye* culture. This is at odds with those Assyrians/Syriacs who generally perceive anyone born to Assyrian/Syriac parents as a *Suryoyo*. Yauno's disagreement with them fits into the approach of those activists who expect a certain way of life (*Suryoyutho*) from the *'amo Suryoyo*. This positive judgement can be heard when Assyrians/Syriacs refer to someone as an *umthonoyo,* implying that the person concerned makes efforts to promote the cause of the *'amo Suryoyo*. At a personal level, Yauno has no desire to develop a closer relationship with Muslims. He says for example 'I would not like a Muslim to marry my daughter.' This is striking since (as some elite members have proposed) he accepts the change to a broader and secularly based definition of the *'amo Suryoyo*, even though he does not identify personally with the *Mhalmoye*. When defining the Assyrians/Syriacs as a 'future' collective group of people, Yauno seems to prioritize the collective goal of the people above his personal goals. To increase the chance of preserving the '*Suryoyo* culture', he is willing to include the *Mhalmoye* Muslims, bearing in mind that a nation consisting of a large number of people has the power to develop the means to maintain 'its culture' and with that its survival.

Yauno's example shows how remembering can be used in different ways. The concept of the 'future in the past' can draw individuals and groups closer to one another but it can also drive them asunder. At the collective level, Yauno displayed openness by including the *Mhalmoye* in his concept of *'amo Suryoyo* if they fit into the future goal of his people. Nonetheless, he could also reject them as a collective should they not identify with Assyrians/Syriacs and/or if they did not want to invest in the future of this people. In a nutshell, the same past can be construed differently. Usually, the few *Assyriska* elite who actively work on developing a consciousness of their *Suryoye* roots among the *Mhalmoye* deliberately choose not to focus on the role of the *Mhalmoye* (after they had converted to the Islam) in the persecution (especially during the *Seyfo*) of the Assyrians/Syriacs. Their reason may be the priority they give to the evolution of an *umtho Suryoyto*. Historical events which could obtrude as a hindrance to this goal are shoved

into the background. The historical fact that the *Mhalmoyo* Sheikh Fathulla played a pivotal role in negotiating the raising of the siege of the Assyrian/Syriac village of *'Iwardo* at the time of the *Seyfo* is seized upon as a positive example of the relationship between the two groups.[831] At a personal level, Yauno also used the past to preserve the created historical distance. Indubitably, as far as he is concerned, the past with the Muslims symbolises a *Seyfo* (sword), referring to the collective memory of Assyrians/Syriacs of the Muslim persecutions. The way he used it here also refers to his perception that Islam is an uncivilized religion and hence he feels no closeness to or identification with it at a personal level. Although the past can be used in two different directions, in both cases the goal in mind is to develop a better future for the Assyrian/Syriac people.

9.4 Conclusion

As I have illustrated in earlier chapters, the *Assyriska* ideology assumes an ethno-national collective identity of their people, constructed on a putative Assyrian ancestry. In the discursive process of arguing with the *Assyrier* and outsiders about the name, the *Syrianer* have also gradually begun to adopt the concept of the *'amo Suryoyo* which is close to that of the *Assyrier* but based on a different ancestry: Aramean. Hence, although formally they are part of the same group of people today, theoretically they now partially define the boundaries of their people differently.

I have distinguished a narrow and a broad definition of the boundaries of the *'amo Suryoyo*. Together these two definitions fit into a broader circle. The components of this circle are based on specific *nodal points*. To a certain extent, both (narrow and broad) definitions are to be found in the discourses of both elite groups but for partly different reasons. Quite clearly, the broad definition tends to be used more often by the *Assyriska* elite, whereas the narrow definition occurs most frequently in the discourse of the *Syrianska* elite. Taking the discursive and the non-discursive elements into consideration, both definitions can be used simultaneously by the same individuals in a complementary way. Nevertheless, elites may compete in favouring or marketing the one more than the other, depending on their ideology at a certain moment. This indicates both the negotiable character of

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831 See further Gaunt (2006) for the role which Sheikh Fathulla played. See for a source in *Suryoyo* (Latin script) Beth Sawoce (2006).

the definition of their people and the absence of a hegemonic definition with clear-cut boundaries for both insiders and outsiders.

The 'narrowest' (theoretical) definition to be found in the discourses includes the people who are seen to be closest to the core of the collective identity of their people: Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic and Syriac Protestant church members. In everyday life, the first group takes the central position, perhaps also because it is by far the largest group in Europe. Remarkably, but not surprisingly, ex-activists among the *Assyrier* tend to share this discourse on boundary use with the *Syrianska* elite. Both elite groups believe that the differences that have historically developed between the members of the Syriac churches in daily life are too big to ignore. It is important to remember that the *Syrianer* developed this discourse because of their exclusivist ideology, whereas the narrow definition of the *Assyrier* has resulted from a degree of disillusionment in achieving their ideology of a broader definition of their people by bridging denominational boundaries. The point of departure for the broader (theoretical) definition is that all seven *Syriac* churches are included in the concept of *'amo Suryoyo*, focusing on the commonalities between them and ignoring the differences. Although among both groups, the 'broader definition' functions especially at the imagined, theoretical or politicized level, this is the case to a far greater extent among the *Syrianska* elite members. Unquestionably, the *Assyrier* have made more attempts to live up to the 'broader definition' of the *'amo Suryoyo*. Their principal energy has been invested in developing greater co-operation with the members of the Assyrian Church of the East. This decision is unsurprising since activists in both groups share the same ideology: of being of the same descent, although today they are followers of different denominations.

The fact that the definition of the *'amo Suryoyo* which the *Assyrier* use often tends to be broader and more inclusive can be explained in the light of the discourse of the *Assyriska* elite which allows them more flexibility than the *Syrianer* in defining the boundaries of the *'amo Suryoyo*. *Assyrier* are more open to negotiations with people who have a potential for future inclusion in the concept of *'amo Suryoyo*. Therefore, their discourse tends to increase the variation in closeness to and distance from these 'potential members': the *Rum* (who generally do not identify themselves with the *Suryoye* today, but might in the future), the members of the Syriac Church in India, the *Mhalmoye* Muslims, and also the Yezidi (*Çalkoye*) (although in the case of the Yezidi, inclusion is advocated by only a very few political activists). Flexibility

in defining boundaries also means that all the denominational groups which are considered to be part of this people, or potentially part of them, are positioned closer or farther away from the core collective of the Assyrians/Syriacs. In contrast to this, the discourse of the *Syrianska* elite leads to a stagnant definition of *'amo Suryoyo*. Except for the Syriac Catholics and the Syriac Protestants (who split from the Syriac Orthodox Church after the sixteenth century), who are considered to be closer to the national identity of the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church, any member of the other churches is considered to be at the same distance.

In line with the discourses they employ, elites use the concepts of *Suryoyutho* (Assyrian/Syriac culture, language and more – a '*Suryoye* way of life') and self-identification by 'outsiders' in processes of their inclusion and exclusion of people from the definition of the *'amo Suryoyo*. The starting point is that the *umtho Suryoyto* is dispersed all over the world. Consequently, the existing concepts of *Suryoyutho* are made explicable by this dispersion and the concomitant context of different ways of life. From this point of view, the more specific the definition of *Suryoyutho* is, the narrower the *chain of difference* of the *'amo Suryoyo* becomes. The *Syrianska* elite are more stringent in their requirements. What *Suryoyutho* entails is less negotiable and the traditional boundaries of the 'self' are well guarded. The members of the *Assyriska* elite are more disposed towards negotiating a broader concept of *Suryoyutho* which fits into the political discourse which they espouse, especially at a discursive level.

The core characteristics of *Suryoyutho* are considered to be Christianity and the ability to speak the mother tongue, *Suryoyo*. The great majority of the Assyrian/Syriac elite members continue to perceive Christianity (especially in relation to Islam) as a central *nodal point* around which their collective identity is built. This is clearly expressed in their discourses about the *Mhalmoye*; not sharing Christianity as part of this core identity means that *Mhalmoye* Muslims lack a great part of what being *Suryoyutho* entails. In the discourses of the elites, the putative Assyrian/Syriac past of the *Mhalmoye* as former members of the Syriac church has to be disregarded in the present-day situation of the *Suryoye*. This is where the future comes into play: the few elite members who were willing to include the *Mhalmoye* in the concept of *'amo Suryoyo* (on condition that they identified themselves with the *Suryoye*) did so with the idea that with this larger scope the Assyrians/Syriacs will be able to gain a better political position in the Middle East. This idea is negotiated discursively in relation to the modern idea of the secular concept of nation:

in the future it should be possible for *Suryoyutho* to undergo a substantial change from what is embraced by the current (narrow) concept. For instance, theoretically it could mean that Muslims could be included in the future definition of their people. Consequently, it is possible to distinguish between the present boundaries used for the definition of the *'amo Suryoyo* and those which might replace them in the future. This reveals how future prospects also influence the present delineation of a group of people. Importantly, it also admits a potential for identity change or the interpretation of a people's identity over time. The importance of the *Suryoyo* language as the mother tongue is expressed in the harsh judgement meted out to Assyrians/Syriacs who no longer speak it, including people who grew up in urban areas (Istanbul, Baghdad, *Hasake*) and under particular political circumstances.[832] This indicates the importance they accord language in their collective identity.

Self-identification has been demonstrated to be an important factor in defining the collective boundaries of the *'amo Suryoyo*. Although I had not asked the elite about it; it was raised, mainly by the *Assyriska* elite. Some of the more exigent of the *Assyrier* even required self-identification from the current members (within the traditional boundaries) of the *'amo Suryoyo* before considering them to be part of the group. This should be seen at a symbolic level. It might be on a par with natularization or citizenship exams, functioning as rituals before being allowed to enter a collective group. No one will ask each person who is considered to be a member today whether or not he or she identifies as an Assyrian/Syriac. Therefore, the pertinence of the remark about self-identification indicates the importance of this element to the group cohesion. This discourse is especially strong among political activists and university graduates. The importance of self-identification in the discourse of the *Assyrier* has not come as a bolt from the blue. First and foremost is the fact that the *Assyriska* elite have taken an active stand in declaring that Assyrians/Syriacs are a nation. From a modern Western perspective, the idea of being a nation also implies secularism. This would automatically entail a change in the traditional denominational boundaries of the *'amo Suryoyo*. In order to apply this new concept to a people who refer to a Christian past dating back 2000 years and traditionally organized along denominational lines, it is necessary to find means which can help mobilize the ideas which will eventually lead towards the birth of an Assyrian/Syriac

[832] In this thesis, I have written relatively little about the role of language.

nation. *Self-identification* is one of these means; it implies a sense of closeness and cohesion, solidarity and it might lead to a shared future goal. If self-identification can develop closeness, it can become the glue which will bind the dispersed 'imagined *umtho Suryoyto'*. The dispersed aspect is very important, since defining the boundaries of a formal group will not make it effective if there is no self-identification among its formal members.

From the perspective of the *Syrianska* elite members, self-identification has a different role. They do *not* stress the importance of the self-identification of those who are considered 'outsiders', because *Syrianska* elite members have a clear idea of whom they include and exclude. If they do not first identify themselves with those 'outsiders', they do not permit such 'outsiders' the right of self-identification with the *'amo Suryoyo*. Therefore, self-identification by outsiders alone does not affect the boundaries. *Syrianska* activists also have no active intention of changing the current effective boundaries of the *'amo Suryoyo*, which they are convinced are founded on the Syriac Church. It is possible to assert – with some additional ethnic-mobilized awareness and secular idea of their collective group – that they have continued to uphold the boundaries used in the Middle East. A few *Syrianska* elite members (mainly university graduates who are non-activists) who do find self-identification important use the narrower definition of the *'amo Suryoyo*. The role the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* elite respectively assign to self-identification allows the members of the Syriac Church in India to be closer to the *'amo Suryoyo* in the discourse of the *Assyrier* than in that of the *Syrianer*. This is paradoxical because the starting point in the discourse of the *Syrianer* is usually to share a common foundation in the Syriac Orthodox church. In the eyes of the *Syrianska* elite, the apparent missing link is the lived sense of kindredship and interaction with the same church members in India. This aspect is less important to the *Assyriska* elite because, in their more politicized discourse of *'amo Suryoyo*, they allow the use of theoretical boundaries alongside the effective boundaries applied by the ordinary people more space. Effective boundaries are sustained through a strong sense of self-identification and sense of closeness.

10 A FLOCK WITHOUT A SHEPHERD

Hawina khed qat'o dlo ru'yo[833] (We have become as a flock without a shepherd) is a phrase which the Assyrians/Syriacs commonly use when they want to express their sense of being leaderless. The elderly end this phrase by making the gesture of holding their arms out and looking upwards, focusing their hope on God and then bringing the hands together again to a passive gesture of submission, expressing that they are not able to solve the problem personally. The phrase also presumes that, in the past, they used to have a shepherd (*ru'yo*). Apparently they do not feel that their *ru'yo ruhonoyo* (religious leader[834]), who is the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, meets their current expectations of what a *ru'yo* should be. Be that as it may, there is a second interpretation of the phrase *qat'o dlo ru'yo* which is related to the negative judgement passed by Assyrians/Syriacs on any leadership position: 'Our leaders are incompetent' (*a rishonaydan lo kothen bker*) is a sentence which readily crops up when Assyrians/Syriacs discuss their leadership. This judgement encompasses their feeling that they are forlorn, being a people bereft of leaders. Both religious and secular leaders do not seem to meet their present-day needs. Retrospectively, the era they experienced strong leadership was long time ago. After that they were subjected to the rules of other peoples and finally scattered 'to the four corners of the World' – to 'foreign countries'. They have become as an 'orphaned flock' which has lost its way home and cannot retrieve their *unity*. The leadership vacuum which developed and which is palpably felt by Assyrians/Syriacs is inextricably linked to their past and present sorrows.

The desire for effective leadership (as I shall illustrate in this chapter) also expresses the ideal of *unity* among the Assyrian/Syriac people at a time which they lament exclaiming: '*ma hul lema i flighuthathe!?*' (How long must we live in this disunity!?). The vacuum in the leadership is a breeding-ground for dissensions and offers an appropriate space for the development of a social structure riddled with traditional factionalism (*'ashirto*). In their situation of

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[833] This actually refers to Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In the case of the Assyrians/Syriacs, the lack of such a shepherd is sorely missing and is implicitly assumed to be needed.

[834] Literally, *ru'yo ruhonoyo* means 'spiritual shepherd'.

worldwide dispersion, this sense of the need for *unity* is probably also most urgent because they find themselves in a position in which they want to be represented to the many new 'others' they come across in their dispersion. Only few respondents mentioned potential individuals who might possibly assume the leadership of their people in order to unite and empower them. The *Assyriska* activist Zakay mentioned as an ideal, a charismatic figure resembling Jesus: 'I believe that when Jesus came – when this people [*Suryoye*] lived as tribes – He came as a charismatic person and collected these people together. I believe that such a thing could happen.' Zakay is implying that there was unity in the past and that there is no unity now. However, this unity is seen as vital to his *'amo*. Father Aday assumes that priests should participate in this political process instead of fighting its aims:

> ...I like it very much when priests have a political understanding. Clergy should understand that Jesus *did* political work. Jesus changed through his attitude the religion of the area. People converted to Christianity; this is politics. If Jesus is God who came to earth and who managed to change the world, so why then is a priest not allowed to have a political ideology?

This portrayal of Jesus as an activist is quite regularly heard among clergy and *umthonoye* who gained their education within the church. By analogy, knowing the central position which Jesus gained among Assyrians/Syriacs (whether religious or secular) they imply to say that their own activism is not something bad. By referring to Jesus as an activist, they legitimate their own activism. Especially in relation to the stand of the clergy regarding the national needs of their people, they imply in this example of Jesus the central role which they would rather give to clergy. This seems to be paradoxical because on the one hand, *Assyriska* activists (and since 1983 also the *Syrianska* activists) take the stand that the clergy should only get involved in religious matters. This latter stand can be explained with their discontent about the way in which clergy fulfil their role at the moment when they get involved in non-religious affairs.

The ideal typical character which elites require of the 'Good Shepherd' has messianic features. By merging moral virtues and personal authority, the Good Shepherd is portrayed as a 'saviour' who can overcome the vitiating inner dissensions and who is endowed with the ability to empower the Assyrians/Syriacs as a people. The different qualities the elite enumerated with which a leader in charge should be endowed, are: 1) competence in winning the broad acceptance of his leadership; 2) a charismatic person

willing to shoulder the 'struggle of this people'; 3) possessed of the ability to defend and sustain Assyrian/Syriac traditions and language; 4) humble, learned, a skilled diplomat, fair, open to criticism, possessing integrity and able to unify the people. Interestingly, *unity* as the main feature of the leadership was mentioned by *most* of the *Assyriska* respondents, but *not by any* of the *Syrianska*. The explanation for this discrepancy is to be found in the basic idea on which the Assyrian Movement had been founded at the beginning of the twentieth century, namely the unity of the different Syriac churches under one national umbrella name 'Assyrian'. Therefore, they consider the ability of a leader to unite 'the people' essential. In contrast to them, the *Syrianska* elite members have opposed this ideology of the *Assyrier* strongly (see further especially Chapter 7).

The qualities of an 'ideal leader' have a relational and contextual character and are therefore not static. They are formulated in relation to the present-day situation. The desired qualities are those which are absent in the present context. For instance, the experienced ineffectiveness of the current leaders has resulted in the desire for 'effective leadership', or the state of *berberiye* has increased the strong desire for a leadership that can provide *unity*. The qualities are contextual because these leadership discourses are formed in a European context in which secular and democratic leadership are considered to be important criteria. Contextual changes have influenced the image of the 'ideal leader'. People have begun to compare their leaders with Western politicians. Leadership discourses may therefore also change over time.

Following DT's premises, the need for identification with something ('hegemonic projects', 'leadership discourses') is the result of the 'permanent' lack within the structure, that is, the lack of a 'full identity' (Laclau 1996d: 92). This is the discursive terrain which necessitates leadership discourses within identity discourses. There is a dialectical relationship between the 'representative' and the 'represented'. Representation is a necessary moment in the identification process in order to achieve a partial meaning. As Laclau (1996d: 99-100) puts it, '…the discourse of the representative must fill the gap in the identity of the represented'. This explains also the articulated need for leadership in the identity discourses of Assyrians/Syriacs after their emigration to Western countries.

The problems which occur at the representation level of a discourse can be studied within the frame of the concept of the *split subject*. As I have illustrated in other chapters, emigration to the Western countries led to the

state of the *split subject* among Assyrians/Syriacs in which the implications of the experienced *dislocation* have resulted in the crisis of identification. This crisis can also be studied as a leadership crisis and thus, a crisis of hegemony. From the view of DT, hegemony implies the presence of 'political and moral-intellectual leadership' (Torfing 2005: 11). Discourses aim to realize hegemonic leadership for ideological totalization. Through hegemonic leadership the *split subject* aims to find a solution to its crisis. Competition for hegemony means also competition for leadership and representation. Nevertheless, as Laclau (1996d: 103) indicates, 'total representability is impossible'. Therefore we can only speak of 'partial representations'.

In this chapter, I shall give an account of the current leadership discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac elite members by pursuing a discussion of the following: 1) We *have* no leaders; 2) We *need* a leader; 3) *Conditions* required to realize secular leadership; 4) Who is the leader?

10.1 'We Have No Leaders'

Asking questions in order to reach an understanding of the elite's discourses about the current leadership in charge, many replied flatly: 'We have no leader.' This statement was generally followed by a critical tirade against the present community leaders who are dismissed as not being competent to handle the situation. The sense of a leadership vacuum can often be traced back to a retrospective perspective on Assyrian/Syriac history, ascribing it to *dislocatory* events. Na'im, an *Assyrisk* academic and activist, illustrates the implicit parallelism he makes between what he perceives to be the past failure of the traditional community leaders and their present inability to lead their people effectively in the worldwide diaspora:

> I believe that our people were burdened with a severe trauma at a time at which they were not prepared for this [calamity]: the roots of our people were hacked away [*qshi'enne*]! The killing of our people between 1914 and 1918 produced a situation in which they no longer were able to derive pride from being the *'amo Suryoyo* [Assyrian/Syriac people]... The *Seyfo* was the reason for the abandonment of hope… The *Suryoye* had not been able to defend themselves; the *'amo* were on the point of being severed from their *shirsho* [roots]... As victims of the *Seyfo*, our people lost their faith, not least in our leaders. They question why their leaders had not been prepared for just such a day on which the Muslims would attack us. Even

> if they did not put this question into words at that time, instinctively they probably asked it in their minds… Their instinct for survival prompted them to ask such questions. They lived through this trauma for five years; every second and every minute they were forced to live in danger and with the fear that they could be attacked and killed any moment. This trauma – after its wounds had healed a little – led the people to pose the question of why this had happened... Therefore, indirectly the trust in their leaders ebbed...

Often, as Na'im does, the elite attribute the present-day weak leadership to the annihilation of their emerging secular leadership during the *Seyfo* (1914-18), mentioning the intellectuals Ashur Yausef and Freydon Aturaya. Moreover, they claim that since then, especially in the aftermath of the *Seyfo*, the Assyrians/Syriacs have not had the chance to develop a secular leadership. Nevertheless, sometimes, the great trauma caused by the *Seyfo* is imputed to the historical failure of the Assyrian/Syriac leaders to defend their people at that juncture. Na'im has also not overcome his lack of trust in the leadership of his people.



Illustration 19: Drawing by the autodidact artist Sharro Malke, expressing the incapability of the church leader as the 'ill man in bed', while people keep coming to him with their problems to be solved. Photo: Naures Atto

Following Na'im's line of thought, we see that his personal reflections on the disappointing quality of the leaders in charge also encompass the leaders of the Assyrians/Syriacs from the times before and during the *Seyfo*. This catastrophic event is perceived as the point of departure for their collective exile from the homeland. Na'im's retrospective reading of Assyrian/Syriac history helps him to extend the failure of the clergy (in their position as 'leaders in charge') to the present context. They are castigated for their choice of accommodation with the political regimes of the Middle East. Broadly speaking, the elite members tend to use this argument when they construct their grounds for the separation between religious and secular leadership. They judge the religious leaders to have failed to take strategic precautions to save their people from persecution in their home territories and also for having been unprepared to face the challenges confronting them in the diaspora. Bereft of strong leadership in a time when collective empowerment was required in the diaspora, Na'im wants to see the emergence of new secular figures to lead his people. The development of stronger legitimacy for these leaders would enable them to inspire a greater *unity* among the Assyrians/Syriacs. Among the ordinary people, *unity* implicitly assumes strength as a people. I want to elabourate on an example that is related to conversion and which is used as a more direct consequence of the functioning of Syriac Orthodox clergy. A *Syriansk* activist explains about the choice of his son who converted to the Baptist Church[835] due to dissatisfaction within the management of his own church:

> …Today we cannot observe that the priests and archbishops have developed themselves. There is emptiness in our church and therefore there is a trend that hundreds of young people have started going to the Swedish churches, most of the time the Protestant church… The [Syriac Orthodox] church has stayed very conservative…

Another example which expresses the shortcoming of today's clergy at secular level is from Father Aday, himself a priest with an activist background who accuses the clergy for the commonly lack of *umthonoyutho*:

> ...They only preach about the Bible and not about *umthonoyutho*. It draws the attention that when Father Akbulut[836] was imprisoned, the church did

[835] A respondent mentioned that about eighty Assyrian/Syriac families joined this church in Södertälje since 1995.

[836] See further for the case of Father Yusef Akbulut, Donef (2001).

> not protest publicly. They blame us [activists] that we do not like the church! If we did not like the church then we would not have protested against his imprisonment. We do not mind [being blamed]; it all falls within our *umthonoyutho*; it is all our *umtho*. Our clergy in Sweden did not do anything. They did not join us in demonstrations and they did not write anything against the imprisonment of Father Akbulut and against Turkey... But, the Archbishop in *Tur 'Abdin* stood besides the priest in his stand. Father Akbulut is a soldier of the church; they should have taken care of him.

When I asked elite members: 'Who is the leader of the '*amo Suryoyo* today?' Their reaction was different to that with which they responded to other questions. They smiled cynically or laughed regretfully. Eventually, I did receive some answers implying deep disappointment in the Assyrian/Syriac leadership. 'The situation of today looks like a soup – well, thank the Lord! [*Shkur mine d Aloh*]: we do not have one [political] leader but we have leaders of different *gabe* [parties],' says the *Assyriska* scholar Gabriel, expressing a sentiment general among the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* elites. The middle-aged teacher of Syriac, Shabo, says his grandfather drew a metaphor between the situation of the *'amo Suryoyo* and that of a 'chicken without feathers on its wings' (*gdaito da gefayda mpartene*). To have many leaders but to be deprived of a 'shepherd' leaves a huge yawning waiting to be filled. They would all prefer secular leadership by one individual (representing the Good Shepherd) or by a parliament, expressing the hope that one day they can have a leader as do any other people.

On the point of secular leadership, both *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* elite members agree. Several said: 'Perhaps you expect me to say that the Patriarch is the leader of the *Suryoye*, but he is not!' Even the symbolic power of the Patriarchate is perceived as being very weak. Given his established position, it is remarkable that such individuals as a member of the older generation *Syrianska* Shem'un, a deacon and former teacher of the Syriac language in church schools (*madrashyotho*), also shares this opinion:

> What leaders? Do we have leaders? The archbishop is a religious person who does his best to run his monastery. He is neither a king nor the leader of a country. He is not a secular but a religious person who is responsible for the church. Since all our secular people [leaders] died, we all focus on the archbishop. We see him, a living person, and say this is the one who is alive. But this should not be the case… The Turkish authorities maintain the archbishop as a communications partner because they do not want to

> talk to anyone else. They know that, when and if the going gets rough, they can request him to talk about religious matters only. I have never heard that we have had any secular leaders for the last 2000 years…

Shem'un is referring to the situation in which an archbishop functioned as a mediator between the Turkish State and the Assyrian/Syriac people and to the way in which the archbishop has been used as a channel in order to steer his community members in the direction as the Turkish authorities' wish. Therefore, he implies that the archbishop would never be able to defend the collective interests of his community. This statement also implies the need for secular leadership alongside ecclesiastical leaders.

Highly remarkable is the distinction that the female *Assyriska* activist Qetso (in her fifties) makes between the leadership of the *Syrianer* and that of the *Assyrier*:

> We [*Assyrier*] do not have a leader at the moment. In the past the church had the leadership. We thank them [religious leaders] [for the work they have done], since otherwise our language or culture would have disappeared. In the last forty years in which we have lived in Europe, we have learned about our past and about where we are from... Therefore the *gabo* [party] of *Assyriska* does not yet have a leadership. But the *gabo* of *Syrianska* is represented by the church. As far as I am concerned, the church is part of my identity and not my [whole] identity...

Qetso touches upon many issues in this citation. First, she makes a distinction between the leadership of the *Syrianer* and that of the *Assyrier*. She claims that the first mentioned is ruled by the church.[837] Implicitly, she is expressing the idea common among the *Assyrier* (also discussed in Chapter 7) that the *Syrianer* are conservative, backward in political matters and that they empower the church more than they should. Second, she already notes a change from religious to secular leadership among the *Assyrier*; she does not recognize the leadership of the church as representing her at the secular level. Third, by acknowledging the efforts of the church in the areas of

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[837] The common idea among Assyrians/Syriacs is that the *Syrianer* have had a closer link to the church than have the *Assyrier*. From the beginning of their settlement in Europe, the *Assyrier* have adopted a critical stance regarding the church – no longer accepting any failure made. This is also a facet of their idea that the religious and secular leadership among Assyrians/Syriacs should be separated. Although these ideas are still present today among the masses and, therefore also among the *Syrianer*, at that time they were considered too 'revolutionary' and unacceptable. As discussed in Chapter 7, this allowed space for the church to punish the adherents of the Assyrian ideology.

culture and language, Qetso is simultaneously asserting that the church lacks the political aspect of her people's representation. She personally would prefer this to be in the hands of secular leadership.

My respondents spontaneously mentioned the reasons for being bereft of (competent) leaders. A common idea is that the Assyrians/Syriacs are individualists (internally) and that each of them likes to be in charge, metaphorically expressed in the phrase 'each of us wants to sit on a chair' (*kul ha minan grohem dyotu 'al kursi)*.[838] The upshot is that this individualistic attitude is now assumed to be the stumbling block preventing them from accepting one leader. 'We have not developed a system in which we deal with each other democratically,' says the *Syrianska* businessman and activist Nahir. He thinks that the Assyrians/Syriacs are used to and well able to take care of themselves as individuals, but not at the collective level. The *Assyriska* student Yauno has a different and rather positive explanation for rejecting one leadership. Yauno values this individualist attitude as something positive; in contrast to the collective attitude which he ascribes to other peoples in the Middle East whom, he implies are 'blind followers of dictators'.

> We do not have a leader. You have noticed that also in Sweden we are individualists. We do not like to follow one leader, as do the Kurds with Öcalan and the Turks with Atatürk. The *Suroye* accept only God as sole leader in authority above them. We are rebellious; we do not want to surrender and submit to others by accepting a certain leadership... It would be good if we could establish a board to discuss our issues. Therefore, I believe that we can get somewhere. But, since we live under a dictatorial regime in the Middle East, it is hard to make progress…

Yauno's reflection is a rationalization of the situation. He ascribes positive characteristics to his people to allow himself to accept the situation. Interestingly, despite the fact that the majority of his people live in the diaspora, and that he has been in Sweden for about twenty-five years, he still ascribes the negative evaluation of the situation to the regimes in the Middle East. Perhaps it is because he identifies the core foundation or roots of his people to be in the Middle East. Moreover, his reflections may concern the past more than the present, although he is talking in the present and in

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838 Already in the 1980s the poet and activist Ninos Aho wrote the poem *Dukano l-Umthonoye* (Shop for *Umthonoye*), criticizing the fact that Assyrians/Syriacs had founded so many associations within a short period. The criticism is based on the idea that the number of institutions was based on internal competition rather than cooperation.

relation to the future of his people. Throughout this thesis, I have presented the strong collectivist approach of Assyrians/Syriacs. The element of individualism which Yauno raises is an interesting one. What makes Yauno think his people are rather individualistic? An answer might steer us in the direction of the topic of this chapter 'a flock without a shepherd.' The absence of a leader or a 'Good Shepherd' allows individuals space to take initiatives and move in different directions within 'their collectivist culture'. One can speak therefore of different dimensions of the same discursive field. Moreover, individuals and families will have to manage their own affairs in their position as a minority anywhere in the world.

Another external reason which (only a few *Assyriska*) elites mentioned for being bereft of leaders, is that because Assyrians/Syriacs have not ruled their own country due to their dispersion throughout different countries, they have been deprived of the opportunity to develop a secular leadership. Perhaps it is enough to say that these are emotional reflections engendered by a situation of distress. People imbue their situation with meaning in order to form an opinion or to explain it.

In short, in the leadership discourses, the critique of the current leaders is a necessary moment for the construction of the *myth* for an 'ideal' and 'desired' leader. Through and in critical discourses, the leadership vacuum is constructed in order to formulate the need for new and alternative leadership. This is the moment where different discourses aim to fix the meaning of the 'desired' leadership.

10.2 'We Need A Leader'

Quite independently of the question of whether Assyrians/Syriacs will someday have their own state, both the *Assyriska* and *Syrianska* elite members do find it necessary to be represented by secular leadership. However, their negotiations to achieve this are prompted by different reasons. The main reason given by both is based on the argument that they are a *'amo*; here: an ethnie, distinct from other groups and bearing a secular connotation as that of other national groups; a situation which implicitly requires secular leadership. As Father Aday puts it, 'We are a *'amo* and we should have a leader.' This unequivocally suggests a division between the secular and religious spheres. Certainly, the sense of a need for the division of religious and secular responsibilities of clergy and secular leaders is high. Gabriel says: 'Throughout the entire world the church and the secular world are divided.

The priest has a function to perform in the church and the political organizations should deal with the secular issues and represent our people.' The *Assyriska* academic activist Barsaumo relates secular leadership to being an *umtho* (nation) as follows:

> We should have a secular leader. As I see it, the church and the *umtho* [nation] are two different things. I could be Christian and keep this in my heart; I do not have to show it to the outside world. However, the *umtho* is something compulsory. I shall have to say that I am a *'amo*, a person with a history, that I have an *athro* [homeland] where I am from and many other matters. My whole identity is based on the *umtho*… We are not *noqes* [less (implying 'less developed')] then other people, so why could we not have one [nation]? … In any of the countries to which we have migrated, we have been able to comply with the laws of that country. If we had our own country, our leaders would be chosen democratically without creating any problems.

The last statement expresses the belief that Assyrians/Syriacs are competent for self-government and assumes the wish for doing so. Although the concept of self-government is related to territorial autonomy, they apply this concept to their situation in the diaspora. Without implying territorial self-government in the European diaspora, apparently they do wish to develop some kind of secularly based collective representation. This intimates the depth of their wish to continue to retain their distinctiveness as a people among majority populations.

This secularization argument has a rhetorical dimension and can be understood as part of the modern dimension of living in secularly based societies in European countries – denouncing religious hegemony – in which they seek accommodation as a group of people. At this stage, it could be said that the reason for this argument is not heavily based on their highly developed secular values. The evidence of this is that it is still common among lay elites to win influence among the people through the role the clergy can play by backing their organizations. Instead, the call for a division between the spheres of religious and secular influence can also be perceived as a disagreement of the secular elites about the handling of certain issues by the clergy. And by using the 'secularization' argument the lay elite have an instrument available to develop their influence spheres in a European context. Although the elites are scathing in their judgement of the capabilities of their present leaders, when focusing on the future needs of the Assyrians/Syriacs, they express themselves more positively when putting

their reflections about the possibility of an Assyrian/Syriac leadership into words, perhaps an indication of their hope that one day they will indeed be represented by such a secular leadership. The realization of such leadership could mean a sudden radical, positive and historical shift for them. This can be seen in relation to an imagined better future.

The *Assyriska* elite members adduce a more elabourate argumentation in favour of secular leadership than do their counterparts, the *Syrianska* elite members. For example, the former argue that secular leadership will assist the development of an ethno-national collective identity for the Assyrians/Syriacs, thereby preventing them from assimilating in Europe and the eventual vanishing of the Assyrians/Syriacs as a distinct group. An identity based on the inclusion of all various *Syriac* churches to which Assyrians/Syriacs belong in the ethno-national concept is perceived as a means to prevent their disappearance as a people. Consequently, the *Assyriska* elite members accord any future secular leader a strong role, expecting him to work towards the goal of the development of a secularly based 'Assyrian/Syriac way of life'. This assertion has a strong rhetorical dimension. They are highly critical of the fact that many Assyrians/Syriacs give the clergy unquestioned authority. The *Assyriska* activist Melke explains his argument for a cross-denominational approach as follows:

> If we do not have secular leadership, we shall become extinct. If we have only religious leadership, we shall be organized into different churches and disappear as a people… In Sweden, *Suryoye* have begun to adhere to different new religions. Should they join non-*Suryoye* churches, the number of [ethnically organized] *Suryoye* will decrease drastically. However, if we are composed of all the members of the different churches, people will remain [ethnically] *Suryoye* – no matter what religion people have.

The starting point is that – in a secularized Europe – anyone leaving the church is traditionally[839] no longer considered a *Suryoyo*. Theoretically, this could include many people, since there are already quite a number among the younger generations Assyrians/Syriacs in the diaspora who give the religious aspect merely a cultural meaning in their life. In an effort to overcome this 'problem', Melke's argument might be helpful as an instrument to stem the fast pace of extinction through assimilation in the diaspora. Although Melke

[839] In the Middle East, anyone who converted to a different religion automatically became a member of the ethnic or national group of that religion. Often this was accompanied by starting to speak a different language.

does not specifically mention cases of becoming a 'non-believer,' in his example he implies that he is also including them in a secularly based collective identity of his people. It could be expected, that depending on the success of the secular leadership, the concept of the collective group of Assyrians/Syriacs might be used in a broader or narrower way. Melke's ideas can therefore be understood in relation to the current traditional concept of *'amo Suryoyo*.[840] Another argument which the *Assyrier* adduce is that, through the vehicle of a new secular leadership institution, Assyrians/Syriacs may eventually accept the different institutions of their people, rather than simply and blindly opposing the diversity of institutions which is what they do today. They hope that by adopting this attitude they can stimulate national unity among the Assyrians/Syriacs.

Two main alternatives are suggested for the organization of a secular leadership: a *si'tho mdabronitho* (board of representatives) or a Parliament-in-exile with its own president. The first option implies the second, for the obvious reason that the first option would not have any political legitimacy in the countries of the Middle East. The Parliament-in-exile would be expected to assume the function of representing the Assyrians/Syriacs in external collective affairs. The primary focus would be to accept the role of protecting the rights of Assyrians/Syriacs in relation to the regimes under which the Assyrians/Syriacs live. Proponents of this secular model assume that, as a people, the *Assyrians/Syriacs* would encounter fewer problems and that they would manage themselves better than they do today. The *Assyriska* priest Aday shares this idea: 'Then the conflict [about the right designation] among the people would stop too. The Synod would turn its attention to discussing theological, church and the language matters.' The Parliament-in-exile is expected to assume the task of representing the Assyrians/Syriacs in external civic and political affairs. The emphasis here is that its principal role would be protecting the rights of the Assyrians/Syriacs in relation to the regimes under which they live:

> Our organizations work well as groups but what they miss is the ability to work collectively together… Not one party of the *'amo* has the right to speak on behalf of the people. The people [*Suryoye*] are not prepared to accept this any longer. In our [future] parliament, we [*Suryoye*] should decide what to request from Turkey as a people before negotiating with

[840] See Chapter 9 for the discourses regarding the boundaries of the *'amo Suryoyo*.

> Turkey… In our external affairs, we should adopt one approach. Internally we can continue disagreeing with each other; that is fine.

The *Syrianska* priest David asserts a more strategic need of his people: secular leadership is essential to the creation of a trans-national nation. He uses the term *daule* (which means state or land) in the sense of 'nation', thereby implying that a 'country' and a 'nation' somehow bear a relation to each other. In the case of the Assyrians/Syriacs, 'their nation' is not circumscribed by any boundaries since they are a nation at trans-national level. Although Father David does affirm that there is need of secular leadership, he also believes that the Patriarch should retain the supreme leadership. Possibly Father David feels obliged to represent the discourse of the church as a means to negotiate a path towards a change in leadership from his position as a priest:

> ...I believe that it is good to have a secular leader too… Even without a country, we can achieve many things; we can develop a *daule* [here: nation; he uses the term for country with the meaning of 'nation']. This should be with the consent of the Patriarch and the archbishops. The church has its law. It should not be subjected to the law of civil organizations. This would be deleterious, since they [secular leadership] could destroy what our church has built up over a period of 2000 years... If the Patriarch is not the leader, I personally shall not accept the rule of anyone else, since we do not have a country in which we might have different parties and work towards the welfare of the people from the point of view of different ideologies.

Shem'un, a *Syriansk* teacher, relates the need of secular leadership to *umthonoyutho*[841] (love for the people). He does not believe in secular leadership alone. Instead, he stresses and implies the importance of a patriotic attitude among the ordinary people:

> I do not believe in one secular leader for our people. I believe instead in a situation in which each individual member of our people is imbued with that *ruho*[842] [*umthonoyto*] for our people. In that case, each of us becomes a leader. If we lack this *ruho,* one leader alone will never succeed, no matter how hard he tries… The discussion between the *hudre* [associations] about

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[841] See Chapter 6 for a further discussion of *umthonoyutho*.

[842] *Ruho* means literally 'spirit'. In its use here, it is intertwined with 'attitude' because *umthonoyutho* assumes a certain devoted attitude to the people.

> the name is merely the outcome of their *berberiye* [rivalry] between one another; nothing more. It was not because this *ruho* is a reality. I have not seen any trace of *umthonoyutho* in practice among either of the groups [*Assyrier* and *Syrianer*]. If they were imbued with *umthonoye,* they would have co-operated. They know they are both the sons of the same people. Is it possible that my cousin belongs to a different people? No! Therefore I conclude that their activities are not *for* the people.

In this citation, Shem'un criticizes the activities of the secular Assyrian/Syriac organizations in Sweden and states explicitly what he expects from secular organizations while expressing his disappointment. In the first place, it is anticipated that they should articulate *umthonoye* principles (principles expressing love for their own people) and favour co-operation instead of rivalry with each other. Co-operation implies *unity* rather than *rivalry*.

10.3 Conditions for Secular Leadership

Elite members speak about secular leadership at a very hypothetical level. When asking the *Assyriska* academic activist Na'im whether he believes in secular leadership for the Assyrians/Syriacs and whether they would accept it, he argues that by promoting this process of *umthonoyutho* the Assyrian Movement has been trying to run before it can walk:

> They [ordinary people] do not understand the concept of secular leadership. This is the mistake the Assyrian Democratic Organization [ADO] made. It wanted to develop a secular identity too quickly. It should have waited a bit longer... Therefore the *Mtakasto* [ADO] lost members and stirred the antagonism of the people...

The *Assyriska* academic activist Barsaumo expands on Na'im's idea when he outlines the difficulty in the structural diversity and dispersion of the Assyrians/Syriacs today:

> Today it would be very hard to become the leader of our people. We are very much dispersed over different countries, speak different languages and have different interests. I do not believe that at this moment in time one layperson could actually emerge as the leader. Perhaps one religious leader might be able to encourage the *renye umthonoye* [patriotic ideas], to bring the other [Syriac] churches closer… This could present the

> opportunity for an initial attempt to unify on the basis of a national identity…

Barsaumo's assumption is that it is still the religious leaders who exert most of the influence on the people. He believes in developing *unity* within the church. As the statements of Na'im and Barsaumo reveal, many Assyrian/Syriac elite members think that it is essential to achieve certain conditions in the present situation before it will be possible to appoint secular leadership for the people. Accordingly, Na'im thinks that 'secular organizations should have developed a stronger strategy for themselves in order to be able to assume responsibility for the people and instigate a change from religious to secular power.' No matter how eager Assyrian/Syriac elite members are to see the ascendancy of a secular leader, not many see opportunities for achieving that goal now. Aday, an academic activist has a very jaundiced view and raises objections to secular leadership in the current situation. The crux of Aday's objection to secular leadership is that such a role implies more power than religious leadership would. His fear is that the misuse of secular power could damage the people as much as an over-reliance on religious power could:

> I do not want a leader who cannot be replaced… I know that the people live in different countries. In such a situation, it is not possible to have one leader for our people. But, if all our people lived in one geographical area and the people were in a position to choose a board and a leader who could be replaced as in other countries, it would be fine to have secular leadership.

Father Abrohom relates to this idea of fear for not being able to replace a leader and more specifically to the role of the *'ashirto* and the absence of a democratic system:

> ...We will not be able to have this Parliament [in exile] if we remain in the state we are in today; until the illiterate people are in charge, – the people who cannot sign with a pen but use their fingerprint to sign a paper, instead of a real signature, – and the church helps them, then we will not have an *athro*, or a parliament in the *athro* or outside the *athro*. The day we loose all backward ideas, and the day we start thinking that each individual is a full individual, and the day of instead of asking "whose son or daughter this is" but to ask "what has he studied or what potential does he have", the day we accept one another's ideas, and the day we accept one

> another as equal, that day we will be able to select a neutral person. The day we loose the *'ashirto*… – else we will not get anywhere.

Another precondition the *Assyriska* elite members mention as one which would make a strong secular leadership possible is the *unity* of the *Syriac* Churches under one national name. Allied to church unity, they find it important to live in one particular geographical area or preferably to have their own country, instead of 'living dispersed' (*mbarbeze*) all over the world. They reason that secular leadership would automatically follow after the Assyrians/Syriacs had achieved their own country.

10.4 Who is the Leader?

In this section I shall discuss the ideas of elite members about the question of who they think the leaders in charge of their people are. Their answers illustrate the difficulty of identifying the leader(s) of the 'people' and with that, the crisis of leadership among Assyrians/Syriacs.

10.4.1 Church Invested with Leadership

As just demonstrated, not all Assyrian/Syriac elite members who define their people in terms of an *ethnie* or a nation and who believe that they should have a secular leader were able to identify a secular leader to represent them at this very minute. Among them there are also those who have continued to identify the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church as the leader of the people. This is probably because in the cold light of day they know that the 'nation' they hope for and anticipate they will become in the future, and by extension a secular leader of this 'nation', both have still to be attained. None of the secular leaders has yet been able to acquire enough legitimate power and attract followers among the grass roots. Endeavouring to explain this anomaly, some have argued that it is still the decisions of the Patriarch which are largely adhered to by most of the people, who also tend to ignore the decisions of secular leaders.

A few *Assyrier* in particular insisted on reiterating that the five Patriarchs of the Syriac churches are the leaders of the *'amo Suryoyo*. They stated that the *Suryoye* are a nation of different churches and, hence, the different patriarchs as the leaders in charge should share the leadership of their people. Eliyo, an *Assyrisk* activist, rationalizes this leadership by referring to the ethnic

character of the Syriac church, which means that the Patriarchs represent the people both religiously and ethnically. He believes that *Suryoye* means more than being Christian. Eliyo is also convinced that Assyrians/Syriacs should have a secular leader. Yacob, a *Syriansk* academic activist, has a similar idea but formulates it differently. Yacob thinks that the clergy should still remain in charge since he finds the core of his identity in the church. Despite this avowal, he refuses to accept their edicts on how to organize his life in a broad sense. This position is an intermediate station moving towards the antithetical idea that the leadership of the Assyrians/Syriacs should be wholly secular, which I shall discuss a little later. Formally, Yacob regarded the archbishop as the leader in Sweden but practically he acknowledges only the leadership of the secular *Syrianska* organizations in the external (non-Assyrian/Syriac) environment:

> The leader is the Patriarch. Nevertheless, his position does not give him the right to decide about how they [the *Suryoye*] should live. This is the responsibility of the federations... I mean the *Syrianska* federation [in Sweden]. The *Assyriska riksförbundet* stands for something different, although it is composed of the same people… To some extent a kind of secular leadership already exists. Here in Sweden, it is personified by the president of the Syriac Federation. To the outside world, the youth is represented by the president of the Youth Federation. However, were they to ask me and other *Syrianska* young people who the leader of the *Suryoye* is, we would not say that it is the president of the Federation, but the archbishop. Perhaps this is because we draw our core identity from the church and the logical consequence is that we perceive the archbishop as the leader of the people... Nevertheless, the archbishop does not represent us to the outside world. The people who do this are the president of the Federation and of the Youth Federation. Should the media supply incorrect information, it is the responsibility of these Federations to react to this misapprehension…

Yacob's citation connects to the next section about secular organization's leadership.

10.4.2 Secular Organizations Invested with Leadership

As has just been said, in the absence of a secular leader, some members of the elite identify the Patriarch as the leader of the Assyrians/Syriacs. This idea is by no means unanimous among either the *Assyriska* or the *Syrianska* elite members as there are those who explicitly state that they do not accept

the Patriarch as the leader of the *'amo Suryoyo*. Eliyo, teacher of Syriac, repudiated this idea by stating that the people are the employers of the clergy and that therefore: 'The clergy should not tell the people what to do. It should be the other way around.' Among both these elite groups there are those who are adamant that they feel unable to accept the Patriarch as the leader of the *'amo Suryoyo*. Some of them specifically criticize the current Patriarch for his 'weak' leadership. The political activists and intellectuals are particularly vehement in their criticism, accusing him of not taking an explicit stand on the human rights of the Assyrians/Syriacs in the Middle East. Moreover, as the activist Danho explains, the ordinary people do not look upon him as a secular leader:

> Since he [the Patriarch] does not participate in the *knushyo Suryoyo* [Assyrian/Syriac society], he is no longer thought of as a leader. A *Suryoyo* leader should be someone who is known to all *Suryoye*, who is prepared to take up the struggle on behalf of this people, and be a person who none of the people would have no qualms about following.

Although they might be united in their dissension, they cannot agree on the present legitimate secular leadership of their people. Central to the argument of those *Assyrier* who identify their organizations as those with the most legitimate claim to represent the people is that they believe they are able to achieve the separation of religious and secular leadership. Their trump card is that they focus on their ability to take up the struggle for their human rights in the Middle East, a task which they believe the clergy have neglected.

Cogently, those among the *Assyriska* elite members who do perceive secular organizations as representatives of the Assyrians/Syriacs often fail to mention any specific name. There are two reasons which may be adduced for this reticence. The most salient is that from their elite position they do not deign to identify the secular Assyrian/Syriac organizations which represent the ordinary people. Secondly, it should also be born in mind that they might have been speaking purely theoretically and that they may have merely mentioned secular organizations to give some idea about how matters should evolve in the future. As the *Assyriska* Eliyo said: 'Today, those secular organizations which pursue the goal of the development and awakening (*teqimo*) of the people are, in my view, the leaders of the people. They throw themselves into developing the language, establishing associations and building churches to ensure the future existence of the people.' Only a few *Assyriska* elite members (who are deeply involved in secular *Assyrisk*

organizational life at the moment), actually name specific organizations such as ZOWAA and ADO, as representatives of the Assyrians/Syriacs. An example is Gebro, an academic and activist, who mentions local and national organizations representing the Assyrians/Syriacs in the countries concerned. His choice of these organizations is based on the idea that individuals or organizations have to espouse a certain ideology which will serve the 'goal of the people (*u nisho du 'amo*):

> In Sweden it is the Assyrian Federation. In Iraq it is ZOWAA, in Syria ADO, in Istanbul the association[843] and in the *Turo* [*Tur 'Abdin*] it is Mor Gabriel [the monastery]. We do not have one leader yet, nor do we have a parliament yet… I do not consider the current people[844] in charge [of the church board] in Istanbul to be the representatives of the *Suryoye* there, since they do not share the *Suryoye* ideology[845]. They assume that *Suryoyutho* means Christianity and nothing more… The *Syrianska* federation does not represent our people in Sweden either, because, under the terms of its ideology, we are *Suryoye* in the sense that we are members of the *Syriac Orthodox Church* only. The *Madenhoye* [Assyrian Church of the East] and Chaldeans are excluded from their concept of *Suryoyutho*. Last week they organized the commemoration of the *Seyfo* in Brussels, but they did not invite any of the other Federations of our people to attend. By contrast, the Assyrian Federation includes all the churches of our people.

The *Syrianska* elite members, especially those individuals who are personally active in *Syrianska* secular organizations, tend to think of the president of the Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA) as the person in charge of the '*amo Suryoyo*. Consequently, at the local level they identify with *Syrianska* organizations which are organized under the hierarchy of SUA. This attitude implies the exclusion of the *Assyriska* organizations from the representational stage. In contrast to the *Assyriska* elite members, the *Syrianska* activists did not give any specific reasons for their choice. Female activist Warde puts the legitimate power of the president of SUA into perspective by distinguishing on the one hand between the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer*. And on the other hand between two groups of *Syrianer*. Those *Syrianer* who are very much

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[843] He means the *Mezopotamya Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği* (Mesopotamian Culture and Solidarity Association) which was founded by Assyrians/Syriacs in 2004.

[844] He mentioned specific names which I want to keep anonymous for privacy reasons.

[845] Here he implies the Assyrian ideology for the Assyrian/Syriac people, which he assumes to be the ultimate solution for his people.

connected to the church and those who tend to profile themselves in secular organizations and less through the church:

> Theoretically, he [the president of SUA] is the leader of the *Suryoye*, but at the practical level he will probably not be accepted by all the people. The *Assyrier* and the older people will probably not acknowledge the president of SUA as their leader. For example, my grandmother shall not know him. She assumes that the Patriarch is the leader of the *Suryoye*…

Hobel, a *Syriansk* politician who is well aware of the different opinions about secular leadership among the people and who is conscious that this may result in a new division among Assyrians/Syriacs, says:

> If the *Assyrier* do have secular leadership, it does not represent me. [Interviewer: Have the *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* really diverged too greatly?] Actually that is as it is… Certainly, if nothing is done, we shall reach that point. If we do not accept each other's designation of choice – this could be the pattern in the future. People could work under two different names and on certain issues which we share – such as the *Seyfo*… we could work together.

Assyriska ex-activists who are somewhat removed from the institutional life of their people explicitly state that they are not convinced of the strength which secular Assyrian/Syriac organizations ascribe to themselves today. They are critical of what they call the 'empty rhetoric' (*mamlo khalyo*) of these organizations and their failure to build up a large platform of members and activities. These ex-activists tend to believe that these secular organizations have continued to exist simply for the purpose of personal gain more than anything else. In relation to the character of today's secular organizations it is important to say something about the expectations from *umthonoye* about the involvement of the higher educated and especially of university graduates in both secular and religious institutions. Initially *umthonoye* had high expectations of the educated among them (often looking forward to see the educated growing up and increasing in number). Today, a common complaint heard about *umthonoye* is the low level of interest, involvement and dedication to 'their community' from this group.[846] The activist Malkuno

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[846] And the question is indeed how the interest, involvement and dedication of second and third generations is going to be in relation to their people and its future. This question is also related as to whether 'their people' will still be visible in Western countries and whether they will find the need to organize themselves as a distinct group.

says:

> The university graduates of our people do not play an important role among our people. But we can notice a high increase in students the last years. Unfortunately they study subjects for their future profession and not subjects they can do something for the people… Until today, those who play an important role in the life of the *Suryoye* people are those that have not studied.

Also Shabo indicates that secular institutions have not been successful in attracting many higher educated to manage the institutions of their people. In his reflection, the activist Shabo explains this little interest through the people who manage the present-day institutions:

> Today there is a gap between my generation and the generation that grows up in Europe. The young people who have grown up here, have a very good idea of the situation of our people, but they do not want to enter our institutions which are classical and based on old structures, ruled by illiterate powerful people. And they do not have the self-confidence that they can enter these boards and change things. They keep themselves distanced from these institutions. We, both associations and the church failed to get them involved... If we do not succeed in giving responsibility to the younger generation, then this is a big mistake. Tomorrow, during the General Members Meeting we want to push the idea that the people in the board should be youngsters. They asked me to become the president again... Besides, if they want me to become it again, then it means that we have failed. Thirty years ago I was among those that established the institutions and until now they cannot find someone else?...

A similar critical attitude prevails among *Syrianska* elite members who are not active in secular *Syrianska* organizations. They are not prepared to accept these as their representatives and question the legitimacy of the leadership among the *Syrianska* ordinary people. A clear example of this attitude is Matay, a student who was very much involved in the *Syrianska* organizations until the mid 1990s:

> Some people say: "We hope that our organizations will commence working together." But, what organizations are they talking about!?... None of these organizations is strong enough to develop a monopoly on representing the people. They all say the same. And the people really do hope that they will all pull together. However, I for one am not convinced that we do have any real leaders, especially any secular leaders… Indeed I

> think that it is misleading when any of our secular organizations say that they are representing the people. They do not have the legitimacy to adopt such a stance. They represent only their members, but not the *'amo* [*Suryoyo*].

Matay exemplifies the belief that secular organizations represent their own members more than they do the whole collective of Assyrians/Syriacs in Sweden. The fact that different secular organizations present themselves as *the* institutions in charge of the *'amo Suryoyo* shows that there is still plenty of room in the field for leadership to be occupied and it is for this space, this field of tension, in which the different Assyrian/Syriac secular organizations are competing right now. It is important to note that the context is not strictly secular and that the church continues to take part in this competition for leadership.

10.5 Conclusion

As I have illustrated in this chapter, the *myth* of an 'ideal leader' is constructed in and through discourses. The emergence of the *myth* is related to the absence of a leader that can provide solutions to their experienced problems. That is why in the construction of the ideal leadership, one can see a high level of expectations. The 'ideal leader' is defined as the one who will provide in the needs of the *split subject,* foremost in the *unity* of the people.

The leadership discourses of Assyrians/Syriacs should be understood against the backdrop of migration, – which has lead them away from being a society in the Middle East where they were characterized principally by church affiliation, religious organization and leadership. The strong shift in the discourse about their identity, from ethno-religious to ethno-national, has altered the tenor of the discourse about the leadership of the Assyrians/Syriacs, moving it in the direction of the slow institutionalization of secular national leadership to represent the different *Syriac* churches at global level.

Although both *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* fail to identify *one* sole leader of the Assyrians/Syriacs, there is still a small group of the elite members who identify the Patriarch as *the* leader. In their eyes, he still holds *the* most legitimate power among the ordinary people. Nevertheless, all elite members emphasized that there should be a separation between religious and secular leadership, responsibilities and spheres of influence.

The main difference in the leadership discourses of the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer* is revealed when they attempt to identify the present-day secular leadership of Assyrians/Syriacs. While the majority notes that, as a *'amo,* the Assyrians/Syriacs are not yet represented by any secular leadership, there is still a minority, mainly political activists, who identify either with the ideology of the *Assyrier* or with that of the *Syrianer*. Elite members of both ideologies are conscious that this adherence to two different leadership discourses can result in the danger of an internal separation of the Assyrians/Syriacs. The risk of division lies in the fact that each political discourse does not accept the leadership of the other one. Consequently, what unites both ideologies continues to be some authority exerted under the leadership of the Patriarchate of the Syriac Orthodox Church. Even so, among both ideologies, there are voices opting for a board of representatives or a Parliament-in-exile representing the various *Syriac* churches. If this latter model gains majority support, it means that a new step in the history of the Assyrians/Syriacs will have been taken; an advance in the process towards secular representation and leadership.

The leadership vacuum which Assyrians/Syriacs experience reflects the actual difficulties that they encounter at institutional level in their present state of dispersion. The conceptions and ideas they nurture of their actual and their ideal leadership are heavily related to other discourses forging their collective identity. The ideas about what might be effective leadership for Assyrians/Syriacs shed light on the way elite members understand their dispersion today, how they interpret their history and how they connect their past and future as a people. Here, the symbolic role of leadership betrays a great deal about how Assyrians/Syriacs reflect on their collective identity and how they would like to be perceived by the outsiders. Identifying a leader for their people who can represent them enshrines the possibility that outsiders might identify them as 'a people'. The absence of leadership is what makes them absent as a people from the perspective in which they would like to be positioned among other peoples.

11 CONCLUSION: Challenging the Hostages' and Orphans' Dilemma

The boy approached her, gazing at the ground with suffering and grief;
The unity of the Assyrian nation written on his forehead;
He saw the girl and his breast heaved with sighs;
He wanted to talk but the words were choked in his throat by groans.

Fawlos Gabriel[847]

Undoubtedly, during the last four decades the topic which has aroused the most heated discussion in the Assyrian/Syriac community in Europe has been: What is the 'correct name' of this people which should be used in Western languages? While outsiders have posed questions about why the same group of people uses two different names and what the difference between them is, the insiders especially have experienced the consequences of the dissension about this use as problematic. They have experienced it as *flighutho* (split) within the community and associated this with the weakening of their people in relation to outsiders. I have shown that this *flighutho* and the subsequent competition between elite groups have permeated almost every aspect of Assyrian/Syriac society and, as people are very aware of this, they are highly critical of it.

Given this situation, the central aim of this research has been the identification of the present-day identity discourses among Assyrian/Syriac elites in the European diaspora and an attempt to find an explanation for the emergence of these political discourses and their antagonistic relationship in the discursive field. In the light of my research, I have related the emergence of new identity discourses to the settlement of Assyrians/Syriacs in Western countries. Unquestionably, emigration engendered an identity crisis among Assyrians/Syriacs and transformed them into a *split subject*. In the 1970s,

[847] My translation of the original in Syriac. This stanza is taken from Fawlos Gabriel's poem *Huyodo d-Umtho Othuroyto* (Unity of the Assyrian Nation) which he wrote on 21 July 1930 and published in I. Hackwerdi (Ed.), 1 September 1930, No. 74, 4th year.

Assyrians/Syriacs already disagreed with being grouped into the categories of the national groups (for instance, Turks or Arabs) in the countries from which they emigrated in the Middle East. Following from this initial objection to being categorized into (what they considered alien) national identities, in the subsequent process of searching for a name to represent their people in the Western diaspora, competing political discourses culminated in a 'name debate' among themselves about the 'correct name' for their people in Western languages. The far-reaching consequences at institutional level – both secularly and religiously – raise the question of how such a situation could have occurred. To attempt to find an answer to this question, I formulated the following research questions:

1) *What are the discourses of identity among the Assyrian/Syriac elites in the European diaspora?*
2) *How can we contextualize these discourses historically? More specifically, what is the relationship between the emigration of Assyrians/Syriacs to Europe and the articulation of identity discourses?*
3) *How can we explain the hegemonic struggle between Assyrian/Syriac elites?*

To find an answer to the first question – identifying the identity discourses – it has been necessary to study the emergence of identity discourses so as to be able to contextualize their formation. My starting point has been that such aspects as hegemony and power relations between different elite groups constitute important factors in the formation of identity discourses and in the 'name debate'. As I have illustrated, this starting point has made it necessary to consider subject positions outside Sweden, as a consequence of the inherent transnational character of the Assyrian/Syriac 'Imagined Community' and its interconnectedness. Nevertheless, I have limited myself to the main institutionalized discourses in the Swedish public sphere because of my research focus.

Contextualizing Identity Discourses

For an explanation of the present-day identity discourses, I have studied the conditions of their emergence from a historical perspective. Characteristic of the position of Assyrians/Syriacs in the homeland is that they had a religious status and that they have actively been denied the status of an ethno-national group. This also explains their organization along religious lines and makes

plain their subordinated position in a majority Muslim society; politically, the majority religion in society took precedence. In this context, it was usual for the ordinary people among Assyrians/Syriacs to consider their Christianity as the main *nodal point* around which their collective identity was organized. The fact that their non-Muslim identity was decisive to their position strengthened the central role which religion assumed in their identity. Consequently, the *chain of difference* ('us') and the *chain of equivalence* ('others') were based on a person's religious affiliation. These two main categories functioned as the starting point for the organization of social life, which was lived by Assyrians/Syriacs as a given situation resulting from a policy of assimilation into the majority groups living in the Middle East. This policy meant that in the modern nation states which were created in the post-Ottoman period, they have been considered as 'Christian Turks', 'Christian Arabs' and, since the increase of the political power of the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, they have also been considered as 'Christian Kurds' by these respective majority groups. Alongside this category, it has therefore been expected of them that they live by such an identity thereby strengthening the collective identity of the respective majority groups. Naturally such a situation meant that they lived a subordinated life in relation to the majority groups. This offers a partial explanation of their strong urge which they have later displayed in Europe to be recognized as distinct from these groups.

With their *en-masse* emigration to Western countries, – which they identified as 'Christian' and hence as countries which could provide them with a potential new 'home' – their identification along religious lines became dislocated. Overall, the context of emigration has resulted in a situation in which about 300,000 Assyrians/Syriacs have settled in Europe, and this exodus has meant that their numbers in the homeland have decreased enormously, especially in *Tur 'Abdin*, where they now remain as a population of about only 2500 people. In this regard, I have analysed the mass emigration of Assyrians/Syriacs as an *exodus* from their subordinated position but also as a *flight* bearing with them a mythical idea about their future expectations of Western countries. The essential *emptiness* of this *myth* has allowed space for a great diversity of expectations from their new places of settlement. This *myth* about their future prospects in a new country contrasts strongly with their subordinated position in the Middle East. The *myth* which they created with their migration is related to identification with an assumed Christian West and consequently the positive image which they

developed of the West. This is the moment at which they changed their orientation in life and the *myth* about their new home emerged.

Their settlement in specific geographies of Europe has made it possible for them to remain closely connected at both family and collective level. From the very beginning, they have perceived Sweden as their 'new home' and orientated themselves as permanent settlers there. In other words, after their *exodus,* they burned their bridges behind them. The Swedish integration policy, which is based on *equality*, *partnership* and *freedom of choice*, has offered Assyrians/Syriacs considerable space in which to organize and establish themselves relatively quickly. The community life which they have established in Sweden, specifically the 'ethnic enclaves' such as is the case in Södertälje, have exerted positive effects on the group's development or mobility within broader society in many respects; above all in the educational and economic fields they have managed to capture a strong position. The Swedish context has also offered them space to engage in society politically and to speak about the rights of their people in the Middle East. The fact that the Swedish Parliament approved a resolution (11 March 2010) which recognized the *Seyfo* as a genocide is only one example of the results of their political involvement in Swedish society. Not all has been plain sailing. The negative consequences which ethnic enclaves bring in their train are related to social control, but first and foremost to the problems to do with the young people. In such a context, individual criminality becomes a collective stigma.

Another point which should be mentioned in the context of their settlement and the reflection on the *myth* about their new home, their expectations and their disappointments, is bound up in their experience of the 'Hostages' and Orphans' Dilemma'. I have explained that, as a new home, Sweden is also the concrete symbol of their eternal rupture from the historical *athro* (homeland). This traumatic break actuates a sense of having become *yatume* (orphans). Although their situation is unfortunate, in the historical *athro*, they experienced their position as being that of *yasire* (hostages). This raises the question of which horn of their dilemmas should they favour? In two minds, their future is therefore negotiated in a process of reflecting on the past, the present and the future destination of their people from the present-day context.

In the process of over four decades of settlement in Sweden, they have negotiated their identity with the means available in the context of living. What they were not prepared for was a confrontation with a Western

(secular) society in which religion plays a different or less central role in the organization of public life; religion is a private matter. This situation has dislocated their earlier concept of identity, which developed in societies where people were organized along religious lines. I have therefore explained the consequences of their emigration to and settlement in Western countries in terms of the 'dislocation' of their collective identity. They could no longer distinguish themselves from other groups (for example, Turks and Arabs) who migrated from the same countries on the basis of their former collective identity categorization along religious lines. The identity crisis in which they found themselves manifested itself in the emergence of a *split subject*. A *split subject* occurs when the subject can no longer identify itself with hegemonic projects or frameworks. In the case of Assyrians/Syriacs, the effect of dislocation resulting from their mass emigration has engendered the need for a re-definition of the collective identity of their people – both conceptually and in the representation of a name. In such a situation, an empty space for the articulation of new or previously weak identity discourses has emerged.

In an attempt to heal the *split subject*, *Assyriska* activists have endeavoured to answer the requirements of the new society of which they have become part, in order to distinguish themselves from other groups and be recognized as a distinct national group. As the first group to institutionalize their identity discourse, *Assyriska* activists have based their ideology on the early ideas of Assyrian/Syriac *umthonoye* (patriots) who were active at the beginning of the twentieth century in the Middle East and on that of the Assyrian Democratic Organization (1957) in Syria. I have identified several central *nodal points* around which the identity discourse of the *Assyrier* has been built. They have promoted a national cross-denominational identity which incorporates the different Syriac Churches under one national umbrella name 'Assyrian' (in Swedish *Assyrier*). It is believed that such a cross-denominational approach will strengthen the position of their people among other peoples. This organization seems preferable to their (former) traditional organization along denominational lines which is assumed to keep them weak and dependent on others – assuming a subordinated position. The use of the designation 'Assyrian' has also been thought necessary in order to avoid confusion with the name 'Syrian' (formerly used to translate their *emic* name *Suryoye*), which is commonly used in the contemporary context to refer to an inhabitant of Syria and assumes an Arab national identity. The *Assyriska* ideology has also assumed that there is a separation between secular and religious spheres and

responsibilities. In the group, 'Christianity' is an assumed and unquestioned *nodal point*. Therefore their Christianity is not articulated very explicitly.

To build a picture of the relationship between present-day identity discourses and those of Assyrian/Syriac elites at the beginning of the twentieth century, I have also studied the discourses of *umthonoyutho* from a historical perspective.[848] I have abstracted early ideas of *umthonoyutho* among the Assyrian/Syriac elite of the early twentieth century in the Middle East on which present-day elite members have based their *umthonoyutho*. My findings have led me to argue that the link between present-day identity discourses and this early stage *umthonoyutho* was the Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO), founded after the political changes in Syria in 1957. ADO built on earlier ideas of unity and national identity of such *umthonoye* as Naum Faik and Ashur Yausef. As a reaction to the rise of Pan-Arabization politics and the effect of dislocation it had on Assyrians/Syriacs, ADO aimed at healing the damage caused as a consequence of their no longer being able to live with a distinct identity, different to an Arab one which was imposed by the ruling regime. The ADO members who settled in Europe in the 1960s continued to propagate the ideology of their organization. Simultaneously, the first group of Assyrians/Syriacs from Lebanon which was invited to Sweden by the Swedish authorities in 1967 was presented to Swedish society as *Assyrier*. Linguistically the Swedish term *Assyrier* for 'Assyrians' already existed in the language and therefore it could be used without major obstacles up to 1975.

During this period, in the tolerant atmosphere created by the liberal Swedish Integration Policy, the first Assyrian/Syriac organizations were founded. As the first secular institution of Assyrians/Syriacs in Europe, the *Assyriska föreningen i Södertälje* (1971) has had a pioneering function in relation to other secular community institutions. ADO members played an active role in the formulation of its initial policy and that of similar organizations which ADO founded in the first decade of its existence. These organizations became seedbeds for the further development of an Assyrian ideology, but this time in a European context; an empty space to be filled with new meaning. By making good use of their institutions, *Assyriska* activists have

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[848] Here I give my explanation and definition of *umthonoyutho*, which I understand in the first place as a form of patriotism: 'To sense and express love (*hubo*) for the Assyrian/Syriac people and to dedicate one's life to their care in a broad sense (language, culture, history, homeland and church.'

propagated the Assyrian ideology, introduced new national symbols, reinterpreted former symbolism and have set their sights on building a national cultural tradition by paying specific attention to their language (both classical Syriac and the spoken *Suryoyo*), secular music and folklore, literature, national figures and national days.Although this form of present-day *umthonoyutho* builds on early ideas of *umthonoyutho* (from the beginning of the twentieth century), it has developed an exclusivist approach in relation to the 'name of the people' and, to a certain extent also to the people's heritage. In their attempt to achieve national unity, early *umthonoye* elite members used (predominantly) the designation 'Assyrian' as a national name to represent the collective of the different Syriac Churches, but without rejecting any of the other names in use among the members of these churches. In contrast, in the process of negotiating the collective identity of their people, present-day identity discourses tend to be rather particularistic and focus especially on the discussion about what is the 'correct name' of their people (especially in Western languages). In this regard, the 'correct name' of their people has become a self-perpetuating aim in itself and has therefore distanced from its initial function which was as a means by which to achieve unity.

The difference between early and modern approaches to *umthonoyutho* can be explained by the different stages through which the *umthonoyutho* passed in response to the contextual dislocations experienced. At the beginning of the twentieth century, ideas of *umthonoyutho* were limited to intellectuals who wrote about their perceived ideals of their people. This left an empty space in society for the emergence of a national identity and for an ideology to articulate it in a new discursive field. However, pertinently there was not yet any space to disseminate this ideology among the ordinary people and to implement it in society. I have discussed how this form of *umthonoyutho* was expressed especially in the magazines which were published by intellectual elites at the beginning of the twentieth century. On only a few occasions did these ideas materialize in institutions, of which the Assyrian Orphanage in Adana was just one example. After the *Seyfo* during The First World War, those elite members who survived were forced to disperse and settled in different parts of the world. The upshot of this dislocation was that they had to deal with the new contexts in which to live and the particular challenges these posed. In the discursive field of the Western diaspora, elites encountered an empty space for the reinterpretation and the implementation of their ideals. Changing or shifting ideas of *umthonoyutho* can be explained by these dislocatory events. As a consequence of the dislocation they

experienced, *nodal points* (such as the 'name of the people') were imbued with different meanings and transformed into *floating signifiers*. At this stage of the implementation process, the *myth* of the 'unity of the people' as a vehicle to survive as a people and the goal of being recognized as a distinct national group shifted into the background, while internally the focal point of the 'identity question' emerged as the 'correct name' of the *'amo Suryoyo* in Western languages. An important reason for this shift was that the name of their people in Western languages was the first subject to be disputed by oppositional elite groups at the beginning of the hegemonic struggle. This dispute has therefore had an epoch-making function in relation to the continued struggle and it has become the *nodal point* around which the struggle for hegemony has been built.

The subsequent 'name debate' can be seen as a consequence of the aim of different elite groups to solve the 'identity crisis' they experienced in their efforts to heal the *split subject* while they were competing with each other for hegemonic power. This debate has been dominated by the struggle between three main groups: the *Assyrier*, the clergymen and a third group which came to be known as the *Syrianer*. Its internal struggle disputing the 'correct name' by which the *'amo Suryoyo* should be known in Western languages has resulted in the institutionalization of the Assyrian/Syriac community along two main identity discourses. In order to give an idea of the extent of this struggle, I have analysed the conditions of the emergence of the 'name debate' and the institutionalization of the identity discourses which have resulted from this struggle from a historical perspective in Sweden. In my analysis I begin by clarifying in the storyline of the *split* – the main logics behind the formation of competing political discourses about hegemony in the socio-political vacuum which they encountered. From a discourse theoretical perspective, identification processes are the result of hegemonic struggles between elite groups with different political discourses. I have illustrated how the identity discourses were formed in a triangle of relationships between two lay elite groups and the clergy (as representatives of the Syriac Orthodox Church, the main leading institution of the people) in their attempt to heal the *split subject* which resulted from the identification crisis.

In this process of negotiating the identity of their people in the discursive field, the Syriac Orthodox Church, represented by the Patriarch in Damascus, strongly opposed the cross-denominational identity discourse of the *Assyriska* Movement. In this context it is important to remember that, at that time (1970s and 1980s), the church still enjoyed enormous legitimacy

among the ordinary people and the clergy were in the position to exert considerable influence on the people. The great influence of the clergy explains, for instance, why in their attempts to seek legitimacy for a particular identity discourse both the *Assyriska* and the *Syrianska* elite have continued to refer to statements which clergy have made in the course of their careers about the 'correct naming' of the *'amo Suryoyo*.

In their opposition to the *Assyrier*, the clergy was supported by lay elite members who were also opposed to the ideology of the *Assyrier*. As an alternative, both the clergy and these oppositional laymen promoted a denominational identity, advocating the discursive argument that Assyrians/Syriacs are a religious community which includes members of different nations. They assert that both church and people should be referred to by the name *Syrian* (as the English translation for *Suryoye*). Thereafter, this dual opposition has attempted to establish an alternative truth regime, a new *objectivity*. Despite its historically strong hegemonic position, the church representation did not succeed in institutionalizing this denominational discourse among the community members in the diaspora. But it managed to break down the hegemonic use of the designation *Assyrier* and identification as Assyrians among the ordinary people. In the long term, it has shown that the main aim of the church has not been to propagate a denominational identity in the first place, but to break down the emerging ideology of the *Assyrier*, because these new ideas were thought of as threatening and did not fit its discourse in relation to the position of Assyrians/Syriacs in the Middle East.

In explaining the extent of the antagonism between the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer*, I have also argued that Middle Eastern regimes have played a considerable role in the 'name debate' through their mobilization of some clergymen and laymen (still living in those countries or in the diaspora) who have 'co-operated' with these regimes, in whatever form. Middle Eastern regimes have perceived the cross-denominational identity approach as a 'threat' to their national identity. Consequently, the church opposition to the Assyrian Movement explains many of the activities which followed.

I have illustrated that the stand of the church simultaneously offered more space and hegemony to lay elites who also opposed to the *Assyriska* Movement and whose position resulted in the emergence of a counter ideology which has come to be represented by what I have called the *Syrianska* Movement, whose ideology would not be perceived as threatening by Middle Eastern regimes. In its formation process, the *Assyriska*

Movement was placed at the core of their constitutive outside. Hence, the *Assyrier* became the main group in relation to which the *Syrianska* Movement developed its ideology and identity discourse. Distancing itself from and refusing to identify with the *Assyrier*, this group introduced the designation *Syrianer* (in English, first *Syrian and* later Syriac*)* as an alternative to represent its people. Besides their divergence in their name choice, the ideology of the *Syrianska* activists assumes Aramean ancestry. I have argued that the choice not to use the designation *Araméer* (Swedish for 'Aramean') is probably tied up with the first phase in the emergence of the *Syrianska* Movement. Overall, in other European countries, the opposition to the *Assyriska* Movement has predominantly used the designation Aramean instead of *Syriac,* especially in the last two decades. The focus of these lay elite members was fighting a secularly based cross-national identity. On the basis of this starting point, their approach to the name *Suryoye* has been denominational and they have translated it as *Syrianer*. The most essential move at that point they thought was to make a statement to the *Assyrier*, who had been presented as those who 'falsified' the history and 'misrepresented' the identity of their people.

Although the *Syrianska* elite fought the cross-denominational approach of the *Assyrier* in the first phase of opposition, this attitude gradually changed thereafter. Over time, – in their antagonistic relationship with the *Assyrier* – the denominational approach of the *Syrianer* has made space for a cross-denominational national identity. Simultaneously, in this process or shift the already assumed Aramean ancestry has become more pronounced and articulated in relation to the oppositional identification with an Assyrian ancestry. This has been a very marked change in a period of only three decades. In this shift, the *Syrianska* Movement has also propagated a division between the secular and the religious sphere and a division along these lines between the responsibilities of lay- and clergymen. This separation began to take shape after the hegemony of the *Assyriska* Movement was broken by the dual-opposition alluded to above. In the process which followed, *Syrianska* elite members began to compete with clergymen for hegemony in the sphere of influence in the community and have consequently achieved the present-day status quo.

The role of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the triangular relationship with the *Assyriska* and the *Syrianska* elites must not be overlooked. Although the representatives of the church said that they opposed identification both as Assyrian and as Aramean, in reality they have promoted identification with an Aramean ancestry. Consequently, their tendency has been to ally

themselves more closely with the ideology of the *Syrianska* Movement. This aspect is important to understanding the support which the identity discourse of the *Syrianer* has enjoyed among the clergymen and the ordinary people. In its stand, the Church has provided the *Syrianska* Movement space to make use of clergymen to preach against the ideology of the *Assyrier*. Considering the hegemonic position of the church historically, its stand has had a great impact on the hegemonic space which the *Assyriska* Movement lost to the oppositional *Syrianska* Movement. Hence it must be stressed that the church has played a major role in the 'name debate' among Assyrians/Syriacs. It is possible that its influence would have increased if the Swedish authorities had not engaged in the 'name question' and requested the Patriarch *not* to excommunicate those who identified themselves as 'Assyrian'. On account of the intervention of the Swedish authorities, the Synod of the Syriac Orthodox Church made less harsh or perhaps more 'compromising' decisions in relation to the *Assyriska* activists. In a different dimension, – by introducing the compound name *Assyrier/Syrianer* – the Swedish authorities have played a unique role in developing space for bringing representatives of both discourses closer and have therefore had a unifying role in the name conflict.

The identity crisis has built itself around the *nodal point* 'the name of the people' and it has transformed both the name and the collective identity of Assyrians/Syriacs into a *floating signifier*. Hence, their traditional identity discourses have become dislocated and begun a process of transformation. At the surface level, the main difference between the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer* has remained their disagreement about the 'correct name' to be used to represent their people and the ancestry which this name assumes. They have been challenging each other's institutionalized identity discourses and, by taking this step, they have both recognized and challenged each other's hegemony over the people. This competition for hegemony has been organized around the attempt to hegemonize any further influence on the 'naming' of their people in Western languages and to institutionalize the identity discourses to which they each adhere. In their competition for hegemony, they have also aimed to fix the meaning of such elements as symbolic and cultural capital around particular *nodal points* (such as the *Assyriska* or *Syrianska* culture and the *Assyriska* or *Syrianska* history). The upshot has been that identity discourses are organized around particular *nodal points* and are used to draw political frontiers between the inside (*chain of difference*) and the constitutive outside (*chain of equivalence*). Their non-

adherence to a certain identity discourse places individuals in the *chain of equivalence* and results in splits within the community. Consequently, hegemony exercised over the influence on the 'naming' stretches far beyond this question. The struggle over the 'correct name' has become symbolic of the struggle between elite groups over hegemony within the Assyrian/Syriac community.

Discourse institutionalization indicates the sedimentation process of discourses in which institutional norms and hegemonic ways of thinking are presented as objectivity. Although they have come to institutionalize separately and antagonistically, the study has also shown the inter-connectedness of antagonistic subject positions and their identity discourses. Nevertheless, the institutionalization of discourses has strengthened the antagonistic relationships between elite groups. This process has also created space for communication between both groups at institutional level; a new *modus vivendi*. Therefore, institutionalization does not mean simply that their differences have increased; instead the reverse is true. Although disagreeing with each other, they have begun to use similar strategies, arguments and means, but those which fit their own discourse and challenge the discourse of the main antagonistic other in this respect.

Diversity within Particularity

To illustrate the diversity in the two main competing institutionalized discourses, I have analysed the discourses of individual elite members in relation to the naming of the *'amo Suryoyo* in Western languages, the boundaries of this people and their leadership. The naming, the boundaries and the leadership of the *'amo Suryoyo* can also be seen as three *nodal points* around which identity discourses have been built and disputed internally. The fact that they are disputed indicates their floating character. Consequently, this allows space for different interpretations and diverse meanings both within each of these discourses and between them. Depending on the context, the *nodal points* around which a specific discourse has been built can change. This open character of identity allows space for changes in identities and simultaneously explains their occurrence.

The analysis of the individual discourses disputing the 'correct naming' of the *'amo Suryoyo* is based on a categorization of both the primordial and situational arguments which are employed in it. I have shown how, in the discursive field, both *Assyrier* and *Syrianer* struggle for hegemony in order to

fix the 'correct name' of their people and to imbue it with the meaning which lies at the core of their particular ideology. Generally speaking, both groups approach identity as a pre-given, natural phenomenon and the formulated arguments largely assume a primordial understanding of identity. This approach ignores and denies the changeable and relational character of identity. Even the situational arguments employed assume a primordial essence. The goal of the elite members is to seek justification for their arguments by referring to historical sources as if the 'truth' was formulated thousands or at least hundreds of years ago and consequently the task of the present-day elites is to 'discover' this truth and to show this to those who have not yet made this discovery. The main difference between those using the primordial and those who opt for the situational arguments lies in the fact that the latter recognize the situational use and relativization of arguments and, by doing so, betray an indirect recognition of the contextual use of arguments and change in identities. Although the aim of both groups is the objectification of the collective identity discourse, to a certain extent the situationalists do not deny its constructed character.

Primordial arguments are used more frequently by the *Syrianska* elite than by the *Assyriska* elite. There are two main explanations for this. Unquestionably, from the beginning the *Assyriska* elite have worked consciously on the construction of a national project for the future survival of their people; their approach to 'identity' has been overwhelmingly political, a project in which they have employed a top-down strategy. The disillusionment which has befallen pioneering *Assyriska* elite members has shown that they have been far less successful than achieving the initial goal they set themselves. The second difference between them can be explained by the process in which the identity discourse of the *Syrianer* developed in relation to that of the *Assyrier*. Initially, the focus of the *Syrianer* was on the rejection of the primordial arguments of the *Assyrier*. Instead, they identified at denominational level as members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. Later, they developed alternative primordial arguments – basing themselves on Aramean ancestry – and specifically in relation to those already used by the *Assyrier*. Not surprisingly, the line of argumentation follows the same structure as that of the broader *Syrianska* discourse. I have illustrated that primordial arguments in favour of an Aramean ancestry play a role at symbolic level, especially in the competing relationship with the *Assyrier*. In daily life, this assumed ancestry plays a less central role. In the last decade, after the introduction of situational arguments by the *Assyrier* and the

relativization of earlier used primordial arguments, in order to 'de-freeze' the relationship between the representatives of the two main competing discourses, *Syrianska* elite members have also begun to relativize their more static approach to the naming of their people. Hence this shift in both groups can be explained in processual and relational terms.

I have also illustrated the diversity within the two main institutionalized discourses in relation to the construction of the boundaries of the *'amo Suryoyo* – fluctuating between a narrow and a broader definition. In the process of boundary construction, both the *chain of difference* ('us') and the *chain of equivalence* ('others') are formed. The narrow definition of the *'amo Suryoyo* assumes the inclusion of the members of the Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic and the Syriac Protestant Churches. The broader definition includes seven Syriac Churches, at least at theoretical level. Depending on the context, both definitions might be used by the same individuals interchangeably and simultaneously for different purposes. Whereas the narrow definition assumes a more traditional approach, the broader definition results from a political discourse and functions as a *myth* waiting to be transfigured into a *social imaginary* (and consequently collectively shared) in need of being realized.

I have shown that the narrow definition assumes a much more central place in the discourses of the *Syrianska* elite and among those *Assyrier* who have been disillusioned in their ideal of realizing a broader definition of the *'amo Suryoyo* or of turning the *myth* of a broad definition into a *social imaginary*. The *Syrianska* elite defend the narrow definition because of its exclusive or more traditional approach to the boundaries of their people. In contrast, the disillusioned *Assyrier* assume that their ideology of the national unity of their people has failed and that they will have to revert to reality, believing that the historical differences between the Syriac Churches are not yet easy to overcome. Nevertheless, the majority of the *Assyrier* continue to adhere to a broader definition of the *'amo Suryoyo*. This definition functions as one of the main *nodal points* in their ideology; if this definition cannot be lived up to now, the aim is still to realize this in the future. Simultaneously, this assumes the hope of regaining the unity of their people, which would also be tantamount to be the unity of the different Syriac Churches under one national umbrella. This aim explains their relatively open approach to negotiating with potential future members about being included in the future definition of their people. In contrast, the *Syrianska* elite display far less willingness to adopt a broader definition.

The negotiational character of the boundaries of the *'amo Suryoyo* is based on the concepts of *Suryoyutho* (Assyrian/Syriac way of life) and self-identification. The narrower the concept of *Suryoyutho* used, the narrower the definition of the '*amo Suryoyo* becomes. In this case, the *Assyrier* also use a broader and a more negotiable concept of *Suryoyutho*, adjusting their political discourse in an attempt to create a broader platform for national unity. As far as the *Syrianer* are concerned, the concept of *Suryoyutho* is less negotiable but is instead considered a means to defend the present-day boundaries of the people. In the eyes of both groups, the core characteristics of *Suryoyutho* are considered to be Christianity and their mother tongue, *Suryoyo*. Self-identification also functions as a central factor in fixing boundaries and, in this capacity, in the inclusion of individuals and groups in the definition of their people. But, while in the first place the *Assyrier* stress the importance of self-identification by potential future members, the *Syrianer* stress the need of their own self-identification in connection with outsiders before allowing them space to identify themselves with the *'amo Suryoyo*. Therefore it is the latter discourse which maintains the traditional boundaries. Theoretically, the approach of the *Assyrier* can be explained as a way to create cohesion among the members of the future (inherently broader) *umtho Suryoyto*, and therefore to make this broader definition effective. As a whole, the diversity of the boundaries used illustrates their negotiable character and the absence of a hegemonic definition with clear-cut boundaries for the *'amo Suryoyo*. This indicates that Assyrians/Syriacs find themselves in the stage after the dislocation of traditional boundaries and continue to negotiate and objectify new boundaries.

In the last empirical chapter, I investigated the relationship between identity discourses and leadership discourses against the backdrop of their emigration and the subsequent transformation in their identity discourses. I have argued that the change from an ethno-religious identity discourse to an ethno-national one has resulted in the emergence of the *myth* about the need for secular leadership. So far, Assyrians/Syriacs have failed to identify one (secular) leader of their people. This indecisiveness has created a leadership crisis and a vacuum. This leadership vacuum has consequently constituted a mythical space in which the characteristics of the 'ideal leader' have been defined. Moreover, the leadership vacuum has resulted in a competition between elite groups for hegemony. In the absence of a secular leader, a very small minority continues to identify the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church as the leader in overall charge. In this situation, the experience of the

need for leadership is the main source plumbed for the construction of the *myth* about an 'ideal leader' who is supposed to play a 'messianic' role in the unification of the split and dispersed Assyrian/Syriac people. As might be expected, the *myth* about the 'ideal leader' who is expected to heal the *split subject* is defined differently in the leadership discourses of the *Assyrier* and the *Syrianer*. Each group tends to recognize the leadership of their secular institutions as those in charge of the people, denying the importance of the representatives of the other group. This approach again creates a situation in which both groups remain connected solely through the leadership of the Patriarch, whether they want to be or not. Simultaneously, those who adhere to the discourse which seeks to effectuate the unity of Assyrians/Syriacs propose a 'Parliament in Exile' or a 'Board of Representatives', composed of representatives of the various Syriac churches.

The Myth about the Need for Unity

Internal attempts to bring the representatives of both groups closer did not commence until about the mid-1990s. However, at an institutional level these have so far not been realized by a long chalk; indeed they have grown farther apart. Representatives of the sedimented discourses continue to make attempts to hegemonize their influence in the process of imbuing *nodal points* in the identity of their people with meaning. From the perspective of both elite groups, a future unity assumes a specific particularistic discourse. Despite the continuity of this antagonism at institutional level, the majority of the ordinary people have distanced themselves from this and have begun to relativize the importance of the 'name debate', because of the palpable split which it has caused in their community.

Throughout this thesis, I have illustrated that Assyrians/Syriacs have a strong sense of being dispersed and disunited. This has resulted in a situation in which a longing for *unity* has become common. *Unity* is understood to be equivalent to strength; it is associated with the future survival of their people. As shown in this study, this lack of *unity* is seen as an important reason for the misery in which they have lived throughout the centuries. Therefore, competition between elite groups for hegemony is usually considered something negative. They relate it to the present status quo of 'disunity' at two different levels. On the one hand, it is a reference to the definition of the *umtho Suryoyto* in the different Syriac churches and, on the other hand, it is a reference to the present-day situation in which the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church now identify with two different national names and

ancestry. The latter form of disunity is considered the one in need of the most urgent attention, at least by the ordinary people. The political activists see the first form as the more strategic, but they also recognize the problematic situation created in relation to the use of two different names for the same community; the opposite of what they are aiming for.

Despite the strong antagonism between the two main institutionalized discourses, in the introduction I have illustrated that the longing for unity has overcome the existing split and antagonism at the most urgent moments experienced by Assyrians/Syriacs. The threat to existence of the Mor Gabriel Monastery was the theme with which I commenced this thesis. I connected this to the threat of extinction which Assyrians/Syriacs experience as a people, both in the homeland and in the diaspora. Why is this so? Because the survival of Mor Gabriel is inherently connected to their own survival as a people, although now the majority live in the diaspora. This explains the big, 'united' demonstration showing support for the continued existence of this monastery. Mor Gabriel Monastery symbolizes their presence in one part of their homeland – *Tur 'Abdin*, where only 2500 Assyrians/Syriacs now remain. In their eyes, losing the monastery is inherently connected to the threat of extinction hanging over their own heads.

The Assyrian/Syriac diaspora can exist only through the *social imaginary* of a homeland; without a homeland, there cannot be a diaspora or an existence outside the homeland. Unless there is a homeland, it is impossible to speak of a diaspora and the dispersion of a people. Consequently, to speak of the dispersion of one's people is communicating where home is. This mechanism re-roots all 'imagined members' of the community in a homeland in order to continue to exist as a collective – creating the *myth* of a united people, although they continue to live dispersed in the diaspora. This can be seen as an attempt to turn this *myth* into a *social imaginary* through the strength of a shared collective of ideas in order to assure survival.

The *myth* about the need of unity is built on the assumption that gaining this will improve and strengthen the position of Assyrians/Syriacs in the discursive field. Unity as a *myth* is an empty space in which different expectations or demands are inscribed. This *myth* functions as an elastic field and its purpose is to keep the different members of the group together, although diverging in ideas and distancing themselves from each other, they are simultaneously drawing closer, depending on the contextual changes. The 'elasticity', which is the main characteristic of the elastic field, prevents the different community members from breaking away from the collective. The

myth of *unity* functions in a similar fashion; it offers hope of a better future for this trans-nationally based 'imagined community'.

Given this set of circumstances, it is possible to conclude that the urge for survival as a people has resulted in the creation of a *social imaginary* and, as a consequence, in a unified action to save Mor Gabriel. The existence of Mor Gabriel symbolizes Assyrians/Syriacs' existence as a people and holds out hope of finding the remedy which is proof against what I have termed the "Hostages' and Orphans' Dilemma" (*Yasire u Yatume*) – in which they see their position as that of hostages (*yasire*) in the homeland and orphans (*yatume*) in the diaspora. Unless a remedy can be found, it is believed that their position will deteriorate. Imbued with this urge for survival, representatives of competing discourses organized a united struggle for the cause of their people. The unity displayed during the demonstration therefore assumes a situation of disunity outside the context of the demonstration. It is this disunity (*flighutho*) which has been transformed into their greatest problem by Assyrians/Syriacs in the last four decades, and so far they have been unable to reach any substantial solutions.

To conclude, this study has contributed to the insights into the processes of emigration, settlement and identification of Assyrians/Syriacs in the European diaspora, specifically in Sweden. Making use of the concepts of Discourse Theory, I have made a thorough analysis of and provided an explanation for the *emergence* and *change* in the identity discourses of Assyrians/Syriacs in the process of their emigration and settlement. The discourse theoretical approach has allowed me to illustrate and explain the contextual, relational and processual character of identities caught up in vicissitudes in identifications. From this perspective, I have approached 'identity' as an open space which can be imbued with different meanings and interpretations. Consequently, I have shown how this open character has functioned as a condition for the emergence of the 'name debate' among Assyrians/Syriacs.

Although grounded in a European context, the main focus of this thesis has been the formation of identity discourses among Assyrians/Syriacs in the Swedish context. In a future study, I shall build on this initial research and look into the formation and changes of identity discourses of Assyrians/Syriacs who have settled in other Western countries. The comparative analysis of such an empirical study will assist in developing more insights into local, contextual and relational aspects of identity and the strategies employed by subjects in this formation process. In the long term, it

is hoped that this strongly empirically embedded research will contribute to the theoretical debate of ethnicity and identity.

Awake from your slumbers;
Observe the world, O my brother;
Harken to the voice of a free people – How marvellous.
The times have changed and we are far from our friends;
We have closed our minds to the work which was once ours;
The boat of the people is tossed back and forth on the sea of life;
The day will come when it makes port safely;
We have hope and trust in this people;
They will break free their manacles and rise up this century. [849]

George Shamoun

[849] The music for the song *Rghush Men Shantho* by Habib Mousa (1986). My translation of the original in *Suryoyo*:

Rghush men shantho/Wahzi britho habro rhimo/Washmah qolo d'amo hiro men hasimo/Mshahlef zabno u rahiqina ma haurone/Wamhalaqlan me haunayna kul 'amlone/Sfitho d'amo kuzza u kethyo b-yamo d-haye/Kito yaumo dkulyo u shelyo b-femo d-maye/Ketlan sabro u haymonutho bu 'amano/Dtower qayde u ma'le rishe bu dorano.

Transcription

In contrast to a complex system of transliteration which is common among linguists, the transcription of non-English words has been kept simple. For example, I have not made a distinction between the 't' (*teth*) as in *turo* (mountain) and the 't' (*tau*) as in *taudi* (thank you). Similarly, I have used an 'h' to pronounce the characters in *Suryoyo* 'he' as in *haymonutho* (believe) and 'heth' as in *hirutho* (freedom). Consequently, people who do not know *Suryoyo* might therefore pronounce words in which a '*teth*' or a '*heth*' is used, wrongly. What is more important in this study is the meaning of words. For the spelling of place names and the names of individuals, the original spelling has been kept. Below I shall define only those signs which are not common in the English alphabet and explain the use of combinations of letters that are used to replace specific letters that are more commonly used among linguists in the field of both *Surayt* and Syriac.

ç As in the English *chamber*

i When used as an article and in a word in *Suryoyo*, such as in *i 'ito* (the church), I have used the English *i* (small character), which ought to be pronounced as in the English *been*.

j As the *j* in the English *jar*.

g As the *g* in the English *good*.

gh As the *ğ* in Turkish *mağaza* and *ağa* when used at the beginning of a word, such as in the *ghenso* (ethnicity).

kh As the *kh* in Arabic *Omar Khayyam*, such as in *nukhroyo* (foreigner).

' Corresponds to the Arabic *'ayn*.

ş As the *sh* in the English *shall*.

th As in the English *think*.

Glossary

Unless otherwise mentioned, the words in this glossary are in *Suryoyo* (*Surayt*). I have not indicated when it concerns the use of 'loanwords' from other languages.[850]

'Adat	Traditions, customs.
'Ade	Tradition, custom.
Admo	Blood.
Agha	Clan leader (in the context of this study, Kurdish)
Ahuno	Brother.
Allsvenskan	(Swedish) Swedish Soccer Premiere League.
'Amo	People, ethnie. The term 'people' perhaps implies the more traditional sense of *'amo* (used in the Middle East); the term 'ethnie' can be perceived as the translation of *'amo* on the basis of a more modern concept and from a present-day perspective. I have used these translations interchangeably – unless it has shown to be necessary to make a distinction.
'Amo Mbarbezo	A dispersed people, ethnie.
'Ashirto	In the context of this study, *'ashirto* refers to the extended family. Traditionally it is a term derived from the Arabic *'ashira* and the Kurdish *'ashirat* for 'clan' but used with a different meaning when applied to Assyrians/Syriacs (see further Chapter 7).
'Askar	Soldier.
'Askariye	Military service.
Ashuriye	'Assyrians', derived from the Arabic *Ashuri* for 'Assyrians'. Sometimes Assyrians/Syriacs (here: members of the Syriac Orthodox Church) who disagree with the idea of referring to themselves as

[850] See further for loanwords in *Suryoyo*, Aziz Tezel (2003) and Sina Tezel (2011).

'Assyrians', use it to refer to the members of the Assyrian Church of the East. Those who do identify themselves as Assyrians also use the Syriac term *Othuroye* to refer to the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. In use, these two variants refer to the geographical area in which these terms (*Ashuriye* and *Othuroye*) began to be used among the ordinary people: *Ashuriye* was used in Arabic-speaking areas especially in Iraq and Syria; whereas *Othuroye* has become familiar to the people through the national movement and the 'name debate' in a European context.

Assyrier An *Assyrier* (Swedish) is a *Suryoyo* who assumes Assyrian roots and/or who chooses to use the designation *Assyrian* as a national name for his people. Its adherents present their choice as the path which was pioneered by such elite members as Ashur Yausef and Naum Faik at the beginning of the twentieth century. This was a path which was adopted to promote *'irutho* (enlightenment) among the *'amo Suryoyo* in order to prevent their extinction as a group of people through the expedient of uniting the *Syriac* churches under one umbrella name 'Assyrian', a name derived from that of the former ancient Assyria empire.[851] Today it has become a name steeped in deep symbolic significance for its adherents.

Assyrier/Syrianer The Swedish compound name for Assyrians/Syriacs.

Assyriska The Swedish adjective for *Suryoye* (see also *Syrianska*).

Athro Homeland. *Athro* is also used with the meaning of land, nation-state or country.

'Aybo Shame.

Bahro Light.

Band Kurdish for 'party', mainly used in the context of local politics in an agricultural society.

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[851] The second Assyrian Empire fell in 612 BCE.

Berberiye Local traditional politics. See further Chapter 7.

Beth Nahrin Mesopotamia.

Britho World.

Darbo Road.

Daule Land, country.

Dayro Monastery.

Derraaza Harvesting machine.

Dhelm Oppression.

Dlomo Oppression.

Dolumo Oppressor.

Emwotho Nations.

Fellahi Kurdish term which was used in *Tur 'Abdin* to refer to Christians. In this sense it was used synonymously with the Kurdish term *Suryani* to refer to the same group.

Flighutho Disunity, split.

Fulhono Work. In the context of this study it refers to the *fulhono* in the context of *umthonoyutho*, hence to the work to be done for the Assyrian/Syriac people.

Furqono Salvation.

Frikyrkoråd Free Church Council (in Sweden).

Gabo Party, faction.

Galwoyo Refugee.

Gargro Threshing sledge.

Garshuni Text produced with a Syriac script but in Ottoman Turkish or Arabic language, or Syriac language written in Ottoman Turkish script.

Gavur Turkish term for 'infidel'. It has been used to refer to non-Muslims.

Golutho Diaspora, emigration.

Goluyo Refugee.

Goresto Hand mill.

Ha b-Nison Assyrian New Year, celebrated on April 1.

Haram Arabic for 'unclean' and 'forbidden'.

Hdoyonutho Unity.

Hdoyutho Unity.

Hemse Peas.

Hirutho Freedom.

Htitho Sin.

Ihtiyat Ottoman Turkish for 'reserve forces'.

Hubo Love.

Hudro Association.

Hulto Aunt (matrilineal).

Huyodo Federation, Unity.

'Ito Church.

'Irutho Enlightenment.

Jarjar Threshing sledge.

Jebbo Social aid, Social Welfare Office (both when used in Western context).

Kaldoye Chaldeans.

Katholik Roman Catholic.

Kaymakam (Turkish) deputy-governor.

Ghenso Ethnicity.

Knushyo Meeting, society, community.

Krulto Circle. In the context of this study, *krulto* refers to a committee of ADO which consisted of five people.

Kurmanji A dialect of Kurdish language.

'Laymtho Girl.

'Layme Young people.

Leshono Language.

Madenhoyo Easterner. It is used in relation to *Ma'erboyo* for 'Westerner'. In the context of this study it refers to an Eastern *Suryoyo*, or a member of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church.

Ma'erboyo Westerner. In the context of this study it refers to a member of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

Madrashto Church school.

Malfono Teacher.

Malkoye Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic church members.

Malkutho Heaven.

Merdalli Arabic dialect spoken in the town Mardin, Turkey.

Merdalliye Inhabitants or people from the town Mardin.

Mardutho Culture.

Margonitho Diamond.

Mashritho Camp; in the context of this study it refers to the cultural awareness youth camps.

Mbarbezina We have become dispersed.

Mhalmoye Assyrians/Syriacs consider *Mhalmoye* to be Assyrians/Syriacs who converted to Islam at the beginning of the seventeenth century. See further Chapter 9.

Millet Originally an Ottoman Turkish word to designate a group of non-Muslim people in the Ottoman Empire.

Motho Motherland.

Mukhabarat Arabic for Intelligence Service.

Muhtar Turkish term for 'village head'.

Mullah Title of a Muslim religious leader in Arabic.

Nasturnoye Members of the Assyrian Church of the East. It is perceived as a derogatory term by the members of this church.

Nukhrayto In the context of this study 'foreign lands'; literally the female form for 'foreigner'.

Nukhroye Foreigners.

Oromoye Arameans.

Othuroye Assyrians.

Prut Protestants.

Qat'o Flock.

Qentronutho Literally it means 'centurionship'. In the context of this study it is used with the meaning of 'federation'.

Qritho Village.

Renyo Idea, ideology.

Ruho Literally it means 'spirit'. In the context of this study it comes close to the meaning of 'attitude' (as in *ruho umthonoyto*).

Ru'yo Shepherd.

Sa'a Arabic for 'watch'.

Seyfo Genocide perpetrated against the Christian population in Ottoman Turkey by the Young Turk regime in the First World War. Literally, *Seyfo* means 'sword'.

Sharbo Jar.

Sho'tho Watch.

Surayt Spoken modern Aramaic language of *Tur 'Abdin*. In this geography, the speakers themselves referred to it as *Surayt*. In the present-day, especially people in academia refer to ti as Turoyo (see also Appendix 2).

Sureth Eastern *Suryoyo* spoken language, mostly spoken by the members of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church.

Suroyo/e The singular *Suroyo* and the plural *Suroye* have been used in *Tur 'Abdin* in the spoken language *Surayt,* to denote a member(s) of the Syriac Orthodox Community. Note that this use and understanding was common among the ordinary people, while elites may have had a different understanding of it. The first group used this denotation sometimes as synonymous for Christian(s), although it does not mean Christian (*mshihoyo*). The use and meaning of *Suroyo* in historical perspective requires more research.

Süryani(ler) Turkish for *Suryoye* (plural).

Suryoyo/e *Suryoyo* refers both to a member of the *'amo Suryoyo* (Assyrian/Syriac people), to their mother tongue of the *Suryoye* and to the (*Suryoye*) people. Traditionally, *Suryoyo* has been used to refer to classical Syriac. At the present day, people also use it to refer to the spoken mother tongue (which they referred to as *Surayt* in *Tur 'Abdin*). Therefore, departing from an *emic* approach, when I

refer to the *Suryoyo* language I mean the spoken language, *Surayt* (see also Appendix 2).

Suryoye Madenhoye Members of the Assyrian Church of the East or literally 'Eastern *Suryoye*'.

Suryoye Ma'erboye Members of the Syriac Orthodox Church or 'Western *Suryoye*'.

Suryoyutho In the context of this study, 'Assyrian/Syriac way of life'. See further Chapter 9.

Syriac (English) A reference to the classical Syriac Aramaic language. Furthermore, in the present-day it is also used to refer to the *Suryoye* as a group, as an alternative to the earlier term in use 'Syrian'.

Syrianer (Swedish) A *Syrian* (singular form of *Syrianer*) is a *Suryoyo* who rejects the designation *Assyrier* and, implicitly, any links to an Assyrian past. Individuals who identify as such might or might not assume Aramean ancestry. The starting point espoused by the *Syrianska* elite members is that the *'amo Suryoyo* cannot justifiably claim Assyrian descent. They consider the designation Assyrian a new name for the *'amo Suryoyo* and substantiate their opposition to its adoption by stating that such a step will eventually lead to the division (*flighutho*) of their people and subsequently to their rapid extinction. This is a stance in 'defence' of their name – *Suryoye* – which they chose to translate by the Swedish term *Syrianer*. During the interviews, elite members apparently took this translation for granted, because they did not try to explain or defend the use of the term *Syrianer*. In fact it is a new term which has been created in Swedish language in Sweden (in the second half of the 1970s) to refer to the Assyrians/Syriacs.

Syrianska The Swedish adjective for *Suryoye* (see also *Assyriska*).

Ta'da Oppression.

Talaba(e) Respectively Kurdish and Turkish terms for 'students'. In the context of this study the *Talaba* were Kurdish activists who launched an opposition against the Turkish authorities in the 1970s.

Taudi Thank you.

Tauditho Religion.

Taye Muslims.

Tehrimo Excommunication.

Tyoho To flee, to be expelled.

Turoyo This is a reference to the spoken mother tongue of Assyrians/Syriacs; formerly known as *Surayt* (see further Appendix 2).

Twiroye Literally, 'broken'. In the context of this study it is used in the sense of 'defenceless'.

Ummah Arabic term for denoting the Muslim community or nation.

Umtho Nation.

Umthonoyo A person who follows the principles of *umthonoyutho* for his/her people (see *umthonoyutho*).

Umthonoyutho To sense and express love (*hubo*) for the Assyrian/Syriac people and to dedicate one's life to their care in a broad sense (language, culture, history, homeland and church). Often, *umthonoyutho* is used with a meaning which approximates patriotism and sometimes to a lesser extent It is also used with the meaning of nationalism. See further Chapter 6.

'Utmo Darkness.

Vali Turkish for 'governor'.

Varlık vergisi Turkish for 'capital levy'. See further Chapter 3.

Waride Roots; literally 'veins'.

Yasire Hostages.

Yatume Orphans.

Yaumo d-Sohde Martyrs Day.

Yüzbaşı (Turkish) military rank, equal to 'captain'.

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1:

Contextualizing the Syriac Orthodox Church within Christianity

It is beyond the aim of this thesis to discuss the development of the distinct Christian communities after the division in the main Christian Church in the first centuries of the current era.[852] Nevertheless, in order to contextualize the present-day discourses of the Assyrian/Syriac elite historically, it is necessary to say something more about when and why they split, and how they relate to each other as institutional bodies. Their relationships have framed the space for formal interaction between the members of the different churches today. This discussion will also stand as an illustration of the dynamics in the relationships between the various Syriac churches historically, allowing me to contextualize this thesis which deals with contemporary discourses about today, the past and the future.

The Advent of Christianity

The region of Syro-Mesopotamia from where the Assyrians/Syriacs originate has been the centre stage of many struggles between major powers and a crossroad of migrations of peoples. Throughout the course of history, this region has been ruled by different people and empires, among them the Romans/Byzantines, Persians, Arabs, Mongols and the Turks. The consequence of the change in hegemonic power often also gradually brought a change in the religious affiliation of the masses – people felt strong pressure to choose for one of the religions of the ruling groups. The logical consequence of this is that religious affiliation became an important factor for the position of people in society. Religion did not remain an individual matter but played a role in people's collective life – as has been the case in all pre-modern societies.

At the advent of Christianity and during its propagation (until the eighth century), the area of the Middle East was dominated by two rival powers, the

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[852] See for a good overview of the early history of Christianity and more specifically the Miaphysites, Frend (1972).

Roman Empire[853] (which later became the East Roman or the Byzantine Empire) and the Persian Empire[854], until the beginning of the seventh century. Just as other powers which have dominated this region, Byzantium and Persia were multi-ethnic empires, enriched by a variety of cultures and languages. The majority of the people living in the border areas of these two empires in greater Syria and Mesopotamia (present-day Syria, Lebanon, South-East Turkey and Iraq) spoke a variety of Aramaic dialects. Even long before the creation of these two empires, Aramaic had functioned as the *lingua franca* in various regions of the Middle East. It continued to fulfill this role until well after the rise of Islam. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Greek also had become a central language, especially in urban and administrative settings. This relative linguistic homogeneity is what facilitated the spread of Christianity in Syria and Mesopotamia. The link of Christianity with both of the languages was strong from the beginning. Although the first texts pertaining to Christianity were written in Greek, both Jesus and his first disciples spoke an Aramaic dialect. This trend was reflected among the first Christian communities, which were composed of speakers of both languages. As a result, the religion spread rapidly in the first and early second century, first through Antioch and afterwards not only to the West but also to Edessa (*Urhoy*) and Nisibin from where its dissemination steadily increased. For a very long time, these two cities, on the border between the two empires, had been important cultural and political centers and acted as points of departure from which the new religion radiated throughout the Eastern Middle East.

Syriac as a Literary Language

A large number of the Aramaic-speaking people in the Roman Empire were among the first to convert to Christianity in the first centuries of the current era. Although the new Christian communities in various areas of the present-day Middle East were interconnected through peripatetic preachers and the new Christian literature, they had still specific cultural characteristics (Van Rompay 1997). Some of the ways in which this was expressed were the language, liturgy and church melodies. In the area of eastern Syria and Mesopotamia, Christianity was characterized by the use of the Aramaic language. Christianity, and later the Syriac Orthodox Church, became a central element on which they would base their identity. By the third century,

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[853] Hereafter, for the period after Constantine I shall refer to it as the Byzantine Empire.

[854] The first two centuries it was known as the Parthian Empire.

the spoken dialect of Aramaic in the greater region of Edessa had already developed into an established language, usually referred to as Syriac. This 'standardized' form of Aramaic produced an extensive literary tradition – a role which it has retained up to the present day. Syriac and its literary tradition became an important vehicle for the spread of Christianity, but it was also Christianity which gave the language the mass audience to become the focal point of a large literary tradition. One effect of the strong development of the Syriac language was that it became possible to channel and appropriate the strong influence of Greek culture into an endemic regional tradition. In this respect, it can be claimed that the creation of this literary language and its use for educational purposes helped to develop a Syriac intellectual elite (often monks and priests). Although they tended to be learned in Greek culture and literature as well, these elite members were the key to the spread of the Syriac language and literature. With the dissemination of the language, the conversion to Christianity continued to make progress in upper Mesopotamia and within the boundaries of the Persian Empire.

Christianity as State Religion and the First Schisms

Despite persecution, notably under the rulers Decius (AD 249-51) and Diocletian (AD 303-11), Christianity was able to develop into a solid institutional structure under Constantine (d. 337) (Cameron 1993a: 10-11). His conversion to Christianity eventually led to the establishment of Christianity as the *State Religion* in the Roman Empire in 380. In his religious politics, he made great efforts to achieve unity in his heterogeneous empire.

As the struggles in the empire were about the 'True Creed', Constantine felt obliged to intervene in the religious affairs of the empire in order to achieve uniformity of Creed; a trend which eventually would result in various bitter inner-Christian conflicts and splits. In addition, an already existing church hierarchy was sanctioned at the Council of Nicea in 325.

Almost a hundred years later (410, Council of Mar Isaac), the first lasting schism from the mother church occurred among the Christians in Persia, who proclaimed their independence from the Patriarch of Antioch and the Emperor in Constantinople (Winkler and Baum 2000: 24). The reason for this schism was not dogmatic but political; the wars between Byzantium and Persia. What prompted the church hierarchy to take such a step was its desire to mark an independent position in relation to the Byzantine Church in order to win greater acceptance from the Persian rulers.

Thereafter, it was fully integrated into the Persian Empire. It was given the name *The Church of Persia* or *The Church of the East*. The church has also been known under the name *East Syrian Church*, in juxtaposition to the *West Syrian Church* in Western Syria and in the Byzantine Empire; today it officially bears the name *Assyrian Church of the East*.

In the fifth century, the first priority was to resolve the internal Christian debate within the Byzantine Empire on how Christ's Divinity relates to His Incarnation as a human being.[855] Theologically, the Ecumenical Synods of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) were instrumental in defining the three main creeds[856] which became the core of the three major Christian Movements and, eventually, the various Christian churches of the Near East and the Mediterranean. At the Synod of Ephesus, the ideas of Nestorius (Patriarch of Constantinople) regarding his Christology and the Virgin Mary were declared heretical. After the condemnation of Nestorius, many of his followers migrated to Persia and gradually gained some ascendancy in the Church in Persia. The Church of the East, which was already independent, chose to adopt a Dyophysite Christology, related to Nestorius' position,[857] but in fact based rather on Theodore of Mopsuestia.[858]

After the Council of Chalcedon (451), it was another half century before the Creed became the undisputed dogma of the Byzantine State Church. From 518 onwards, Emperor Justin I and his successor Justinian (I) fully

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[855] See further Meyendorff (1989), Grillmeier and Hainthaler (1979-2006).

[856] These Creeds have been classified as follows:

- *Dyophysite Creed*: Christ has two natures which should be distinguished, but never separated (Teule 2008: 41). This Creed was not accepted at the Council of Ephesus in 431. The Assyrian Church of the East is follower of this Creed. Read further about this creed in Teule (2008: 40-48).
- *Miaphysite Creed*: Christ has one nature out of two natures ('one (*mia*) nature of the Word of God Incarnate'). The Council of Chalcedon in 451 did not recognize this Creed. The Syriac Orthodox, Armenians and Copts are followers of this Creed.
- *Chalcedonian compromise Creed*: Christ is one in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation. This Creed became the Creed of the Roman Empire as an instrument to unify its Christian citizens. In the era which followed, both friendly negotiations and persecutions failed to attain an agreement between the representatives of the different opinions and it became impossible to realize the ideal of one Creed in the empire.

[857] This is why the Assyrian Church of the East has also been known by the erroneous name *Nestorian Church*, after Nestorius.

[858] In 484, at the Synod of Beth Lapat this was officially adopted and at the Synod of Selukia-Ktesiphon (486) confirmed (see further Winkler and Baum 2000: 31-34).

committed the empire to Chalcedon. The opponents of Chalcedon were perceived as dissenters, heretics and a threat to the stability of their empire. The church hierarchy and the monastic communities were therefore subjected to waves of systematic persecution.[859] In response to the oppression, the monastic clergy of the Syriac Christians played a leading role in mobilizing opposition against the Byzantine church structure. One side-effect of the oppression was the adoption of a more distanced attitude towards the Empire on the part of the Miaphysites. Nevertheless, believing their Creed to be the right one, they continued to hope that the Emperor would one day recognize this once again, achieving the apotheosis of one Empire, one Emperor and one Church. In daily life, the church hierarchy and monastic orders sought to escape the influence of the Emperor, mostly in Egypt and in rural monasteries. After the persecution had destroyed the original Miaphysite hierarchy (which had been part of the State Church), Jacob Baradaeus (Bishop of Edessa, ca. 500–578) played a fundamental role in the founding of a new independent, stable organizational structure for the Syriac Miaphysites.[860] The concentration of this new structure in rural monasteries explains the reason why the Miaphysites also became geographically marginalized.[861]This marked an important turning point in the consecration of laymen as archbishops; from then onwards, almost all archbishops were selected from monastic circles. This practice had already begun in the Christian Church in the third century but only became a common practice for the Miaphysites from about the sixth century. Jacob travelled all over the empire, most notably in Syria and northern Mesopotamia, consecrating more than thirty bishops, many more priests and

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[859] Note that the persecution was regionalized. For example, there was no persecution in Egypt before 536. Persecuted Miaphysite individuals became the martyrs and heroes of the 'True Religion' in the historiography of the sixth century, and they became the foundation of a tradition which evolved into a new formal hierarchy in the Christian church in the second part of the sixth century (see further Van Ginkel 1999).

[860] For further reading see Van Rompay (1997).

[861] The congregations were connected through priests and deacons (as had also been the case in the State church). They were more tightly interrelated through the building of structural networks which were presided over by bishops. The Archbishop, a bishop of a big city, had both religious and political rule over the smaller villages in the area. The congregations of the West Syriac Christians in the Persian Empire also established their own church organization with its own *Maferyono*, who held a formal position below the Syriac (Orthodox) Patriarch. However, in Persia he functioned as the supreme leader for the West Syriac Christians. *Maferyono* is derived from the term *firee* (fruits). Hence, a *maferyono* is a person who enables fruit to grow. In practical terms, it meant that he was allowed to consecrate clergy. The round, black head cover worn by the priests takes its name *firo* from this.

two Patriarchs.[862] Historically, Jacob left his mark on the name of the Syriac Miaphysites, who have been called *Jacobites*, usually by outsiders.[863] The foundation of this new hierarchy introduced a more organized life to its Syriac and Greek-speaking members.[864]

Among Christians in Syria and Mesopotamia, there were also groups which accepted the Creed as defined at the Council of Chalcedon. Those who remained dogmatically loyal to the Byzantine Church were known as Melkites.[865] From the seventh and eighth century, they were re-organized into their own church, which became increasingly more independent, but continued to maintain its close association with the Byzantine Church. Today they are predominantly Arabic or Greek speaking. Another group retained a seventh century compromise formula, from which the Byzantine Church later withdrew. This group eventually became concentrated in Lebanon around the monastic circles of Maron and became known as Maronites. They evolved into an official church in the eighth century and became a Uniate church with the Roman Catholic Church (acknowledging papal supremacy but retaining its own hierarchy and liturgy) at the time of the Crusades (Abouzayd 1999: 305).

Retrospectively, it is possible to see that the divisions in the church were also heavy influenced by non-theological struggles: political (mainly between Byzantium and Persia), ethnic, social, and personal matters between the clergy (Van Rompay 1997).[866] Syriac-speaking Christians gradually began to express their own traditional cultural identity with their own Christian literature. From the late sixth or the beginning of the seventh century, they loosened their ties to the Byzantine Empire and its ideology. Hence, a form

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862 Although these two patriarchs bore the title 'Patriarch of Antioch', they could not have their see in Antioch. They were forced – as have been the Patriarchs after them – to move around between different places and monasteries.

863 The term *Jacobites* is commonly perceived as a heretical name by the Syriac Orthodox Church, because it ascribes the foundation of this Church to Bishop Jacob Baradaeus only, although it is believed that the church had already existed before him. Jacob Baradaeus was only responsible for ordaining many clergymen for his church which was persecuted by the Byzantines for its anti-Chalcedonian Theological stand in the sixth century.

864 See further Honigman (1951), Van Ginkel (1995).

865 The name 'Melkites' (*Malkoye* in Syriac) means 'followers of the King.' They were (and are) to be found in Greater Syria, Palestine and Egypt. They are now locally known as 'Rum Orthodox', the name 'Melkites' being used chiefly by the Greek Catholic Church.

866 For a warning against the over-interpretation of these non-religious elements, see further Jones (1959: 280-298), Van Ginkel (1995: 103-217), Iricinschi and Zellentin (eds. 2008) and Ter Haar Romeny et al. (2009).

of Christianity was established among them characterized by a dominant element of Syriac, instead of Greek. Eventually this assisted in the evolution of a vigorous Syriac literary culture.

At this point, a few words should be said about the Syriac church in India. According to some, from the first century of the current era, but definitely since the fourth century, there has also been Syriac Christianity in India (see further Chapter 10). Tradition traces this back to the Apostle Thomas who would have made the first converts among the people in South India. Thereafter, several small groups of Christians from Persia, Syria and Mesopotamia travelled to India which injected new impulses into the Syriac Christian communities there.

Syriac Christianity and Orthodoxy

Syriac Christianity has often been presented by its hierarchy as a more genuine and authentic tradition, in which the *Hellenic* (here 'pagan') influences are fewest (Cameron 1993a: 183). It is important to draw attention to the fact that the conversion to Christianity in the Byzantine Empire led to a strong break with what converts saw as their ancestral culture (Cameron 1993a: 80). This often led to an idealization of Syriac Christianity and Syriac spirituality, which was favourably contrasted with mainstream 'Greek culture' (Cameron 1993b: 183). The Greek term *Orthodox* (the 'true creed', *Trisat Shubho* in Syriac) has been used in the title of the church to express this 'genuine' aspect of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch. It was a way of challenging the genuineness of the other Christian Churches at the time. Believing themselves to be the true Christians, the Miaphysites continued to refer to themselves as 'the Orthodox', and used such pejoratives as heretics or 'Nestorians' for the Chalcedonians and the East Syriacs. Likewise, other Churches applied the term *Orthodox* to their institution. John of Ephesus (ca. 508-ca. 588) already used to refer to his own group as the 'Orthodox', while all the others were generally disparaged as heretics or were referred to by the name of the person who had had a dominant influence in that specific church (as in the case of Nestorius and Jacob). The earliest attestation so far of the phrase Syriac Orthodox, used by a member to designate his own community, can be found in an unpublished hagiography – on Theodota of Amid (d. 698) – in a Syriac manuscript from the early eighth century by Symeon of Samosata, at the dictation of Father Joseph, Theodota's

disciple.[867] Archival material from the early twentieth century shows that there was no uniformity in the use of the term *Orthodox* in the formal title of the Syriac Orthodox Church until at least the 1930s.[868] In an unpublished survey of some works in his archive, George Kiraz ascribes the use of *Orthodox* in a formalized manner to the beginning of the twentieth century, when church representatives began to use formal letterheads.[869] Before that, as shown in the Patriarchal Archive in the Zafaran Monastery, varieties of

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[867] The use of 'Syriac Orthodox' in the early eighth century might indicate that too many churches were already referring to themselves as *Orthodox*. Consequently, Father Joseph (who dictated the text) found the need to use *Syriac* in combination with *Orthodox*. I defer a more elabourate study to historians.

There is also a *Garshuni* translation by Brother Bishara of the Zafaran Monastery which dates from the eighteenth century. A publication of the translation of the Garshuni by Jack Tannous is on its way. Interestingly, whereas in the initial text in Syriac the author Symeon of Samosata in the same paragraph used first the reference *Syriac Orthodox* (*Suryoye Orthodox*) and the second time only *Syriacs* (*Suryoye*), in the Garshuni translation of the Syriac by Jack Tannous, Brother Bishara twice uses the phrase *Syriac Orthodox*:

> 'Then Mar Theodota went out to go to the region of the fortresses (al-ḥuṣūn) and passed by Bīlū and Pīlīn and the rest of the districts that are there. So he said to his disciple, 'Joseph, my Son, let us go and visit those **Syrian Orthodox** [my emphasis] who are in flight because of neediness and the great number of the Arabs. We will pray for them and encourage them in the hope of faith, for I know that the Romans are driving them out so they will change their faith.' … The two of them rose up and went along and they arrived at the little lake called 'Hūrē.' He found the **Syrian Orthodox** [my emphasis] gathered, all of them, at the fortresses, for they had heard about the Arabs seeking to enter into that region. They therefore wanted to flee and enter into the islands of that lake and to the fortresses and they were in difficult miseries.'

I would like to thank Jack Tannous for providing me with this translation before its publication.

The fact that Bishara translated *Suryoye* in his eighteenth-century manuscript with *Suryoye Orthodox* might indicate that by then the term *Suryoye* had come to be used synonymously with *Suryoye Orthodox*.

It draws attention to the fact that the Greek term *Orthodox* is not translated by the Syriac *Trisat Shubho*. Besides the fact that this exhibits the strong influence of the Greek language, it might also be an indication that no Syriac terminology yet existed to denote the idea of *Orthodoxy* at that time. A follow-up question is: When did the Syriac phrase *Trisat shubho* begin to be used?

[868] Examples of the use of *Orthodox* are to be found back in 1) 'The Constitution of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate' (*Al Hikma*, 1913, No. 10, pp. 143); 2) *Al-Hikma* 1927, issued by St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Convent in Jerusalem; 3) in the 1928 constitution of the Beirut-based *Knushto d-Kawkbo* (Star Association); and 4) in Dolabani (1929). Another example showing that until at least 1930 there is still no uniform usage of *Orthodox* in the name of the Syriac Orthodox Church is an encyclical issued by Patriarch Elias III in 1930 which does not mention *Orthodox*.

[869] Private correspondence with George Kiraz, 2009.

phraseology were used by the Patriarchs in their correspondence. The first to have a printed letterhead imitating the Western tradition was Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum when he was a bishop in Syria. It might be argued that *Orthodoxy* was introduced in the past, but by the twentieth century it could also be communicated through the new discursive means available and with partly new purposes.

In a church document with legal status from 1914 in the Ottoman Empire, it was sometimes used as an adjective and sometimes as a substantive part of the name of the church.[870] Although today the term *Orthodox* has assumed a formal position in the title of the Church, it has less of a functional role. Whereas once the churches, as discussed above, competed for authenticity, today they have reached an agreement that the divisions were about other matters (see, for example, the citation of Patriarch Zakka I Iwas, later in this text).

The Uniate Churches

In continuing the story of the mosaic of Syriac Churches, it is important to mention the several churches which have united with the Roman Catholic Church since about the sixteenth century:[871] 1) Members of the Church of the East united with Rome in 1553, with the consecration of the first Chaldean Patriarch (Patriarch Shim'un VIII 'of the Chaldeans'), ordained by the Pope. 2) Under the influence of the Franciscans, the Syriac Orthodox in

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[870] See, for example, the regulations of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate to the Ottoman State in the article *Süryani Kadim Ortodoks Kilisesi Patrikhane Nizamnamesi* by the sociologist Mehmet Simsek (Ancient Syriac Patriarchate regulations, September 2005, No. 6: 725-742). In 1914, a committee of the Syriac Orthodox Church was requested by the Ottoman State to set up a document regulating what its formal status in the Empire had been in 1913. Although it was already a *millet*, this formal document did not exist until 1914. This 'regulation document' (*Nizamname*) was compiled by a representative committee consisting of laymen and clergy and signed on 18 March 1914. On 24 June 1914, it was published in the Patriarchal magazine (No. 21: 36). The original document is to be found in the archive of the Forty Martyrs Church in Mardin. It is possible to draw the conclusion that in these regulations the term *Orthodox* was used in two principal but different ways: as the name in the title of the church by the members of this church committee *and* as an adjective. In the text of the regulations, the term *Orthodox* is used as an adjective. Hence, as an adjective *Orthodox* is here used in relation to those Syriacs who are *not* Orthodox; for example, in Article 1, 'Orthodox Syriac Ancient Patriarchate' (*Ortodoks Süryani Kadim Patrikliği*). But, in other articles it is also possible to find *Orthodox* in the title of the Church, such as in Article 15, which states: 'The Syriac Orthodox Churches in India' (*Hindistan'daki Süryani Ortodoks Kiliseleri*).

[871] See further about the Uniate churches, Brock (2004: 44-65), Murre-van den Berg (2007: 249-268), Galadza (2007: 291-318). See for the history of the different Catholic churches in Turkey after the Second World War, Teule (2010: 35-52).

Aleppo accepted a Roman Catholic Bishop (Andreas Ahijan), consecrated him in 1656, and in 1662 he became the first Syriac Catholic Patriarch. They continued to use the West Syriac rite. 3) After the arrival of European missionaries in India, the East Syriac Church in India fragmented into at least eight different churches (Brock 1999: 468). 4) The Melkite Catholic Church was founded in 1724. Although more churches could be mentioned (such as Syriac Protestant Churches), there is no need to delve any farther into the matter in this study.

Changing Historical Relationships between the Syriac Churches

The diversity of Creeds used in the Church since the fifth century led to partially different collective identifications and group boundaries. Especially after Nestorius' ideas were declared heretical at the Council of Ephesus and the Church of the East in Persia became ever more influenced by Nestorius' ideas, the distance and enmity between the so-called Nestorians (East Syriacs) and Jacobites (West Syriacs) increased. From that period, two separate Syriac church communities continued their separate ways mainly in the current states Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran.[872] Historically, their relations after the division have been far from peaceful. Up to the eighth century, for example, the Syriac Orthodox seemed to have felt a greater affiliation with other Miaphysites,[873] such as the Armenians, than with the Dyophysite East Syriac Church (Witakowski 1987: 48). It is important to note that these relations were dominated almost completely by religious elites who set the path for hegemonic discourses among their communities.

Despite the schism, in later centuries this antagonism ameliorated and the interchange between the two traditions increased. This is especially visible between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries; the period of the so-called Syriac Renaissance.[874] The Syriac churches have always continued to share such aspects as a common liturgical language, use of the Eastern liturgy, historical sources, mystic literature, apocalyptic texts and other genres, and the veneration of the same saints. New processes show that Syriac churches which united with Rome a few centuries ago and had

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[872] See further for the relationship between these two churches after the Islamic conquest, Hage (1966: 81-83), Kawerau (1955: 70-72), Murre-van den Berg (2007).

[873] Witakowski refers to them as *Monophysites* in his publication of 1987.

[874] The Mongol invasions (the second invasion by Timur Lenk was the most severe) were the main reason for the end of this period, leading to more isolated communities. See further about the Syriac Renaissance, Teule (2009).

consequently latinized their liturgy (at least partly), have begun to reverse that process by re-introducing their former Syriac liturgy. This is happening among the Maronites[875] in Lebanon and the Melkites in America, who are working on recovering their Eastern heritage (Abouzayd 1999: 305, Melling 1999: 313). Especially among the West and the East Syriacs, besides Syriac as liturgical language, their mother tongues (different modern forms of Aramaic) continue to play a central role in their collective identity. This is different among the urbanized Syriac Christians especially in Iraq, who adopted Arabic as their mother tongue; sometimes as long ago as the eighth and ninth centuries.

Since the mid-twentieth century, the Syriac Churches have commenced dialogues about theological and ecclesiastical matters with other churches.[876] One example is the meeting at the Pro Oriente Foundation in 1971, in which the Chalcedonian and the non-Chalcedonian churches reached a new agreement on the Christology of Christ. In 1984, in a joint declaration issued by Pope John Paul II and the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, they declared that (O'Mahony 2006: 532):

> The schisms that arose in the fifth century in no way affect or touch the substance of their faith, since these arose only because of differences in terminology and culture and in the various formulae adopted by different theological schools to express the same matter.

In the 1990s, meetings between the Syriac Orthodox, the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean churches also developed greater affinity between these churches. For everyday life, this new attitude means that the members of the different churches are free to participate in the service of other churches. The church institutions allow space for developing closeness among its members. This was a process which the lay (and at informal basis also clerical) intellectuals had already begun around the end of the nineteenth century (see further Chapter 7).

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875 To stress the Syriac tradition of this church, the contemporary official name of the church is *Antiochian Syriac Maronite Church*.

876 The Syriac Orthodox Church became a member of the World Council of Churches in 1955. See further about the dialogues between the churches, Brock (2004).

Appendix 2:

The naming of the language *Surayt* and *Turoyo*

At present, especially in the diaspora, the majority of Assyrians/Syriacs refer to *Surayt* as *Suryoyo* (in everyday language) and as *Turoyo* (in linguistic and especially academic contexts). Traditionally, the term *Suryoyo* has been used to refer to classical Syriac. In the present-day, when Assyrians/Syriacs want to distinguish *Surayt* from classical Syriac, they refer to the latter with *Suryoyo kthobonoyo* ('written *Suryoyo'* – as traditionally the spoken language was not written). Since the mid-1980s, some individuals have attempted to develop a system for writing the spoken language *Surayt* in both Syriac[877] Aramaic script and Latin[878] characters.

In a recent study, Sina Tezel (2011) refers to this language on the cover of her book as *Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo* and in the book itself as *Ṭūrōyo*, because it has become the most commonly used term in academia. As she mentions, the increase in the use of the term *Turoyo* among the ordinary Assyrians/Syriacs can be explained by the fact that Western scholars refer to it as such. Many of these scholars are not even aware of the fact that what they have referred to as *Turoyo* was called *Surayt* by its speakers in *Tur 'Abdin*, the geography in which it had been traditionally spoken. How did this shift in reference take place? The linguist Aziz Tezel (private correspondence, 2011) thinks the term *Ṭūrōyo* was formed after the Arabic term Ṭōrānī. He observes that the term *Turoyo* is not found in any early dictionary of Syriac and that it is also missing from Prym and Socin's (1881) *Der Neu-Aramäische Dialekt des Tur 'Abdin*, who used a *Surayt*-speaking informant from *Midyad* (although they do mention the Arabic term *Ṭōrānī*). Furthermore, Eduard Sachau who made a journey through *Tur 'Abdin* and Mardin in 1879-1880 writes 'In Midyad they speak a dialect of modern Syriac, called *Ṭōrānī* (1883: 412, see for this reference also Ibid: 420, 429). If the term *Turoyo* had been used by the *Surayt*-speaking informants of these linguists it might have been expected to have

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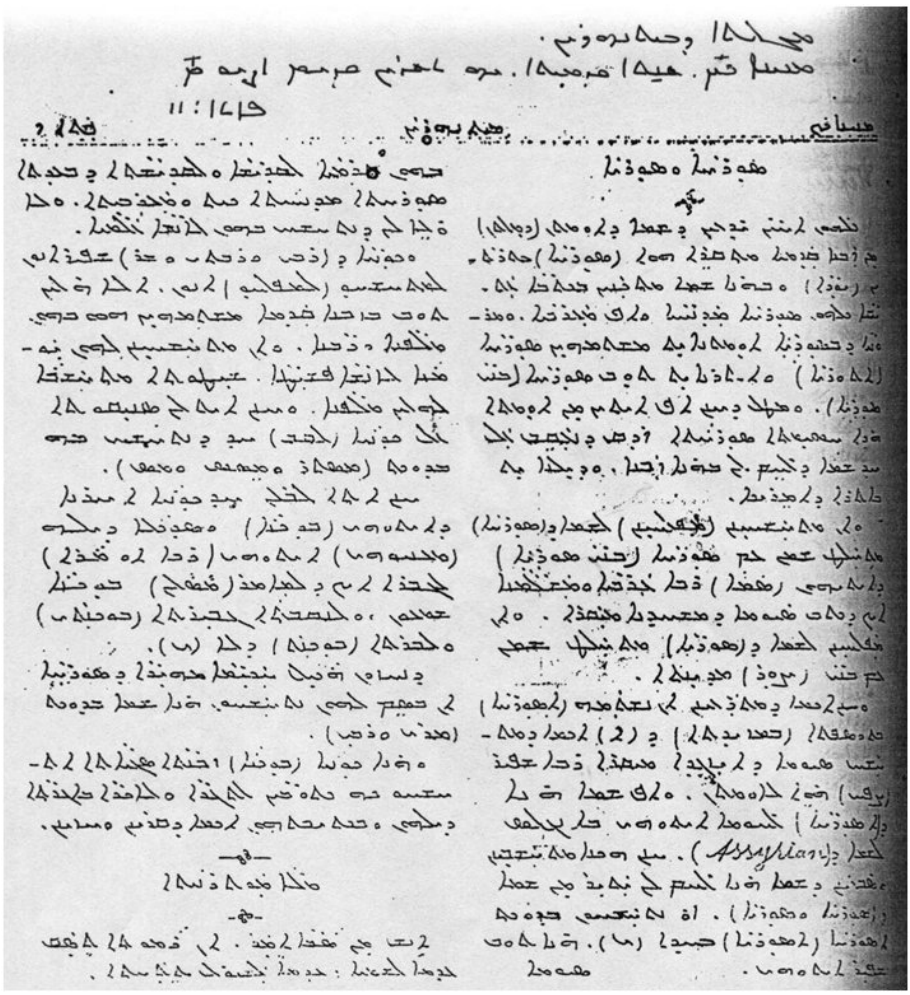
877 See for instance the *Little Prince* of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry which has been translated into *Surayt* by Kreis aramäischer Studierender Heidelberg (2005).

878 Most of the publications by Jan Beth Sawoce are written in *Surayt* with Latin characters. See also Diyarbakerli (2009).

been used by that time. Aziz Tezel's hypothesis is that during the twentieth century, *Surayt* speakers in Syria, Lebanon and some of the speakers in *Midyad* who were familiar with the term *Torani* and therefore used it, transposed the meaning of the Arabic term *Ṭōrānī* into *Ṭūrōyo*. Similarly, Assyrians/Syriacs in the *Gozarto* (Jezire) in Syria used to refer to Assyrians/Syriacs in *Tur ʿAbdin* or who had come from *Tur ʿAbdin* in Arabic as *Torani* (Arabic for *Turoyo,* '[someone] from the mountain') and to their language as *Torani* '[language] of the mountain'. And when they spoke in *Suryoyo*, they referred to the people as *Turoye* and to the language as *Turoyo*. The use of the last two designations can also be explained in terms of social and geographical boundaries and perceptions between and about the urban people on the one hand and agriculturalists on the other hand. Departing from this idea, it might even have been possible that those who did not speak *Surayt*, referred to it in Arabic as *Torani* and that those *Surayt* speakers who lived in Arabic-language dominated areas began to use the term *Turoyo* instead of the term *Surayt*. The upshot would have been that the term *Turoyo* began to be used in an Arabic-speaking dominated geography, therefore mainly outside *Tur ʿAbdin*. The reference to this language as *Ṭūrōyo* by linguists such as Ritter and Jastrow and their students therefore says something about the use of terminology specifically by their informants when describing the language.

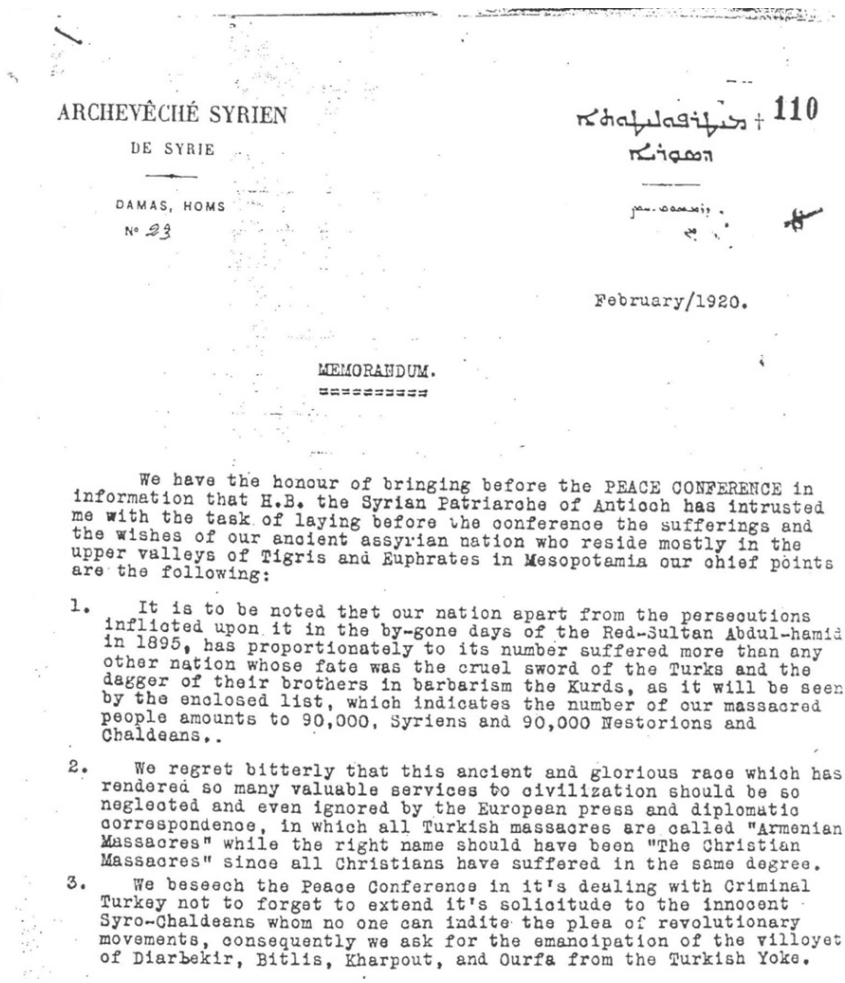
Appendix 3:

Naum Faik about the Use of the Name of His People in the American Context



Appendix 4:

Memorandum Presented by Archbishop Ephrem Barsaum at the Paris Peace Conference



ARCHEVÊCHÉ SYRIEN
DE SYRIE
DAMAS, HOMS
N° 23

110

February/1920.

MEMORANDUM.

We have the honour of bringing before the PEACE CONFERENCE in information that H.B. the Syrian Patriarche of Antioch has intrusted me with the task of laying before the conference the sufferings and the wishes of our ancient assyrian nation who reside mostly in the upper valleys of Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia our chief points are the following:

1. It is to be noted thet our nation apart from the persecutions inflicted upon it in the by-gone days of the Red-Sultan Abdul-hamid in 1895, has proportionately to its number suffered more than any other nation whose fate was the cruel sword of the Turks and the dagger of their brothers in barbarism the Kurds, as it will be seen by the enclosed list, which indicates the number of our massacred people amounts to 90,000, Syriens and 90,000 Nestorions and Chaldeans..

2. We regret bitterly that this ancient and glorious race which has rendered so many valuable services to civilization should be so neglected and even ignored by the European press and diplomatic correspondence, in which all Turkish massacres are called "Armenian Massacres" while the right name should have been "The Christian Massacres" since all Christians have suffered in the same degree.

3. We beseech the Peace Conference in it's dealing with Criminal Turkey not to forget to extend it's solicitude to the innocent Syro-Chaldeans whom no one can indite the plea of revolutionary movements, consequently we ask for the emancipation of the villoyet of Diarbekir, Bitlis, Kharpout, and Ourfa from the Turkish Yoke.

111

ARCHEVÊCHÉ SYRIEN

DE SYRIE

DAMAS, HOMS

N°

† ܡܝܛܪܦܘܠܝܛܐ ܕܣܘܪܝܐ

- 2 -

4. We protest against the projected establishment of a Kurdish authority, a so-called delegation is endeavouring to promote it's influence and renew the horrible scenes of the recent Kurdish barbarism.

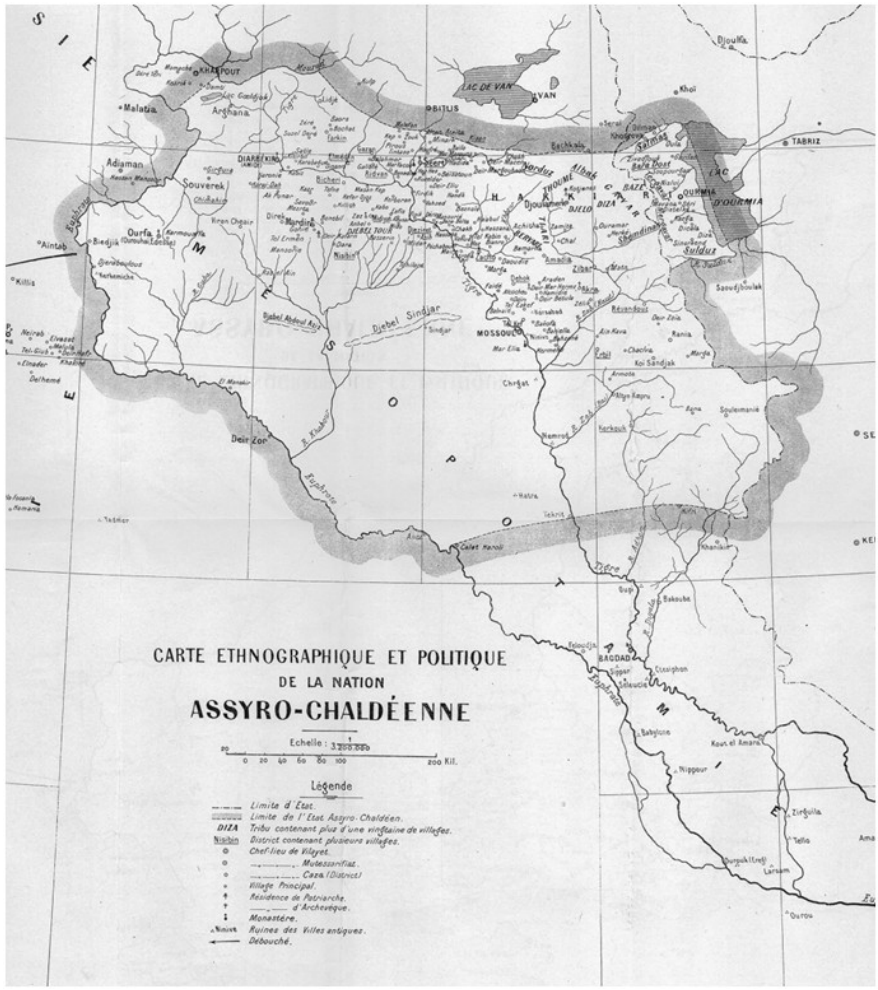
5. We ask for indemnities in compensation of our damages.

6. We ask for the assurance of our National and Religious future.

We count on the justice of the Peace Conference to listen to our Nation which sighs for a tolerable future in which she can play her ancient role of Assyio-Chaldean civilization.

† Severus A. Barsaum
Archevêque de Syrie.
Délégué du Patriarche Sa.

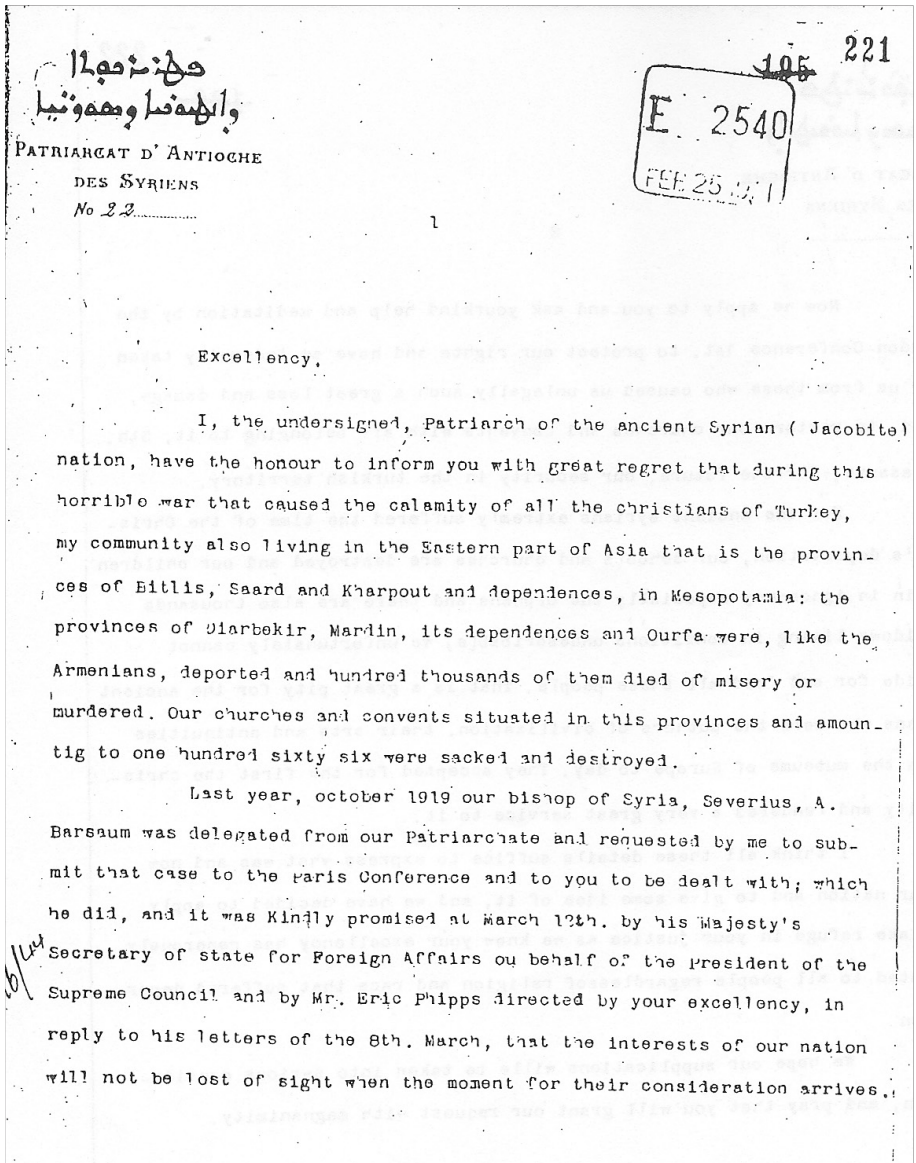
Appendix 5: Assyro-Chaldean Map (1919)



Assyro-Chaldean Map: Requested geography for autonomy by Archbishop Ephrem Barsaum at the Paris Peace Conference (1919).

Appendix 6:

The Letter of Patriarch Ignatius Elias III to the British Foreign Minister Lord Curzon



ܦܛܪܝܪܟܘܬܐ
ܕܐܢܛܝܘܟܝܐ ܕܣܘܪܝܝܐ

PATRIARCAT D' ANTIOCHE
DES SYRIENS
No 22

~~195~~ 221

E 2540
FEB 25 1921

1

Excellency,

I, the undersigned, Patriarch of the ancient Syrian (Jacobite) nation, have the honour to inform you with great regret that during this horrible war that caused the calamity of all the christians of Turkey, my community also living in the Eastern part of Asia that is the provinces of Bitlis, Saard and Kharpout and dependences, in Mesopotamia: the provinces of Diarbekir, Mardin, its dependences and Ourfa were, like the Armenians, deported and hundred thousands of them died of misery or murdered. Our churches and convents situated in this provinces and amountig to one hundred sixty six were sacked and destroyed.

Last year, october 1919 our bishop of Syria, Severius, A. Barsaum was delegated from our Patriarchate and requested by me to submit that case to the Paris Conference and to you to be dealt with; which he did, and it was Kindly promised at March 12th. by his Majesty's Secretary of state for Foreign Affairs ou behalf of the President of the Supreme Council and by Mr. Eric Phipps directed by your excellency, in reply to his letters of the 8th. March, that the interests of our nation will not be lost of sight when the moment for their consideration arrives.

222

~~196~~

PATRIARCAT D' ANTIOCHE
DES SYRIENS
No

2

Now we apply to you and ask yourkind help and meditation by the London Conferenoe 1st. to protect our rights and have an indemnity taken for us from those who caused us unlegally such a great loss and damage, 2ond. to restore our churches and convents with all belonging to it, 3th. to assure, for the future, our security in the turkish territory.

For the ancient syrians extremly suffered the time of the Christian's deportation, our schools and churches are destroyed and our children remain in ignoranoy especially the orphans and there are also thousands of widows living in conditions undescribable, we unfortunately cannot provide for and feed all these people. That is a great pity for the ancient syrians who were the authors of civilization, their arts and antiquities adorn the museums of Europe to day. They accepted for the first the christianity and rendered a very great service to it.

I think all these details suffice to express what was and now is our nation and to give some idea of it, and we have decided to apply and take refuge in your justice as we know your excellency has generously assisted to all people regardlessof religion and race that suffered deportation.

We hope our supplications wille be taken into serious consideration, and pray that you will grant our request with magnanimity.

223

1921

PATRIARCAT D' ANTIOCHE
DES SYRIENS
No 3

Thanking you in anticipation,

Constantinople 16th. February 1921

I beg to remain

Yours very truly

Ignatius Elias III

Ancient Syrian Patriarch of Antioch

His Excellency

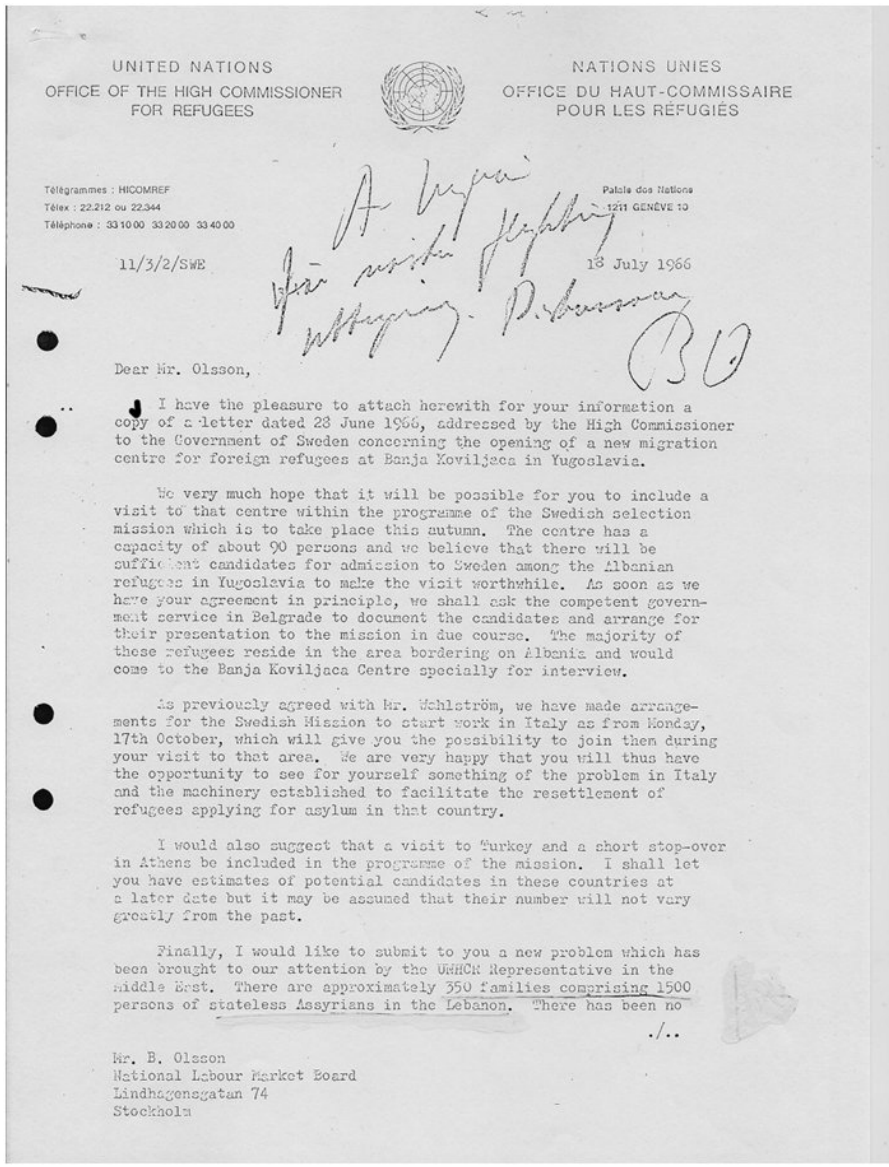
Earl Curzon of Kedleston

British Foreign Minister

etc.

Appendix 7:

Communication between UNHCR Officials and the Swedish Authorities about the Settlement of Assyrians from Lebanon in Sweden



UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES

NATIONS UNIES
OFFICE DU HAUT-COMMISSAIRE
POUR LES RÉFUGIÉS

Télégrammes : HICOMREF
Télex : 22.212 ou 22.344
Téléphone : 33 10 00 33 20 00 33 40 00

Palais des Nations
1211 GENÈVE 10

11/3/2/SWE

18 July 1966

Dear Mr. Olsson,

I have the pleasure to attach herewith for your information a copy of a letter dated 23 June 1966, addressed by the High Commissioner to the Government of Sweden concerning the opening of a new migration centre for foreign refugees at Banja Koviljaca in Yugoslavia.

We very much hope that it will be possible for you to include a visit to that centre within the programme of the Swedish selection mission which is to take place this autumn. The centre has a capacity of about 90 persons and we believe that there will be sufficient candidates for admission to Sweden among the Albanian refugees in Yugoslavia to make the visit worthwhile. As soon as we have your agreement in principle, we shall ask the competent government service in Belgrade to document the candidates and arrange for their presentation to the mission in due course. The majority of these refugees reside in the area bordering on Albania and would come to the Banja Koviljaca Centre specially for interview.

As previously agreed with Mr. Wahlström, we have made arrangements for the Swedish Mission to start work in Italy as from Monday, 17th October, which will give you the possibility to join them during your visit to that area. We are very happy that you will thus have the opportunity to see for yourself something of the problem in Italy and the machinery established to facilitate the resettlement of refugees applying for asylum in that country.

I would also suggest that a visit to Turkey and a short stop-over in Athens be included in the programme of the mission. I shall let you have estimates of potential candidates in these countries at a later date but it may be assumed that their number will not vary greatly from the past.

Finally, I would like to submit to you a new problem which has been brought to our attention by the UNHCR Representative in the Middle East. There are approximately 350 families comprising 1500 persons of stateless Assyrians in the Lebanon. There has been no

./..

Mr. B. Olsson
National Labour Market Board
Lindhagensgatan 74
Stockholm

desire for migration amongst this group until recently, nor had such a solution been encouraged by the World Council of Churches and ourselves. However, it appears that increasing labour restrictions upon aliens now make it extremely difficult for the young men in the community to find work. This has produced a spontaneous desire for emigration and some 48 cases of 125 persons would like to emigrate to Sweden. I attach herewith for your background information some notes on this group prepared by the World Council of Churches. Dossiers of these refugees will be sent to you under separate cover. While we realise that the transplantation of this group of refugees may present some special settlement problems, we note that those of them who have already emigrated to the United States are reported to have adapted themselves well. We would, therefore, greatly appreciate favourable consideration being given to the admission of some of these refugees to Sweden.

It is also probable that a few additional candidates of other nationalities would ask to be presented to the Swedish mission if it were to visit Beirut. We have already submitted to you the dossiers of two individual cases Emirzian and Novak who have been found potentially suitable by Mr. Skogh. There may also be a few Armenian candidates who have applied for admission to the United States but have a very limited chance of admission to that country since they suffer from tuberculosis.

I hope the above information will enable you to take a decision regarding the scope of your autumn programme and shall be glad to let you have any further data you may require.

Yours sincerely,

S. J. Sims
Acting Chief of the
Resettlement Section

Note submitted by the World Council of Churches on a Group of Assyrian Refugees in the Lebanon

The refugees of Assyrian origin in the Lebanon are part of a large group who left their homelands after the first world war. Some 5000 made their way to Lebanon, but many have since emigrated elsewhere or become assimilated, and there are at the present time 1500 (350 families) who are under the mandate of the UNHCR.

They have remained apart from the local population, living together in their own area and are said to be of somewhat difficult character. However, those who have emigrated to the USA have adapted themselves well, and some have become successful and respected. Being stateless, they cannot obtain working permits in Lebanon and are mainly employed as casual labour in the building trade, where it is reported they are good workers. As a result of increasing pressure against the employment of non-Lebanese they are finding it extremely difficult to get work, and there has developed a spontaneous desire especially among the young men to emigrate.

48 cases (123 persons) are at present registered for emigration. They are mainly young men, of primary-school level of education and without special skills, though a certain number have received vocational training in such fields as electricity, general mechanics and carpentry. The candidates are basically healthy, capable of hard work, and respond to encouragement. Individual dossiers are in process of preparation* by World Council of Churches.

14/7/66

* available by now

UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES

NATIONS UNIES
OFFICE DU HAUT-COMMISSAIRE
POUR LES RÉFUGIÉS

Télégrammes : HICOMREF
Télex : 22.212 ou 22.344
Téléphone : 33 10 00 33 20 00 33 40 00

Palais des Nations
1211 GENÈVE 10

4 August 1966

Dear Mr. Wahlström,

I should like to refer to my letter dated 18 July 1966 to Mr. Olsson concerning the programme of the next Selection Mission, Copy of that letter was sent to you.

I have in the meantime received additional information from the UNHCR Representative in the Middle East which may be useful to you in deciding whether the Lebanon is to be included in the itinerary of the mission.

I am now informed that in addition to some 60 cases comprising 150 persons amongst the Assyrian community who are likely to apply for resettlement in Sweden, there might be some 6 - 8 applications relating to 20 - 25 persons from other refugee groups, most of which would be physically or socially handicapped. A visit to Beirut would therefore appear worthwhile, irrespective of the decision to be taken concerning the possible admission of Assyrians to Sweden. It might in fact provide you with an opportunity to examine this problem on the spot while interviewing the other candidates.

I shall look forward to your early news concerning the programme to be arranged for the Selection Mission.

Yours sincerely,

S.J. Sims
Acting Chief of the
Resettlement Section.

Mr. Ragnar Wahlström
National Labour Market Board
Lindhagensgatan 74
Stockholm

Appendix 8:

Encyclical (November 29, 1981)[879]



IN THE NAME OF THE ETERNAL, DIVINE AND ALMIGHTY BEING

IGNATIUS ZAKKA I IWAS PATRIARCH OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST, SUPREME HEAD OF THE UNIVERSAL SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



We extend our apostolic benediction, best wishes and greetings to our venerable brothers, His Beatitude Mor Baselius Paulos II, Catholicos of the East, and Their Eminencies the Metropolitans; to our spiritual children: the honorable archdiocesan vicars, chor-episcopii, monks, priests and deacons; and to all our esteemed Syrian Orthodox people. May the divine providence of the Lord be bestowed upon them through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and all the martyrs and saints. Amen.

After inquiring about your well being... It is our pleasure to inform you that we held our Syrian Orthodox Holy Synod of Antioch between the

[879] Source: Syriac Orthodox Resources:
http://sor.cua.edu/Personage/PZakka1/19811129Name.html

third and fifteenth day of Second Tishrin (November) 1981 at the headquarters of our Apostolic See in Damascus, Syria, where we placed the benefit of our Church and its advancement as our main concern, regardless of the efforts which it may require or the sacrifices which may have to be endured to achieve this, following the footsteps of our blessed predecessors. In order for the outcome of the Synod to be at the level of our spiritual aspiration, and in order for the Holy Synod to become a milestone in the modern history of our Church, each of its members took on his behalf his historical duties. Starting with our pastoral responsibilities, the salvation of souls, the maintenance of the true Orthodox faith and tradition, the revival of our Holy Syriac language, and the resurrection of our glorious Syrian Antiochean tradition, we studied a condensed agenda which included various matters: The budget of the Patriarchate, its internal organization, its endowments and institutions, and all what relates to its affairs. We looked into the case of St. Ephrem's Seminary in Atshane, Lebanon, and the importance of advancing it spiritually and educationally in order to bring it to a good academic level; for this, we appointed a bishopric committee under our chairmanship. We also studied the affairs of our Church in India and its relation to our Apostolic See of Antioch in the presence of His Beatitude, the Catholicos, and our bishops in India during a General Synod which we held in the headquarters of our Apostolic See from the seventeenth day of Second Tishrin (November) till the twenty seventh of the same month, during which we wrote a constitution for our Church in India, stating its relation with our Apostolic See. Further, we discussed the relation of our Church with sister Orthodox Churches and other Churches and communities, as well as the role of our Church in the ecumenical movement. The Synod then looked into the issue of the date of Easter and decided to keep it according to the tradition of our Church, raising no objections against changing it once all the Churches in the Middle East agree on a specific Sunday in the month of Nisan (April). The Synod then made the final touches to the Constitution of our Holy Church and the Canons of Personal Affairs, taking into consideration the requirements of the modern age. It also examined the affairs of the archdioceses in general, pointing out the role of the priest in the Church and the importance of the individual; in this respect, it declared that the Sunday of Priests of every year is to be dedicated for supplications for priests. It also declared the Sunday which follows the Feast of the Cross, the anniversary of our

installation, to be the Patriarchal Day. The Holy Synod insisted on the importance of preparing a new generation filled with faith, as well as spiritual, humanitarian and patriotic values, where individuals learn religion at religious centers and Sunday schools which are associated with the leadership of each archdiocese. The Synod also found it appropriated to reexamine the liturgical texts and to publish them; for this purpose, it appointed a special committee. Here, we take the opportunity to order our children, the priests, to perform the Church rites in dignity, to observe fasting and perform prayers at the designated times according to the traditions of the Church, and to visit the faithful continuously creating a spiritual atmosphere in each family during such visits. We also urge our children, the deacons, to master the rites, practicing them with faith, piety and obedience, and to be committed to serving the house of God according to their spiritual mission.

The Holy Synod paid special attention to the issue of the true name of our Church. The Synod is of the following opinion: it is well established that from the very dawn of Christianity, and since St. Peter, Head of the Apostles, established its See in Antioch-Syria until this day, our Church is known as **the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch** (*`idto suryoyto orthodoxoyto dantiokh*), and its language is known as the **Syriac language**; (*leshono suryoyo*), and its people by the **Syrian people** *(`amo suryoyo*). By this name of noble origin, which stems from our ancient history, our Apostolic faith, and our proud civilization, we are known as a Church, our language is known, and we are known as people [*the original reads*: تُعرف كنيسةً ولغة وشعباً] amongst all religious, educational and social circles, locally and internationally. We do not accept any other name.

What appeared and appears contrary to this name is not only alien and foreign, but also a distortion, falsification and forgery of the historical truth. We, in our Apostolic power, declare our distress and disapproval to the new names which have appeared lately and which have been attached to our Church and our people such as 'Assyrian', 'Aramaean' and the like. These names aim at distracting the existence of our Church, dividing its children, destroying the landmarks of its glories, and annihilating its civilization and its spiritual and humanitarian traditions. But Christ is in its midst and she is unshakable; its shepherds are vigilant and awake, protecting its walls, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Therefore, we warn all the faithful of our Church, especially priests and deacons, regardless of their hierarchical offices, against adopting these

ideologies which are in opposition to the Holy Church and its faith, and which are disgraceful to its reputation. We notify you that our Holy Synod granted power to the heads of archdioceses to take the appropriate ecclesiastical actions to deter those who entice so that they return to the path of truth, especially in archdioceses in which these ideologies have started to appear and have become dreadful, turning into grave danger for the Church.

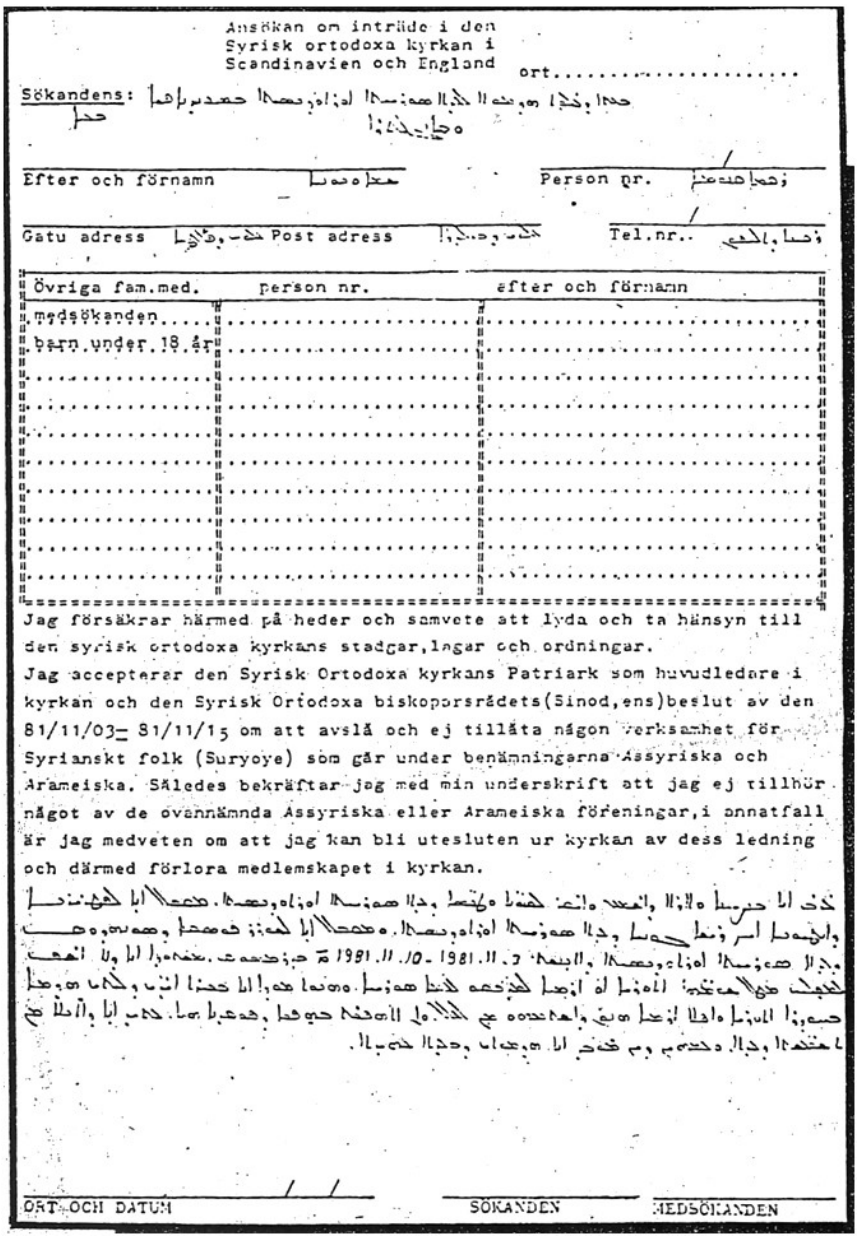
Our dear spiritual children: In the endeavor to maintain the unity of our Church, vigilantly caring for our children, and out of our fatherly love to you, we appeal to you all, clergy and people, to care of your spiritual and social responsibilities, and to appreciate the sacrifices which your blessed forefathers endured to keep the jewels of faith which were entrusted unto us, and to maintain the sacred things which our Church prides itself with. We also appeal to you to distinguish the voices of the true shepherds and to stay away from the wolves which aims at ravaging you, you the blessed flock of Christ. And we advice, for the second time, those who entice and have gone astray from the Church to return to its bosom and to live side by side with their brothers in love and trust as members of one Syrian [Orthodox; *the original reads: suryaaniyya* أسرة سريانية] family.

And the Grace of the Lord be with you all the time. Amen.

Issued from our Patriarchal Residence in Damascus, Syria,
on the 29th day of Second Tishrin (November) 1981, the second year of our Patriarchate.
Translated from the original published in the Patriarchal Journal (1981)

Appendix 9:

Registration Form of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Scandinavia and the UK (1981)



Ansökan om inträde i den
Syrisk ortodoxa kyrkan i
Scandinavien och England

ort.....

Sökandens:

Efter och förnamn — Person nr.

Gatu adress — Post adress — Tel.nr.

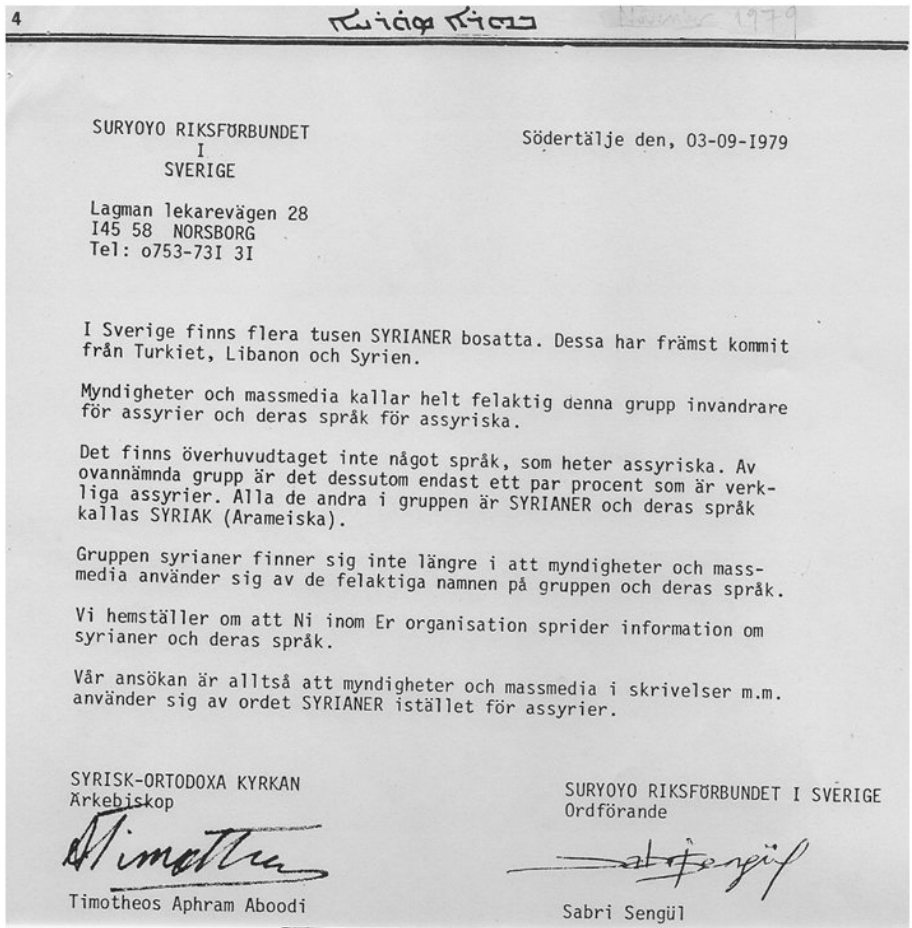
Övriga fam.med.	person nr.	efter och förnamn
medsökanden		
barn under 18 år		

Jag försäkrar härmed på heder och samvete att lyda och ta hänsyn till den syrisk ortodoxa kyrkans stadgar, lagar och ordningar.
Jag accepterar den Syrisk Ortodoxa kyrkans Patriark som huvudledare i kyrkan och den Syrisk Ortodoxa biskopsrådets(Sinod,ens)beslut av den 81/11/03- 81/11/15 om att avslå och ej tillåta någon verksamhet för Syrianskt folk (Suryoye) som går under benämningarna Assyriska och Arameiska. Således bekräftar jag med min underskrift att jag ej tillhör något av de ovannämnda Assyriska eller Arameiska föreningar, i annatfall är jag medveten om att jag kan bli utesluten ur kyrkan av dess ledning och därmed förlora medlemskapet i kyrkan.

ORT OCH DATUM — SÖKANDEN — MEDSÖKANDEN

Appendix 10:

Joint Letter of Archbishop Timotheos Aphram Aboodi and the *Suryoyo Riksförbundet* to the Swedish Authorities and the Mass Media (1979)



4 ܒܗܪܐ ܡܘܪܝܐ November 1979

SURYOYO RIKSFÖRBUNDET
I
SVERIGE

Södertälje den, 03-09-1979

Lagman lekarevägen 28
145 58 NORSBORG
Tel: 0753-731 31

I Sverige finns flera tusen SYRIANER bosatta. Dessa har främst kommit från Turkiet, Libanon och Syrien.

Myndigheter och massmedia kallar helt felaktig denna grupp invandrare för assyrier och deras språk för assyriska.

Det finns överhuvudtaget inte något språk, som heter assyriska. Av ovannämnda grupp är det dessutom endast ett par procent som är verkliga assyrier. Alla de andra i gruppen är SYRIANER och deras språk kallas SYRIAK (Arameiska).

Gruppen syrianer finner sig inte längre i att myndigheter och massmedia använder sig av de felaktiga namnen på gruppen och deras språk.

Vi hemställer om att Ni inom Er organisation sprider information om syrianer och deras språk.

Vår ansökan är alltså att myndigheter och massmedia i skrivelser m.m. använder sig av ordet SYRIANER istället för assyrier.

SYRISK-ORTODOXA KYRKAN
Ärkebiskop

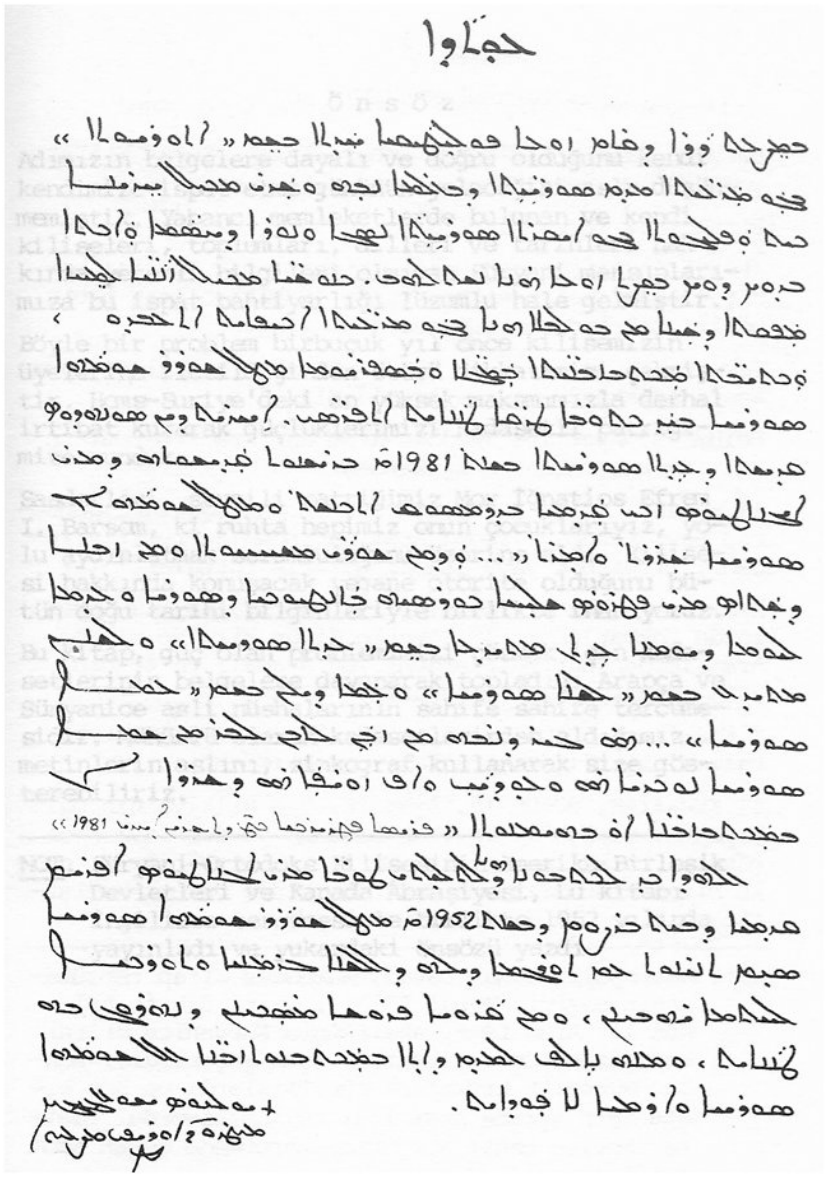
Timotheos Aphram Aboodi

SURYOYO RIKSFÖRBUNDET I SVERIGE
Ordförande

Sabri Sengül

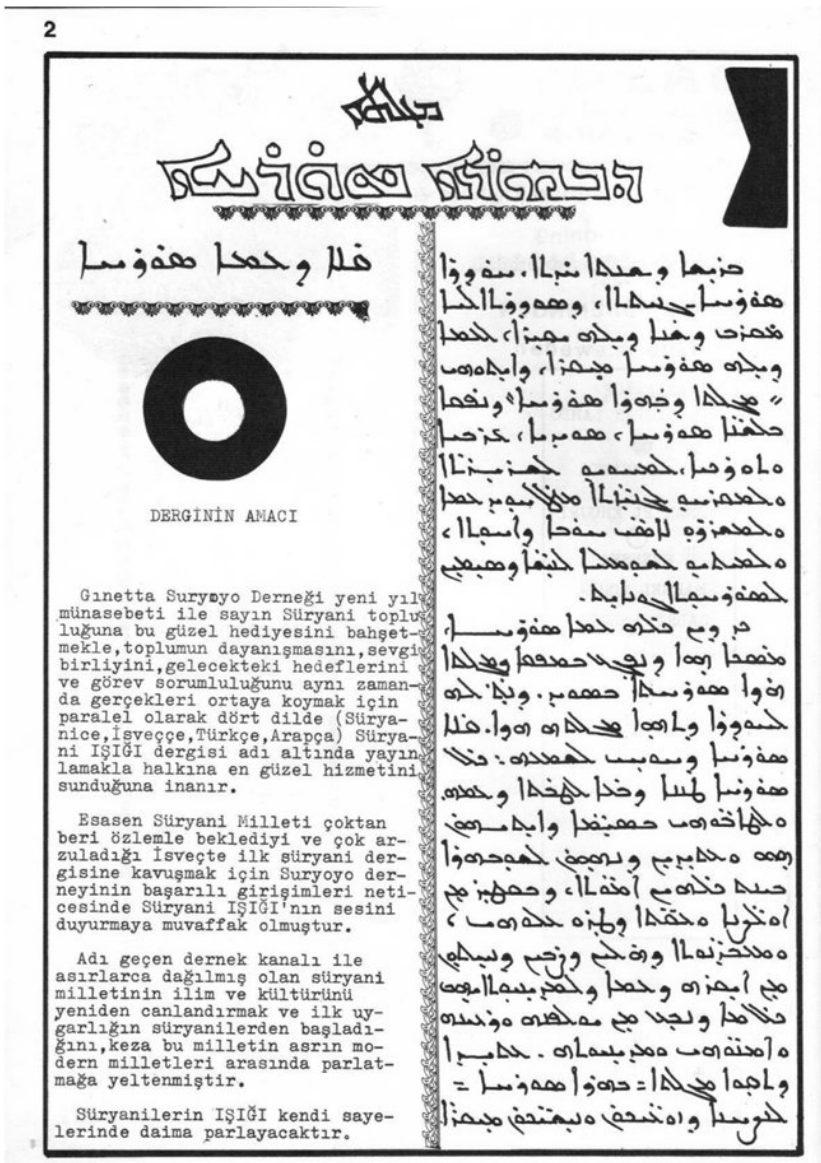
Appendix 11:

Introduction by Archbishop J. J. Çiçek to Ephrem Barsaum's Book *The Syrian Church of Antioch: Its Name and History* (1983)



Appendix 12:

The First Editorial of Bahro Suryoyo (1979)



2

DERGİNİN AMACI

Ginetta Suryoyo Derneği yeni yıl münasebeti ile sayın Süryani topluluğuna bu güzel hediyesini bahşetmekle, toplumun dayanışmasını, sevgi birliyini, gelecekteki hedeflerini ve görev sorumluluğunu aynı zamanda gerçekleri ortaya koymak için paralel olarak dört dilde (Süryanice, İsveççe, Türkçe, Arapça) Süryani IŞIĞI dergisi adı altında yayınlamakla halkına en güzel hizmetini sunduğuna inanır.

Esasen Süryani Milleti çoktan beri özlemle beklediyi ve çok arzuladığı İsveçte ilk süryani dergisine kavuşmak için Suryoyo derneyinin başarılı girişimleri neticesinde Süryani IŞIĞI'nın sesini duyurmaya muvaffak olmuştur.

Adı geçen dernek kanalı ile asırlarca dağılmış olan süryani milletinin ilim ve kültürünü yeniden canlandırmak ve ilk uygarlığın süryanilerden başladığını, keza bu milletin asrın modern milletleri arasında parlatmağa yeltenmiştir.

Süryanilerin IŞIĞI kendi sayelerinde daima parlayacaktır.

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Samenvatting

Dit onderzoek is uitgevoerd in het kader van het PIONIER project *The Formation of a Communal Identity among West Syrian Christians,* onder leiding van Prof. Bas ter Haar Romeny aan de Universiteit Leiden.[880] Mijn vier collega's hebben zich bezig gehouden met de identiteitsformatie van de Syrische Christenen vanuit theologisch, historisch en kunsthistorisch perspectief in de periode tussen de vijfde en dertiende eeuw.[881] Ik heb mij als antropoloog binnen dit project gericht op de moderne tijd.

De aanleiding voor mijn historisch antropologische studie is het wereldwijde debat over de 'juiste naam' van de *'amo Suryoyo*[882](Assyrische/Syrische bevolkingsgroep) in Westerse talen geweest. Hoewel ik het debat in een transnationale context heb geplaatst, is deze studie vooral gebaseerd op de situatie in Europa en specifiek toegespitst op de situatie in Zweden. Ik heb mij gericht op de discoursen van verschillende 'elite' groepen binnen de *Suryoye* gemeenschap. De elite bestaat uit individuen die een invloedrijke rol hebben binnen de groep. Het gaat hierbij onder andere om geestelijken, hoogopgeleiden, activisten en de oudere generatie (mannen) die vanuit de traditionele rol invloed weten uit te oefenen binnen de groep waar zij deel van uitmaken. De wijze waarop ik het concept 'elite' heb gebruikt is derhalve relatief.

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880 Zie verder over dit project, Ter Haar Romeny et al. 2009.

881 Zie verder voor hun resultaten, Immerzeel (2009), Snelders (2010), Ter Haar Romeny (forthcoming) 'The Commentary of the Monk Severus with the Additions of Simeon of Hisn Mansur: Genesis', Van Ginkel (forthcoming) 'Creating an Umta: Michael the Great, His Sources and the Development of an Ethnic Awareness in Syrian Orthodox Historiography'.

882 Hoewel ik in dit boek in het Engels de dubbele benaming *Assyrians/Syriacs* heb gebruikt, zal ik voor de Nederlandse samenvatting de benaming *Suryoye* (Assyriërs/Syriërs) en '*amo Suryoyo* (Assyrische/Syrische bevolkingsgroep) gebruiken omdat dit in de Nederlandse context vrij gebruikelijk is en het de leesbaarheid van de tekst vergemakkelijkt.

Binnen de context van deze studie zijn de *Suryoye* gedefinieerd als de leden van de Syrisch Orthodoxe Kerk. Hierin ben ik uitgegaan van de definitie zoals gehanteerd in het PIONIER Project Syriac Christianity, waar dit onderzoek deel uitmaakt van een breder onderzoeksproject. Zoals ik heb laten zien in deze studie, kan de definitie *Suryoye* ook een bredere groep impliceren, afhankelijk van individuele verschillen in identiteitsdiscoursen.

In dit werk laat ik zien hoe het 'naamdebat' is ontstaan, welke groepen hierin een centrale rol hebben gespeeld en hoe ditzelfde debat heeft geleid tot een splitsing binnen de gemeenschap. De splitsing komt tot uitdrukking in de institutionalisering van de groep binnen twee verschillende dominante organisatiestructuren – zowel op nationaal als internationaal niveau. Ter illustratie van zowel de dominante ideeën als de diversiteit binnen beide discoursen heb ik in de laatste drie hoofdstukken individuele discoursen geanalyseerd ten aanzien van drie aspecten: a) de 'juiste naam' van de *'amo Suryoyo* in Westerse talen; b) de grenzen van de *'amo Suryoyo*, oftewel: 'wie zijn de insiders?' en c) het leiderschap van de *'amo Suryoyo*. Voor een verklaring van de genoemde splitsing en de geïnstitutionaliseerde identiteitsdiscoursen, heb ik de volgende onderzoeksvragen centraal gesteld:

1) Wat zijn de identiteitsdiscoursen van de *Suryoye*-elite in de Europese diaspora?
2) Hoe kunnen wij deze discoursen in een historisch perspectief plaatsen? Nog specifieker, wat is de relatie tussen de emigratie van the *Suryoye* naar Europa en de gearticuleerde identiteitsdiscoursen?
3) Hoe kan de strijd tussen de *Suryoye*-elites onderling verklaard worden?

Voor het beantwoorden van deze vragen heb ik de huidige discoursen over de eigen collectieve identiteit in een sociaal-historisch perspectief geplaatst. Daarnaast heb ik gebruik gemaakt van de concepten van de *Discourse Theory*, welke mij hebben geholpen bij het verklaren van processen die hebben plaatsgevonden. Het uitgangspunt van de *Discourse Theory* is dat identiteiten niet gegeven (*pre-given*) zijn, maar een relationeel en daarom open en dynamisch karakter hebben dat verandering van identiteiten mogelijk maakt en deze verklaart. Dit alles is inherent antagonistisch. Daarom is het vertrekpunt van de *Discourse Theory* dat groepsformaties het gevolg zijn van antagonistische relaties binnen een sociaal veld en schrijft zij een belangrijke rol toe aan machtsrelaties en hegemonie.

De eerste historische hoofdstukken behandelen de positie van de *Suryoye* in de *athro* (het vaderland) en hun emigratie in de afgelopen eeuw, met een sterke focus op de emigratie naar Europa. Ik heb gesteld dat hun emigratie bezien moet worden tegen de achtergrond van hun gemarginaliseerde en onderdrukte positie in de *athro*. In de periode na de Eerste Wereldoorlog zijn

zij in Turkije niet erkend als een niet-Islamitische minderheid, een status die wel aan Armeniërs, Grieken en Joden is toegekend. Dit betekent dat zij niet beschermd zijn door enig internationaal verdrag of door de Turkse constituties (1923, 1961 en 1980). Er kan dan ook gesteld worden dat hun positie in de Turkse Republiek ten opzichte van die in het Ottomaanse Rijk is verslechterd, wat er mede toe geleid heeft dat zij bijna volledig verdwenen zijn in hun voormalige *athro*, zoals in *Tur 'Abdin* (Zuidoost Turkije).

Een ander aspect dat een belangrijke rol heeft gespeeld in hun emigratie is dat de *Suryoye* zich als christenen sterk met het christelijke Westen identificeerden en op grond hiervan allerlei hoopvolle verwachtingen koesterden. Hun veronderstelling was dat zij van harte welkom zouden worden geheten. Zowel tijdens de emigratie als bij het vestigingsproces werden zij hierin echter teleurgesteld. Hun verwachting dat Westerse autoriteiten op de hoogte zouden zijn van hun positie in het Midden Oosten en daarom hun asielverzoeken als vanzelfsprekend zouden inwilligen kwam niet uit. Hoewel zij als collectief nergens als politieke vluchtelingen zijn toegelaten (behalve in Zweden tot halverwege jaren 1970) maar enkel om humanitaire redenen, bleven zij standvastig in het idee als groep recht te hebben op politiek asiel vanwege hun politiek gemarginaliseerde en onderdrukte positie in de landen van herkomst. In de sterke emigratiegolf die vooral na de eerste helft van de jaren zeventig volgde, hebben leden van de gemeenschap zowel legale als illegale manieren gevonden om op de plek van bestemming te komen. Familiebanden hebben hier een belangrijke rol in gespeeld. Families waren verspreid over verschillende landen in het Midden-Oosten. Het vertrek van familieleden heeft daarom mede een transnationale kettingreactie teweeggebracht. Dit verklaart de grote aantallen en de snelheid waarmee de emigratie plaatsvond – iets waar Westerse overheden niet op voorbereid waren en hetgeen ze, overigens tevergeefs, lange tijd hebben tegengewerkt. Uiteindelijk is de grote meerderheid van de *Suryoye* asielzoekers erin geslaagd om zich in het Westen te vestigen en zich op een toekomst in het nieuwe thuisland te richten.

Een blik op hun vestigingsproces in Zweden laat zien dat dit gepaard is gegaan met uitdagingen. Maar ondanks de grote verschillen met de emigratielanden hebben zij zich relatief snel weten te wortelen in de Zweedse samenleving. Dit heb ik uitgelegd als het gevolg van een process van interactie tussen de *Suryoye* als emigranten en de Zweedse overheid als ontvanger in het nieuwe vestigingsland. Enerzijds hebben *Suryoye* zich vanaf het begin erop gericht om in Zweden te blijven en anderzijds heeft de

Zweedse overheid een beleid ontwikkeld dat gericht is op de actieve participatie van immigranten in de Zweedse maatschappij. Ankerpunten in dit beleid zijn geweest: gelijkheid, partnerschap en keuzevrijheid. *Suryoye* hebben hier actief gebruik van gemaakt, wat de ontwikkeling binnen de groep en hun mobiliteit in de maatschappij mede verklaart.

De vestiging in Zweden heeft ook tot nieuwe vragen geleid waar zij niet op voorbereid waren, zoals de vraag naar hun collectieve identiteit. Dit heb ik uitgelegd als het gevolg van wat Laclau (1990) *dislocation* (ontwrichting) noemt van hun voormalige collectieve identiteit welke in de context van het Midden Oosten was gevormd. In een maatschappij waar religie nog steeds de meest centrale rol speelde in de identiteit van mensen, gold dit ook voor de *Suryoye*. Hun identiteit was sterk gebaseerd op het christen-zijn en meer specifiek op een Syrisch Orthodoxe en dus een confessionele identiteit.

Hun identiteit raakte echter ontwricht omdat zij in het Westen een confessionele identiteit niet langer als uitgangspunt konden hanteren om zich te onderscheiden van andere nationale groepen uit het het Midden-Oosten. De *Suryoye* hadden als burgers van de verschillende landen in het Midden-Oosten, dezelfde nationaliteit als de betreffende nationale groepen. De Westerse autoriteiten deelden de *Suryoye* naar de nationaliteit van het land van herkomst in en classificeerden ze derhalve als Turken, Syriërs, Irakezen of Libanezen. Het feit dat al deze categorieën in het Westen vaak met een islamitische identiteit worden geassocieerd was één van de redenen (maar niet de enige) waarom *Suryoye* naar een alternatieve categorisering op zoek zijn gegaan. Hun gemarginaliseerde positie onder de meeste regimes in the Midden Oosten heeft ook tot een distantie ten opzichte van deze categorieën geleid waardoor zij zich in sterke mate gebruik hebben gemaakt van een alternatieve sub-identiteit. Hun ervaring met uitsluitingsmechanismen ten gevolge van hun marginalisatie heeft er mede toe bijgedragen dat zij zich sterk hebben afgezet tegen de benamingen die Westerse instellingen hanteren om de *'amo Suryoyo* aan te duiden.

Door hun vestiging in Europa werd het noodzakelijk dat de *Suryoye* vanuit de nieuwe context naar de eigen identiteit gingen kijken. In Europa speelt religie niet meer een centrale rol in het publieke leven maar is het deel gaan uitmaken van de privésfeer. Daarom werd het noodzakelijk om niet meer het geloof maar andere elementen in de eigen identiteit een centrale plaats te geven. Het feit dat de meerderheid in het Westen als christen werd gezien en dat zij zichzelf wilden blijven onderscheiden van de christelijke meerderheid, speelde ook een rol. Hun eigen christelijke identiteit bleef van

belang maar kreeg een andere rol. Zo zouden zij zich kunnen blijven onderscheiden van zowel de voormalige buitenstaanders (meerderheid islamitisch) als van de nieuwe buitenstaanders (meerderheid christelijk). Dit verklaart mede de verandering in hun identificatie van een etnisch-religieuze naar een etnisch-nationale.

De ontwrichting van hun identiteit betekende voor de *Suryoye* dat het noodzakelijk werd om de eigen identiteit zowel in een nieuw concept te gieten als in nieuwe termen uit te drukken. *Suryoye*-activisten die de Assyrische ideologie aanhingen, zagen heil in het gebruik van de benaming 'Assyriërs' in Westerse talen. Het voormalige concept van een confessionele identiteit werd hiermee verruild voor een cross-conventionele benaming die de verschillende *Suryoye* kerken onder één benaming kon herenigen. Deze benadering gaat terug tot ten minste het begin van de twintigste eeuw in het Ottomaanse Rijk. De *umthonoyutho* (patriottisme) die destijds onder een kleine elite heerste, werd abrupt onderbroken door de *Seyfo*, en bijna twee decennia daarna, door de *Simele Massacre* (1933) in Irak. In de jaren vijftig van de vorige eeuw kwam er weer een opleving van *umthonoyutho* onder invloed van de Assyrische Democratische Organisatie (ADO) in Syrië, waar het opkomende Pan-Arabisme zowel een belemmering als een oorzaak was voor het ontstaan van een nieuwe impuls en een meer politiek georiënteerde vorm van *umthonoyutho*.

Onenigheid over de naam van de gemeenschap in Westerse talen in de diaspora ontstond voor het eerst in Amerika en Canada, nadat Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum in 1952 het besluit bekend had maakt dat de juiste naam van zijn gemeenschap niet 'Assyrisch' maar 'Syrisch' was, hetgeen een Aramees erfgoed en geen Assyrisch erfgoed veronderstelde. Dit besluit leidde in Amerika en Canada tot grote onenigheid binnen de kerkgemeenschap en ging gepaard met het uit de kerk treden van leden. In Europa ontstonden onenigheden in een vrij vroeg stadium na de eerste grote emigratie-golf naar Zweden, vanaf de tweede helft van de zeventiger jaren. Het conflict begon met de weerstand van geestelijken en leken tegen het gebruik van de naam *Assyrier* (Zweeds voor 'Assyriërs') en de ideologie van Assyrische activisten. Karakteristiek voor deze eerste oppositie van de kant van de geestelijken is dat zij identificatie op confessioneel niveau voorstonden. Ondanks de historisch sterke positie van de Syrisch-Orthodoxe Kerk zijn de geestelijken er niet in geslaagd om hun identiteitsdiscours op confessioneel niveau geïnstitutionaliseerd te krijgen. De rol die de kerk heeft gespeeld heeft er echter wel toe geleid dat er een einde kwam aan het

dominante gebruik van de naam *Assyrier* in Zweden, wat uiteindelijk het primaire doel van de kerkelijke oppositie bleek te zijn. Ik heb het laatste toegeschreven aan het feit, dat de Assyrische ideologie als een bedreiging voor de nationale identiteit werd ervaren door de regimes in het Midden-Oosten. Onder de *Suryoye* heeft de Assyrische Beweging als eerste de cultureel-politieke rechten van de eigen bevolkingsgroep opgeëist. Daarom is die vanaf het begin de groep met de meest bedreigende ideologie binnen de *Suryoye* gemeenschap ervaren.

De oppositie van de kerk heeft tegelijkertijd ook ruimte gecreëerd voor een ideologie die zich ook de bestrijding van de *Assyriska*-beweging ten doel stelde. Dit verklaart voor een groot deel waarom geestelijken en de meerderheid van de gewone burgers sterke tegenstand boden tegen de ideologie van de *Assyrier*. De rol van de kerk zou ongetwijfeld nog grotere gevolgen hebben gehad als de Zweedse autoriteiten niet hadden ingegrepen en de Patriarch van de Syrisch Orthodoxe Kerk hadden verzocht om de *Assyriska*-activisten niet te excommuniceren. Als gevolg hiervan heeft de Synode van de Syrisch-Orthodoxe Kerk vanaf begin jaren tachtig minder harde besluiten tegen de *Assyrier* genomen.

Hoewel de oppositie in de beginjaren verschillende namen als alternatief en tegenhanger van de naam *Assyrier* heeft gebruikt, is uiteindelijk de naam *Syrianer* (in het Zweeds) de algemeen geaccepteerde naam van de oppositie geworden. Vanuit deze positie heeft de *Syrianska*-beweging een eigen ideologie ontwikkeld in relatie tot de *Assyriska*-beweging en zich tot een tegenbeweging ontwikkeld met een discours over de eigen identiteit. Het uitgangspunt is dat de *'amo Suryoyo* geen relatie heeft met een Assyrisch maar met een Aramees erfgoed. Daarnaast bood de *Syrianska*-beweging in de beginperiode hevige tegenstand tegen de cross-confessionele benadering van de *Assyriska* elite, die zich inzetten voor het ontwikkelen van een nationale identiteit. Echter, in dit proces van tegenwerking heeft ook de *Syrianska*-beweging na verloop van tijd een alternatieve cross-conventionele ideologie ontwikkeld die teruggrijpt op een ver historisch verleden: het Aramese erfgoed. Dit proces is gepaard gegaan met het maken van onderscheid tussen de religieuze en seculiere invloedssferen binnen de gemeenschap en de taken die hiermee te verdelen zijn onder de religieuze en seculiere elite. Het streven naar een bruikbaar onderscheid werd tevens een basis voor de competitie tussen de religieuze en seculiere *Syrianska* elite.

Op de lange termijn heeft de 'identiteitscrisis' in Zweden geresulteerd in de institutionalisering van twee dominante identiteitsdiscoursen – *Assyriska*

en *Syrianska* – in een proces van onderlinge rivaliteit. Beide groepen hebben elkaars macht bestreden om de eigen invloed in het 'naamdebat' maar ook in brede zin te vergroten. Dit proces betekent niet dat de onderlinge verschillen alleen maar zijn toegenomen. Hoewel beide groepen het oneens zijn met elkaars ideologie en deze bestrijden, maken zij tevens gebruik van soortgelijke strategieën en argumenten, maar gearticuleerd vanuit een kader dat binnen het eigen discours past, zodat het discours van de tegenpartij alsnog bestreden kan worden. De strijd om de hegemonie tussen de betrokken groepen is daarom een belangrijk kenmerk van het formatieproces van de identiteitsdiscoursen.

Deze studie heeft bijgedragen aan de inzichten in processen van emigratie, vestiging en identificatie van de *Suryoye* in Europa en meer specifiek in Zweden. De discours-theoretische benadering heeft mij in staat gesteld om het contextuele, relationele en processuele karakter van verandering in identiteiten te illustreren. Vanuit dit perspectief heb ik identiteit als een 'open concept' benaderd waaraan verschillende betekenissen gegeven kunnen worden. En ik heb aangetoond hoe dit open karakter van identiteit een voorwaarde is geweest voor het ontstaan van het 'naamdebat' en laten zien dat identiteiten niet statisch zijn maar continu bloot staan aan verandering.

Curriculum Vitae

Naures Atto was born in Mzizah (Tur 'Abdin) in 1972. In October 1980 she settled in the Netherlands with her family. She holds a BA in Personnel Management (Hogeschool Enschede, 1991-1995). During her internships for AKZO Nobel (Netherlands) and Eastern Group (England) she conducted research on the organizational policy relating to highly educated personnel. Spurred on by her interest in development-oriented policy and work, she continued her study with an MA in Culture, Organization and Management (Organizational Anthropology) at the Free University in Amsterdam, from which she obtained her MA degree in 1998. From 1999 to 2003 she worked with several consultancy agencies as researcher and consultant. Since 2003 she has been affiliated to the *Leiden Institute for Religious Studies* (Leiden University). This dissertation is the result of the research which she conducted in the framework of the PIONIER Project *The Formation of a Communal Identity among Syrian Orthodox Christians (451-1300)*. Since 2008 she has been working as a post-doc researcher in the Euryi Project *Identity and Migration: Christian Minorities in the Middle East and in Diaspora.* Her work has been awarded the *Helga-Anschütz-Preis 2010*, 'Als Anerkennung ihrer Verdienste um die aramäische Sprache und Kultur' and in 2004 she was the recipient of a 'Certificate of Appreciation in Recognition of Her Outstanding Efforts and Distinctive Contributions' from the *Syriac League of Lebanon*. She is co-founder and chairman of the *Inanna Foundation.*