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The Sweet Burden: Constructing and Contesting Druze Heritage and Identity in Lebanon

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The Sweet Burden: Constructing and Contesting Druze Heritage and Identity in Lebanon

by

Chad Kassem Radwan

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Department of Anthropology College of Arts and Sciences University of South Florida

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Before having written a single word of this dissertation it was apparent that my success in this undertaking, as in any other, has always been the product of my parents, Kassem and Wafaa Radwan. Thank you for showing me the value of dedication, selflessness, and truly, truly hard work. I have always harbored a strong sense of compassion for each and every person I have had the opportunity to come across in my life and I have both of you to thank for understanding this most essential human sentiment.
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Abstract

This dissertation research examines how shared aspects of identity are constructed among the Druze in Lebanon and how it contributes to conceptualizations of heritage. Assessing the educational resources focused on aspects of Druze heritage, the barriers to cultural preservation were elucidated. Utilizing a number of qualitative research methods, participants’ feedback constructed a narrative that considers what they believe to be at risk for their community. These issues included addressing a perceived knowledge gap wherein the majority of Druze expressed a need to expand the educational resources in their community. Participants defined the kinds of resources and social supports that are lacking and explained how existing texts, lectures, and seminars should be improved, increased, and made more accessible.

This dissertation is a result of ethnographic fieldwork which I conducted throughout 2014. Having lived in the town of Aley, Lebanon, I conducted research interviews with individuals that represented a broad spectrum of society, taking into account women and men of different ages with diverse social, economic, and educational backgrounds. Through participant observation, I shared many of the daily experiences of research participants and observed the Druze in their regular lives, their social gatherings, and at sites of historical significance.

Using a political economic theoretical framework, this research also explored the diversity of ways in which social phenomena are contested among the Druze in Lebanon. While much of the anthropological and social science research on heritage focuses on its material
components, utilizing pre-established models that conflate heritage with tangible symbolic expressions, a political economic approach insists that the context of social structures are taken into account. This also lends itself to a conceptualization of heritage as a process by which individuals create meaning in their lives, which are shaped by social contexts such as history and contemporary culture. This research highlights the fact that a priori models that fail to consider both social structures and the fundamental perspectives of participants are based upon ideologies that lack a critical academic lens.

This dissertation demonstrates that while Druze particularism often necessitated a level of conformity and ascription to traditional values, the diversity of individual approaches to shared identity contributed to the plasticity of cultural forms and varieties of self-expression. As well, expanded and improved educational resources that encourage individuals to learn more about their history and the basic tenets of their faith were widely seen as a valued means of ensuring the society’s continuation.
Note on Translation

The translation and transliteration of all of the Arabic terms that follow are approximate. Arabic letters, and short vowels in particular, can result in a variety of different spellings for the same words or names. For example, some authors spell Druse instead of Druze, and others texts might use a more literal transliteration to spell Duruz. Some differences in spelling do appear in direct quotes or titles since I retained the author’s preference. Aside from proper nouns, the Arabic words have been italicized. Some words like fatwa or souk were not italicized since they have become increasingly common in the English lexicon. However, I chose to italicize the word sheikh since I often utilized its lesser known plural form, mushayekh. Although I may have opted to use the plural sheikhs, I chose not to do so because of the overarching assumption that all mushayekh are necessarily male, which is not the case among the Druze. Thus, I may utilize sheikhs in the few instances in which I refer exclusively to male mushayekh, but in all other cases I utilize mushayekh to include both the sexes. Proper titles with Arabic words were not italicized however, such as Sheikh al-Aql or Sheikh al-Fadil.
Chapter 1 Introduction to the Research

Prospective and Druze Community

It didn’t take her long to understand that I was there to talk about preserving Druze heritage. With her husband nearby, chiming into the conversation from time to time, she perked up and said: “Let me get back to my point. So yes, you have to keep your oil.” I nodded and smiled pretending I understood the reference. She continued: “This is a story told by an important sheikh and I think it’s from the Greek era. There was a king, and late at night one of his subjects came to him seeking his knowledge. The man said to his king, ‘I want to learn from you, to be a part of your trusted inner-circle.’ The king replied, ‘Here is a spoon full of oil. Walk through my palace and gaze at all of the wonderful things I keep here and then return to me.’ When he came back to the king, he explained all of the fascinating things he had seen. He was stunned by the beautiful scenery in every corner of the palace. Seeing his empty spoon, the king asked him what had happened to his oil. He explained that it must have dripped away along his path but that he hadn’t noticed it as he was looking here and there. The king said, ‘I’ll give you another chance.’ He filled the man’s spoon again and told him to go back through the palace and then to return to explain what he had seen. The second time, he returned with his spoon full but said, ‘I can’t explain anything because I was so cautious not to spill my oil.’ The king then denied his request to be admitted into his inner-circle. He explained to the man, ‘You can gain my confidence when you’re able to see all of the things around you and return with your oil.’”
Halfway through her story, I had understood the message. She elucidated: “The oil is the history. It’s your history, your identity. This is your past. This is the heritage.”

**Exploring the Research Rationale**

The allegory offered in the opening vignette relates the need to find a balance between becoming engrossed in the world around us while preserving an essential part of our identity. Our ostensible king was neither satisfied with his subject’s unawareness of or enthrallment with the fascinating palace that surrounded him. Rather, his wisdom and trust would only be gained with an approach that was compromising, requiring an appreciation of one’s surroundings and mindfulness towards the task at hand. The lesson the subject learned was that if he was either too distracted or too indifferent towards the world, then he would be unable to achieve a sincere understanding of that essential quality of self, represented by the oil he carried in his spoon. The research participant who shared this story with me had spent a great deal of time considering how to best inculcate a strong sense of Druze heritage in her two young children. She went on to say: “Wherever you go, you keep your oil. You can successfully navigate the world, but you have to keep your oil.”

Similar to other ethnoreligious minorities, the Druze community believes it is facing the problem of cultural assimilation and the loss of their heritage in both the diaspora and countries of origin. The Druze often promote a strict form of endogamy and their community has remained relatively resilient throughout their history due to social practices such as passing, dissimulation and relegating the inner-teachings of the religious doctrine to the few. Taking into consideration other dogmatic and social factors, many Druze express an interest in gaining an understanding of the elementary principles of the faith as well as history. The goal of this research project has
been to assess the range of available educational resources focused on Druze religious beliefs and history and to understand how increased knowledge on these topics can lead to greater preservation of the community’s distinct heritage in Lebanon. My research question asks how improved resources concerning the fundamentals of the Druze faith and history influence collective notions of Druze heritage.

While a standard curriculum cannot motivate individuals to seek new knowledge, addressing the gap in formal education on these subjects is a necessary step to providing the tools for individuals to inquire actively. As anthropologists have championed the increased awareness of cultural heritage of minority and marginalized populations, it has been my goal to assess the community’s needs through qualitative research that asks participants to identify the resources required to help ameliorate a perceived knowledge gap. While these issues were discussed as pervasive among all of the Druze community, this research focused on those in Lebanon, where I lived and conducted fieldwork throughout most of 2014. As will be discussed in the fifth chapter of this work, I am of Druze descent and the issues related to access to cultural resources that focus on history and doctrine are something that I have been intimately familiar with for years. Having studied applied anthropology, it became increasingly apparent that there are significant associations between how groups construct and contest their heritage and their familiarity with the cultural forms they identify as unique to themselves. Put more plainly, the goal of this research is to assess how educational resources concerning Druze history and dogma might address communitywide concerns about maintaining their perceived Druze heritage.

The larger aim of this research project has been to identify practical approaches to preserving the heritage of the Druze community. It is necessary to recognize that terms like heritage need to be examined in order to keep the focus of this project grounded and to be able to
offer meaningful suggestions via application. While much anthropological research is concerned with the material aspects of heritage, we should also recognize that many people use the term heritage synonymously with both their cultural identity and their ethnicity, among other associations. Therefore, as Druze heritage is being considered comprehensively, this research approaches preservation as defined by members of the community. For example, when articulating what their heritage means to them, Lebanese Druze often discussed their familial ties, their social bonds, and their shared values, just to name a few of the characteristics they identified. In the following chapter, I will review a broad spectrum of literature to offer a more critical examination of how heritage has remained a relatively unscrutinized concept in the social sciences and how that might be ameliorated.

Anthropology is perhaps the field best suited to address issues such as preserving intangible forms of heritage and culture. In particular, applied anthropology offers approaches that can lead to thoughtful and practical solutions by working with members of the community to better understand how they perceive their condition. Applied anthropology is active and includes research that utilizes the various methodologies of the field to assess and address contemporary social issues. Anthropologist, Alexander Ervin, adds that the field finds its strength in its intentions to understand the process by which decisions are made and the interplay between decision-making and prevailing policies, social or otherwise (Ervin 2005:4). Therefore, this research will include methods that encourage individuals to discuss any aspects of their Druze heritage they believe to be relevant while avoiding restrictions that delimit “Druzeness” to a particular set of religious beliefs or best social practices. Likewise, it is not the goal of anthropology to verify the veracity of an idealized tradition. Rather, anthropology provides tools to facilitate, allowing the anthropologist to identify patterns in the community by gathering and
interpreting the opinions and concerns of the individual (Greenbaum 2002; Hyatt 2012; Jackson 2012; Stuesse 2009; Yelvington 1995; Wilkie 2000).

Anthropologists are often aware that ideas such as “community” offer useful ways of conceptualizing groups of individuals that can share a given space or some overarching set of values. It can also frame cultural groups more generally, which Raymond Firth defines as: “that aspect of behavior that is learned by the individual and which may be shared by pluralities of individuals” (Firth 1957:58). In some cases, “community” can also imply a consistent ideology that is neither real nor shared by a majority of members of the group. Since they are often dichotomously situated to one another, the best approach is to understand that community and individuality define one another diametrically. More specifically, community sentiment implies a shared ideology or set of values, social bonds, symbols, and shared identity, while the individual’s conceptualization of and engagement with these shared characteristics often represents significant diversity within the group. Part of the goal of this research will be to understand how the Druze conceptualize community and how they shape Druze heritage and identity. Similar to other religious groups, notions of community can and do vary, similar to a variety of individual associations with Druze identity. In order to do this account for this variety, I began with the following six questions that provided a framework for the selected research methods:

1. What are the key aspects of Druze heritage amongst members of the community and how is it discussed/defined?

2. What do Druze individuals know about their history and religious beliefs (in particular the uninitiated or the non-mushayekh)?
3. What do Druze individuals want to know more about/where do they find information and resources lacking?

4. Do Druze individuals perceive threats to the continuation of their shared heritage? What are the identified causes and are there suggestions for amelioration and improvement?

5. Can heritage preservation be reinforced with improved cultural resources (e.g. a more accessible curriculum, a forum for discussing the community’s needs, an expanded religious program, etc.)?

6. Who might help shape, support, and implement these new or improved resources?

These questions work together to iteratively build on one another, moving the inquiry from a dialogue of the broader themes to a more specific discussion of the applied aspects of this research.

My intention is to explore shared conceptualizations of community, identity, and heritage, which constitute contested categories of belonging rather than attempting to unveil the supposedly obscure, or discover the purportedly hidden, authentic and valid qualities of the Druze. The importance of promoting religious and historical knowledge is an issue especially relevant to the Druze. As a religious minority in the countries of origin, concerns of assimilation are particularly pertinent. Commissioned by The Social Science Research Council in 1936 to provide a working definition of acculturation Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville Herskovits state that assimilation, “is at times a phase of acculturation” (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, 1936:49). In this way, acculturation is not simply associated with adaptation and can be framed as detrimental to those groups either representing the minority or those who lack power in the relationship of cultural contact. In their analysis of the processes of acculturation,
they explain that subsequent changes in the cultural patterns of one group or the other can be disproportionate and might result from political or social dominance (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, 1936:151).

As a minority group that has always lacked the militaristic support of other religious groups, the Druze have faced issues of acculturation and assimilation, such as the centuries-long of rule by Ottoman forces. Moreover, the Druze recognize no method of conversion and practice a strict form of endogamy. Their belief in reincarnation not only distinguishes them from their Muslim, Christian, and Jewish neighbors, but is intrinsically linked to social institutions such as marriage. Druze partners are required to beget Druze children while lineage is traced through the patriline, which is the father’s line of descent. As well, a lack of proselytization results in very real consequences for the community if exogamous marriages become increasingly common. For many Druze, their distinct identity and sense of cultural and religious heritage entails endogamous marriage patterns as well as the reproduction of certain core religious beliefs. To further elucidate these points, chapter six examines research informants’ conceptualizations of Druze heritage while chapter seven offers an in-depth discussion of the resulting social problems as perceived.

In conducting my thesis research among Druze in the United States, I suggested that a robust understanding of the community’s history and religion can result in very positive outcomes for the Druze. I stated that: “For most researchers who have studied the Druze, it is believed that advancing knowledge of the faith… will intrinsically have a positive effect on the strength of the community. Similarly, we can be certain that as religious comprehension becomes less prominent among members, the community itself loses purpose and participation in the society wanes” (Radwan 2009:29-30). In the following pages, I illustrate that more stratified
access to religious tenets has become detrimental and that expanded historical/religious knowledge can lead to a more resilient Druze heritage. To this end, the final two chapters offer space for both the research informants to propose possible means of ameliorating the perceived issues. In specific, chapter eight focuses on a comprehensive look at the wide range of issues that constitute the perceived religious and historical knowledge gap among the majority of Druze and how anthropological research might be applied to make the path towards improvement more viable.

An Introduction to the Druze

While some documents remain covert, the published literature on the Druze has allowed me to become familiar with the founding of the religion, which began as a revolution within Islam. Near the end of the 10th century CE in Egypt, the sixth caliph of the Fatimid Dynasty, al-Hakim bi-Amrillah, revealed the new faith. In perhaps his most prominent work, *The Druze Faith* (1974), Islamic and Middle Eastern studies professor Sami Makarem explained that the Druze follow many of the same teachings as earlier Abrahamic religions but remain distinct due to their understanding of al-Hakim’s role in history, which is not widely agreed upon by historians (32-44). The Druze practice a relatively distinct kind of monotheism called *Tawhid*, which is often loosely translated into Unitarianism and emphasizes a realization of unity with one supreme God. Many explained to me that it was much more accurate to refer to the community as *Muwahideen*, which are the followers of the path to *Tawhid*. Their belief in the transmigration of the soul, or reincarnation, sets them apart from nearly every other religious group in the Middle East and serves as a source of unity for the community.
Towards the first half of the 11th century, as the new faith gained adherents in Anatolia, the Levant, and throughout modern-day Egypt, al-Hakim’s successor to the Caliphate set out to exterminate many of the new followers of Tawhid. However, communities of Druze endured in the mountainous regions of the Levant due to their geographically defensible positions, homogeneity, and the practice of religious dissimulation, (Makarem 1974:44). For the Druze, dissimulation can be defined as any variety of social practices that warrant a denial of one’s faith, and in this case their cultural identity, with the aim of protecting it from those perceived of as outsiders. This practice has worked to shape both public perception of the Druze and social interactions within the community and its roots and implications will be discussed in the literature review which follows this chapter.

This brief illustration of Druze history will be expanded upon in the third chapter that provides a more in-depth review of their past and a discussion of modern-day Druze communities. The previous couple of paragraphs concerning Druze history identify some very unique qualities that have shaped the community. Without implying that their concerns are necessarily different from other ethnic or religious minorities, understanding their issues can certainly lead to a better understanding of a variety of social forms. The desire to retain one’s heritage can sometimes be seen as a need to cling to the traditional or the outmoded as a response to the effects of the inevitable march of progress or globalization. For example, in Appadurai’s Modernity at Large (2005 [1996]), he explains that despite the economic and political forces that drive globalization, its effects are by no means uniform as it motivates the production of particular localities.

Druze communities today can predominantly be found in central and southern regions of Lebanon and Syria, and in northern regions of Israel and Jordan, forming a semi-contiguous
region within predominantly mountainous terrain (see Figure 1.1). This region also includes the highly contested Golan Heights, which also contains a number of Druze towns. Within the Middle East, the only significant Druze community outside of this general region lies northwest of Damascus, Syria in the province of Idlib. Significant diasporic Druze communities can be found in many other countries outside of the Middle East, including Canada, the United States, Venezuela, and Australia among others. In the United States, the Druze community is not centrally located as it is in the countries of origin. Rather, it exists as a collective of familial and social attachments, which for the Druze in diaspora symbolizes shared aspects of their identity (Radwan 2009). While Druze population figures and demographics will be addressed more thoroughly in chapter three, it is important to note that accurate estimates of the total population do not exist due to extremely dated Lebanese census figures and combined representation with Muslim population figures in Syria. Total population figures vary greatly with some approaching one million and others as high as 1.5 or 1.6 million worldwide with the vast majority of those individuals living in the Middle East (Halabi 2014:16).

Focusing her early research on the Druze community in southern California, anthropologist Intisar Azzam explains that communities are shaped by qualities both externally ascribed and internally subscribed. In other words, both insiders and outsiders define a group. Given that much religious knowledge is relegated to the few initiated members of the faith, or mushayekh, Druze identity is especially malleable. In her book Persistence and Malleability of Ethnic Boundaries: The Experience of the American Druze (1997), Azzam said that the important symbols of Druzeness were very flexible and open to being redefined by individuals (Azzam:153). Many research participants expressed an interest in learning more about Druze
history and doctrine even if they were unfamiliar with the traditional interpretations of the group’s shared symbols. This group represented a large majority of the Druze population in Lebanon and while many believed there was a significant dearth of resources available to learn about their heritage, they expressed an interest nonetheless. They also framed their Druze identity as a social construct that draws on their proximity to Druze enclaves and the practice of endogamy that in part defines Druze particularism. As well, they identified an overarching belief in reincarnation as a facet of their belief system that works to set them apart from their Christian, Muslim, and Jewish counterparts.

The religious community among the Druze, which I have referred to as mushayekh, include a significant portion of the total Druze population in the countries of origin, which one
scholar estimates at about 15 percent of all Druze in the Middle East (Russell 2014:131). The word *mushayekh* is the plural for *sheikh* in Arabic and includes both the male *sheikhs* and female *sheikhas*. Given the consistent association between the gender-specific label of *sheikh*, which refers exclusively to males who make up the vast majority of *mushayekh* in the Islamic world, I refer to the collectivity of both male *sheikhs* and female *sheikhas* as *mushayekh* throughout this work. While details about the role of *mushayekh* in greater Druze society are discussed towards the end of the fourth chapter, they represent those who have been initiated to gain a deeper understanding of the doctrine. They dress modestly and are discernable from uninitiated members of the Druze community and are required to incorporate the Druze doctrine into their lives, which should be lived austerely and in constant awareness of one’s spiritual wellbeing.

Formative Cultural Facets: Proximity, Endogamy, Kinship and Reincarnation

The anthropologist Intisar Azzam identified some of the key facets of the cohesiveness of the Druze when she stated: “In all reliable literature on the Druze, it is asserted that they have held and transmitted their beliefs secretly through the organization of tightly knit, cohesive, and geopolitically distinct communities, and protected the secrecy of their Faith through the practice of endogamy” (Azzam 1997:41). These characteristics, along with a formative belief in reincarnation, frame the Druze sense of community in the Middle East and shape social relations for those in the diaspora.

While living near other Druze is part of everyday life in many towns throughout Lebanon, a growing number of Druze are becoming socially integrated amongst Christian, Shia, and Sunni regions, and vice versa. While proximity, endogamy, kinship, and reincarnation represent four specific social characteristics that reinforce one another and help define the
community in the countries of origin, they can sometimes essentialize a standard or an idealized “Druzeness.” It should be stated explicitly that it is neither the intention of this research study to advocate for an ideal Druze identity nor a supposedly pure conceptualization of Druze heritage. Rather, the aim is to recognize the role of shared cultural, historical, and religious knowledge among the Druze and to highlight how their experiences, interpretations, and expressions have significant implications in the construction of their shared heritage.

In the literature, Druze kinship systems receive a significant amount of attention and is often discussed in terms of their endogamous practices. Anthropologist Fuad Khuri distinguishes three types of endogamy including clan, lineage, and first cousin endogamy (Khuri 2004:199). What is defined as endogamous marriage can include those from the same town that have remote familial affiliations or to marrying directly within the patriline, be they a close or extended relative. First cousin marriage can refer to partners from either the mother or father’s sides but agnatic kin are almost always preferred. Similar to fellow Arab groups, as well as a plethora of other ethnic communities throughout the world, marriage to a man’s father’s brother’s daughter, or bint ‘amm, has historically been a common practice among the Druze but is certainly becoming less frequent.

For the Druze, endogamy works on at least two different levels. First, although cousin marriage (specifically patrilineal, parallel cousins wherein the fathers of the potential spouses are brothers) has been a traditional practice among the Druze and other Arab groups throughout the Middle East and North Africa, it has become increasingly less common. Due to the logistics of living further apart, the lower birth-rates that result in smaller families and fewer cousins to marry, and changing cultural standards that reflect Western values about marriage. The second level of endogamy defines in-group marriage as within the larger Druze community. This is in
part because the Druze community can be conceived of as a family of brothers and sisters, or *ikhwan*, with marriages and blood-ties that intersect all family groups, even across national boundaries. Since the first level of endogamy has become largely symbolic, I mainly discuss endogamy in terms of its second level throughout this work, thus defining exogamy as marriage between a Druze individual and a non-Druze individual.

In their book, *Crucial Bonds: Marriage Among the Lebanese Druze* (1980), Nura Alamuddin and Paul Starr conducted a comprehensive study of Lebanese Druze marriage records dating back to the 1930s. They found that there were significant differences between the Druze and other religious groups in relation to their marriage patterns. Having reviewed records that date back 50 years before the publication of their text in 1980, the authors explained that the Druze community showed a remarkable resilience to outside social pressures, including broader socioeconomic changes that altered Lebanese society during this time period. In recognizing the factors that contributed to the durability of traditional marriage practices, they state: “The changing interests and definitions of a group can find an expression in traditional practices without necessarily producing an obvious formal restructuring of them. The Druze, like many Middle Easterners, exhibit considerable capacity to mold traditional practices with needs and values introduced or influence by the forces of change” (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:86). In his study, Khuri explained that larger kin groups produce a greater pool of potential marriage partners, leading to higher rates of endogamy, ensuring the ability of agnatic spouses to preserve family property in the patriline (Khuri 2004:199).

Anthropologist Dale Eickleman said that considering the entire context of how notions of family are constructed, is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of cultures in the Arab world. In his book, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach* (1989), he explains: “the full
context in which ideas of family and personal relationships are held is perhaps especially important for an understanding of Middle Eastern societies because kinship forms and the personalization of social relationships permeate even bureaucratic and industrial settings” (Eickleman 1989:153). More importantly, family relations are especially significant to the processes of creating and maintaining cultural heritage. They allow us to connect to our ancestors and the history they represent. For the Druze, family relations pervade all aspects of social life and have significant implications on the conceptualizations of both individuality and group membership.

Kinship informs at least three important levels of social relations including the extended family, the village or town unit, and the community worldwide. While other ethnic and religious groups may refer to one another as family, these connections constitute especially tangible relationships for the Druze who have practiced endogamy throughout their history and accept no converts. These practices have had real implications on how they value the family unit, which remains highly esteemed despite modernization and changing social roles (Swayd 2009:93). The family name of an individual reveals their extended relations with other families as well as town of origin, which often comes with a particular reputation. When introducing oneself to other Druze anywhere around the world, one’s family name might also expose actual common descent through marriage or shared ancestry.

Druze kinship relations are interrelated with the practice of endogamy and their belief in reincarnation. Religious Studies professor Samy Swayd explains that, among the Druze, reincarnation creates opportunities for kinship ties between individuals and their families from former lives, as well as between current and past families, due to the belief that they are always reincarnated within the community (Swayd 2009:103). As anthropologist Jonathan Oppenheimer
states: “Persons whose previous identity has been established in this way are expected to maintain contact with their erstwhile agnates, whom they address and refer to by kinship terms” (Oppenheimer 2009:628). Relations from past lives are still considered family to such a degree that marrying one’s former siblings or children is taboo and is unheard of once connections have been reestablished.

The kind of father’s brother’s daughter marriage the Druze have practiced, or bint ‘amm in Arabic, is very similar to other ethnic and religious groups throughout the Middle East. Whether or not the system of endogamous marriage among the Druze is truly unique is debatable but the practical benefits are much the same and include the retention of property rights and offspring within the family line. Among the Druze, Khuri refers to it as the “syndrome of endogamy,” explaining that they can exert extreme social pressure to ensure that members marry within the community. The impetus rests mainly in a shared ideology that is informed in part by the religious community of mushayekh, as well as a strong sense of pride in the community and an ethnoreligious identity reinforced by their perceived differences from their Christian, Muslim, and Jewish neighbors. As ethnomusicologist Kathleen Hood states: “Because their community has been closed and endogamous since the end of the da’wa¹ many Druze are related, either by blood or marriage. This network of strong social interconnections has resulted in a strong communal feeling” (Hood 2007:14).

Reconnecting with relations or friends from previous lives depends on whether or not individuals claim to have some recollection of their earlier incarnations. While cases of individuals recollecting identifiable details of their past lives are somewhat rare, those who claim to remember small hints are relatively more common and provide an interesting example of the

¹ The closing of proselytization in 1044 CE.
intersecting relationships among religious philosophy, social practice, and the kinship structure. Individuals who begin to share these memories or farsighted glimpses are rarely contested and a pervasive belief that one can have such remembrances, including non-Druze who are also thought to experience reincarnation, was apparent. In fact, whenever this was the topic at hand, nearly everyone I encountered seemed to know of or be directly related to someone who had the experience.

The connections that result from reincarnation are just one important facet of the kinship ties that create the foundation on which the Druze establish their sense of community and thus their sense of belonging. The study of kinship in anthropology is diverse and includes creating kinship diagrams, which was the focus of Robin Fox’s influential book *Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective* (1983 [1967]). Fox defines kinship as: “the study of what man does with these basic facts of life – mating, gestation, parenthood, socialization, siblingship etc. Part of his enormous success in the evolutionary struggle lies in his ability to manipulate these relationships to advantage” (Fox 1983 [1967]:30). The ways in which individuals classify and navigate their kin-relations have provided beneficial adaptive strategies (Fox 1983 [1967]:31). However, kinship is not always reckoned by the “blood-ties” and nuclear family units that often define Western notions of family and of marriage partners (Fox 1983 [1967]:33).

Anthropologists have taken diverse approaches to the study of kinship and have foregone traditional kinship diagrams, sometimes creating models or theories of their own. For example, Eric Wolf utilizes a political economy approach to illustrate how economic systems often reflect the strategies of kinship (Wolf 2001:167). In place of family he looks at how “corporate kin units” are formed alongside the interest to acquire wealth or even land (Wolf 2001:171).
As anthropologist Antoinette Jackson stated: “maintenance of kinship connections through land ownership from one generation to the next [is] a key cultural resource and an invaluable link to the past” (Jackson 2014:2). Druze sense of belonging is thus a result of both jointly constructed through inheritance of land, which is passed down to offspring. The assets of the father are passed on to his widow and then on to their children. Both sons and daughters have the potential to inherit property and family buildings. If for whatever reason the family’s home or property cannot be split evenly amongst offspring, the choice heir is likely to be the oldest son, especially if he is married. In such instances the remaining offspring are given portions of whatever assets remain although daughters inherit half the portion of their brothers as discussed in the third chapter (Azzam 2007). The inheritance of land of is handled by Druze courts in Lebanon, which register wills. The possibility of being disinherited is particularly rare but it does result in a kind of social control by which parents might ensure that their sons and daughters act in honorable ways, which often includes marrying among the Druze community (Khuri 2004:55, 56). Understanding notions of kinship is always relevant to understanding cultural heritage and social organization among any group from the Middle East because important decisions are almost always a family affair: “marriage choices are made by a group of people from the extended families of the conjugal pair, whether the marriage is among Muslims, Christians, or Jews” (Eickleman 1989:170). Indeed, Druze culture has much in common with these other religious communities, drawing on similar interpretations of other Abrahamic faiths, among which endogamy is also the standard. For all of them, and perhaps especially the Druze, marriage within the community can be a symbol of reaffirming the shared heritage of the couple when considering its association with lineage.
Anthropologist Victor Ayoub explains how endogamy and a lack of conversion perpetuate the community’s insularity. He says that the Druze community has historically comprised a set of interrelated familial groups and adds: “A strong pride in being a Druze and a strong commitment to maintain the solidarity of the religious group derive from the social relationships which have emerged as these principles have been applied. Such sentiments have helped, in turn, to perpetuate the principles and consequent social relationships” (Ayoub 1970:140). Likewise, the principles of kinship reckoning dictate family values which contribute to forming much of the foundation of the society’s social structure (Ayoub 1970:137).

While the collective opinions of research respondents indicated that a substantial majority of Druze lack a functional knowledge of their religion, religious ideology still plays an important role in their communities throughout Lebanon. Protection of one’s brothers and sister in faith, or hofez al-Ikhwan, is an important doctrinal precept for the Druze (Swayd 2009:38). Loosely, Druze conceptualize the worldwide community as an extended family of sorts. In Lebanon: “Extended families live in close proximity to one another; brothers build their homes on adjacent land when possible, and decisions are often made in consultation with other members of the family” (Swayd 2009:58). In some instances this also applies to Druze in the diaspora as the concept of the family unit extends to cousins, aunts, uncles, and in-laws. As well, many young Druze are likely to consult with their parents about pursuing romantic interests, especially since they might be familiar with the reputation of other Druze families. This represents one example of how a particular religious belief has important social implications and that a comprehensive understanding of culture best illustrates the nuances of complex social challenges such as a community-wide knowledge gap and preservation of ethnoreligious identity.
The Implications of the Research Project

The goal of this research has been to identify and support efforts to provide resources that impart knowledge of the community’s history and religious tenets. This study has involved working with Druze of all different kinds of backgrounds in Lebanon to identify their various conceptualizations of heritage and how it can best be preserved. More specifically, my research methodology has focused on discerning how various members of the Druze community in Lebanon conceive of and expresses their heritage and how they may be seeking to preserve it. This research has also examined the cultural resources of Druze communities throughout Lebanon and has asked if educational resources focusing on the community’s history and the basic tenets of their faith are recognized as a means of preserving their heritage. To do this, I have assessed the degree to which individuals are engaging with such resources while identifying how they might be improved. It is also important to note that the Druze community, like so many other groups, represents a heterogeneity of people with a variety of social, economic, political, and religious experiences. My repeated use of the phrase “Druze community” is not intended to imply a standardized form or singular approach to identity or heritage, as will be illustrated in the plethora of diverse feedback that participants provided.

While the objective of this research project has been to provide practical support in understanding and preserving Druze heritage, some of the specific outcomes have included identifying the cultural and educational resources available, the levels of participation, and how such resources can be improved, expanded, or made more accessible. Participants have been essential in defining how they think about and express their Druze identity so that the research implications are suited to promoting greater enculturation. Without implying that there is an optimal “Druze culture,” I am advocating for greater accessibility of cultural resources and the
knowledge necessary to allow individuals to engage with Druze history and religious beliefs if they see fit to do so. The resources that I mention here are those that the community has deemed relevant and include a wide variety of formal institutions and informal resources of learning. Their diversity reflects the comprehensive nature of engaging with one’s heritage and the malleability of any constructed history. By encouraging diverse interpretations of Druzeness, it is possible to recognize that the ways in which the Druze define their heritage in Lebanon today is not necessarily the same as what they might have done when the religion was founded a millennium ago, nor in past centuries when the Druze prince Fakhr ad-Din II established his authority over what was conceivably the precursor to the Lebanese state, nor when the Lebanese Civil War raged throughout the 1980s (Hitti 1962:11).

As will be discussed in the sixth and seventh chapters, the Druze’s interest in expanding, improving, or developing new or existing educational resources was made apparent by those with whom I spoke. Participants offered a variety of opinions and ideas that coalesced into practical recommendations that might help inform both future researchers as well as existing community efforts. Mainly, the contributions of this research were largely shaped by the ideas put forward by study participants while their input was the key factor in shaping the application of this project. However, my role as researcher has not been limited to interpreting participants’ feedback. During my time conducting fieldwork, I became increasingly familiar with current efforts and the resources available to the Druze community in Lebanon, as well as the literature focused on a wide array of salient topics. This project represents a direct effort in collecting firsthand data to address social issues among the Druze community for applied purposes. While there are a variety of potential applications, including promoting social movement, this research
will serve as a reference point for further work that might address very specific cultural resources.

In order to preserve Druze heritage, Druze identity (which includes cultural values, social bonds, feelings of community, shared symbols, etc.) should be strengthened by personal knowledge of the community’s history and religious tenets. As a student of applied anthropology, it is imperative that the application of this research might in some way inspire social change and encourage an increase of the available educational resources. This research has the potential to make substantial contributions to aspects of applied anthropology that advocate for social change, improves educational assets, and promotes the importance of preserving intangible cultural resources among vulnerable populations. Concerning beneficence, it is my hope that the Druze individuals believe that the community can be strengthened by inspiring an interest in Druze history and religious knowledge. Indeed, the collective knowledge gap is real and evident to the vast majority of the Druze in both Lebanon and elsewhere. In deciding to conduct this research, it has always been my goal to make resources, information, and knowledge accessible and to encourage active inquiry addressing the apparent historical and religious knowledge gap that has become so pervasive.

Before fully delving into the subject at hand, presenting the layout of the subsequent chapters will help readers recognize how this discussion of Druze heritage unfolds. Following the introduction, which presents an overview of the Druze community and key themes of the research study, the second chapter deals comprehensively with the pertinent literature on heritage. More specifically, I review a broad sample of social science research before outlining my theoretical approach to the study of heritage. Chapter three offers an overview of Druze history leading up to their contemporary situation in Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. Chapter four
positions the Druze community in the greater anthropological research on minorities in the Middle East and reviews various studies whose themes on heritage relate to the Druze. In chapter five I provide details about the town of Aley, the community in which I lived while conducting research throughout Lebanon, along with an in-depth discussion of the academic issues that surround studies wherein the researcher shares the ethnic background of those being researched. Here I also explain my research and sampling methods and highlight the pertinent ethical considerations. Chapters six and seven work collectively to explore the data in four sectioned themes that iteratively build on one another and chapter eight concludes by discussing how this research contributes to applied anthropology and to supporting collective efforts to preserve Druze heritage.
Chapter 2 Reviewing Heritage in the Literature and Developing a Theoretical Perspective

Ethnography was an essential tool to finding out about how the Druze constructed collective notions of their heritage, their shared identity, and their sense of community. As a researcher attempting to understand how an ethnoreligious community conceives of and creates their shared notions of society and religion, in this case the very things that make the Druze a community, many social factors had to be taken into consideration. As will be discussed in later chapters, participants’ feedback illustrated how things like popular culture, globalization, regional politics, welfare programs, economic factors, philosophy, theology, history and collective memory, all play integral roles in constructing notions of shared values and community.

In order to focus my literature review, I’ve considered academic works in both anthropology and other relevant fields, as well as the vast majority of published materials on the Druze in the English language. By operationalizing the research question, which asks how improved resources concerning the fundamentals of Druze religion and history influence collective notions of Druze heritage, it became apparent that heritage emerges as the most formative facet of theoretical inquiry. The anthropological and broader social science research that both employs and analyzes concepts of heritage, forms the crux of the following literature review. However, the discussion is not limited to a critical look at heritage as an essentialized
social phenomenon. By including a number of fields that contribute to the emerging field of heritage studies, I’ve considered a comprehensive range of diverse approaches to heritage, which draw on other important social concepts, such as identity among ethnic and religious minorities at home and in the diaspora, authenticity and collective memory, preservation and assimilation, and that most integral of anthropological concepts, culture.

The following literature review has been organized into two sections beginning with an overview of how the concept of heritage has been constructed and deconstructed. The second section includes my definition of heritage and is summed up with a discussion of my theoretical approach. In the following pages, I hope to contribute a more nuanced discussion to the academic literature that addresses how ethnic and religious minorities negotiate the prospect of preserving their heritage using available cultural resources. Moreover, this literature review helps elucidate how individuals conceptualize and define what constitutes assimilation, preservation, or the maintenance of cultural heritage for any minority group.

**Topic Areas in Studying Heritage**

Heritage is a term that varies in its textbook definitions, its academic treatments, and its use in everyday life. Given this multitude of handlings, heritage has become a concept that is simultaneously laden with meaning and too amorphous or ambiguous to accurately capture any specific facet of community. In anthropology, research on heritage similarly includes a number of approaches, each framed by a key thematic focus that is largely governed by the research goals. For example, an anthropologist involved in cultural resource management works from a well-known foundation that includes specific methods, bodies of literature, and theoretical discussions that have been constructed by referencing certain themes and using familiar jargon,
thus establishing a relatively distinct field. Having identified seven of the most prominent thematic foci in cultural heritage research, the following discussions explain the main goals and themes for each of these and provide a critical analysis of their strengths and weaknesses by referencing a sample of significant anthropological and non-anthropological works.

Writing in an edited volume, professor Regina Bendix has stated that since the 1990s: “scholarship on heritage practices has enjoyed a boom of its own. It is as difficult to categorize the scholarship about it as to comprehend the phenomenon, constitution, use, evaluation, and critique of cultural heritage itself” (Bendix 2009:253). In the anthropological literature, different theoretical approaches to heritage are largely defined by the focus of their themes and their research goals. These themes include a variety of topic areas and theoretical frameworks and are often cohesive in their content and their common approach to the concept of heritage. This cohesiveness also connects the anthropology of heritage to a number of related fields, to form a sort of conglomeration around the continually coalescing field called heritage studies.

Based on a review of academic literature that both defines heritage and uses it to examine a number of cultural aspects, it is apparent that this interdisciplinary theme continues to develop into an increasingly distinct field referred to as heritage studies. Experts in this field, and those who actively take part in its debates, often have a broad range of backgrounds such as architecture, geography, history, tourism, and fine arts, not to mention local preservationists or others who are actively engaged in their local communities (Miri 2012; Stanton 2005; Turnpenny 2004). This diversity is due to the fact that both products and processes of heritage are implicated in some of the most fundamental qualities that define each of these disciplines. Heritage is based on nationality, language, ancestry, ethnicity, and even artistic expression, just to name a few of
its potential qualities. As the anthropologist Peter Howard put it: “heritage is revealed as one of those subjects that includes almost the whole of human experience” (Howard 2003:53).

Some researchers like archaeologist Laurajane Smith, believe that heritage studies as an established field is increasingly recognizing the importance of both political contexts and social motivators in attributing significance to their architectural and archaeological projects (Logan and Smith 2009). Thus, the preservation of artifacts and monumental sites, “are subsumed within the new field that sees ‘heritage’ as a social and political construct encompassing all those places, artefacts and cultural expressions inherited from the past which, because they are seen to reflect and validate our identity as nations, communities, families and even individuals, are worthy of some form of respect and protection” (Logan and Smith 2009). Scholars are also an integral part of creating social and political frames of representation and it is important to maintain a vigilant awareness to refrain from essentializing, as best we can, the people, the places, and the things that we study.

It should also be mentioned from the outset that in anthropology, much of the research that is focused on heritage is largely dedicated to its material or tangible parts and traditional expressions while the goals of these research projects are aimed to salvage and preserve material culture (Shepherd 2014:2). As I will explain, the exclusion of intangible cultural heritage represents the principal flaw in the majority of anthropological research that deals with heritage. Generally speaking, many academics see heritage as production and neglect to recognize that material effects are always an expression of individuals whose experiences are the most essential facet in connecting to their heritage. Such research lacks the more inclusive approach that sees heritage as process, refocusing on the integral relationship between the individual, and their experiences, their understandings, and their expressions.
It is important to note that while academics researching aspects of heritage do not necessarily discuss how it should be comprehensively categorized across the interdisciplinary spectrum, many authors do begin their work by providing their definition of the concept. For example, the various fields of heritage related to governmental conservation efforts identified by anthropologist Peter Howard only include tangible things like artifacts, landscapes, and monuments (2003). However, Howard asserts that heritage is a very broad concept and goes on to recognize the importance of intangible social facets as well. For some researchers, heritage is functionally defined as an asset; for others, it is a product that can be consumed (McKercher and du Cros 2002). Some academics explain that the characteristics of heritage can be manipulated and that it is defined by contemporary interests rather than relations with the past (Chan 2005). Erve Chambers divides heritage into public and private realms, and believes that the heritage industry has imprudently become synonymous with the concept of heritage itself (Chambers 2006).

Each of the following discussions highlight some of the most prominent approaches and topic areas in research that utilizes the heritage concept and yet they are not discrete, but share in an overarching debate to define and categorize heritage. Peter Howard described this categorization as based on predefined differences believed to meaningful and stated: “If the job of heritage management is made more difficult by the complexities of deciding what heritage actually is, the job of the interpreter is often made easier as the similarities between the categories are seen to be more significant than the differences” (Howard 2003:53). The following sections represent a more in-depth discussion of the seven topic areas based on the most prominent themes found in the literature and provides a critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each approach by providing examples of some of the more significant works.
available. This is followed by a discussion of my definition of and approach to heritage as informed by this review.

**Heritage as a Manageable Resource**

The fields of cultural heritage management and cultural resource management, or CRM, are largely synonymous in the United States and often represent a topical subfield in archaeology that applies the archaeologist’s expertise in representing antiquated heritage sites (Chirikure and Pwiti 2008; Christenson 1979; Meskell 1998). Alongside archaeologists, cultural anthropologists are also involved in CRM, which includes contemporary arts and other expressions of heritage that are seen as integral assets to members of the community from which they stem and to human culture more generally. The anthropologist Peter Howard is a cultural heritage consultant whose work often stands in stark contrast to that of non-anthropologists in the same field. For instance, Howard recognizes that: “The kinds of heritage that are officially recognized and conserved by government organizations, also tend to be those with less meaning for people in their daily lives” (Howard 2003:52). Meanwhile, tourism experts such as Bob McKercher and Hilary du Cros often neglect to distinguish between the sometimes competing interests at heritage sites that may represent worthy yet conflicting causes (Howard 2003:52).

Anthropological research concerned with cultural heritage management and preservation is diverse and can include intangible heritage as in the work of Antoinette Jackson among the Gullah/Geechee (2012), or facilitating balanced representations of ethnic minorities, such as Susan Greenbaum’s long-term advocacy for the Martí-Maceo Society representing Afro-Cubans in Tampa (2002). In her more recent efforts to redress historical misrepresentations at plantation
sites, Jackson keenly identifies the principal conflict that cultural and heritage resource researchers must face. She explains that: “There are tensions, for example, associated with managing heritage as an asset for preservation and heritage as a product for consumption” (Jackson 2012:15).

In his work, *Heritage: Management, Interpretation, Identity* (2003), Howard identifies several different heritage categories but provides the caveat: “As we examine and attempt to classify all the things (many of them not really objects at all) that can become heritage, we are forced to the conclusion that such a classification is not a very useful analytical tool with which to study heritage, because too many things do not fit comfortably into any one category” (Howard 2003:53). Despite the criticisms of his own schema, Howard maintains the efficacy of classifying heritage resources, which seems constrictive no matter how comprehensive the categories. Creating artificial boundaries that define heritage based on its value as a tangible resource is not a particularly useful way to understand its diverse facets, including its cultural, historical, social, and even ethnic components.

Researchers that focus on managing tangible heritage often relegate their research to public displays since these represent the point of cultural contact with perceived outsiders (Howard 2003:1). While issues of access to the private realms of heritage might be more challenging to penetrate, cultural identity is constructed in both worlds (Howard 2003:1). Howard devotes much of his book to those who work in the field of heritage management and says that while private heritage may not be the focus of their conservation efforts, “they also need to be aware that almost every heritage item has another set of personal meanings to someone, and that every visitor to official, managed heritage arrives with a personal baggage containing a heritage which they regard as much more important” (Howard 2003:4). Howard’s
point is well taken and emphasizes the role of people in constructing value within their cultural, political, and historical contexts. Howard says that heritage is contingent by nature and that: “Volition is critical; things actually inherited do not become heritage until they are recognized as such. Identification is all. Heritage can be regarded as anything that someone wishes to conserve or to collect, and to pass on to future generations” (Howard 2003:6, 11). Scholars engaged in heritage research often have disciplinary backgrounds situate specific artifacts of traditions as essentially important and worthy of preservation (Howard 2003:7). Despite the fact that heritage draws on any number of aspects of group identity, research in heritage management has a deficit of studies that look at how heritage constructs notions of unity and instead focus on tangible artifacts or folklore (Howard 2003:9).

James Clifford’s book Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (1997), explains how scholars might place different values on tangible heritage through the labels and organizational categories their works create. He asks: “Why do certain non-Western objects end up in fine-art museums [and] others in anthropology collections? What systems of value regulate the traffic among diverse collections” (Clifford 1997:108). Having visited four museums in the Vancouver area, he explained that the all provided ethnographic context alongside aesthetic exhibitions and refrained from artificial divisions that situate tribal tangible productions as either art or culture (Clifford 1997:110). The museum displays offered a more complete context that did not necessarily frame native culture as a look into a bygone past. Clifford explained that museums could shift their master narratives from loss and salvage to struggle and revival (Clifford 1997:109). As such, the works of those who manage cultural heritage is best served by directing the narratives they create towards to include the values of
those living communities being represented and not just the interests of the majority (Clifford 1997:110).

**Heritage as a Marketable Tourist Product**

Cultural anthropologist and heritage expert Erve Chambers defines heritage tourism as: “a leisured search for other traditions that are untouched by modern influences and a longing for a sense of authenticity through which the tourist might at least briefly escape the alienation of the industrial age” (Chambers 2010:97). While there are a number of different ways to define heritage tourism, this definition illustrates that the focus is on the tourist who is essentially a visitor and an outsider in at least some recognizable way. It also draws our attention to the tourist’s search for essential qualities that allow them to escape their own modern lives and to experience the culture of those who are seen as more traditional and in some ways vestige representations of our shared human past (Bunten 2008; Kosansky 2002; Shepherd 2002; Stein 2008; Taylor 2001).

A prevalent theme among the research on heritage tourism deals with the exchanges between privileged tourists and disadvantaged natives (Urry 2002). For example, although tourism can have negative effects on the social practices of a community, reactions often vary from retreat to boundary maintenance and perhaps even a greater awareness of self and the revitalization of some customs (Schoenhals 2001). Tourism can also bring wider public attention and financial resources to waning traditional practices and can provide support for historic places (Chambers 2010:57). In general, this area of research focuses on exchanges between tourists and...
locals and addresses how either party might stand to benefit or lose from the financial and cultural exchanges that can take place.

One gap in the focus of tourism-based research is a lack of comparative analysis illustrating how communities respond to newly established tourist economies: “Compared to the amount of scholarship that has been devoted to trying to discern different motivations and types of tourists, relatively little comparative research has been directed to attempting to generalize the ways in which communities and regions respond to tourism” (Chambers 2010:56). As well, anthropological research should recognize that even if local, publicly observed traditions (e.g. festivals, dances, holidays) experience a revival in the context of an expanded tourist economy, their meanings and practices inevitably change. Since tourism necessitates the inclusion or surveillance of outsiders/strangers, it is likely that their very presence transforms the tradition, and therefore its local interpretation as heritage, much in the same way a researcher effects the opinions of informants in the field. In his book Native Tours: The Anthropology of Travel and Tourism (2010), Erve Chambers explains that since the categories of tourist and host are socially constructed, the lines can be blurred as individuals sometimes tour within national boundaries or return to the countries of origin after years of living abroad. However, Chambers also says that anthropologists often focus on the kinds of tourism where the distinctions between host and tourist are especially discrete (Chambers 2010:59). These cases can exoticize those involved and may lead to frequent misrepresentation of heritage tourism issues generally speaking.

A particularly interesting case study in heritage tourism that highlights the manipulation of symbolically important places is Selina Chan’s “Temple-Building and Heritage in China” (2005). She explains how the appropriation of a particular type of temple in the Jinhua province of rural China imposed new meanings on the local community. The appropriated temples are
associated with the saint Wong Tai Sin, who is often revered among the residents of metropolitan
Hong Kong and more recently, among Chinese expatriates that often visit the Jinhua province.
The recent rising popularity of Wong Tai Sin has produced a burgeoning tourist industry wherein
transnational Chinese have adopted a once foreign symbolic figure. Chan explains that the
popularity of these temples represent a: “heritage process, an interpretation, manipulation, and
invention of the past for present and future interests” (Chan 2005:65). Chinese from outside of
Jinhua are driven by their desire to experience traditional temples, festivals, and myths, and have
reconfigured both the meaning of Wong Tai Sin temples and the local cultural landscape to fit
their imaginations. She also explains that the locals were not bereft of power in the decision
making process. Rather, in facilitating the transformation of these temples into heritage sites,
they have determined where tourists go and what they see (Chan 2005:69).

Perhaps the biggest contribution to heritage when studying tourism is that the researchers
involved, particularly anthropologists, advocate working with stakeholders to manage both
tangible and intangible assets. This allows the researcher to find the right balance between
education and entertainment and conservation and commodification (McKercher and du Cros
2002:99). However, positioning heritage as a marketable product for tourist consumption can
limit the scope of the research to groups and people (e.g. artists, performers, entertainers and
representatives) who are considered interesting and to places that are aesthetically pleasing, and
are therefore of value to outsiders. This kind of privileging is analogous to the way in which the
word culture has been popularly used to refer to the high arts and the interests of elite society.
Similarly, looking at heritage tourism can sometimes restrict more holistic approaches, drawing
on constructions of heritage that can be limited to a kind of social fact that exist objectively
outside of those who have given it meaning from its inception (McKercher and du Cros 2002).
A focus on heritage tourism requires a difference between hosts and guests and an awareness of the culture of the latter when contact is made between the two groups (Chambers 2009:354). Some who study tourism, like Paul Shackel, insist that the cultural characteristics of heritage continue to be considered alongside contemporary communities: “Many communities struggle with their sense of place in an increasingly globalized world. Recovery, interpretation, and the celebration of the past are important for sustaining local identity and a sense of place” (Shackel 2005:1). In his article “Local Identity, National Memory, and Heritage Tourism: Creating a Sense of Place with Archaeology” (2005) Shackel explains that the effort to have the town of New Philadelphia, which is perhaps the oldest town founded by an African American, recognized by the Archaeological Conservancy included attempts to increase the town’s profile in the broader public awareness (2). He states that: “Preserving heritage is more than just freezing a moment in time. Heritage is an expression of what people think is important. Places on the landscape that are celebrated by heritage tourism mark who we are as a community and a nation” (Shackel 2005:4).

Tourism has the potential to impact the way a society sees itself and the way it expresses its culture. Host groups have many incentives to produce a cultural experience that is increasingly reactionary rather than representative of any real values or traditions. In his article based on tourism in Indonesia and Tanzania (2007), Noel Salazar states: “Natural and cultural heritage destinations worldwide are adapting themselves to the homogenizing culture of tourism and at the same time trying to maintain, or even increase, their local distinctiveness” (23). Certainly the same can be said of minority communities more generally and of the processes of cultural change, acculturation, and adaptation in contemporary society. In a joint article with Benjamin Porter, Salazar smartly asks: “Can we discover something new about the phenomenon
of heritage when it is uncoupled from common partnerships of management, preservation, and tourism” (Porter and Salazar 2005:362). They highlight the fact that tourism has been the crux by which heritage has been studied in anthropology and given its focus on the juxtaposition of tourists and hosts, it is important to consider that an approach to studying heritage preservation solely for the benefit of host groups may yet to be fully explored.

**Heritage as a Public Performance or Private Experience**

The work of Erve Chambers is also popular in literature that conceptualizes cultural heritage as divided into two spheres, the public and the private. He explains that public heritage is valued: “as commodities, properties, and experiences to be appreciated and accumulated by strangers who may well benefit from the association, but who generally have no stake in the outcome and feel little or no responsibility for the kind of careful upkeep that heritage truly requires” (Chambers 2006:3). Conversely, private heritage remains linked to lived experiences and does not entail production nor performance (Brumann 2009; Hill 1975; V. Smith 1989). Researchers that focus on the differences between the public and private spheres of heritage, such as the cultural geographer David Lownethal, understand that public heritage is an expression of an idealized and antiquated past while private heritage is based on the interpretations of the host community and represents directly inherited values: “which might well be appreciated by outsiders but cannot be claimed or possessed by them” (Chambers 2006:3).

Focusing on the dichotomy between the private and public spheres can be very informative so long as the researcher understands that a public heritage is intended as a representation for the experiences of perceived outsiders, as defined by various members of the
community. These experiences are always mediated by what individuals decide to display as well as the politics of the state or other powerful stakeholders. Combined, national and local interests shape the facets of a group’s heritage, which in turn produces the narratives that others encounter. As well, public heritage often focuses on the historical past, while private heritage is engaged with a group’s cultural present (Bruner 2001; Chhabra, Healy and Sills 2003:705). This dichotomous approach can also limit the scope of research that is focused on the contrasts between public and private cultural heritage.

In many ways, public heritage is based on a public claim to a kind of universal or world heritage wherein our accomplishments as a supposedly united race are conceptualized as shared endeavors (Hamer 1994; Salazar 2007). Oftentimes, when heritage is made larger, that is, removed from the local or private and placed in the public domain for everyone to claim, it may no longer be an intimately important part of our identity and isn’t necessarily aligned with our personal sense of self or our connections to our forebears and the places we call home. While many forms of public heritage may offer substantial meaning in our lives, like nationality, I am referring to the process by which the private is made public without the approval of those being represented, such as those indigenous communities throughout the world that have had their backyards transformed to serve the needs of those who take part in the cash economy.

Situated in contrast to public heritage, private heritage has the potential to be situated as homogenous within a group, neglecting to recognize the variety of individual’s cultural interpretations. While such research should be commended for its focus on the power relations between outsiders and the community, it provides only a one-dimensional interpretation of the private sphere. Similar to the focus on heritage tourism, this research area is primarily a response to today’s heritage industry: “which has in many respects become synonymous with the idea of
heritage itself, and is a direct consequence of our attempts to transform heritage from the realm of culturally distinct personal inheritance into a kind of public history” (Chambers 2006:11). This is in keeping with the fact that there has largely been a shift of resources from the private to the public, including museums and properties of historic interest that have the potential for profit (Chambers 2006:11).

Writing in the journal *Current Anthropology*, James Clifford focuses on native displays of heritage, which he at one point labels contingent performance, as a means of navigating political systems (Clifford 2004:8). Clifford brings to the forefront how public heritage performance benefits native groups. He explains: “Heritage projects participate in a range of public spheres, acting within and between Native communities as sites of mobilization and pride, sources of intergenerational inspiration and education, ways to reconnect with the past and to say to others: ‘We exist,’ ‘We have deep roots here,’ ‘We are different.’” (Clifford 2004:8). Clifford smartly highlights how displays of heritage intended for those outside of the group include a type of self-marketing that facilitates the resilience of the community by encouraging a stronger cultural identity. As will be discussed in following chapters, notions of Druze particularism suffered from a lack of an authorized or widely agreed upon public image. Research participants identified their lack of public engagement parallel to the lack of engaging educational resources within the community, sometimes leading to certain misgivings about what being Druze actually meant on a private scale.
Heritage as Authentic Representation

Eric Gable and Richard Handler are among a number of anthropologists whose research is concerned primarily with notions of the real and authentic – and with exposing the idea of authenticity as a kind of power-laden discourse (Cohen 1988; Cole 2007; Condevaux 2009). In their article in *American Anthropologist* titled “After Authenticity at an American Heritage Site” (1996), they discuss how Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia has become a site that attempts to recall the American past by creating a place that represents an idealized national heritage. They explain that authentic representations are often elusive since heritage sites attempt to establish their cultural authority based on an objective truth that neither exists nor realistically represents anything. However, heritage sites such as Colonial Williamsburg are often seen as authorities of the authentic where heritage has been preserved yet is no longer actively produced. Thus, authentic heritage becomes the concern of preservation rather than continuation while anthropologists might see themselves as doing salvage work for cultural knowledge that might otherwise disappear. This approach to heritage focuses on the role of museums as the chief interpreters of the authentic, even while critiquing their fundamental ability to represent cultural heritage (Levy 2006). Therefore: “Heritage museums become publicly recognized repositories of the physical remains and, in some senses, the ‘auras’ of the really ‘real.’ As such, they are arbiters of a marketable authenticity” (Gable and Handler 1996:568).

Authenticity is a concept that implies that some experiences and expressions have more objective reality, or “Truth” with a capital T, than others. While the ability of heritage sites and museums to reproduce expressions of heritage verbatim is inherently impossible, the effort is of course not without its merits. For example, although the narrative produced at Colonial Williamsburg, defined as a living history museum, has largely focused on the colonial elite,
Historians working at the site have attempted to include depictions of African American slaves and the working class (Gable and Handler 1996:569). Gable and Handler’s research recognized that discrimination and oppression were not welcome themes in a space that is mainly interested in offering a singular and proud portrayal of the nation’s democratic roots, even with excessive efforts and meticulous attention towards reproducing authentic representations of 18th century architecture, dress, and social behavior (Gable and Handler 1996:572).

Perhaps the most glaring issue associated with the search for authentic representations of heritage lies in the futility of chasing an authenticity that is ever-changing with inherently mutable conceptualizations of cultural values. For example, in their edited volume, The Invention of Tradition (1983), the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger explain that traditions are always being reinvented, shaped to suit the needs of contemporary communities. Likewise, in his article with fellow anthropologist Jocelyn Linnekin, Richard Handler explains that traditions: “are invariably defined in the present and reinterpreted to meet the ideological needs of the living” (Handler and Linnekin 1984:280). As well, authenticity can become questionable when heritage resources are situated solely as artifacts of the past and are thus commoditized for the broader public (Chambers 2006:13). It is apparent that oftentimes academics and other power holders have set the standards concerning what is and isn’t authentic (Gellner 1970), often neglecting the perspectives and values intimately linked to those who made their heritage significant to begin with.

Tourism studies professor Ilinka Terziyska identifies nominal authenticity as mainly concerned with the provenance of heritage assets while expressive authenticity is best defined as being candid or sincere with one’s sense of self or personal character: “unlike nominal authenticity, which is empirically tested and based on facts, expressive authenticity connotes
something else, having to do with an object’s character as a true expression of an individual’s or a society’s values and beliefs” (Terziyska 2012:85-86). This second definition of heritage takes a constructivist rather than essentialist approach, by recognizing the subjective interpretations of the worlds which we perceive and thus construct. However, while an objectively defined authentic heritage is no longer tenable in theoretical discussions, it is still pervasive in the marketing of tourist sites (Terziyska 2012:89). Tourists often experience the staged authenticity that is developed with the specific interests of the tourist in mind (Terziyska 2012:88-89).

In his study of Maasai tourist performances at three different sites throughout Kenya, Edward Bruner describes how researchers remained fixated on singular typologies that create stereotypes such as the fierce Maasai warrior (Bruner 2001:881). Citing earlier work by sociologist Dean MacCannell, Bruner states that scholars tended to homogenize both the staged displays of the locals as well as the tourists themselves. For example, the three performance sites that Bruner analyzed varied not only in their approach to an authentic experience, but also in the stories they enacted, portraying Maasai history (Bruner 2001:881). The tourists that attend these performances also include urban Maasai and other Kenyans, although their relation to the narrative is certainly different from that of foreign tourists as is their agency in their interpretation: “many Kenyan intellectuals laugh at parts of the Bomas performance, criticizing the inaccuracies in its representation of tradition and regarding its characterization of the various ethnic groups as inauthentic” (Bruner 2001:899-900). Erve Chambers also says that the perspectives, interests, and expectations of tourists continue to evolve and that they are increasingly well-versed about global politics and economic forces, as well as how their participation in the tourist economy results in ramifications for their hosts (Chambers 2009:353). He believes that the broad expansion of wealth in nations previously considered third-world
continues to lead to increased domestic tourism, which will have a bigger impact than their foreign counterparts (Chambers 2009:354). One example of an assessment of a domestic tourist site, which is among the few quantitative analyses in the field, is Deepak Chhabra, Robert Healy, and Erin Sills’ study that highlighted how perceptions of authenticity could have very little to do with the proximity to the original cultural source material (2003). Focusing their assessment on the satisfaction and likelihood of return among attendees at Scottish Highland games staged in North Carolina, the authors explain that although the event was a reproduction, it was considered a genuine in terms of the traditional culture it represented (Chhabra, Healy and Sills 2003:704). They conclude by stating: “satisfaction with a heritage event depends not on its authenticity in the literal sense of whether or not it is an accurate re-creation of some past condition, but rather on its perceived authenticity (consistency with nostalgia for some real or imagined past)” (Chhabra, Healy and Sills 2003:705).

Heritage as Silence and Elision

In what is arguably his most popular work, Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (1995), Michel-Rolph Trouillot illustrated just how crucial hidden narratives can be in constructing a national identity and heritage in Haiti. Since then, Trouillot’s concept of silences has become a popular theme in the cultural heritage literature, as many social scientist have worked to redress underepresented narratives and omitted perspectives (Appadurai 2005 [1996]; Greenbaum 2002; Jackson 2012; R. Smith 2006). Research that focuses on silence is also often concerned with issues of authenticity and more accurate representations (Gledhill 2000; Rodrigues 2008; Sheriff 2000; Yong 2006). The main distinction between the two topic areas is perhaps in their approach. While anthropologists who focus on authenticity are likely to
critique heritage sites and commodities, those who recognize the intentional elisions in records and representations are commonly concerned with addressing the gaps in history and the heritage it helps to construct. As Trouillot argues, historical authenticity cannot be experienced through narratives that situate the past as distinct from the present. Taking this a step further, it should be recognized that the present shapes the past that we choose to recognize (Trouillot 1995:151). A focus on how power influences control over the general cultural and historical narrative is most useful when acknowledging that individuals are not inherently objective actors and that we are all influenced by constantly renewed practices of power and representation.

Silences can be a double-edged sword of sorts. They can be used by a community to protect their private heritage, or by corporate and national interests to oppress minority and disenfranchised groups. Trouillot illustrates how Haiti’s history, and by proxy its heritage, was forged in both what was and was not acknowledged. He supports a critical examination of historical records that are often riddled with absences and elisions which are more often than not intentional. He states that: “They are created. As such they are not mere presences and absences, but mentions and silences of various kinds of degrees. By silence, I mean an active and transitive process: one ‘silences’ a fact or an individual as a silencer silences a gun” (Trouillot 1995:49). The most important contribution of research that focuses on silenced and underrepresented narratives is their aptitude to shed light on the private and personal interests involved in the process of meaning making that may or may not represent a valid history or heritage for all (Greenbaum 2002; Jackson 2011).

Studies that address the constructive ways in which living communities can use silences to shape their public heritage and protect or preserve what they consider private are not common in the anthropological literature. For example, religious dissimulation among the Druze has often
allowed the community to create a new version of heritage or expressed identity that is acceptable to share with others. The distinguished anthropologist and Middle Eastern scholar Fuad Khuri understood that like other minority groups, the representation of Druze heritage and history is guided by preservation and protection of the community (Khuri 2004:231). Since parts of the Druze religious doctrine are secret, even to the majority of Druze themselves, religious dissimulation, referred to as tаqіyyа, has been an integral part of their social relations with people of other faiths, whether they are tourists or neighbors.

An interesting case illustrating similar concerns has emerged in Israel where for the last decade Druze towns in the Galilee region have become touristic hotspots for international and local Jewish communities. While community members obviously avoid discussing the more contentious beliefs of their faith (e.g. reincarnation, strict endogamy, lack of conversion), tаqіyyа represents an active silence practice that has allowed the Druze to control how they participate in the vigorous tourist economy while preserving their private domain. In this, they appear to be the best possible hosts, feeding tourists in their homes while seeming to lay their heritage bare for nostalgic and inquisitive travelers that come to be entertained by the traditions and pastoral life of those Arabs that decided to comply with the Israeli state early on.

Trouillot says that as we interact with history, we are either actors or narrators. History is malleable, which allows individuals engaged in the heritage of others (e.g. academics and tourists just to name a few) to seek a more authentic truth beyond the fundamental narrative. The people we decide to engage with and the heritage we impose on others are a direct result of our interests and the economic circumstances of all involved. The most important contribution to focusing in how silence can be used to control expressions and interpretations of heritage lies in understanding that silences do not require a consensus since its motives are often structural and
are part of social systems that include politics, economics, and religion, just to name a few (Trouillot 1995:106). Indeed, Edward Said explains that history, like heritage, “is made by men and women, just as it can be unmade and rewritten, always with various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated” (Said 1978: xviii).

**Heritage as History or Memory**

Heritage as history is an approach that is often put forward by those involved in heritage tourism research (Birth 2006; Eidson 2005; Schwenkel 2006; Shackel 2005; Wolf 1982). When the cultural heritage of living communities is effectively supplanted by their history, it can be more easily marketed to outsiders whose interests are based on their claims to a shared human history. Erve Chambers agrees that this universal claim on traditional heritage is typically couched in history from a time in the past that can no longer be contested since it cannot be reached in the memory of living people (Chambers 2006:9). Therefore, heritage can be removed in one swift motion from the context of lived experience if researchers are not careful to recognize the importance of place and the communities in which value has been constructed. On the other hand, heritage as memory is also in the past but remains focused on the discursive construction of acknowledged traits that living people identify with.

In his article “History, Memory and Identity: A Programmatic Prolegomenon” (2002) published in *Critique of Anthropology*, Kevin Yelvington cautions that historicism positions history as an absolute commodity while relegating important, unique experiences to the periphery. Much of the research that focuses on memory or historical accounts can benefit from Yelvington’s historical materialist approach that includes “the integration of an individual into a
larger social context” (Yelvington 2002:228). To understand heritage, it is crucial that anthropologists are able to analyze how people conceive of their history, interpret memories, and construct their past. However, Yelvington reminds us that memory is not always accurate and should not be consecrated as a true depiction of the actual experience. While individual memory can deconstruct objective claims from history’s monolithic façade, it is situated in the cultural milieu, relying heavily on past experiences and current contexts (Yelvington 2002:239). In other words, memory is not always individualistic as it draws from common place frames that are often conveniently situated to reinforce existing cultural norms.

Research based on a noncritical approach to history results in misrepresentations such as the shallow depictions of plantation life offered at heritage sites throughout the southeastern United States. In a more recent publication Speaking for the Enslaved: Heritage Interpretation at Antebellum Plantation Sites (2012), Antoinette Jackson conducted oral history interviews with the descendants of the slaves who worked and lived on nearby plantations over a century and-a-half ago. Aware of the glaring disconnect between the narratives being presented at such sites and the knowledge passed down through her informants, Jackson’s research at once reunites history and memory. Professor of Middle Eastern Studies, Mordechai Nisan, explains that sharing an imagined past, with all its glories and grief, is at the core of how communities define and distinguish themselves. Reflecting on how a shared historical past might influence a collective future, Nisan explains: “In recollecting the historical record, a people enjoins its members in educating their children to store up the collective memories and carry them on to the next generation. In this fashion the people strengthen the conviction of a shared fate” (Nisan 1991:11).
As one researcher put it: “Nostalgia defines the vanishing point of history” (Herron 2007:678). While this statement might seem perceptive, it is the nostalgia that should be of interest to the anthropologist studying cultural heritage. For example, Chambers explores his own nostalgic connections to his hometown in his work *Heritage Matters: Heritage, Culture, History, and Chesapeake Bay* (2006). Having grown up in Washington State’s Puget Sound, he explains that he no longer felt connected to the area since it didn’t resemble its industrial past and had been undergoing an aesthetic overhaul to cater to a growing number of tourists. He admits that while his hometown has likely changed due to its practical needs and shifting service economy, “it has created a past and a sense of heritage distinction that has less and less to do with anything it ever was” (Chambers 2006:36). He goes on to say that: “The other past, the things I do remember, have much less of a public presence, and are captured mostly in chance encounters with old friends, occasional family reunions, and faded photographs” (Chambers 2006:36). For Chambers, these are the facets that shape his heritage as valued expressions of his memory. Research which recognizes the salience of memory in constructing personal accounts of cultural significance can lead to very insightful discourses about heritage, so long as the anthropologist considers informant narratives and takes a critical approach to archived materials and historical representations.

**Heritage as Process**

In reviewing the anthropological literature focused on cultural heritage, my overarching critique emphasizes a common lack of attention to the intangible components. This considerable gap in the academic discussion is best addressed when we understand that heritage is a process of meaning making that includes many aspects of our personal and social identities (L. Smith 2009:123).
This particular topic area represents a dynamic approach to heritage that is most similar to my own perspective. However, it can also make heritage a somewhat nebulous topic that, much like the concept of culture, can be difficult to capture. The research that focuses on cultural heritage as process is best represented by the work of archaeologist Laurajane Smith. While she is among only a few academics to give this approach ample attention, many others mention these important ideas in their own research (De Cesari 2010; Jackson 2014; Olwig 1999; Pokotylo and Guppy 1999; Scher 2002; Turnpenny 2004).

In her book *Uses of Heritage* (2006), Smith explains that both tangible and intangible heritage exist subjectively as values that are broadly recognized and understood under the rubric of our own cultural norms. This is to say that as members of any number of communities, we gain our sense of value from those around us. While value systems throughout the world are by no means universal, traditions and symbols are always present in some form. Therefore, whether it is your family portrait hanging in the living room or the Statue of Liberty in New York City, both are at once obvious articulations of valuable tangible heritage. Working to preserve the archaeological materials of Aboriginal people in Queensland, Australia, Smith came to recognize that heritage was perhaps more prevalent in their daily activities, especially their pastimes. She explains: “I began to realize fishing was a multi-layered activity. . . It was in fact ‘heritage work,’ being in place, renewing memories and associations, sharing experiences with kinswomen to cement present and future social and familial relationships” (L. Smith 2006:1). Recognizing that heritage existed in what others might consider the mundane, she goes on to say: “Heritage wasn’t only about the past – though it was that too – it also wasn’t just about material things – though it was that as well – heritage was a process of engagement, an act of communication and an act of making meaning in and for the present” (L. Smith 2006:1).
This approach supports an understanding that items become artifacts and ruins become heritage sites because we attribute value to them; we essentially conflate our ancestral past with ancient sites and heirlooms. These are material symbols, characteristic representations of the values we embrace. It is not difficult to neglect to identify the crucial link between the material objects, places, ceremonies, and histories, with the process of attributing these things with significance by adopting them into the discourse of heritage. Using her grandmother’s necklace as an example, Laurajane Smith states that: “The real sense of heritage, the real moment of heritage when our emotions and sense of self are truly engaged, is not so much in the possession of the necklace, but in the act of passing on and receiving memories and knowledge” (L. Smith 2006:2).

In her edited volume *Intangible Heritage* (2009) with Natsuko Akagawa, a research associate with the Cultural Heritage Center for Asia and the Pacific, Smith elucidates some of the structural reasons why academics have popularly focused their research efforts on tangible resources. In particular, the World Heritage Convention, or WHC, in 1972 stressed the importance of preserving humanity’s shared heritage by focusing on monumental sites and other appealing places based on a largely Eurocentric value system. While the policies of the WHC and similar international agencies will be discussed further along, Smith and Akagawa cite David Lowenthal who explains that it is futile to seek to preserve an imagined universal human heritage since heritage by its nature is contested (Smith and Akagawa 2009:5). This contestation further exposes the process of meaning making that is integral to how we construct our sense of heritage as individuals that are members of communities with shared pasts. Smith and Akagawa consistently use the phrase “new heritage studies” to discuss how the field is gaining new insight and a more critical approach to subjects such as these.
Essentially, Smith and Akagawa, along with the collective authors in their volume, believe that: “Heritage only becomes ‘heritage’ when it becomes recognizable within a particular set of cultural or social values, which are themselves’ intangible’” (Smith and Akagawa 2009:6). In part, their book also seeks to address the deficiency facing the field of new heritage studies as they believe it to be exceedingly under-theorized (Smith and Akagawa 2009:foreword). Among the most important idea the authors present in their introduction is the larger concern of “how to safeguard and manage a heritage that is mutable and part of ‘living culture’ without fossilizing, freezing or trivializing it” (Smith and Akagawa 2009:2-3). Focusing on how cultural resources are managed in Britain, another author identified similar dilemmas, warning that “Researchers will have to consider how we can deal with contradictory values and whether it is possible to preserve wider elements of cultural heritage without causing stagnation” (Turnpenny 2004:303-304). While these might seem like daunting tasks that are not often addressed in the literature on cultural heritage, increased debate among anthropologists that recognize heritage as a living process will surely continue to benefit the field and its treatment of this essential social aspect which connects individuals to their past and to one another.

**Defining Heritage in the Discourse**

Heritage is a concept that is both loaded with meaning and malleable. Many social scientists and anthropologists alike have used the term as a convenient category from which to study a variety of communal facets ranging from the preservation of historically important sites to understanding issues of cultural assimilation in the diaspora and among minority groups (Asad 1979). The following discussions utilize literature focused on important themes associated with key aspects of the Druze community’s collective heritage. Having reviewed a significant amount
of literature on both heritage in general and the Druze in particular, it was clear that the
following themes merited their own critical discussions to warrant my assertion that an
understanding of Druze heritage represents the most suitable approach in identifying what might
be at stake for the group in the social tableau of the modern Middle East.

Much of the literature previously discussed represents the current academic discussion on
heritage while a more critical analysis of the term is gradually emerging from a narrow approach
focused solely on tangible assets and on transfers of inheritance that only tell part of any story.
Considering textbook definitions, the word heritage finds its root in the term inheritance, which
provides context for the process by which property, biology, and cultural traits are transferred
and received. Oftentimes, definitions such as this delimit heritage to material components but
sometimes allow room for other inherited qualities including cultural traditions, values,
nationality, ethnicity, language, and other traits that shape shared identity.

Although the UNESCO is most known for protecting world heritage sites, they have
more recently recognized the importance of intangible cultural heritage (Smith and Akagawa
2009:3). On their webpage, it is explained that: “Cultural heritage does not end at monuments
and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our
ancestors and passed on to our descendants” (UNESCO 2010). The text goes on to say that
intangible cultural heritage is fragile and that it is essential to understanding diversity and
encouraging respect for others. In my opinion, labeling cultural heritage as fragile or soft is an
assumption that conflates change with loss rather than the production of new cultural forms.
Such conventions are inadequate and seem to be more common in non-anthropological literature
in heritage studies (McKercher and DuCros 2002:83). This may also lead to the privileging of
what is labeled traditional heritage, creating superficial distinctions that make certain forms or
practices appear authentic and worthy of preservation in a reliquary rather than acknowledging meaning that is produced concurrently with lived experience.

As mentioned previously, the World Heritage Convention, or WHC, worked in the early 1970s to produce a list of important cultural and natural sites worthy of protection. However: “The World Heritage List has been shown to be not only Eurocentric in composition, but also dominated by monumentally grand and aesthetic sites and places” (Smith and Akagawa 2009:1). It is apparent that UNESCO’s dominant perception of, and policies towards, heritage preservation is also heavily influenced by a dominant Western agenda, wherein heritage is conflated with the aesthetically pleasing and the grand or monolithic that should inspire pride in all of humanity (Smith and Akagawa 2009:3). While there are a plethora of issues concerning the tensions between various philosophical approaches to both intangible and tangible kinds of heritage, most do recognize that heritage is contested and mutable by its very nature.

It wasn’t until 2003 that the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, or ICHC, had been established, which was a progressive step forward, offering at least a slightly more inclusive consideration of the kinds of cultural forms that warrant protection. In particular, the ICHQ recognized that intangible cultural heritage is inherently connected to the community from which it stems, and should be sustained as such. Moreover, intangible cultural heritage “is preserved in communities whose members practice can manifest forms. If the tradition is still alive, vital, and sustainable in the community, it is safeguarded” (Munjeri 2009:148).

Referencing material heritage, anthropologist Peter Howard states: “Heritage is deeply concerned with ownership, and the root concept of inheritance is fundamentally a legal device for the transfer of ownership. A century ago ‘heritage’ only referred to property transfer, and the
French word *heritage* still has only this meaning” (Howard 2003:104-105). Here, his use of the term suggests that it can be open to more than just property transfer as he explains that heritage has acquired meaning beyond its roots. He even goes on to say that our most fundamental heritage is in our genes. While the genes we inherit from our ancestors are an important aspect of heritage for many, this statement fails to recognize the process of meaning making as the author later states: “the deepest cultural identity seems often to be inherent not in objects which can be preserved but in more personal features and cultural traits” (Howard 2003:88).

In contrast, Erve Chambers says that: “heritage has become one of those ideas that easily commands our respect and attention, but that in the end does not seem to work in any general sense because its most profound meanings are almost invariably personal and thoroughly partisan” (Chambers 2006:1). I agree that heritage often carries the connotation of nostalgia or at least, something which we personally treasure both as members of a community and as individuals; however, this does not mean that anthropology is incapable of studying the phenomenon. On the contrary, individual meaning, values, and partisan opinions are among the core interests of anthropologists, often motivating their academic inquiry. Chambers also recognizes that a more critical treatment of heritage reveals that it largely represents our current circumstances more than our pasts (Chambers 2006:2). Definitions such as this are more and more common in the heritage discourse that is increasingly recognizing the superficiality of the resource centered heritage that has previously been so prominent. Anthropologists and other social scientists alike have labored under the impression that categories such as nationality, ethnicity, linguistic groups, and ancestry to name a few, should constitute discrete aspects of our social worlds although they are collectively integrated into our lives via similar processes. However, artificially constructed boundaries are not representative of people’s experiences nor
their expressions. I agree with Antoinette Jackson who stated that heritage is, “anything a community, a nation, a stakeholder, or a family wants to save, make active, and continue in the present” (Jackson 2012:23).

**Framing my Definition of Heritage**

Much like archaeologist Laurajane Smith, I define heritage as a process of producing meaning from aspects of the past, such as ancestry, history, or culture (L. Smith 2006). This is not to say that heritage is necessarily situated in the past. On the contrary, while it is based on conceptualizations of the past, like memory, heritage is situated in the individual’s current experience and is shaped by any number of one’s cultural perspectives. Heritage can influence nearly any aspect of social life and often serves as a foundational basis from which an individual constructs their personal identity.

This research relies on a more inclusive definition of heritage that goes beyond material culture, tangible symbols, and archaeological sites. When asked to discuss their heritage, many people will immediately identify some aspect of their culture, their language, their nationality, and their family. Heritage is not distinct from these qualities, but is the process by which we claim them. Here, particular attention is paid to how heritage is received, interpreted, and expressed, as well as how specific facets of one’s cultural identity are subjectively identified as integral parts of their shared heritage. Writing in the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Michael Turnpenny explains that to understand intangible cultural heritage, one must recognize that “material culture is the physical representation and expression that is valued due to its cultural significance. This approach to defining cultural heritage recognizes that it can include all elements of life, not merely the built and material world” (Turnpenny 2004:296).
Among anthropologists, the core concept of culture is largely contested and widely debated (Turnpenny 2004:297). Meanwhile, heritage, although commonly evoked, has received little critical attention. In my opinion, a self-serving definition of heritage that is constructed without the opinions of research participants only results in a convenient category rather than an informative framework. I argue that to achieve the latter, anthropologists, and perhaps social scientists in general, need to develop a more nuanced and complex understanding of heritage that considers how individuals use the term and what specific qualities or characteristics they associate with it. In some instances heritage has become fetishized, implying that the term itself has inherent value and exists independently of the processes and people that give it meaning. In recognizing broader conceptualizations of heritage, it is possible to identify the pitfalls of a shallow and static understanding which disregards significant arrangements of place, politics, and power. Turnpenny agrees and states that intangible cultural heritage can range from oral traditions to knowledge about the world more generally. He argues that “traditional approaches, reflected in British government legislation and policy, ignore elements integral to community perceptions of cultural heritage. The current framework of heritage management also hinders practitioners from exploring, conserving, presenting and challenging these constructs” (Turnpenny 2004:295).

The somewhat superficial treatment is perhaps most prevalent among those whose research defines heritage solely as a commodity or marketable tourist product. While tangible assets are important, we must recognize that they are made culturally significant and imbued with value subjectively in a process that is continuously reified and contested from within and without. Similar to my approach, Peter Howard has said that heritage can only be recognized in the process of interpretation. For Antoinette Jackson, this interpretation constitutes a kind of
journey, which “represents a profound desire to see ourselves in the continuum of history on a family, community, national, or global level. It is a quest to know more about ourselves” (Jackson 2012:21). Similarly, heritage is more than just an expression of our links to the past. It is lived experience, largely formulated in our lifetime and shaped by any number of values that are particular to the individual and reflect their personal identity. Put more plainly, cultural heritage is a living process of meaning making (L. Smith 2006) that shares a reciprocal relationship with how we identify ourselves and the cultures to which we subscribe.

Much like notions of ethnicity, heritage is a category that is culturally constructed (although the former continue to be commonly associated with our biology). Anthropologist Dale Eickleman has stated: “Ethnicity in modern usage refers to the way individuals and groups characterize themselves on the basis of their language, race, place of origin, shared culture, values, history…” (Eickleman 1989207-208). Thus, similar to heritage, ethnicity can be very inclusive and anthropologists should recognize that people express these facets of their identity in very diverse ways. Heritage is a particularly useful way to study the Druze because it is a correlate of ancestry. Since the Druze do not proselytize nor recognize any method of conversion, members must be born into the community, making membership discrete and definite. Heritage is also a useful framework because the heritage an individual or group decides to construct and embrace is based on decisions in the present and is largely informed by current, personal, or shared needs.

Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa state that communities must feel connected to their heritage in order to reaffirm their culture and sense of belonging (Smith and Akagawa 2009:foreword). Much of what the authors in their edited volume have to say also relates to the importance of history and memory in the constructions of heritage, or what they have termed as:
“the political and cultural process of remembering/forgetting” (Smith and Akagawa 2009:6). It is particularly important to recognize that in conducting fieldwork that includes interviews and other qualitative methods, participants are relating their remembered experiences, creating a discourse that relates their imagined notions of social phenomena such as ancestry, heritage and community.

Citing her earlier survey among visitors to heritage sites in England, Smith found that it was extremely common for individuals to define heritage as one’s family history and oral tradition and as a retention of memory (Smith and Akagawa 2009:7). In particular, heritage allows people to express and describe their collective memories, especially those things which are assigned a collective value. While it is commonly associated with tourism, historical sites, and objects that reflect a shared national past, it is foremost the means by which shared values and customs allow us to connect our perceived pasts to their material expressions (Bendix 2009:253). Personally, I agree with Regnia Bendix’s perspective which puts even more onus on the process of creating shared values as she states: “Cultural heritage does not exist, it is made. From the warp and weft of habitual practices and everyday experience – the changeable fabric of action and meaning that anthropologists call ‘culture’ – actors choose privileged excerpts and imbue them with status and value” (Bendix in Smith and Akagawa 2009:255).

As will be discussed in the following chapters, my research has included a number of questions to understand how the Druze community in Lebanon defines their shared heritage and to see if its role in the lives of non- mushayekh can be strengthened by expanding collective engagement with historical and religious knowledge. In order to do this I’ve taken Michael Turnpenny’s advice in my approach to studying heritage, as he states: “If we seek to manage the wider cultural heritage that is valued by communities, then it will have to be defined from within,
which requires a recognition that the concept of cultural heritage can include all elements of life, not merely the built and material world” (Turnpenny 2004:303).

In considering the various approaches that influence the study of cultural heritage and other salient themes that have been discussed, I believe that a more robust theory needs to be utilized to account for the major discrepancies noted thus far. I propose a conceptualization of cultural heritage that is less reified than many of the works discussed in the first section of this chapter. Foremost, it is important for researchers to recognize that the negotiation of heritage always involves power and shapes the ways in which we relate to our realities. At the same time, heritage is not an abstraction nor does it necessarily represent an ideal, but is instead experienced and expressed in any number of ways. Heritage should not be fetishized to the extent that it appears concrete since it is not limited to its material expressions. A well-informed conceptualization of cultural heritage is never a fully theoretical nor a figurative concept and it is by no means completely represented by its tangible components.

Aside from Laurajane Smith, it is the intention of this work to build upon the efforts of anthropological studies like those of Antoinette Jackson and Edward Bruner, as well as researchers who offer critical analyses of heritage tourism like Robert Shepherd, James Clifford, and Peter Howard. I agree with Shepherd’s view that: “The most important contributions the discipline provides to conversations about heritage are its traditional emphasis on long term field work, embrace of rigorous theoretical analysis and insistence on the contextualization of its subject” (Shepherd 2014:1). In particular, this contextualization is best approached through a political economy framework, as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter. This work expands upon these researchers’ framing of heritage as a process of meaning making in the present, through its application in understanding how cultural identity is constructed and
contested to understand the root causes of a perceived unfamiliarity with Druze history and doctrine and to facilitate a stronger sense of belonging by means of engagement with expanded educational resources. As Clifford states: “Heritage work, to the extent that it selectively preserves and updates cultural traditions and relations to place, can be part of a social process that strengthens indigenous claims to deep roots—to a status beyond that of another minority or local interest group” (Clifford 2004:9).

It is my intention that this discussion might provide a foundation to encourage a more analytical approach to understanding heritage and the important ways in which it shapes cultural identity. I believe that something akin to a paradigmatic shift in understanding non-academic conceptualizations of heritage, which do not necessarily lend themselves to simple analysis, is required for best practice. Neither over abstraction nor unrelenting reification will do. Plainly put, it is important to keep in mind that the heritage an individual or group decides to construct and embrace is generally based on decisions in the present and is informed by their current circumstances. Given my emphasis on qualitative methods and research questions that allow for participants’ creative interpretations, it is my hope that the following chapters do more than simply scratch the surface of the complex process by which individuals simultaneously learn from, relate to, and reconstruct their shared heritage.

My Theoretical Approach to the Study of Cultural Heritage

My definition of cultural heritage differs primarily because I remain focused on shared interpretations of value within broader social structures. For others, strictly framing heritage as a resource relegates it to its material symbols and neglects cultural knowledge, including a familiarity with history and religion, which has been at the center of this research. It is also
important to remember that individuals have degrees of agency to assign value to social constructs, which in-turn shape and mitigate agency. A strong attachment to community reifies notions of heritage and emphasizes it as a process rather than an intractable monolith of stolid customs and traditions. Anthropologists working with heritage should situate participants’ discourses in relation to their agency, or lack thereof, to elucidate how they express themselves within or in reaction to larger social processes (Roseberry 1988). These processes include historical, religious, economic, and political contexts, among others. In particular the theoretical framework of political economy offers the most suitable approach to illustrate the connections between promoting access to cultural resources and to preserving collective heritage.

In particular, my theoretical approach seeks to illustrate the importance of locating the balance between social or interpretive anthropology’s emphasis on individual agency, while incorporating the broader structural contexts that is the focus of political economy. Through ethnographic fieldwork and a broad approach to cultural heritage that moves beyond its material components, I was able to incorporate the diverse variety of perspectives without limiting them to a specific framework of interest. Put more plainly, participants spoke about their Druze heritage as it related to their community’s politics, yet its correlation with those politics were not as simple as partisan divisions. At the same time, individuals also related their heritage to so many other things including differences of socioeconomic status, processes of traditional enculturation, spiritual progression, ethnic conflict, and globalization just to name a few. Druze heritage represents an intersectionality of all of this, which collectively frames their political-economic environment. This theoretical approach elucidates the importance of situating the opinions of the Druze within these overlapping contexts. The feedback from each individual
participant cannot be relationally situated to any collective phenomena, be it culture, community, or heritage, if it is disassociated from its root causes.

While the nature of these collective phenomena dictates that they are shared within a perceived group, it should also be understood that individuals’ feedback provides us with our analysis. The political economy approach, has allowed me to recognize that Druze heritage, as interpreted by research participants, draws on all of the aspects of their society, including its relationships with other religious groups. Their heritage is at once all of these things yet cannot be reduced to any one of them in particular. Political economy offers the strongest theoretical approach to understanding how Druze identity and heritage are shared by focusing on who informs popular opinion and its generative processes on public discourse. With this in mind, I have attempted to understand how Druze individuals utilize their agency within their given cultural, political, and economic systems to construct their sense of belonging as well as possible sentiments of disenfranchisement. For the Druze, the decision to embrace or to challenge traditional notions of heritage are still choices that are situated in relation to the social process that is heritage. Thus, when I refer to how heritage is being constructed and contested, I once again return to the processes of creating personal value and meaning through shared forms.

Supporting a theory of political economy with an interpretive approach to the discourse constructed by research participants offers an accurate means to understanding Druze heritage. Without overemphasizing the individual’s power to shape their own agency, a theory of political economy reminds us that the choice to partake in or to challenge traditional forms is still a choice that is limited to interaction or reaction within structural contexts. As we will see in the following chapters, contesting or embracing Druze customs, culture, or history includes an extremely complex set of value judgements. The decision to challenge can illustrate indifference
or it can exemplify a great interest in creating new cultural forms of expression while finding value in longstanding traditions. A number of parallel or converging motivations lead to challenges and to change, as does indifference and decline. In some instances, new cultural traditions can become part of a society’s narrative while their source becomes irrelevant or altered to best fit with how the group perceives its historical roots (Chhabra, Healy and Sills 2003:705-706).

A theoretical framework of political economy provides a reminder that most often what gets valued is considered privileged, not because it relates to the interests of the majority, but because of the interests of those who shape ideological systems. For the Druze, an ideological positioning of Druze identity would be to emphasize its unique qualities and advocate a kind of particularism that conflates preservation with insularity. While it is certainly not the goal of this research to endorse outcomes that encourage this kind of insularity, Druze particularism should also be examined critically. Kais Firro explained that Druze particularism could result as a separatist tendency or a kind of process of association. The latter has two expressions that include a shared interest in the common struggles across ethnic or religious boundaries or a strong national sentiment that had served to unite the Druze with other religious groups over the centuries (Firro 1992:353-354). These expressions of particularism illustrate that even notions of uniqueness have not always conformed to the dominant narrative, in this case, separatism.

For the Druze, that dominant heritage narrative is influenced by a plethora of social characteristics from both the imagined past and the cultural conditions of the present. Heritage is a political process that defines belonging and even creates outsiders. This is achieved through an intersection of heritage processes that include national sentiment and history. In the case of the former, the claim of Lebanese nationality includes belonging to a society that represents multiple
religious groups and shifting political dynamics. These are the contexts in which Druze history is imagined and in which Druze heritage is constructed. Utilizing a theory of political economy, grounds heritage in its formative processes. My approach expands Laurajane Smith’s focus on heritage as a process of meaning making by shifting the focus from individuals with inherent agency to individuals acting within their social structures. My approach also provides an example of how ethnographic methods can be applied to understand these heritage processes among a specific group, contributing an important example of an ethnoreligious minority to Peter Howard’s critical discussion of the multi-faceted nature of heritage and identity (2003).

While individuals can describe their own experiences and explain their personal conceptualizations, heritage resides in collective perceptions that are themselves defined by social value systems. Taking a more critical look at how anthropologists often work within pre-constructed frameworks defined by particular ideologies, Talal Asad said “The search for essential meanings in anthropology invariably results in the treatment of ideology in a reductionist fashion … and in confounding it with philosophical issues” (Asad 1979:623). Rather than constraining our use of the term “ideology” to an essential notion of Druze heritage, a theoretical framework of political economy coupled with a discourse-oriented approach allows individuals to express their values in relation to more systemic contexts. To relate back to my definition of heritage, it is important to emphasize that Druze identity and culture are necessarily shared and experienced via the process of heritage and its connections to an imagined past. For the Druze, being part of an ideological system indicates being engaged with one’s heritage and sense of shared identity. This sense of group identity is drawn from the ancestral pasts that we relate to: “This includes not only engaging processes of uncovering knowledge but also simultaneously engaging in the construction of memory” (Jackson 2011:450). People’s
engagement with heritage requires a dialectical understanding of history as conceived in the present. Therefore, heritage is constantly changing and transforming society as it is continually constructed and contested.
Chapter 3 From an Early History of the Druze to the Modern-Day

No publication on the Druze, scholarly or otherwise, is complete without a review of the community’s roots. In the various texts and media, treatment of Druze history has ranged from a few precursory pages to entire volumes devoted to specific historical events. It is important to note that such reviews serve two interconnected purposes: they familiarize the reader with the unfamiliar and construct a foundation for the discussions which follow. Both of these objectives contextualize the goals of this chapter while assuming a level of familiarity, or in this case unfamiliarity, on the reader’s behalf.

Maintaining an awareness of these somewhat obvious facts is a reminder that every book, article, or documentary aims to deliver a particular message in a manner in which the author(s) deems most suitable for the intended audience. In this regard, writing about the history of the Druze community is indeed a balancing act, especially in a work that is not historical but seeks in part to understand the role of historical knowledge in preserving shared heritage. This position becomes more tenuous when considering the range of differences among possible readers, which may include general academics, anthropologists, American Druze, Lebanese Druze, Druze academics, or casual readers interested in ethnic or religious minorities in the Middle East. Each of these kinds of readers have significantly varied backgrounds and knowledge bases that influence their interpretation of the text, and each of them must be considered in its writing. This
consideration of both the reader’s and the author’s positionality, and cultural backgrounds, highlights the goals of this chapter. The following sections expand upon the brief summary of Druze history offered in the first chapter and begin with an overview of the formative years of the community leading up to the present.

Early History of the Druze

The Druze believe that the revelations of their faith constitute certain truths that have been evident since the beginning of time (A. Obeid 2006:11). These truths are represented by the vital belief in the ever-existent path of Tawhid, or oneness with God. The focus on the uncompromising unity of God may arguably make Tawhid a unique theosophy among other monotheistic faiths. The Druze share a belief in God as the originator of existence and in the incremental revelation of religious and philosophical truths during each cycle of the various biblical ages including that of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Christ, as well as Muhammad in Quranic reckoning (Sayegh 1983:10). For some, the pervasive strain of Tawhid, which simultaneously precedes and connects the significant monotheistic faiths, is where their roots lay. In other words, an individual who considers himself or herself on the path to Tawhid, may ostensibly trace their roots to well before the years the historical records indicate the Druze faith was founded. The historical account that follows however, signifies the beginning of the time of al-Hakim bi-Amrillah, which marks what is believed to be the final revelation of Tawhid and the establishment of the community as it is currently known.

In what was an especially diverse religious milieu, the Fatimid Caliphate gained influence in the late 9th and early 10th centuries, later conquering Egypt and establishing Cairo as its seat of power in 969 CE (Firro 1992). Taking their name from their ancestral connection to
the Prophet Mohamed’s daughter, The Fatimids were a Shia Dynasty in what was a largely Sunni region, with significant Jewish and Christian populations represented as well. The rule of the Fatimids took place during what is considered the Islamic golden age, marked by the founding of what is considered by many to be the world’s first university (Al-Azhar), major trade routes with China’s Song Dynasty, the establishment of large hospitals in urban centers, and royal courts which promoted individuals based on their scholarly merit rather than their lineage (Firro 1992:10).

![Map of the Fatimid Caliphate](image)

**Figure 3.1** The Fatimid Caliphate in the late 10th century (Yenemus 2007).

At its zenith, Fatimid rule extended from modern-day Morocco to Turkey (see Figure 3.1) and into portions of the Arabian Peninsula, including the holy cities of Jerusalem and Mecca. In 996 CE the sixth Fatimid caliph named al-Hakim bi-Amrillah ascended to the throne and soon after began to tell his subjects that the Divine Call of *Tawhid* would soon be revealed (Sayegh 1983:7). To say anything about al-Hakim’s character is to walk a fine a line between conflicting historical interpretations. While the Druze tend to have an unabashedly positive view of al-Hakim’s rule, their approach is no less accurate than that of the historian whose explanation...
of limited historical records translates into a sometimes exaggerated expose of the psyche of individuals and groups gone for a millennia. For example, while reviewing literature in preparation for my Master’s thesis, I compared the work of two of the most prominent authors on the Druze community, representing very different approaches to their treatment of the enigmatic al-Hakim. It was apparent that each author’s depictions differed significantly, although this is not to say that they contradicted one another nor lacked accuracy. On the contrary, reading both points of view allowed for a more intricate illustration of this pivotal figure. In comparing Sami Makarem’s *The Druze Faith* (1974) to Robert Brenton Betts’s *The Druze* (1988), I wrote:

Betts focuses on the historical account of Al-Hakim, which shows him to have been strange, impious, and cruel. Betts also emphasizes his belief that Al-Hakim was likely the victim of murder, despite the fact that historical evidence is lacking: “At length he became intolerable even to his friends, and was assassinated by order of his sister, as he walked alone at night” (Betts 1988:10). Conversely, Makarem focuses on an almost folkloric account of Al-Hakim, describing his ascension to the caliphate with vivid images: “His eyes were piercing and his steps were full of confidence. When he reached his golden throne, he sat down and was hailed by all the people who were present” (Makarem 1974:15). Important details are provided by both author’s accounts of Al-Hakim’s life, although the latter doesn’t describe the sometimes tyrannical nature of his rule depicted in mainstream historical accounts, while the former neglects to mention that the caliph inherited the throne at the young age of eleven (Radwan 2008:13).

Perhaps Ambassador Abdullah M. Najjar put it best when he said that al-Hakim’s character was a study in contrasts, marked simultaneously by important acts of generosity and munificence, such as the establishment of Dar al-Hikma (an ancient center of learning), and
egregious flagrancies, such as the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem (M. Najjar 1973:148). Differences notwithstanding, all agree that al-Hakim was a social revolutionary. Throughout the caliphate he abolished slavery without exception, and among new religious adherents, he outlawed polygyny and sanctioned a woman’s right to initiate divorce, own property, and to inherit at a rate equal to half of a man’s share (Azzam 2007:20, 37). He also renounced all religious rituals and idolatry and espoused philosophical inquiry into sacred texts and of the spiritual world more generally. Thus in many ways, the inception of the Druze faith is best understood as a philosophical and social revolution foremost, and secondly as a spiritual revolution among the pervading faiths in the region. This is to say that the Druze faith does have significant distinctions as a branch of Islam including: “the abolition of the hereditary system of imama,\(^2\) which formed the core of Ismaili messianic beliefs” (Firro 1992:10).

After approximately twenty years as caliph, al-Hakim initiated the Divine Call in 1017 CE (Firro 1992:13). Prior to this, he had recruited a number of preachers or religious promulgators, and had instructed them in the particulars of the faith. First among these individuals was Hamza ibn Ali; hailing from the Persian town of Zawzan he traveled to Egypt at the age of twenty and eventually established himself in al-Hakim’s court becoming a close confidant (Sayegh 1983:9). Al-Hakim named Hamza as the Imam, or religious leader, of the Divine Call almost immediately. Hamza was to spread al-Hakim’s message which preached the veracity of Tawhid and the relinquishment of other doctrines (Sayegh 1983:7). Willing individuals of sound mind were accepted into the fold of the new faith by signing a figurative, eternal contract called mithaq, which recognized their acceptance of the Divine Call beyond their lifetime, holding each person accountable in their subsequent incarnations. Figuratively, the

\(^2\) The system of successive imams, Islamic religious leaders.
mithaq continues to bind the Druze together through the belief that individuals are reincarnated into the community as an outcome of their original commitment.

During this first year, another of al-Hakim’s preachers, named Nashtakin ad-Darazi, became envious of Hamza ibn Ali’s special position and began to spread a seditious dogma to attract his own followers. Given his subversive techniques, ad-Darazi’s movement quickly gained traction with the people of Cairo and they began to associate the followers of the new Divine Call with his name, naming them as Druze. Thus many in the Druze community aware of these historical details feel misrepresented by the fixed appellate derived from the name of this principal heretic. Many believe that a more accurate or appropriate name for the community is the Muwahhideen, which translates loosely into Unitarians, or more accurately into those who follow the path of oneness with God, followers Tawhid, (Ewing 2010[1907]:86). This demarcation is manifested in the book of Wisdom, or Kitab al-Hikma, comprised of 111 epistles addressing particular moral, ethical, and theological philosophies in part through doctrinal expose and historical accounts (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:11).

Nashtakin ad-Darazi remains a categorically contentious figure for the community and given the fact that the Druze take their name from him is testament to the power of external social forces, reminding us that our shared identity contains characteristics that are both internally subscribed as well as externally ascribed. The seriousness of ad-Darazi’s actions prompted al-Hakim to suspend the Divine Call one year after it had officially begun. It was restored a year after that in 1019 CE after al-Hakim had him put to death for instigating a revolt against Hamza and the true followers of Tawhid (Sayegh 1983:12). Just two short years later in 1021 CE, al-Hakim, on one of his usual nighttime journeys into the outskirts of Cairo, mysteriously vanished. His disappearance is an especially contested part of the historical
narrative as some authors, exemplified in Robert Brenton Betts’ earlier quote, believe he was murdered while the Druze believe he occultated and that his disappearance was a test of their collective faith (Sayegh 1983:8). In this same year, Hamza ibn Ali retired after entrusting leadership of the Call to his confidant, and another of the faith’s original religious promulgators, named al-Muqtana Baha’uddin (Sayegh 1983:10). In the subsequent twenty years of his lifetime, Hamza remained in constant contact with al-Muqtana, advising him in his direction of the Divine Call. Their correspondence containing religious direction and instruction makes up a portion of the 111 epistles of the *Kitab al-Hikma*. 

Al-Muqtana Baha’uddin would face a number of trials during his tenure as the steward of the Call, beginning with a wicked backlash to the faith’s new adherents, orchestrated by al-Hakim’s successor, the seventh Fatimid Caliph, named Az-Zahir. Upon claiming power of the caliphate, Az-Zahir unleashed an extremely brutal campaign against the new believers with the goal of exterminating both individuals and communities where the faith had taken root. His malice was due in part to the fact that he didn’t trust their loyalties since there was a shared belief that the position of *imam* had passed from al-Hakim to Hamza ibn Ali rather than to himself (Swayd 2009:xlv). The Call went underground during this time and remained that way for six years filled with ruthless slaughter that decimated followers from Alexandria to Aleppo. As these campaigns against the concealed believers slowed down throughout the Levantine region, the Call was finally resumed in earnest in 1026 CE (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:16). Eventually, the Call went underground again due to continued atrocities, but emerged for a final time upon the death of Az-Zahir in 1036 CE (Sayegh 1983:19). During much of this time, Al-Muqtana Baha’uddin led the Call from the city of Alexandria and even gained the trust of Az-Zahir’s son and successor al-Mustansir, the eighth caliph of the Fatimid Dynasty. Finally, in
1043 CE, al-Muqtana suspended the Call indefinitely, deciding that sufficient time had passed for it to have served its purpose (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:16; Firro 1991:13).

After the Divine Call ceased, those individuals who accepted the newly established faith and retained it despite persecution were thereafter known as the Druze. One author recently wrote: “Druzism slowly evolved from being a religious way into becoming a community with distinctive features and characteristics, originally established in the Lebanese mountains” (Halabi 2014:1). Communities of mountain-dwellers found throughout this region were mostly Isma’ili Shia Muslims, similar to the original Fatimids themselves, and were particularly receptive to the faith’s message (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:17). These mountain ranges in particular served as a formidable advantage during the community’s struggle to survive Az-Zahir’s aggressions and militaristic action from a variety of local and distant powers such as the Byzantines. Furthermore: “As a result of their early oppression and struggle for survival, their way of life came to emphasize the martial arts and associated militaristic or Spartan values of bravery, strength, stoicism, and self-sacrifice” (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:18).

As a consequence of persecution the movement had gone underground a number of times in its early years. Part of this strategy included a sanctioned form of religious dissimulation, referred to as at-taqiyya, which will be discussed at length in chapter four. Allowing individuals to openly deny their faith in order to preserve it had previously been a practice of Shia Muslims to secure their communities from outside threats (M. Najjar 1973:32). Throughout their history and into the present, the Druze have faced many such threats adopting strategies of survival from their ancestral forbears against religious fatwas and encroaching empires alike. In reference to a collective recognition of the Druze faith’s connection to its Islamic roots, one author defined at-taqiyya as an accommodating ruse. The author went on to explain that the integration of the
Druze as a sect of Islam: “was strengthened when the Shaykh of Al-Azhar stated that the Druzes are in fact Muslims. This questionable evaluation could legitimize the ‘Ismaili hereticism’ and allow the Druzes to play a respectable role in the Muslim East. Whether either side truly believed in the Islamicism of the Druze religion is a question” (Nisan 1991:91). Here the author refers to a reconciliatory ruling, called the Shaltut Fatwa, which was proclaimed in 1959 while a much earlier fatwa stood against the Druze and other communities in the Levant, proclaimed by the well-known religious authority Ibn Taymiyyah, around the end of the 13th century (Swayd 2009:77; Zebiri 1993). And yet, history has shown that the answer to this question is more nuanced, especially when considering our scrutiny of a millennium-long span of history condensed into these few pages. Despite what may appear to be an extremely tumultuous relationship with its Islamic origins, author Abdullah M. Najjar reminds us about the magnanimity of Islam: “they were called violators and sinners by leading Sunna pedagogues. But for 1000 years, these small groups of dissenters had lived in a total Muslim world, and could have been easily suppressed or eliminated had responsible Muslim leadership so willed and chose. Instead, they lived fairly free, secure, respected and strong” (M. Najjar 1973:35).

Among the most prominent groups to adopt the Druze faith early on in the region of the Levant were the Tanukh tribes. They played a prominent role in the community’s leadership for well over four hundred years, leading attacks on the Crusaders alongside Salah al-Din3 and fighting the Tartars and Mogul invaders under the Mamluk Sultanate (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:18; Dana 2003:4-5). Despite their exemplary military service under the Mamluks, the Druze were never fully trusted and their forces were ravaged in 1305, forcing them to retreat to south Lebanon (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:19). The most prominent Tanukh leader, and perhaps

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3 Also referred to as Saladin.
the most prominent Druze historical figure after al-Hakim and the early propagators, was al-Amir as-Sayyid Jamal ad-Din Abdalla at-Tanukhi, who lived from 1417-1479 CE (Firro 1992:26). During his rule he brought about significant religious reforms, including structuring the process of entry into the circles of trust among the mushayekh (Dana 2003:5). His commentary on the Kitab al-Hikma and writings on ethical conduct continue to be studied by mushayekh today and are considered an integral means to achieve religious knowledge and to living a virtuous life (Firro 1992:27).

Not long after al-Amir as-Sayyid, Tanukh power diminished with the Ottoman invasion in 1516 CE and they were replaced with another dynastic Druze emirate in the form of the long-established Ma’an tribes (Dana 2003:5; Sayegh 1983:21). Under these new princes, the Ma’an Emirate thrived due to increased industrial production and farming, a progressively powerful military, and close relationships and substantial trade with Tuscany and other European provincial powers. The third Ma’an prince, Fakhr ad-Din II, was able to expand his region of power north to Aleppo and down to the Sinai, although his domain remained loosely under the Ottoman regional authority (Sayegh 1983:21). Fakhr ad-Din united the various religious factions across the region and is widely regarded as the first ruler of a relatively self-governed Lebanon4 (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:19; Hitti 1962:11). Professor of Middle Eastern affairs, Nissim Dana, wrote of Fakhr ad-Din: “His reign was characterized by wide-ranging economic activity that brought prosperity and security to the region, as well as by his granting complete freedom of religion to those of other faiths who lived under his rule. His special personality earned him a reputation for firmness and Druze pride” (Dana 2003:5). At length, Fakhr ad-Din’s interests in

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4 In his book A History of the Druzes (1992), Kais Firro says that this precursor to the Lebanese state may be historically contestable.
establishing autonomy from Ottoman rule caused the Sultan to have him and two of his sons executed in Constantinople in 1633 CE (Firro 1992:28).

Provincial princes and feudal lords largely defined Druze social structure throughout much of their history. Early on, these influential families came to supersede the religious mushayekh as leaders of the community in all but spiritual matters, creating a class of aristocrats (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:18). This feudalistic social structure continues to leaves its mark via factionalist configurations and the families that remain politically and socially powerful (Firro 1992:24). Throughout the 17th and early 18th century, rivalries among these influential families continued, culminating in the battle of Ain Dara in 1711 CE near modern-day Aley, Lebanon (Firro 1992:37). Conflicting sides had long standing loyalties to either the Qaysis or Yemenis, which were tribal affiliations divided along an almost ancient, pre-Islamic rift originating in the Arabian Peninsula. Associating with either group seemed to supersede sectarian and social identities and incited violence within the Druze community, resulting in a significant split and emigration east to the Houran region of southern Syria (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:20; Dana 2003:5). Druze power began to wane in subsequent years under the Ottoman Turks and increased clashes with Maronite Christians further relegated their influence to the southern mountains. Eventually, French colonial interests took root and encouraged an influx of Christians within the Ottoman domain (Dana 2003:6).

Hostilities between the Christians and the Druze sporadically flared up resulting in the civil war of 1860, which was in part a culmination of earlier revolts of Christian peasantry attempting to overthrow Druze nobles and landlords. While Druze forces tended to be victorious more often than not, French intervention assured that the Christian forces would eventually prevail (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:22). Although the Druze had strong alliances with Great
Britain, and allowed them to establish Protestant missions in Mount Lebanon, their ability to interpose in the region could not rival that of France (Abi Ali 2013:11). The conflict became so intense that the Ottomans allowed an amalgam force of 12,000 European troops, the majority of which were French, to be dispatched to Beirut, where they facilitated an autonomous Maronite administrative authority in the Mount Lebanon region (Chesterman 2001:32). By this time, the central authority in Constantinople was waning and they resorted to inciting sectarian conflict to maintain their control over Arab populations. The civil war resulted in the permanent decline of Druze political power as well as reduced landholdings (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:23). Given their partnership with the British and the centuries-long Ottoman efforts to subdue their authority and reduce their autonomy, it is no surprise that during the First World War, the Druze joined the Arab revolts in 1916 CE against the central and alongside the allied powers (Dana 2003:8).

Druze Doctrinal Principles

Characterizing the Druze dogma is essential to understanding the community’s shared identity, especially its ostensibly unique qualities. Familiarity with certain religious principles helps illustrate how differences are constructed from within a group, and are thereafter internalized, shared, and expressed. I intentionally use the phrase ‘doctrinal principles’ to step away from the inter-communal debate among Druze academics and mushayekh, which is based on the notion that the Druze follow a life-philosophy rather than a religious doctrine. Discussions such as these can sometimes involve strong opposing opinions concerning relatively amorphous topics such as the nature of philosophy as opposed to the purpose of faith. It has been my experience that disagreements in semantics lack practical focus and can be debilitating towards rapport that might otherwise provide edifying resources to others.
While the Druze have their historical roots in Ismaili Islam (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:11), they often have different interpretations of Islam’s tenets, including the Five Pillars that represent profound metaphorical ideologies rather than literal actions or commands. Certainly Druze interpretation of some of Islam’s basic precepts has been considered untraditional even among the non-orthodoxies of Islam such as the various Shia sects. The degree of similarity and difference between the Druze and other Muslim groups has frequently been contested. For example, as one author highlighted their deviation from other branches of Islam, labeling them heterodox Muslims (Nisan 1991), another explained their relationship as similar to, “that of Mormons with Christianity. They have their own revelation and philosophy that mainstream Muslims would consider unorthodox” (Russell 2014:118). While determining the degree of their similarities may be difficult, the fact that Islam is an integral part of Druze doctrinal practice is not often disputed. Citing directly from the Druze holy book, anthropologist Intisar Azzam explained: “Islam (which means submission) is considered the gate to iman (belief), and belief is considered the gate to Tawhid (recognition of the oneness of God) (Epistle 42)” (Azzam 1997:26).

The term Batiniyyah refers to the esoteric interpretation of the Quran. Druze doctrine was heavily influenced by the Batiniyyah and takes a similar approach to other scriptures and philosophies (M. Najjar 1973:54). Their critical interpretation of these texts, or exegesis, frames their understanding of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam collectively, and heavily influences their approach to monotheism and an emphasis on the oneness of God. As previously stated, the path to realizing this oneness is referred to as Tawhid and its central role in the doctrine explains why the Druze often refer to themselves as Unitarians. Their doctrine also includes a distinct belief that emphasizes the eminence of five cosmic principles, or luminaries, which emanated from
God before creation. They are collectively represented by a colored star (see Figure 3.2), the principal symbol of the faith, and are central to knowledge of the path of *Tawhid*. By name they are: Al-Aql (the mind), An-Nafs (the soul), Al-Kalima (the word), As-Sabiq (the precedent), and At-Tali (the antecedent) (Sayegh 1983:10).

![Figure 3.2 The colored star representing the five luminaries (Silversmith 2006).](image)

The Druze believe in the transmigration of the soul upon death and as a continuous occurrence throughout the ages. For them, reincarnation is a natural facet of life that all people experience regardless of creed or social position. While non-Druze can be reborn among the various religious faiths, the Druze soul is reborn within the community, which is a tangible result of their early acceptance of the Divine Call and an example of the accountability of each individual from one life to the next (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:13). Indeed, the intention of reincarnation is to understand the breadth of social experiences across the range of class, family position, culture, and other identifying statuses. The belief in reincarnation has other practical effects on their social lives and the belief that they are reborn within their community, “has provided the Druze with an automatic cross-cutting tie which, in spite of chronic internal conflict, has perpetuated a highly durable common identity” (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:13).
The Druze sacred text, often called the book of Wisdom or the *Kitab al-Hikma*, is actually a collection of 111 epistles of various lengths spread across six volumes. The volumes include interpretations of religious dogma, doctrinal philosophies, and accounts about the Druze community during its founding, illustrating the vital connections between history and faith (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:11). In particular, many of the accounts from their early history include recorded correspondence between some of the faith’s earliest promulgators during the Divine Call, notably between Hamza ibn Ali and Al-Muqtana Baha’uddin. Druze doctrinal principles reach further back than their millennium of history, incorporating the Gnostic philosophies of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, among others (M. Najjar 1973:48). Ambassador Abdullah M. Najjar explained that the Druze system: “is a concentrated drive to better understand the Divine Intelligence; to pry the soul loose from the superficial in religious credo. It is a Sufist yearning to draw closer to God and the knowledge of his essence” (M. Najjar 1973:49).

The Druze religion has consistently been referred to as a secret creed, but this framing only paints part of a more complex picture. Writing in 1980, anthropologist Nura Alamuddin and sociologist Paul Starr explain: “Druze teachings are divided into two parts: the metaphysical, or Precepts of Faith, and the ethical, or Precepts of Living. The Precepts of Faith are taught only to selected initiates, while the Precepts of Living, are supposed to be taught to all members of the group” (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:30). And yet more recently, an increasing number of non-*mushayekh* have been exploring the tenets of the faith due to increased awareness of the work of Druze scholars such as Sami Makarem and Abdullah Najjar, among others (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:30). However, this increased interest in the doctrine is actually a return to earlier practices wherein many Druze individuals had been familiar with the tenets of faith and the lines between
mushayekh and non-mushayekh were not as discrete as they would become around the mid-1900s and thereafter. While some vices limit one’s likelihood to be permitted to study alongside the mushayekh, all Druze can read the Kitab al Hikma and enter a majlis or other religiously significant place. And yet, access to resources which provide knowledge of fundamental doctrinal principles remains unclear. This is demonstrated in a recent publication by former British and United Nations diplomat Gerard Russell who sojourned into Druze country to discover the community’s connections to classical Greek philosophy. He visited Walid Jumblatt among other notable figures in the Druze community and wrote:

Surely this man, I thought, would share my enthusiasm for tracing his own people’s origins and uncovering their links to classical Greece. But when I asked him about the Druze faith, he gave me an unexpected reply. ‘I know nothing about the Druze,’ the preeminent leader of the Druze declared with a violent wave of the arm. From his piles of books he selected a couple by Tariq Ali and gave them to me as gifts. He invited me to visit him at his palace in the mountains. And then he said goodbye. Either the most powerful Druze man in Lebanon, an intellectual in his own right, had been excluded from the teachings of his own religion, or else he knew better than to pass them on to an outsider (Russell 2014:121).

Druze Communities in the Modern-Day

Writing about contemporary Druze communities Mordechai Nisan, a scholar of the Middle East, wrote: “One of the most mysterious Middle Eastern communities is the Druze minority, whose origins, faith, and aspirations remain shrouded in thick webs of secrecy” (Nisan 1991:79). While his observation is by no means inaccurate, a growing body of literature suggests
otherwise. Nisan goes on to say: “The contemporary role of the Druzes in Lebanese developments in particular, and their not unimportant participation in Israeli and Syrian affairs, nevertheless suggest a public face permitting greater familiarity and study. But the solidity of a long and earthy past has generated mechanisms for adaptability that hide an inner reality not amenable to the ordinary tools of examination” (Nisan 1991:79). Assuming that the inner reality Nisan refers to concerns the inner, esoteric teachings of the faith, then perhaps his observations are relatively accurate. This however does not preclude an understanding of the cultural influences those doctrinal principles continue to have on society and its significant associations with the collective identity of the group. In fact, the goal of the following section aims to do just that. Looking at social, political, and cultural factors in each of the three countries with significant Druze populations, we will come to a better understanding of the social bonds, values, and shared identity which makes the community a cohesive unit across national borders and in spite of significant differences.

Varying claims that the Druze lack a distinct religion stem from the fact that portions of their doctrine are strictly relegated to the initiated sheikhs and sheikhas. The practice of religious dissimulation, or at-taqiyya, has sometimes worked to create an uncertain understanding of their origins and beliefs. While both ignorance and secrecy have protected Druze particularism over the years, it has done little to enamor them in the eyes of the greater Arab populations of the Middle East. For example, ever since the Druze populations in the Galilee region of the British Mandate for Palestine strategically allied themselves with the then newly established state of Israel, they have stood out as the exception to a supposedly united Arab front representing a shared opposition to the Jewish state. Not surprisingly, considerable attention, either negative or
Zeidan Atashi, a Druze and former member of the Israeli Knesset, explains that the success of the Druze in preserving their collective heritage and way of life is due in part to the fact that the community has never actively coveted an independent state. In doing so, they would have concentrated their population, accentuating their cultural identity and stressing the differences between themselves and neighboring states with vast Muslim, Christian, and Jewish majorities. Only when needed: “The Israeli Druze have brought their power and influence to bear, so as to mediate between the Arab and the Jewish populations, and to intercede with state institutions. They have made their services available and used their influence to protect the weak and foster understanding and co-existence in a multi-national and multi-ethnic society” (Atashi 1997:170).

While the history of the Druze in Israel and the occupied Golan Heights has constantly been framed by their political alignment between the Jewish state and the established Palestinian population, the Druze of Syria have long been known for their willingness to rebel against suppressive authorities. For example, they have been regarded as important players in the struggle for Syrian independence due to their rebellion against the Ottoman Grand Vizier in 1838 and their uprising against French forces from 1925-1927, which lead to the Great Syrian Revolt and eventual concessions by France to loosen their imperialistic authority (Firro 1992:290). No matter the national context, their historical narrative is closely associated with their contemporary identity, which is reinforced in their everyday life by their shared heritage. Conducting their research in 1980, Alamuddin and Starr stated that observations among, “Druze of differing backgrounds have shown that the image of their history continues to lend structure
and meaning to present activities, in their relationships with other clans, strata, or factions within
the group as well as with outsiders” (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:23-24). The current situation of
the Druze community in Syria is extremely tenuous given the civil war and the recent threat of
Daish, or the Islamic State in the Levant. Just before Daish entered the conflict, one young
Lebanese scholar noted: “the religious minorities are suffering from an existential obsession,
especially after the religious minorities in Iraq were forced to leave their homeland because of
continuous threat and annihilation” (Abi Ali 2013:20).

In Lebanon, the Druze have slowly transformed from feudal lords to a minority whose
political power is positioned behind that of the Christian, Sunni, and Shia populations. Given the
decline of their influence, the community tends to be cautious in its relationship with others. The
Druze are sometimes considered eccentric or peculiar by members of other religious groups
given their belief in reincarnation and lack of religious rites. For example: “Other Lebanese
occasionally speak of something occurring ‘at the festival of the Druzes,’ which means never.
Because of the absence of great ritual in the Druze faith” (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:29-30).
Lebanon’s confessional system, which guarantees that specific political roles, such as the
president and prime minister, are awarded to predetermined religious denominations, continues
to encourage sectarian segregation. The confessional system also relegates the authority of
certain social institutions, like inheritance and marriage, to be separately governed by each
religious group. Civil marriage is essentially non-existent and all religious groups are encouraged
to marry endogamously. Moreover: “barriers to intersectarian marriages are very strong, and
conversions are rare” (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:6). Thus, the strict form of endogamy practiced
among the Druze is functionally very similar to the marriage practices of other denominations
within the Lebanese state.
Despite the close-knit family ties resulting from a strict practice of endogamy, some maintain old divisions based on competing alliances between aristocratic families and political affiliations, and even as a result of clannish feuds. And yet, they have persevered in threatening environments through a social solidarity referred to as *asabiyyah* by the infamous Muslim historian Ibn Khaldun. *Asabiyyah* is most essentially a bond of shared consciousness stemming from perceived kinship ties and resulting in cohesive sentiments (Nisan 1991:14, 80). As will be further discussed, Druze loyalties tend to lie first with their co-religionists in spite of the international differences among the countries they occupy. Yet, they tend to embrace their national identity more than other religious groups following the words of one of their founding figures: “Obey every nation which passes over you, but remember me in your heart” (Nisan 1991:79).

**The Druze in Israel and the Golan Heights**

In Israel’s 2008 census report, there were over 122,000 Druze, approximately 8% of the non-Jewish population, living in the northern mountains and hillsides, and within the annexed Golan Heights, formerly part of the Syrian state (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2015). Although they represent a small part of the overall population, the Druze are nearly the only non-Jewish minority to serve in the Israeli Defense Forces, or IDF (the small community of Circassian refugees are perhaps the only other exception). Since the early 1930s, Druze villages in the northern Palestinian territories have had generally good relations with their Jewish neighbors as both sides actively worked to create social bonds resulting in the eventual ‘covenant of blood’ in 1956, which required compulsory enrollment of all male Druze to serve in the IDF (Westheimer and Sedan 2007:44). However, the community’s strong ties to the Israeli state have
not always been to their advantage, as this small minority has faced derision and retribution from
their fellow Arabs for their choice to contribute to Israel’s defense while being denied rights
equal to the state’s Jewish population.

The well-known social theorist, Edward Said once stated: “The Orient was almost a
European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting
memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. Now it was disappearing; in a sense it had
happened, its time was over” (Said 1978:1). While this statement is an example of the sort of
 glorified Western perspective that has come to dominate the notion of the ethnic other,
traditional communities and rural landscapes are becoming a rare commodity in Israel. With a
total area smaller than the state of New Jersey (including the occupied territories), and with a
growing population of approximately eight million, the Druze have come to represent an
idealized past within the state (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2015).

Shortly after the First World War, Jewish kibbutzim, or settlements, began associating
former Knesset member Zeidan Atashi explains: “as a result of their own isolation and
uncertainty, the Jewish and Druze communities found their way toward one another, seeking to
gain each other’s confidence. Mutual relations developed gradually, initially at a lower level then
in higher echelons, until Jewish Agency officials began visiting Druze villages” (Atashi:27). The
growing Jewish community quickly recognized the benefits of strengthening their relationship
with the Druze of northern Israel. Atashi recognized two of the more concrete advantages of this
tentative alliance:

1. Through the Druze of Palestine contact could be made with the Druze of Syria and
Lebanon as to the future of the entire region; and those communities could be dissuaded
from aiding or abetting the Arab gangs being organized and dispatched from all sides to menace the Jewish settlements.

2. The Druze had always, but especially in times of danger, have been a very close-knit community in terms of religion. The Jews regarded the Druze as a stabilizing force through which it would be possible to gain access to Arab villages and form ties with Arab groups in various places, with a view to forming ties of good neighborliness and understanding, as with the Druze (Atashi 1997:32).

Although mutual interests were apparent to both communities since early on, it was in 1936 that leaders met and agreed that hostilities would not ensue between the two communities. Until this time, the Druze officially maintained a neutral stance in the conflict between an increasing number of Jewish settlers and their fellow Palestinian Arabs (Atashi 1997:37). While the fate of the coming state of Israel was anything but clear in the mid 1930s, Druze leaders took the risk and threw in their lot with the Jews, who like them, represented an ethnic and religious minority in the countries they inhabited. Whether the costs of this decision outweigh the burdens of its implied duties remains an extremely complicated issue to say the least.

Once the Druze-Jewish alliance was solidified, the Druze were fully committed: “the Druze have customarily maintained allegiance to the incumbent regime in the regions where they have lived, as long as that regime has respected their way of life and their religion. Thus, the retention and defense of the soil, and loyalty to the state, are nothing new in the history of the Druze” (Atashi 1997:166). Despite their apparent loyalties or devotion to the nation in which they reside, the community is widely accused of being treacherous and even vengeful. Folk stories and old adages reflecting the negative stereotypes associated with the Druze abound. One in particular warns visitors that they can eat in a Druze’s home but should avoid staying the
night. Such proverbs have served as fodder for published material and stories in the press in both Israel and the greater Middle East. For example: “Distortions slanted to conform to prejudices and stereotypes purport to betray the Druze as a community having no true religion and subscribing to a separatist national point of view” (Atashi 1997:166).

In Israel the Druze community often finds itself in a difficult situation with respect to their public image. They are often confronted with the issue of being cast as a proper example of what the dutiful Arab minority should represent while being denied the full rights and funding of their Jewish counterparts. While territory for the new state was being consolidated, it was apparent to many that the policies of an emerging Israel unfairly acquired Druze land to be given to the influx of Jewish migrants while the Druze were part of the efforts to rebuff other Arab forces. Indeed: “The state, they felt, ought to view the Druze as a national asset no less than the new immigrants, and should prevent any harm being done to Druze property (namely land), which had always been the bulwark of their survival” (Atashi 1997:176). While disagreements about ownership of land has been the most debated issue since before the creation of the state of Israel, it plays a particularly integral role in the construction and preservation of Druze identity.

As longtime farmers, the livelihood of Druze families and villages has always depended on their ability to cultivate and protect the soil inherited from their forebears. Family land is traditionally split among siblings and daughters, whether married or unmarried, are entitled to a share that is half of that of her brothers. Adherence to this simple but strict code has allowed Druze communities to maintain their distinct ethnoreligious identity since its inception.

Discriminatory practices on behalf of the state stem from limiting funds towards public infrastructure and allocating fewer construction permits in Druze communities. Zeidan Atashi has stated that these policies are deliberate and limit economic growth among non-Jewish
communities while offering significant financial support and land apportionment to areas with Jewish majorities (Atashi 1997:182). At times the relationship between the Druze and the Jewish state has been strained. For example, despite official conscription of Druze into the defense forces in 1956, it was not until 1975 that various other army units became open to them. Before this, they were relegated to serving in Israel’s Border Police or the Arabic speaking Minority Unit, which still includes the majority of Druze soldiers (Nisan 1991:94). Moreover, during the civil war in Lebanon, Druze soldiers in Israel found themselves in a difficult situation as the Israeli state interceded with the goal of supporting expanded Maronite Christian power, whom the Druze had clashed with on numerous occasions. The Druze of Israel nevertheless galvanized to support their fellows across the border: They lobbied their government, raised money for the Druze of the Shouf region, and a few soldiers even fought alongside their brethren in the conflict against Maronite phalangists⁵ (Nisan 1991:95).

It can be argued that Israeli Druze have significant economic opportunities and expanded rights in comparison to their Lebanese, Syrian, and Jordanian counterparts. And yet, discrimination exists even amongst those who serve in the armed forces, which represents perhaps the most highly valued institution in Israel. For example, the young Druze that serve lack the economic opportunities that are often granted to their fellow Jewish soldiers in the Defense Forces. Having completed their 36 month-long mandatory military service, young Jews deciding to purchase houses or land are often fully subsidized by the government. On the other hand, young Druze men that have served are left with few employment opportunities, especially in returning to their villages and their parents’ homes. By this time, their Christian and Muslim

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⁵ The militia of the Phalange party that was mainly Christian.
cohort have had three years of college or work experience since they are exempt from service in the IDF while only a very small number are enlisted and solely on a voluntary basis.

In general, the Druze are not fully integrated into the greater Israeli society and inhabit a sort of isolated class of their own both as a matter of choice and due to the segregating policies of the state. Peter Hirschberg, a reporter for the Jerusalem Post, quoted one Druze informant as saying: “We’re seen as Jews by Arabs and as Arabs by Jews” (Atashi 1997:182). Zeidan Atashi sheds light on one of the main reasons for the state’s apparent discriminatory practices and explains that: “The Israeli government’s approach is basically flawed. Were the Druze to acquire full equality with the Jews, many Arabs would be encouraged to integrate more into the broader Israeli society and fulfill their national obligations” (Atashi 1997:189). While recognition from its Arab neighbors appears to be a true aspiration of the state of Israel, Arabs enlisting en-masse in the IDF, is not desirable. The relationship Israel seeks with its Arab population, and also perhaps with Palestinians in the occupied territories, conditionally requires that the Arab minority remain a somewhat isolated and distant group.

As the author of perhaps the most widely disseminated book about the Druze, Robert Brenton Betts believes that the Israeli-Druze alliance was not simply by virtue of shared interests between both communities. Palestinian Druze were also concerned with the expansion of early Jewish settlements and were very devoted to the preservation of their land. In fact, some authors have explained that there were very few cases of Druze selling their property to the early Jewish National Fund, which offered large sums to Muslim and Christian Palestinians for tracts of property. As well, having established strong ties with the Jews, the Druze took part in no mass exodus in 1948 and were reported to have sheltered fellow Palestinians during the conflict. In fact, the Druze were not very different from other Arab communities at the time and were
attached to their native land in similar ways to their Sunni, Palestinian counterparts. The main differences existed in policies which: “encouraged or outright forced the majority of resident Muslims to leave, whereas all the Druze and most of the Christians were allowed to remain in the Galilee region that according to the United Nations Partition Plan of 1947, was to have been included in the Arab Palestinian state” (Betts 1988:100).

While Druze particularism has served to preserve shared identity for much of their history, segregation has also been forced upon them in certain instances. Author Kais Firro explains that there existed a Zionist agenda whose aim it was to: “drive a wedge between the Druzes and other Arabs in the new state creating ‘good’ Arabs and ‘bad’ Arabs and coopting the Druze elite” (Firro 2001:40). He states that the Druze of Israel lived in particularly rural settings and lacked a desire for an independent state, unlike their Muslim and Christian Palestinian counterparts. In part, this was due to their lack of knowledge in comparison to a handful of Druze power-holders, whose elite status allowed them to make many of the community’s decisions. Firro explains that the Druze were actively pursued by the growing Zionist powers while the favors they granted the community attracted the Druze to the Israeli cause. In contrast to having a rapport with the Zionist movement in the early 1930s, there were a significant number of cases in which Druze villages became the target of violent attacks by fellow Arabs for remaining neutral. In fact: “Acts of violence against Druze members of the IDF by other Palestinian Arabs are far from unknown, and extremist elements seem in fact to single them out for special treatment as collaborators” (Betts 1988:108).

Concerning many of the Druze living in the Golan Heights, resistance to Israel’s unilateral annexation of the land they inhabit still continues. Betts states that this resistance was extremely pronounced in the early 1980s and that: “at a memorial service for Shaykh Kamal
Kanj Abu-Salih, the spiritual head of the Golan Druze and a leader of the resistance movement who had been jailed by the Israelis a year earlier. An estimated twenty thousand Golan Druze and Israeli sympathizers massed on their side of the border and were joined by some fifteen thousand Druze villagers on the Syrian side” (Betts 1988:102). He goes on to say that Walid Jumblatt, the foremost political voice of the Druze in Lebanon: “addressed the rally through loudspeakers from the Syrian side and praised the Golan villagers’ resistance to Israeli annexation. By October 1984, only 250 of the Golan Druze had accepted Israeli identity cards” (Betts 1988:102). Certainly that number has significantly increased today as newer generations with no recollection of Syria continue to be born, although concerted efforts to renounce Israeli citizenship do continue in the Golan Heights. Speaking to a religious affairs minister in the region, one sheikh explained: “If we openly acquiesce to the Israeli annexation, the Syrians will demand explanations, and there is no High Court of Justice in Damascus. . . We must take care of ourselves, because nobody else will” (Westheimer and Sedan 2007:43).

Despite strong support at demonstrations opposing some Israeli policies, the Druze of the Golan Heights are relatively moderate in their day to day life and understand that the possibility of going back to the Syrian state is not imminent. Given the state of disarray in Syria, it is currently beyond anyone’s ability to ascertain the outcome of the unprecedented conflict, which will undoubtedly reshape that nation’s social structures and political configurations. Cut off from their native Syria, Druze in this contested region make the best of their situation by engaging in the often advantageous economic opportunities of the Jewish state. The well-known social anthropologist, Fuad Khuri pointed out that the Druze minority is guided by its desire for self-preservation and has never failed to employ diplomatic or aggressive measures as required to protect itself or to thrive (Khuri 2004:231).
While preference for the state’s Jewish population is apparent, and Israel’s efforts to preserve its Jewish identity informs the politics at play, the annexation of much of the Golan Heights has resulted in a kind of socioeconomic stability uncommon among other Druze communities. It should be understood that: “in societies that are fragmented into ethnic majorities and minorities, it is difficult to ensure in practice complete co-existence, tolerance, and the like. This is especially the case in societies whose majorities fear the usurpation of their privileged position by a growing minority” (Atashi 1997:186). While equality has never been fully afforded the Druze, whose wartime casualties proportionally and continuously outpace their Jewish counterparts in the IDF, one question remains; can Israel’s need to promote equality ever overcome the state’s skewed political philosophy, which predisposes it to discriminatory practices? If so, then perhaps the Druze community’s decision to support the state of Israel will have been truly intuitive.

**The Druze in Syria**

Syria has the largest concentration of Druze in the world yet accurate estimates are difficult to discern and figures range from 600,000 to 800,000 as drawn from three recent periodicals published in the span of a single month (Raydan 2015; Raydan and Levitt 2015; Alster 2015). Since their initial emigration in the early part of the 18th century from the region that would become the state of Lebanon to Houran, in southwestern Syria, the Druze population grew exponentially over the years. With the establishment of Druze communities outside of the traditional bases of power, the Druze have had a second sanctuary of sorts, accommodating population flows between these areas in times of need.
Early on during the period of the French Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon (1920-1946), the Druze community established a reputation as fierce warriors, earning the respect of much of the Arab world. Led by Sultan Pasha al-Atrash (see Figure 3.3), who hailed from a family known for their military prowess, the Druze rose in revolt against the French authority during this time: “In Syria, what began as the Druze revolt of 1925 was soon transformed into a Syrian revolt, with Druze particularism allied to the national movement” (Firro 1992:354). It is interesting to note that Sultan Pasha al-Atrash rejected French plans for an independent Houran and supported a united Syrian state without secularist divisions. The influence of Sultan Pasha al-Atrash on Syrian national identity should not be understated despite its brief mention here. Despite denying any political positions or titles after the independence of Syria, he was later officially recognized as the commander of the Syrian Revolt and lived an undeniably modest life passing away in 1982 at the age of 95 (Betts 1988:94; Provence 2005:57-58). He was so esteemed that his funeral was attended by over one million people and: “the Israelis opened the border from the Golan to allow Syrian Druze, unilaterally annexed to Israel four months earlier, to attend the funeral” (Betts 1988:94).

Although the Great Syrian Revolt was not a military success, it cost France dearly and weakened their imperialistic authority, leading to diplomacy rather than a long-term military intervention (Provence 2005:13-14). Syria eventually gained its independence in 1946 and immediately abolished a system of parliamentary representation based on communal and factionalist representation (Firro 1992:361). As well, the Druze sphere, and that of the Alawites, was incorporated into the new state with its central authority in Damascus (Firro 1992:361). For the Druze: “The adoption of a nationalist ideology, however, did not lead, as one might have expected, to assimilation, but instead to a new form of particularism: The community was
maintained, though now conceived as a sub-unit of the Syrian people and the Arab nation” (Firro 1992:354). Druze particularism was also an enduring social factor and the community was granted the ability to preserve their courts, which have had limited power but continue to oversee issues concerning inheritance and marriage among other responsibilities (Dana 2003:91).

Figure 3.3 Sultan Pasha al-Atrash pictured in Syria in the 1920s (photographer unknown).

Following Syrian independence and the Arab-Israel War, which resulted in the establishment of the state of Israel, the Druze became a mistrusted minority by the authorities in Damascus. Although the Druze did not play a necessarily pivotal role in the final establishment of the Israeli state, their alliance with the Zionist movement and early compulsory service in the Israeli Defense Forces made Druze loyalties suspect in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. In 1954 the Druze paid a heavy price for these suspicions, and their lack of support for the radical regime of Syrian president Adib Shishakli, led to large-scale airstrikes against them (Swayd 2009:149). Shishakli, who was of Kurdish origin, had lead a number of military coups to seize power and
reduce Hashemite influence in Syria, but his presidency was short lived. Alongside the former president of Syria, Hashim al-Atassi, Sultan Pasha al-Atrash helped to encourage insurgents to threaten civil war against the mistrusted regime. Shishakli was eventually exiled to Brazil where he was later assassinated on his private estate by a Druze whose parents were killed years earlier in one of Shishakli’s previous military campaigns against the group (Swayd 2009:63-64, 149).

Currently, conflict has taken over the region as the Syrian Civil War continues into its fifth year. More recently, the Druze have become increasingly embroiled in the struggle despite efforts from the majority to stay neutral. In particular, the Druze of the Jebel al-Summaq region in the Idlib province in northern Syria have faced serious threats from competing forces, including both the Islamic State in the Levant, or Daish, and the al-Nusra Front, also known as al-Qaeda in Syria. Their relatively isolated position, distant from both the mountains of Lebanon and the valleys of Houran, has made them a vulnerable target as an identifiable religious minority. The title of a recent article explains the community’s situation, “Idlib Druze agree to Forced Conversion, Destroyed Shrines under Nusra Rule” (Syria:direct 2015). Home to approximately 18,000 Druze, the townships in the region have been occupied by the Sunni al-Nusra Front, which considers the Druze heretics. Indeed, the Druze of Jebel al-Summaq have been forced to convert to Sunni Islam and have adopted similar styles of dress while socially restricting interactions between men and women as dictated by a strict interpretation of the orthodoxy. However, it has been suggested that they are enacting at-taqiyya, as a means of preserving their communal identity. And yet the persistence of the al-Nusra Front presents a real threat as one individual was quoted as saying: “We fear that they might force our young men and women to marry outside the Druze faith. This could lead to the eventual destruction of our
religion. They’re also attempting to promote polygamy among our young men, a practice we don’t support in our faith” (Syria:direct 2015).

Tensions in the occupied Idlib province became violent on June 10th 2015, when between 20 and 24 Druze civilians were massacred in retribution for the killing of a leader of al-Nusra who had seized the home of a Druze soldier loyal to the Assad regime (Alster 2015). The Druze in Syria have historically remained in the good graces of President Hafez al-Assad, who remained in power from 1971-2000, and his son Bashar al-Assad, whose regime was nearly overthrown at the start of the current conflict in Syria. This allegiance was established for a number of reasons including the fact that as members of the Alawite religious minority, the al-Assad family has had common interests with the Druze community. However, the community’s interests have remained focused on self-preservation rather than total loyalty to any political faction. Another news source reported that: “When the Syrian uprising began, some Druze participated in the protests and a few even defected from the army. The Druze have criticized the brutality of the regime and have also expressed solidarity with those fighting against it” (Raydan 2015). As of June 2015, over 27,000 Druze have deserted their military posts, taking the risk of permanently soured relations with the Assad regime in order to defend their hometowns (Rabah 2015).

Media attention on the crisis continues to be prominent and lately the Druze community has been featured in a significant number of headlines. For example, in June of 2015, journalist Paul Alster reported a story titled, “Jihadist attack on Syria's Druze population could spur Israel to act” (Alster 2015). Since the massacre of Druze civilians in Jabal al-Summaq, the Druze community worldwide has expressed their outrage and called for further action on behalf of their Syrian kin, even insisting on the intervention of the Israeli state (Alster 2015). While Israel has
decided not to take direct military action at this time, the call for support appears to have received considerable attention as, “Ayoob Kara, an Israeli Druze member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s governing Likud party and currently a deputy minister for regional cooperation, said the Israeli Druze community will defend its Syrian brethren. ‘We do not plan to sit idly by while our brothers are being slaughtered in Syria’” (Alster 2015). Aside from the massacre in the Idlib region, threats to the Druze community in the Houran and the Golan regions have increasingly become the concern of Israel since the Golan Heights defines the border between the two states. Without significant resistance from the Syrian state, Daish has continued to advance into the Syrian half of the Golan, subjugating minority and majority groups alike. Given their well-regarded reputation in the Jewish state, and familial connections between the Druze on both sides of the Golan divide, Israel may yet play a role in the conflict in southern Syria especially given the continued encroachment of the Islamic State along its borders.

A recent publication by the Council on Foreign Relations explained that despite international boundaries, the Druze throughout the Middle East share family bonds and are encouraged by their faith to be unified with one another, especially in times of need (Raydan 2015). The authors of the article reported that Druze in both northern Israel and the occupied Golan Heights have demonstrated in the thousands and have sent upwards of $2.6 million dollars to their Syrian counterparts for purchasing arms and supplies as needed (Raydan and Levitt 2015). Although monetary support is much needed, the Druze in neighboring Lebanon and Israel are limited in their capacity to enter Syria to take up arms alongside their brethren. Such actions would be construed as direct involvement in the Syrian Civil War and interpreted as taking the side of one faction or another, similar to Hezbollah’s military support of President Assad’s forces (Raydan and Levitt 2015).
Walid Jumblatt, the most prominent Druze political voice in both Lebanon and in the Middle East generally, has worked to help those in Syria avoid further conflict with the al-Nusra Front. From early on, Jumblatt has encouraged fellow Druze to abandon their support of the Assad regime, which, from the time of President Hafez al-Assad, has been the principal culprit of the assassination of Walid Jumblatt’s father, Kamal Jumblatt, in 1977. His intentions to reconcile the Druze with both the dominant rebel forces and the al-Nusra Front resulted in the rebels promising to join forces in defending Druze communities in the south and al-Nusra issuing a formal apology and a promise to hold those responsible for the massacre accountable for their actions (Raydan and Levitt 2015; Raydan 2015).

While the overwhelming majority of Druze have made it clear that they support the rebel forces, some have continued to fight alongside the regime due to Assad’s ability to take advantage of the vulnerable position of religious minority groups throughout Syria. The increasingly common position among the Druze community has been a need to protect itself given increased isolation, an utter lack of support from any of the major players in the region, and the apparent escalation of threats from Daish. Although Druze unity is most prominent when conflict arises, differences in loyalties and approaches to external threats are apparent. For example, while many support the approach of Walid Jumblatt and his anti-Assad rhetoric, some support the position of Talal Arslan, the second most prominent Druze political figure and the head of the Lebanese Democratic Party. Arslan, along with Wiam Wahhab, a Druze politician with loyalties towards the Assad regime, have advocated continued fealty towards the Syrian state (Raydan 2015). While neither approach can ensure that the Druze community in Syria will find itself on the winning side of the increasingly complex conflict, Jumblatt appears to have been successful in mitigating further clashes while attempting to preserve strategic relations.
between the Druze and others, notably the Sunni majority groups (Raydan 2015). An increased familiarity with the Druze community’s ability to navigate the politically troubled terrain illustrates the importance of not fully committing the entirety of their loyalties to any single cause. In other words, the adage of not putting all your eggs in one basket is wisdom that both Walid Jumblatt and Talal Arslan have collectively recognized despite any long standing contentions that might be apparent between their prominent families.

Writing for *The Middle East Eye*, an independently funded news source, Makram Rabah smartly stated: “The Druze, like many of their neighbors, have survived much worse times, but what remains crucial at this stage is for them to perhaps limit their losses, both politically and militarily, so as to win a place at the negotiation table in post-Assad Syria” (Rabah 2015). The conflict in Syria has highlighted the vulnerability of the Druze communities in the Middle East, which straddle the borders of four nations with differing politics and varying states of belligerency. And yet, their susceptibility is due to more than their geographic position and is shared with other religious minority groups such as the Yazidis and the Assyrians. Despite the fact that these different peoples have had some degree of autonomy for significant periods of time throughout their histories: “internal cohesion means there is a tendency to hold such groups collectively liable for the actions of anyone who has their religion” (Russell 2014:xxiv).

**The Druze in Lebanon**

At about 4,000 square miles, Lebanon is a tiny nation with unparalleled religious diversity. The state recognizes 18 religious sects that are largely divided between various branches of Islam and Christianity. Although no official census has been conducted since 1932 due to the instability that may result from significant shifts in political representation,
contemporarily, Christian groups make up approximately 40% of the population while Muslim groups make up the remaining 60% (Central Intelligence Agency 2015). While the Druze are recognized as distinct from the other Islamic sects, they are included in the Muslim portion of these figures. The Druze make up between 5-6% of the total population with a total figure of somewhere between 215,000-250,000 individuals (Central Intelligence Agency 2015). The total population of Lebanon is approximately 4.5 million, not including the long established population of over 450,000 Palestinian refugees and the recent, massive influx of well over one million Syrian refugees as of 2015 resulting from the current conflict (Central Intelligence Agency 2015). Political representation is divided among the religious sects with the most powerful offices given to the largest recognized religious groups, using the dated estimates established back in 1932. Thus, the president of Lebanon can only be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament a Shia Muslim.

Given their historical predominance in the region the Druze are the only religious minority that is not largely urban dwelling, while migrant populations comprised of other religious minorities tend to gather in urban centers (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:2). Druze villages in Lebanon can be found side by side with Muslim and Christian villages whose communities tend to be more mixed (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:2). In general, The Druze are oftentimes less affluent than their religious counterparts, aside from perhaps Shia Muslims, while agricultural and industrial work make up a significant amount of the income for much of the rural population (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:24). Although on the decline in general, their reliance on cash crop farming is also apparent in both Syria and Israel. However, Druze communities in these neighboring countries tend to lack significant remittances relative to their Lebanese counterparts since the number of Lebanese, Druze émigrés has always been significantly higher, making up a
substantial portion of the business, real estate, and other investments throughout Lebanon (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:4). Since before the official establishment of the state, the regions that would become Lebanon have included communities with a long history of large waves of emigration dating back to the mid-1800s as the size of the Lebanese diaspora was estimated to be upwards of 12 million over ten years ago (Abdelhady 2011:208).

Each of the recognized religious sects in Lebanon controls its own family laws and social welfare programs (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:8). In their 1980 monograph, Crucial Bonds: Marriage among the Lebanese Druze, Nura Alamuddin and Paul Starr explain that Lebanon’s confessional system, which allocates parliamentary representation based on religious populations, was originally based on the region’s social organization and has come to emphasize those divides (5). Such divisions have always been especially significant for the Druze who practice endogamy on a greater scale than their confessional counterparts. The religious communities in Lebanon, particularly the Druze, as a whole constitute distinct coalitions made up of extended relations (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:7). To better understand the similarities within and the differences among these groups, each should be viewed similarly to a tribal association rather than less pronounced group divisions found in developed or industrial nations.

While endogamous marriage is especially prominent among the Druze, it essentially represents all such unions in Lebanon. Popular opinions about sectarian marriage restrictions vary to some degree and younger generations of Lebanese have increasingly taken issue with the limits it imposes upon them. During his recent visit to Lebanon, former diplomat Gerard Rusell illustrated the frustrations of some of these young people in the following anecdote.

In the center of Beirut, a small knot of people were protesting. I saw their slogans on lampposts and placards near the city’s renovated center: “No to sectarianism,” “No to
bribery,” “No to stupidity.” They were asking for the right to civil marriage so that Lebanese from different sects could marry more easily. They had little chance of success. Lebanon is a liberal society in many ways; its bars and nightclubs are crowded every night with Muslims and Christians alike. But a deep strain of conservatism runs beneath the surface, and intermarriage is viewed with disfavor by the influential and conservative Christian and Muslim religious hierarchies” (Russell 2014:118).

Many aspects of the confessional system emphasize religious divisions and as a result, political divisions as well. Middle East professor Kais Firro says that these divisions are not only inherent in the system but have served to limit the central authority of the state, which has remained comparatively weak. Firro states that Lebanon has remained more of a territory rather than a legitimate nation (Firro 1992:358-359). In some ways, the state represents a kind of amalgamation of semi-autonomous entities divided among longstanding ethnoreligious boundaries.

The sovereignty of these communities goes back to the largely decentralized Ottoman governmental structures, as regions with differing ethnoreligious groups maintained independent fiefdoms with separate subsistence economies that did not encourage mixing (Firro 1992:353). After the Ottoman Empire was dissolved as a result of the First World War, the successive French Mandate saw the region separated into differing socioeconomic spheres, resulting in pronounced Druze particularism as well as significant differences within the community as a consequence of the emerging national borders (Firro 1992:353). Druze particularism evolved since the final decline of their power following the conflicts of the 1860s. As Beirut and the regions surrounding it became increasing sites of interest for Christian missionaries and their schools in the early 20th century, the Druze became more exposed to modernization and
European thought (Firro 1992:354-355). Beyond the leadership of Druze mushayekh, a burgeoning group of intellectuals facilitated stronger interrelations with other communities. By creating a public image for the Druze, they defined themselves as a unique group that sought to co-exist with their religious counterparts. Rather than constantly posturing themselves as a misconstrued religious sect: “not only did the new Druze intellectuals not pretend to follow Sunni Islam, they now emphasized the Islamic character of the Druze faith as proof that it was an autonomous Islamic madhab” (Firro 1992:357).

Despite their obvious distinctions from mainstream Sunni and Shia Islam, the Druze collectively insist that they share similar religious philosophies with the other monotheistic faiths, including by proxy Christianity and Judaism. They also are readily willing to express their national pride and shared commitment to the welfare and security of the states in which they reside and do not believe this to be contradictory to their particularism. Professor of law, Abbas Halabi states: “On the contrary, the awareness of their distinctiveness is accompanied by a stronger historic and patriotic awareness that has always prompted them, as Lebanese, Arabs and Muslims, to engage in an effective and dynamic role in the Middle East” (Halabi 2014:144-145). This dynamic mixture of loyalty to sometimes conflicting interest groups has lead them to refrain from entering conflicts or taking political sides unless absolutely necessary. The strategy of remaining protective of their mountain homes yet maintaining a preparedness for action has resulted in a community that is often regarded as insular and yet has historically been involved in the politics of the states in which they reside and especially in Lebanon (Nisan 1991:92).

Contemporarily, the Druze in Lebanon are largely led by the politically influential Jumblatt family. Walid Jumblatt’s father, Kamal, was among the founders of the Progressive

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6 Madhab refers to Islamic schools of thought with particular focus on law.
Socialist Party, or PSP, and was its first leader. While the PSP has always been secular by principle, much of its support has come from the Druze and the party has served to restore a considerable portion of the community’s influence in the Mount Lebanon region, which was lost in the conflicts of the 1860s (Firro 1992:359). Writing about the influence of the Jumblatt family among the Druze, Gerard Russell explained that they, “have achieved the remarkable balancing act of remaining feudal landowners, based at a castle in Lebanon’s southern mountains, while also running a modern radical socialist political party” (Russell 2014:118). During the Lebanese Civil War, which began in approximately 1975 and ended near or after 1990, Israel invaded Lebanon from the south and Lebanese Christian militia forces gained control of Druze areas in their wake. The threat was considered so great that the PSP and other predominantly Druze militia factions set aside their rivalries to take back the region in what was called the ‘war of existence’ (Firro 1992:360).

With the then significant military power of the Progressive Socialist Party, the Druze were successful in reclaiming their region, which they continue to occupy. For decades, Walid Jumblatt’s skillful politics has served the community well as one journalist recently noted: “Jumblatt’s actions should be viewed as part of the history of a clan that has survived centuries of turmoil and wars, from the Abbasid caliphate and the Crusades to the self-proclaimed Islamic State” (Rabah 2015). While the majority agree that Jumblatt’s leadership has largely been to the benefit of the community, factionalist politics remains significant among the Druze. In particular, the civil war in Syria has been especially divisive in terms of Druze sympathies for the different players, including both the Assad regime and Hezbollah (Raydan 2015). And yet, the ability of the Druze to come together at crucial times has continued to preserve their communities in Lebanon and to further their reputation for fierceness. It is apparent to the vast majority of Druze
that despite their various connections to other political and state parties, they must rely on one another to survive and prosper, predicting the political undercurrents and planning as best as possible in an area of the world where very little is certain (Halabi 2014:147).
Chapter 4 The Anthropology of the Middle East
and Research on the Druze Community

In order to couch this research effort in the field of anthropology, I have reviewed a number of the most important works on the Middle East, with considerable focus on ethnic and religious minorities. The following chapter also includes an exhaustive review of works on the Druze, paying particular attention to contemporary discussions of the social aspects of the community. Interestingly, authors of such texts have comprised a veritable menagerie of writers with truly diverse backgrounds, interests and intentions as will be discussed. Literature and academic research on the Druze has been expanding exponentially since the early 2000s and the quality of such publications has also improved. The literature that spans the community’s first 900 years has been relegated to the travel journals of Europeans such as the 12th century traveler Benjamin of Tudela, the French philosopher Volney in the mid-1780s, the 4th Earl of Carnarvon, Henry Howard Molyneux Herbert, in the mid-1800s and T. E. Lawrence during the First World War. These were later replaced by more academic inquiries focused on discerning Druze politics and religious beliefs. Most recently, an increasing number of social scientists have turned their attentions on the Druze, and a more robust and nuanced depiction is beginning to emerge. It is my intention that this work will add to a burgeoning Druze studies and set a foundation for further applied research among ethnic and religious minorities in both the Middle East and the world over.
The anthropological and social science research on Druze communities both in the countries of origin and in the diaspora was relatively sparse before the second half of the 1990s. Since then, such research has become more common in a range of fields. I believe that this is due to a rise in Druze religious consciousness and an increased demand for information from both outsiders and insiders. Alternatively, this new scholarship may reflect thematic shifts within a number of disciplines (e.g. sociology, political science, education, etc.) with emerging interests in the diaspora, the Middle East, and religious or ethnic minority groups.

Currently, there is an expanding number of books and articles from both Druze and non-Druze academics discussing history, dogma, and a variety of modern social facets. These publications delve into a wide range of topics, many of which are also popular in the greater anthropology of the Middle East, especially the body of research concentrating on the region’s ethnic and religious minority groups. While some popular anthropological themes focus on topics such as notions of honor, traditional economies versus modernization, the importance of religious ceremonies, and kinship, I have selected the most relevant themes from this larger body of research that intersect well with the literature on the Druze community. Thus, the following chapter has been divided into three sections with the first focusing on how the larger body of anthropological research in the Middle East relates to the literature on the Druze. In particular, the most cogent themes that intersect both bodies of literature include the status of ethnic and religious minorities, assimilation or preservation of unique cultural traits, and the social roles of women. The second section includes a robust review of the social science literature specifically focused on the Druze community. I have arranged these reviews into four areas that relate most to the research at hand, including politics, reincarnation, esoterism, mushayekh, and community cohesion. The third section utilizes various examples of research whose themes are related to
heritage and identity to focus on topics of particular importance to the Druze, including the interrelation of identity and heritage, connections to land, shared aspects of diasporic and minority communities, and the ethics of cultural heritage as a resource.

**Anthropological Traditions in the Middle East Compared to Research Themes on the Druze**

In situating the various research themes focused on the Druze, it is important to recognize that despite the community’s sometimes insular tendencies and its minority status, the Druze are Arabs whose millennium of history has until recently transpired entirely in the region currently referred to as the Middle East. Therefore, situating this body of literature in the larger anthropological tradition of research in the Middle East will facilitate a better understanding of how this knowledge can be applied to other ethnic or religious groups.

Any discussion of the Druze might tend to seem exotic given a number of the community’s distinct beliefs, while some authors are diligent in reminding us that many aspects of their culture are not so different from others (Taheri 2005). For instance, Fuad Khuri stresses that the Druze share innumerable cultural characteristics with other groups in the Middle East, including the importance they place on visiting saintly memorial shrines to receive blessings, much like the sacred tombs of marabouts found throughout Morocco and Algeria (Geertz 1968; Khuri 2004:35, 43). In reviewing the following works, I noticed a substantial number of references to the Druze and other religious communities as having Sufi traditions, suggesting their shared inclination towards less orthodox and more mystic religious practice (Eickelman 1989; Khuri 2004:37; Swayd 2009). Whether or not this label encapsulates any specific approach to faith isn’t particularly important, but it does illustrate the connections among, and positioning of, non-dominant sects in the Middle East.
Much of the early anthropology on the Middle East focused on themes such as modernization through particular subjects like increasingly sedentary Bedouins or other nomadic groups and the dissolution of their traditional social structures. The most well documented of these changes has been parallel cousin, or Father’s Brother’s Daughter, marriage. More specifically, patrilineal parallel cousin marriage has become a hallmark of any anthropological research conducted throughout the region (Ayoub 1970; Barth 1970). In his entry on the Middle East in Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer’s *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (1996), Dale Eickelman provides a succinct overview outlining some of the shortcomings of this research area. He states: “Despite the prevailing image of the region as populated by nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples – until the 1960s most anthropological studies of the region focused on pastoralists – nomads today constitute less than one percent of the population and never constituted a majority of the non-urban population in the past (Eickelman 1996:367).

Eickelman begins his account of the anthropology of the Middle East with the late 19th century anthropologist William Robertson Smith, who was among a good number of fellow researchers whose work was inspired by the allure (or as Edward Said would define it, the Orientalist tendency to exoticize the peoples and the provinces) of the region. His research, focusing on the evolutionary stages of kinship, religion, and political organization, would heavily influence many subsequent works by both E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Emile Durkheim. (Eickelman 1996:368). However, the interest in the Middle East as a region of anthropological inquiry was soon pushed to the periphery as anthropologists increasingly focused on so-called ‘primitive’ societies (Eickelman 1996:368). Eickelman believed that the given theoretical models at the time were not well suited to developing a research frame for communities that researchers perceived as too complex (Eickleman 1989:48-49). Thus, it wasn’t until the publication of
Carleton Coon’s *Caravan: The Story of the Middle East*, in 1951 that anthropology saw its first overarching ethnographic inventory of the region. In it, he likened the Middle East to a mosaic, illustrating its provincial differences. However, he also explained that the metaphor was not entirely accurate since he saw it as a static symbol that didn’t accommodate a society undergoing substantial cultural shifts (Eickelman 1996:368). This was an acute observation as the Middle East continues to be a contested landscape with shifting political and religious ideologies paralleling economic struggles and challenges for power.

Eickleman also discusses the importance of the functionalist perspective in the early anthropology of the Middle East. As he explains, it encouraged researchers to conceptualize culture as a whole and to conduct comprehensive ethnographies on many different facets of society to find the practical connections (Eickleman 1989:51). This resulted in robust ethnographies that served as useful reference points for later anthropologists. However, with its comprehensive approach, functionalism was among the reasons why anthropological research in the region was relatively rare in the first half of the 20th century. The gap is apparently so wide that Eickleman was prompted to state: “for the most part, the ‘official’ history of anthropology omits reference to studies of the Middle East because until recently the discipline’s priorities did not include the study of complex societies and civilizations” (Eickleman 1989:48). I believe that research on the region is no longer the exception and has been increasing since his volume was published in 1989. Given the large amount of literature I have become acquainted with, the past two decades have seen a rise in scholarship focused on both Arab communities in general and the Druze in particular. Such research is increasingly common as anthropologists have continued to turn their attention to marginalized groups in hopes of ameliorating social problems through applied research.
Ethnic and Religious Minorities in the Middle East: Marginality and Transformation

In his book *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression* (1991), professor of Middle Eastern Studies Mordechai Nisan provides a detailed framework for defining the term minority. He explains that while minority status can be defined by having fewer numbers than a majority group, it is also essential to consider certain qualitative traits alongside the numbers (Nisan 1991:9-10). More specifically: “These peoples stand in juxtaposition to the predominant powerholders in the Mideast region: Sunni Arabs in the core zone, Sunni Turks, Pakistani Punjabi Sunnis, and Shiite Persians in Iran” (Nisan 1991:9-10). According to Nisan a distinguishable history, culture, geographical placement, and ethnicity are also characteristics which define minorities. It is interesting to note that given the importance of religions in the region, he classifies it as an expression of culture: “religious particularity characterizes the semi-Muslim sects or heretical offshoots, specifically the Druzes and the ‘Alawites. To the degree that religion remains a core aspect of regional culture, these minorities will continue to enjoy a high degree of collective specificity” (Nisan 1991:11).

While Nisan’s framing of minority classification offers more detailed insights than discussed here, the immutability of the term must also be recognized. It is true that the majority of anthropological and social science research conducted on communities in the Middle East has focused on groups considered minorities in one sense or another, this is largely due to the fact that nearly every community holds attributes that separate them from an identified majority. For example, while most countries in the Middle East and North Africa have a religious Sunni majority, Sunni Muslims by no means constitute a homogenous community. Within this group alone exists a number of various ethnic affiliations, nationalities, social classes, and styles of worship, to name some of the possible variations. Perhaps the most prominent piece of
anthropological literature that illustrates this is Clifford Geertz’s *Islam Observed* (1968). In his cross-cultural comparison of two nations situated at the ‘book ends’ of the Muslim world, Morocco and Indonesia, Geertz is able to draw connections between these majority Sunni countries that, despite their dissimilarities, shared the comparable dilemma of a waning Islamic identity (Geertz 1968:4). Geertz accomplishes this comparison by relating the story of a historical figure from each nation that was integral to its Islamization and in defining their concepts of spirituality. For Moroccans, the essence of spirituality and even national identity, is embodied in the figure of the warrior saint, or marabout, the most prominent example of which is Sidi Lahsen Lyusi, a 17th century half Berber half Arab who challenged the region’s first sultan and gained recognition as a *sherif*, a direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammad (Geertz 1968:30-34). Among Indonesians, spirituality is embodied in the patient hermetic, an archetype personified by Sunan Kalidjaga, a 15th century nobleman turned thief who spread Islam in Java after he renounced material wealth and waited for over a decade by a river to receive religious instruction (Geertz 1968:25-29).

What is important to understand about these historical figures is that they are metaphors for spirituality, representing the idealized values that their respective societies have incorporated into the national narrative. For the Druze, al-Hakim bi-Amrillah, the faith’s founder, represents the main axial figure whose reputation transcends the mundane and is elevated to a divine status. What makes the comparison among these three figures so relevant is that while Lahsen Lyusi represents the epitome of the zealot and Sunan Kalidjaga a quietist, al-Hakim has been described as having both of these polar qualities depending on the author. Interestingly, these extremely opposing descriptions occur in perhaps the two most widely read English texts on the Druze, Sami Makarem’s *The Druze Faith* (1974), and Robert Brenton Betts’ *The Druze* (1988). The
former author’s work likely reflects the fact that it was commissioned by the leading Druze religious authority in Lebanon, the position of Sheikh al-Aql, and discusses the life of al-Hakim in sometimes overly subjective tones. In contrast, Betts states very concretely that al-Hakim’s sister, Sitt al-Mulk, ordered his assassination although there has never been any evidence of his murder. As well, this is in direct contradiction to the Druze belief in his occultation and the fundamental aspect of al-Hakim’s role in the revealing of *Tawhid* (Radwan 2009:12-13).

Most historical accounts agree that al-Hakim was an eccentric figure. As previously mentioned, he is simultaneously praised for founding al-Azhar in Cairo, widely recognized as the world’s first university, and blamed for sending his forces to destroy the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Both Betts and Makarem neglect to address the full discussion, which may be revealing of their positions as insider or outsider to the community. Whatever the case may be, important figures that represent the narrative principles of a particular group are embodied in the symbols and values they come to represent. These factors are so important to a faith, that they provide the social structures that sustain the community (Geertz 1968:2).

Another important work from anthropologist Dale Eickelman, titled *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach* (1989), takes a closer look at the anthropology of the region with particular attention to research conducted among marginalized groups. For the Druze in the Middle East, marginalization, has been a persistent problem that continues in different forms to this day. Given their perpetual minority status in their countries of origin, similarities exist between the Druze and other non-majority ethnic and religious communities in the Middle East. For example, Eickelman explains that ethnic Kurdish and religious Alevi communities, which are oftentimes the same, are heavily disenfranchised in Turkey, a state known for its European inspired model of democracy and the supposedly egalitarian treatment of its citizens. Eickelman
states that their very identity is a political risk and that: “Speaking, reading, and writing Kurdish is forbidden” (Eickleman 1989:212).

Currently, Druze communities in Syria, Israel, Lebanon, and Jordan have substantially different roles on their respective national stages. For example, those in Syria are highly stigmatized for their belief in reincarnation, which distinguishes them from mainstream Islam (Bennet 2006:94). While those in Israel have gained the trust of the Jewish state, at least in public, they have done so at the expense of compulsory service in the Israeli Defense Forces since 1956, thus losing favor with other Arabs in the region (Nisan 1991:94; Westheimer and Sedan 2007). Early on in the creation of the Jewish state, the Druze developed a tenuous pact with the new government largely due to a number of clashes between their villages and those of local Christians and Sunnis (Atashi 1997). The burgeoning Jewish population may have also been amenable to an alliance with the Druze as they recognized their similar qualities such as their status as religious minorities in all of the nations in which they lived until the establishment of Israel in 1948.

Perhaps the most prevalent form of discrimination for Israeli Druze is of the economic sort. Over time, the Israeli government has prevented the extension of development zones into Druze communities who lack manufacturing jobs, thus relegating them to a tourist economy that caters to wealthier Jews from Europe and North America (Westheimer and Sedan 2007:35). Conversely, while Druze ethnic identity has been manipulated by the state, it has been both detrimental and beneficial in varying ways. For example: “In Israel beginning in the 1960’s, the state separated Druzes from other Arabs in the minorities section of the Ministry of Education. Druze history, culture, tradition, and overall heritage were incorporated in the new school curriculum” (Swayd 2009:51).
Taking a look at another minority community in the Middle East, Lila Abu-Lughod wrote extensively about the Awlad Ali Bedouins of Egypt in her book *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (1999). Although she originally intended to study the social relationships between men and women, upon arrival she realized the importance of the poems that both men and women often recited in daily speech. What stood out in her work was the constant theme of change among the Awlad Ali. Speaking about how she noticed a plethora of material goods associated with modernization (mass produced clothing, cars, and wristwatches), Lughod states: “Unlike me, they did not regard these as alarming signs that they were losing their identity as a cultural group, that they were no longer Bedouins, because they define themselves not primarily by a way of life, … but by some key principles of social organization: genealogy and a tribal order based on the closeness ofagnates (paternal relatives) and tied to a code of morality, that of honor and modesty” (Abu-Lughod 1999:40-41). In other words, despite the fact that these Bedouins did not necessarily ascribe to some of their traditional practices (e.g. nomadism and sheep herding), or even to outwardly prescribed stereotypes (e.g. hand woven clothing, camels, and sun dials), they remained Bedouins due to their self-perception and recognition of the values that express their heritage. Much the same can be said about the Druze in both the diaspora and the Middle East. For example, one would expect them to know more about their faith or to understand the meanings behind their shared symbols, and yet: “being a Druze is not entirely a matter of religious belief and practice, but a cultural phenomenon as well, a complex of behavioral expectations” (Khuri 2004: xvii).

For the Awlad Ali Bedouins in Egypt, changing economics have altered their social relations further stratifying them with increased wealth disparities due to involvement in the cash economy (Abu-Lughod 1999:70). Moreover, traditional kinship ties may also be at risk among
Bedouins settling in urban areas where neighbors increasingly make up one’s social circles (Abu-Lughod 1999:77). Yet, despite the perceived transformation into a society that looks increasingly similar to the Egyptian majority (e.g. permanent homesteads), honor and modesty continue to be the formative values for the Alwad Ali. As minorities, both the Druze and many Bedouin groups attribute great significance to their freedom, or *hurr* (Abu-Lughod 1999:87). For the former, freedom signifies a lack of oppression and the right to practice one’s faith in private without outside interference or even the encumbrance of formal religious ceremonies (Khuri 2005).

**Assimilation and Preservation in the Diaspora and Among Minorities**

Issues of assimilating or preserving cultural heritage are pertinent to ethnic and religious communities in the diaspora and to minorities in the countries of origin since both are defined by their non-majority status and inferior numbers as previously discussed. The effect of assimilation on minority groups in the diaspora appears to be an increasingly popular theme in anthropology. In his article *The Dynamics of Identity Reconstruction among Arab Communities in the United States* (2006), el-Sayed el-Aswad looks at the multiplicity and plasticity of Arab American identity among Muslim and Christian Egyptians in the greater Detroit area. For his Muslim respondents, moving from a nation where they made up an obvious religious majority to a nation where they are a stigmatized minority, especially after the September 11th attacks, was a profound change (el-Aswad 2006:111). However, much the same can be said of his Christian respondents since they are conflated with ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’ in the American imagination, thus resulting in the same stereotypes (el-Aswad 2006:114). It seemed clear that Arab Christians
(e.g. Copts, Maronites, and Chaldeans) did not necessarily feel that they had integrated with the religious majority in the United States, much like their Muslim counterparts.

Minority groups like the Druze, live in ethnic or religious enclaves in the countries of origin where they may have less daily interaction with majority groups. Remarking on the kind of alienation some Arab Americans may experience upon returning to their home countries, el-Aswad borrows Edward Said’s term ‘double-exile’ (el-Aswad 2006:114). However, he doesn’t take his discussion to the next logical level as the Arab American no longer necessarily enacts a double identity since they are likely to have fully embraced their so-called hybridized identity in both the United States and the country of origin. Perhaps the strongest example of a hybridized identity can be found among the offspring of exogamous marriages. For the Druze, individuals of mixed parentage tend to have a status which differs from their non-mixed counterparts. Not surprisingly, rates of exogamous marriages differ in the United States and in Lebanon although reliable data is insufficient to say precisely by how much. Discussing the increasing rates of exogamous marriages as reported in her study, anthropologist Intisar Azzam found that: “these fundamental changes have not meant the loss of Druzeness or of a Druze sense of identity. Instead, new forms of identity expression seem to have evolved and continue to evolve, which are more congruent with the socio-political conditions in the Unites States” (Azzam 1997:150).

The issue of what constitutes cultural, ethnic, and religious assimilation is much too complicated to be dealt with here. However it is important to recognize that since identity and status include both externally ascribed and personally subscribed qualities, whether or not individuals are seen to have assimilated, or believe they have assimilated, can be a matter of perspective. This is especially the case in the United States wherein our sense of belonging can largely be self-defined, although cultural factors remain imperative to who and what we value as
well as how we self-define. As Azzam stated, Druze of mixed parentage may decide to embrace this facet of their parent’s heritage and their decision to do so has had social implications on the community. While an increasing number of Druze of mixed parentage creates new forms in the collective imagination of the community and expands criteria of inclusion, these changes are neither unilineal nor evenly embraced. In Lebanon for example, such individuals can carry a certain stigma that is largely inescapable and impacts possible marriage choices, entry into religious circles, and perhaps even access to social programs, which are divided by the nation’s confessional institutions.

To promote a strong sense of community in diaspora, certain kinds of cultural and social reforms are often required to reshape the community’s identity so that it maintains its relevance in the host society. Here I refer to sociologist, Dalia Abdelhady’s definition of diaspora, which: “is traditionally used when referring to immigrant populations that span more than one national context” (2011:10). It should also be recognized that cultural exchange goes both ways and that minority communities similarly influence majority or host populations (Gans 1992:13). For instance, Kurdish speaking Alevis represent as many as two million immigrants in West Germany, defining the nation’s Turkish migrant community and affecting overall immigration policies (Eickleman 1989:212). Similarly the political and religious identity of nations that held colonial power in North Africa are largely shaped by the substantial populations of those they once subjugated, such as Moroccans and Algerians in France and Libyans in Italy (Eickelman 1996:368). The contributions of the sociological literature are especially important to consider when discussing issues of assimilation and preservation (Gans 1979; Kasinitz et. al. 2008; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; R. Smith 2006). For example, Herbert Gans explains that straight-line assimilation theory is limited by ignoring any individual agency. Many of the shifts
and changes among minorities in the diaspora are representative of the community’s practical needs and not necessarily a continuous and lineal movement away from their roots (Gans 1992:3). This is the case for ethnic organizations or individual acculturation, which in either case may lead to new or hybrid forms of ethnic identity. If minorities comprise a kind of distinct group, it is important to ask, what they are being assimilated into.

For Richard Alba and Victor Nee, the United States represents a multicultural society that moves beyond the idea of a distinct, non-ethnic majority into which all ethnic minorities eventually assimilate: “past a certain point, attachment to the ethnic group would hinder minority individuals from taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by American society, which require individualistic mobility, not ethnic loyalty” (Alba and Nee 2003:5). Framing the United States as a multicultural society suggests that diversity is part of the social system rather than immigrant minority groups assimilating into an ethnic or cultural majority represented by the image of the melting pot. While this framing seems to more accurately represent processes of adaptation and assimilation, the countries of origin may remain a significant influence on the lives of such individuals for many generations: “The homeland forms the basis for collective memory, and for ethno-communal solidarity and consciousness; it also molds cultural, social, political, and economic life in the diaspora” (Abdelhady 2011:11).

In my opinion, the conflict between preservation and assimilation is much more nuanced than Alba and Nee’s singular prediction explains. For example, many Cuban Americans throughout south Florida have been financially successful in their ethnic enclave and while they did not necessarily acculturate or assimilate, their incorporation into American society defines the reciprocal process more accurately (Gable and Handler 1996). Given my research on the North American Druze, in the majority of instances, individuals perceived their social relations...
with fellow Druze as beneficial to them and to their families (Radwan 2009). Becoming fully incorporated into American society does not necessarily mean that immigrants must or will ever have to sacrifice their ethnic identities, national sentiments, or religious values. For example, many Druze expatriates have transnational lifestyles wherein they and their children regularly return to and visit Lebanon, which is where the overwhelming majority of American Druze trace their ancestry.

In her book on the large diaspora of Lebanese émigrés, Dalia Abdelhady explained: “Generally assimilation is depicted as a one-sided process of incorporating migrants into host societies” (Abdelhady 2011:3). The factors by which émigrés become absorbed into their host countries include the decline of their original language, gaining social and economic mobility akin to the majority population, and the loss of their distinct ethnic identity through intermarriage (Abdelhady 2011:3). And yet the cultural and religious traditions of these groups creates a strong sense of nostalgia that influences their lives abroad (Abdelhady 2011:11). Drawing on Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits once again, distinguishing between assimilation and acculturation reminds us that the former is one facet of the latter (1936). According to professor of psychology John Berry, acculturation is defined as including intercultural contact more broadly, and concerns strategies of adaptation by both émigrés and those previously residing in the country (Berry 2005:697). Acculturative processes also have effects on the Druze in the Middle East since Lebanon is an extremely culturally and religiously plural society and some have embraced traditions that are especially particular to the Druze in reaction to the more dominant cultures of their neighboring communities.

It is not a stretch of the imagination to assume that ethnic loyalties are perhaps enduring certainties, as many individuals in diasporas beyond their homelands remain distinct “others”
and retain a kind of double consciousness as explained by the prominent sociologist and civil rights activist, W. E. B. Du Bois (Alba 1990:208). As for the prevailing white majority in the United States, a lack of apparent ethnic identity seems to involve an illusory process by which generations of Europeans intermarried, resulting in increasingly inviable cultural distinctions that have come to represent a default ethnic status. Richard Alba explained that some of the exceptions to white assimilation were among parishes or churches that preserved the language, beliefs and culture that distinguished the original communities. Such parishes and churches created ethnoreligious enclaves that encouraged individuals to socialize and marry within the perceived community (Alba 1990). Considering that the Druze are a minority too small to have immigrant enclaves or ethnic communities segregated from the white majority, their strategies for preservation are intrinsically linked to their broader social networks, which still often include other Druze families.

Women’s Roles: Tradition and Transition

Looking at the anthropology of the Middle East, gender roles have been one of the most dominant themes since early on, although Dale Eickelman stated that most works offer a shallow portrayal of women’s roles making them seem as if they live and work in entirely separate worlds from that of men (Eickelman 1989:187). This may largely be due to the anthropologist’s inability to be a part of the domestic and private life wherein most social interactions take place among family members. As well, male anthropologists were, and in many Middle Eastern communities still are, unable to gain an intimate access to women to conduct interviews or participant observation. Having lived among the Rwala Bedouins for over three years with his wife and children, William Lancaster achieved a kind of trust and access to the community that
allowed him to understand the status of women as perceived by both sexes (Eickelman 1989:85). Although Elizabeth Warnock Fernea’s book *Guests of the Sheikh: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village* (1969), seemed to support the simple dichotomy of divided male and female worlds, her experiences among the Shiites of El Nahra were greatly nuanced. Perhaps the most important contribution of Fernea’s popular work resides in her ability to illustrate the inseparability of religion from notions of community, individual identity, and gender.

Since anthropologist Louise E. Sweet’s book, *Women of ‘Ain Ad Dayr* (1967), there has been a relatively small yet significant number of works focused on the role of women in Druze society. More recently, anthropologist Intisar Azzam wrote her book *Gender and Religion: Druze Women* (2007), which discussed the discrepancies between women’s rights as explained in the religious scriptures, and women’s rights in practice. Given that the faith was historically established at the turn of the first millennium, the rights afforded women were relatively revolutionary. For example, women were able to initiate divorce, inherit property from their deceased husbands, and were to be the solitary wife in marriage since polygamy was outlawed (Azzam 2007:27-31; Oppenheimer 2009:218). Eventually however, and largely due to the influence of the 15th century Druze religious leader Emir al-Sayyid, the Druze adopted Sunni Hanafi Law, which in many ways limited women’s rights in the community thereafter. Today, Druze religious courts have a restricted range of power and anyone stepping too far out of the boundaries delineated by gender roles is likely to suffer social rather than legal consequences.

Druze women are pivotal to the survival of Druze communities in the diaspora, bringing families together and encouraging their children to appreciate their kin and facilitating a cultural appreciation for communal values (Daou and Chiro 2008:5-6). In positioning *mushayekh* as the keepers of religious knowledge among Druze communities in the countries of origin, it is
accurate to say that women, namely mothers, are widely considered the keepers of culture for the community. Among the Druze, women also become *sheikhas*, and often become initiated at a younger age than men. *Mushayekh* frequently marry one another but if a man married to a secular woman decides to become a *sheikh*, “he cannot, unless the wife decides of her own free will to do it, too. She can do it alone, or the two can do it together, but not just the man” (Court and Abbas 2011:140).

Despite the comparatively substantial religious influence women may have in society, Druze women often still lack the economic opportunities available to men. For example: “Despite the trend toward women working, and the increasing number of women with higher education, as of 2005 still only 20.6% of Israeli Druze women were in the labor force” (Court and Abbas 2011:137). While Israeli Druze communities are generally the most conservative in terms of their community values, it is likely that this statistic is somewhat representative of populations in Syria, Jordan, and parts of Lebanon as well. Despite the sometimes slow march of progress, the literature has made it apparent that women’s liberties will continue to parallel their increasing rates of achieving higher education.

Writing in *American Ethnologist*, Jonathan Oppenheimer conducted a thorough ethnography among the first Israeli Druze women to achieve higher education beginning in the 1980s (2009). He writes that as young adults, these women were trailblazers, whether or not they knew it, often facing severe stigma as they left their villages and attended classes with men (Oppenheimer 2009:219). There was further social pressure on these young women to adhere to their traditional roles in all other aspects of their lives, lest they incur a bad reputation which would have prevented subsequent generations of young women from being allowed to attend academic institutions (Oppenheimer 2009:222). In many respects, the personal achievements of
these first female college graduates opened the path for others to follow. Oppenheimer reports that: “A little more than a decade ago, Druze women did not apply to universities. Today, there are hundreds of female Druze students, outnumbering the male students of their community. It is now considered not only permissible but even desirable for Druze women to obtain a higher education” (Oppenheimer 2009:229). The overarching message for any traditional society is that at first, change must be fashioned within the given social structure if it is to be successful, rather than threaten it (Court and Abbas 2011:145).

Looking again at Lila Abu-Lughod’s work among the Awlad Ali, we can see how women express themselves by means of *ghanawas*, orally delivered poems literally meaning little songs (Abu-Lughod 1999:27). While men also used this means of communication, Abu-Lughod sometimes focused on poetry as an important means among women of expressing intimate messages not to be shared with the men of the community. This sometimes covert means of communication is important as modesty in all of its aspects is the key virtue that Awlad Ali women must possess to gain and maintain honor. The literature shows that this statement is also true for Druze women who while striving for equality, must also maintain the boundaries of modesty to be considered honorable or respectable enough to encourage any kind of social change (Abu-Lughod 1999:119). Perhaps the most important facet of modesty for all ethnic and religious groups in the Middle East, is women’s chastity. In fact, the word *ird*, which can be interpreted as the chasteness of the female kin group, is synonymous with the honor for the entire kin-group or community (Khuri 2004:55). Writing in the journal *Gender and Education*, Naomi Weiner-Levy identifies the dichotomy of the inner or covert identity and the manifest or overt (Weiner-Levy 2008:143). While the former can be considered a kind of veil, it is apparent that
women throughout the Middle East share at least a modicum of liberties based on their ability to express themselves privately rather than publicly (Weiner-Levy 2008:144).

Having stated that endogamy among the Druze is most often concerned with marrying within the larger community, rather than just the patriline, marriage between different families has always led to kinship ties that connect the entirety of the Druze community all over the world. Traditional endogamy within among first cousins, with the preference being towards the father’s brother’s daughter, was once seen as a way to ensure the family’s honor in that daughters remain under the supervision (patrilocally) of her family rather than another family that she would have otherwise married into: “The father and brothers are the guardians of her honour, which is, by extension, theirs as well. Marriage, by itself, is believed to safeguard a girls’ reputation and, consequently, the family’s honour” (Khuri 2004:207).

Writing in 1995, anthropologist Michael Peletz stated that the study of kinship was then shifting towards a focus on social relations and the differences among those engaged in the social reproduction within wider political and economic structures (Peletz 1995:366). Certainly, the most significant differences in the production of systems of kinship has always existed between men and women. Utilizing anthropological methods to look critically at the domestic family unit in ancient Athens, author Cheryl Anne Cox illustrates that women could potentially wield significant social power despite the line of patrilineal descent that rarely admitted matrilineal relatives into the line of inheritance (Cox 2014:xiiiv-xiv). The succession of inheritors that Cox lays out is very similar to that of the Druze with the main difference being that Druze women always inherit half of the share of male siblings rather than only inheriting in their absence. The resulting friction among agnatic kin was also similar: “showing how conflicts between fathers and sons, 1 0 and between brothers, led individuals to seek help and support through female
agnates such as sisters, or through the matriline” (Cox 2014:xvi). Gender roles have placed constraints upon women in the Druze community in Lebanon, perhaps less so than their Muslim and sometimes their Christian counterparts, but their increased rates of pursuing higher education, their leading role in maintaining the social bonds of the community, and their prominence in the household and in the extended family, has resulted in an ability to influence every facet of both domestic life and Druze society.

The Anthropology and Social Science Research of the Druze

While there have been a number of works published on the Druze in Arabic, and some in French as well, one of the first and perhaps most important to have been published in English was Sami Makarem’s The Druze Faith in 1974. Commissioned by the Sheikh al-Aql and his offices in Lebanon (the foremost representative of Druze mushayekh), the book responded to an appeal from American Druze who worked collectively to let their voices be heard since establishing the American Druze Society in 1946. It was actually earlier than this however when the Druze in the United States had officially organized themselves, establishing the al-Bakura al-Durziyya, or the first fruit of the Druze, in 1908 (Khuri 2004:95). Since meetings were always conducted in Arabic and a growing number of second-generation Druze didn’t speak Arabic well or at all, participation in al-Bakura al-Durziyya waned until it was eventually reborn as the American Druze Society, or ADS. Since then, members of the society have actively sought to learn about their heritage in English by facilitating knowledgeable speakers at social events, funding a number of publications through the Committee on Religious Affairs, or CORA, as well as by publishing a quarterly magazine called Our Heritage.
While Makarem’s earlier publication focused on the historical establishment of the faith, namely the life of the religion’s enigmatic founder al-Hakim bi-Amrillah, and was intended to be read by the Druze youth in the United States, subsequent works progressively included more academic approaches and inquiries, although the rigor of each author’s methods has varied considerably. Questions of methodological rigor have however been far less damaging than the intentions of the authors. Speaking about early writers on the Druze, the late Ambassador Abdullah M. Najjar, cousin to the previously discussed Abdullah E. Najjar, has stated: “Writers on Druzism were moved by various motives. Some of them were vengeful; others were reckless and recorded every thing [sic] that came to hand in rumor, gossip, fiction, and persiflage; still others were venal merchants and were in the market for anything that attracts, bewitches and fascinates” (M. Najjar 1973:41). Indeed, some of the more fascinating but far less flattering notes written by individuals such as the 4th Earl of Carnarvon, were so degrading that they do not warrant being repeated. And yet such ignorant accusations have had long-term effects and continue to shape the stigmas that surround the Druze to this present day (Herbert 1860:82-83, 87-88).

On the other hand, a few social scientists and anthropologists have been more culturally relative and have addressed topics ranging from how a belief in reincarnation shapes social structures (Bennet 1999; 2003) to expanding college enrollment among young women from some of the most conservative Druze villages (Weiner-Levy 2006, 2008). The following discussion takes into consideration all of the various pieces of literature and elucidates their importance to illustrate a collective image of where the Druze come from, who they are today, and where they might be headed as a community. Having previously conducted applied research on this relatively unique ethnoreligious group (Radwan 2009), it is my belief that an opportunity
to become more intimately acquainted with particular practices, beliefs, and problems, will translate into a richer understanding of the complexities relevant to any ethnic or religious minority group, both inside the boundaries of the Middle East and beyond.

**The Nature of Druze Politics**

The defining characteristic of the vast majority of political decisions for the Druze have principally been motivated by the need to survive and to protect one another across international lines and political affiliations. Certainly, the need to survive and to thrive is pertinent to any minority group, and distinguishing the Druze from others neither earns them a special status nor makes their complicated position any more unique by comparison. Many of the characteristics that define Druze politics in general are shared among other religious or ethnic minority groups in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, even if their dogmatic differences may be significant. Writing in an edited volume on the Druze, media correspondent and columnist Amir Taheri compared the community to their regional counterparts explaining that such groups often play important roles in secular political movements, such as Druze support for the Progressive Socialist Party, originally founded by Walid Jumblatt’s father, Kamal (2005). He explains that the goals of their involvement have been to, “promote political unity in the hope of safeguarding religious diversity. In other words, opening oneself to a broader political identity was a means of ensuring one’s right to a closed religious identity” (Taheri 2005:187). Taheri also says that similar to the Druze, examples of communities engaged in such revolutionary politics can be found among Arab Christians throughout the Levantine region and Egypt or the various ghulāt Shia sects found in Iran and interspersed through the Caucasus.
Discussing the duality of Druze domestic politics, a recent graduate student at the Lebanese American University wrote that the community’s loyalties are often divided between the government in power and those that oppose it (Abi Ali 2013:11). Providing a poignant example from Lebanon, Assem Abi Ali explains that the Druze leader, “Walid Jumblatt established an alliance with the United States and the Arab monarchies in 2005, joining forces with the Lebanese Sunnis, while the other prominent leader Talal Arslan founded an alliance with Syria and Iran, and consequently, aligning himself with the Lebanese Shi’a at a time where Sunnis and Shi’a in Lebanon are tensely opposed to each other” (Abi Ali 2013:13). Much of the political clout of the Lebanese Druze is divided between the once feudal ruling families of Jumblatt and Arslan. Although offering a kind of competition to one another, these political factions seem to close rank when the greater community is threatened. For example, after a 2008 governmental crackdown on Hezbollah’s telecommunications system, which was linked to Walid Jumblatt, the well-armed forces of Hassan Nasrallah attacked the Druze mountainous areas near Beirut. Despite being able to greatly deflect much of Hezbollah’s strength, the Druze sought a reconciliation with them, which was gained by Walid Jumblatt reaching out to his political rival Talal Arslan, who has an established record of being their ally (Abi Ali 2013:13-14). Thus, despite differences found between regional divisions and among political alliances, Druze leaders believe that the fate of the community is interlinked, remaining dependent upon one another when significant threats emerge.

In his book The Druze: Culture, History, Prospects (2014), former judge and professor of law Abbas Halabi explains that the Druze have developed a robust ability to defend themselves as a response to numerous acts of persecution throughout their history (147). Thus, their unity in times of duress makes them especially resilient although their options for international support
have always been limited unlike their Christian, Muslim, and Jewish neighbors: “the Christians of Lebanon can rely on the support and assistance of the Vatican and the West, the Sunnis can depend on the Islamic world and its billion Sunnis, or at least on the support of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, just as the Shi’is can rely on Iran” (Halabi 2014:147). Druze communities throughout Lebanon are strong supporters of a united Lebanese state and are less prone to advocating for divisions along religious lines. Their patriotic ideals have often motivated them to support Arab causes while not hindering their interest to maintain distinguishing characteristics, which separate them from others. Referring to the difficulty of walking sometimes fine political lines, Halabi explains: “they have preserved their cultural and confessional distinctiveness, and consolidated their roots in a country in which they feel proud of having been among its founders and builders” (Halabi 2014:144-145). Taking pride in their national identity stems from their unique historical links to the land given that, “Lebanon had no political history before the Druze arrived on its soil. They built it up and wrote its annals and stamped their name on its countenance, for it became known for a long time as ‘Gebel el-Druze’, meaning ‘Druze mountain’” (M. Najjar 1973:21).

Returning to Mordechai Nisan’s book that samples various topics on minority groups in the Middle East, the author provides a critical discussion of the Druze community’s identity as ethnic Arabs. He explains that while the Druze have been integrated into a larger Arab identity for a significant amount of time, it has more recently been a matter of politics rather than history. And yet: “beyond this problematic exercise in establishing Druze origins, the salience and integrity of Druze ethnicity has been an incontestable reality for some one thousand years” (Nisan 1991:80). Throughout the later part of the 20th century, Druze were hesitant to wholly commit to any particular side in the Lebanese conflict, but did not hesitate to support particular
factions when called upon in the governmental dealings of the capital (Nisan 1991:92). Even into modern times the support of the Druze community remains of significant importance to Lebanon’s more powerful and more numerous political factions. Whether it be military support, or diplomatic backing, the Druze community in Lebanon has remained relevant due to both their geographic position and the civil strategies of their most politically influential figures.

Druze communities in both Israel and Syria likewise have wielded significant political clout disproportionate to their population figures. The political influence of the community might also be attributed to both their historical links to the region and a reputation for military prowess: “Military skills were a natural educational trait, and the Druzes could mobilize an inordinate proportion of the community when the situation demanded” (Nisan 1991:83). Their well-earned reputation as fierce military allies/rivals has mostly stemmed from a defense of their landholdings while goals to appropriate new territories have rarely been part of their militaristic strategy for the last century. It seems apparent that an independent state has not been viable nor pursued since the opportunity presented itself after the Syrian revolution in 1925 (Atashi 1997). While Nisan makes it clear that an attempt to establish independence would be construed as an intentional division from the Muslim majority, such a move would also be considered threatening to the Jewish state (Nisan 1991:97). Gerard Russell illustrated this point best as he explained a scene from his recent venture to Beirut: “Soldiers were stationed at key points around the city center. A dispute between political factions in the Lebanese Parliament had been ongoing for several months, preventing the formation of a government, and the troops were on the streets to prevent trouble. The Druze parties could play kingmakers in these disputes, but never kings” (Russell 2014:118).
Reincarnation: A Foundation for Social Practice

For the Druze, the belief in reincarnation is extremely pervasive (Radwan 2009:45) even while knowledge about its religious facets is not common. The Druze doctrine explains that at the faith’s historical inception in 1017 CE, new adherents committed themselves by agreeing to a document recognizing their commitment to the principle belief in Tawhid, or the unity of God. It is this contract, called the mithaq, which binds the Druze individual to the community in this life and the next (Swayd 2009:114). In other words, Druze often understand that they are reincarnated within the community and are bound to it by the transmigration of their soul, thus the saying ‘We are born in each other’s houses’ (Khuri 2005:62).

While the majority of authors have discussed a belief in reincarnation as a categorical aspect of the community’s belief system, anthropologist Marjorie Anne Bennet has stated that it may not be accepted universally. She explains that reincarnation plays an important role in both the family and village structure, but also states: “There is, however, some resistance within the community to a belief in reincarnation. This resistance is due in part to image management in the political context of Syria, and also because a belief in reincarnation is a stigma for a group in the Islamic Middle East” (Bennet 2006:87). She goes on to say that reincarnation is not interpreted uniformly in the community, especially among the more highly educated (Bennet 2006:101). While this may be the case among a rather small percentage of the group, Bennet rarely cites specific examples of individuals who directly disavow the belief. In her article “Reincarnation, Sect Unity, and Identity among the Druze” (2006) published in Ethnology, Bennet focuses on Syrian Druze and explains that a number of her informants were likely to be working in the heavily urbanized Damascus, where individuals might be more likely to remove themselves from beliefs that are seen as either parochial or not in keeping with dominant forms of Islam. In
contrast to this, during my thesis research among the Druze in North America, I found that nearly 95% of research respondents shared a belief in reincarnation (Radwan 2009).

Although she frequently implies that reincarnation is not universally accepted, Bennet’s work is largely concerned with the social implications of the phenomenon. She explains that even the Arabic word for reincarnation, tagammus, is loaded with meaning as it derives from the verb qammasa, to put on a shirt. The use of this word thus implies that the soul, having traveled from one body to the next, is essentially re-clothed (Bennet 2006:88; Playfair 2006). Since new converts have not been accepted into the faith since the original proselytizers halted offering the mithaq in 1043 CE, the Druze are a closed community, creating a clear boundary for both outsiders and insiders. In other words: “Ideologically, to be a Druze is to be a member of a community that has been intact and impermeable for at least a thousand years, and reincarnation is the mechanism through which the integrity of the original community of Druze souls has been maintained” (Bennet 2006:90).

Belief in reincarnation also has strong implications in shaping social ties across villages and family units. These links are essentially the result of a relatively rare occurrence wherein individuals (typically during childhood) remember parts of their former lives. If a parent is attentive to signs that their child is experiencing such remembrance, and channels of gossip lead to information about their previous incarnation, it is not uncommon for one to be reunited with former family members. While such reunions can be awkward, especially in cases where the reincarnated individual is still a child, they can also lead to strong ties between families and individuals who would not have otherwise broached the respectful distance that colors most other social interactions (Bennet 2003:147). One example of the strength of these relationships can be seen as one of Bennet’s informants, a young man named Shafiq, visited his brother from
his former life to discuss a marriage prospect much in the same way he would consult with his current family including his parents in his current life (Bennet 2006:99).

In their article, “The View From the Bridge: An Israeli Druze Woman as Guardian of Religious Tradition and Agent of Social Change” (2011), authors Deborah Court, a professor of education specializing in qualitative research, and Randa Abbas, a chemist and one of the first Druze women to earn a PhD in Israel, discuss Abbas’s shift in status when it was revealed that she remembered her previous life. Like other young women in the 1980s, Abbas was disparaged for having attended a university outside of her village at a young age and for pursuing her advanced degree. Simultaneously, she was well regarded by some due to her ability to remember her previous life. These conflicting social attitudes eventually prompted some of the prominent local mushayekh to insist that she become a sort of spokesperson, encouraging young girls to seek school at the local branch of the university rather than travel as she had to earn her advanced degree in the larger, more distant Hebrew University. Not surprisingly, Abbas was hesitant to encourage young girls to not seek schooling that might be distant from their homes. Abbas’s story is interesting because despite breaking with the very conservative gender roles common among Israeli Druze, her ability to remember her past life positioned her into becoming a convenient mouthpiece for some of the socially influential mushayekh (Court and Abbas 2011).

While Marjorie Anne Bennet states that it is relatively rare for individuals to remember their past lives and that it is often relegated to those who experienced violent deaths, others have contradicted her by stating that remembrance to some degree is quite common (Oppenheimer 2009). Although there are conflicting remarks about the precise details of reincarnation in the literature, all agree that it has an important role in Druze social organization. Reincarnation can also be comforting to those who have lost a loved one as the Druze belief in immediate rebirth
can help remind family members that someone else is about to experience the joy of a newborn, giving the deceased a fresh start. Yet, this is perhaps an optimistic treatment of how individuals experience loss. In practice, the Druze mourn much like their Christian, Muslim, and Jewish counterparts and have similar practices to the *bka*, or crying poems that express sorrow and grief, of North African Bedouins (Abu-Lughod 1999:197). Much like other Arabs, poetic chanting is increasingly less common and is conducted by older women in consoling the family of the deceased. For the Druze however, such laments often reference continued existence through reincarnation (Bennet 2003:148).

Much has been made of Druze interconnectedness, as will be further discussed in the final portion of this chapter, and the role of reincarnation cannot be underestimated here. Their pervasive belief in reincarnation sits at the interstice of their esoteric theosophy and their common connections through kinship reckoning and spiritual constancy. For the Druze, reincarnation: “according to which a Druze is reborn within the community – enhances this sense of minority bond, and ensures a continued concern for the survival of the community, the guarding of its past, present and future, through time” (Halabi 2014:146).

**Secrecy and Esoterism**

Remembering her past life as a young girl, Randa Abbas was told by her mother: “Listen, we live in a mixed village with Christians and Moslems, and they don’t believe in reincarnation. Do us a favor and don’t talk about this in public. What you want to say, say to me or to your father. If people ask you what your name is, say Randa” (Court and Abbas 2011:138). As discussed in the previous section, reincarnation is a widely held belief that separates the Druze from their historically Muslim roots (Bennet 2006:90). Given that they are a religious minority in
a region of the Middle East that continues to be rife with religious conflict, most knowledge about the faith is essentially so clandestine that it remains widely unfamiliar even among a substantial majority of the Druze population. The history of the community reveals why secrecy has become a structurally important facet of the community, allowing them to survive both external threats and internal conflict. Even after the doctrine was first declared by the caliph of the powerful Fatimid Dynast, the Druze faced extreme persecution very early on, resulting in their occupation of steadfast, mountain holdings where their majority resides to this day.

Since their early persecution, the Druze have practiced religious dissimulation, referred to in Arabic as at-taqiyya, or simply taqiyya. When under duress or in protection of their faith, taqiyya has allowed them to deny their religious beliefs, covertly maintaining the community. Although not placing much significance on sanctified buildings like mosques, churches, or synagogues, dissimulation has had certain consequences on the Druze, including a lack of sanctified places of worship, although gathering places to read sacred scriptures are common. The Druze also lack, and by some effects deny, formal religious ceremonies and have public burial rights similar to Muslims, even though certain prayers are recited in private as the body of the deceased is prepared. Oftentimes, a good deal of the literature insinuates that this absence of prescribed ritual is a detriment to social cohesion. On the other hand, the malleable structure of religious identity has resulted in a variety of perspectives that allows individuals to ascribe personal qualities to their Druze identity. The notable Lebanese anthropologist Fuad Khuri explained it in this way: “The Druze grant individuals freedom of choice in the practice of religion since they consider religion to be a private experience rather than a public right – a sort of ‘secret’ between man and God that should not be divulged publicly to others” (Khuri 2005:64).
In what was, and perhaps still remains, an extremely controversial book, *The Druze: Millennium Scrolls Revealed* (1973), the late Ambassador Abdallah M. Najjar poignantly addressed secrecy and dissimulation among the Druze to ardently advocate for expanded religious disclosure. In doing so, Najjar provides a critical discussion of *taqiyya* explaining: “compulsion gives the tongue its excuse so long as the heart remains resolute; you may force someone to say something he does not choose to say, but you cannot impel him to change his thought or what is in his heart in belief or faith” (M. Najjar 1973:34). His explanation of *taqiyya* in practice stands in contrast to that of Mordechai Nisan who states: “Telling the truth is politeness, not obligation; a white lie is a sign of caution, not unethical behavior. In religious terms, hiding one’s Druze identity can be a necessary posing in a threatening environment” (Nisan 1991:82). Both perspectives illustrate that the practice of religious dissimulation is complicated in degree and intention and even its roots in Druze history are suspect as the anthropologist, Kais Firro has pointed out that there is no mention of *at-taqiyya* in the Druze scriptures whatsoever (Firro 1992:21). It is not an official part of the dogma but it is a social practice that has been taken up since early on in Druze history and although the term dissimulation most accurately depicts its characteristics, the term also connotes prudence and carefulness in the Arabic language (Firro 1992:20). Firro offers a different viewpoint from other authors and suggests that the notion that *taqiyya* is a reaction towards hostility may not be entirely accurate since it is also a facet of Gnostic philosophies wherein the inner teachings are necessarily relegated to the few due to their rigor and the possibility of misinterpretation by both outsiders and insiders (Firro 1992:21).

Returning to Abdullah M. Najjar’s book, the author explains that historically, *taqiyya* was first used by Shia Muslims to protect themselves against the Umayyad Caliphate during the early
years of Islam (M. Najjar 1973:36). This allowed them to outwardly appear loyal to burgeoning Sunni decrees while preserving their fealty to Ali and his descendants as the rightful heirs to the Imamate, or line of Imams. Despite its utility as a means of preservation and protection of the faith, Najjar clearly believed that it had served its purpose and that the efficacy of dissimulating had become a detriment to the Druze community: “The Taquiyyah survives in our day, not as a useful tool, but a legend; not a protection but a symbol of diffidence and shyness” (M. Najjar 1973:37). This viewpoint exemplifies a more recent debate among many educated Druze that positions *taqiyya* as a historical basis for the community’s apparent lack of religious inculcation.

In her book based on her dissertation research, *Change for Continuity: The Druze in America* (1997), Druze anthropologist Intisar Azzam focuses on the ascriptive qualities of esoterism. Having conducted ethnography among her fellows in southern California, she explains that the esoteric qualities of the faith have led to ideas that it is both secretive and mystical making it seem even more inaccessible and perhaps even irrelevant to the daily lives of members of the community (Azzam 1997:37). I believe that while this trend may have some veracity, this is oftentimes the approach of the older generation of American immigrants who were taught that their religion was a secret and were not likely to question their restricted religious knowledge. However, having attended a large number of Druze social events and conventions throughout the United States, it is apparent that newer generations are prone to asking lots of questions and are not satisfied if told that knowledge of their religion is a secret. While secrecy and esoterism have played an important role in Druze history, some academics have compared these qualities to a double-edged sword. Azzam put it best when she said: “If *taqiyya* has ensured the Druze survival, it has invited … blind speculations and harmful allegations of every sort” (Azzam 1997:40).
After provoking much negative speculation about Druze beliefs and ritual in his mid-19th century travel journals, the 4th Earl of Carnarvon, Henry Howard Molyneux Herbert, noted: “As, however, mystery and concealment naturally engender suspicion, so the inviolate secrecy of their religious rights has given some confirmation - although it is not in the nature of proof - to many charges against Druse practices” (Herbert 1860:80-81). In his review of social anthropologist Isabelle Rivoal’s Les Maitres du secret: Ordre mondain et Ordre religieux dans la communaute Druze en Israel (2000) (translated to Masters of the Secret: Worldly Order and Religious Order in the Druze Community in Israel), Kais Firro explains that much of the literature on the Druze, with Rivoal’s work being an exception, tends to exoticize the community. He opens with the following expose:

One of the last vestiges of Orientalist scholarship, the Druze community in the Middle East is still generally presented as an enigma, highlighted for the secrecy and mysterious rituals its scriptures seem to warrant. This, of course, is an essentialist reading that remains stuck on the text and, even when it (re)discovers them as people, turns the Druzes into witnesses of that text (Firro 2002:1, 330).

Some of the more insidious effects of distilling minority communities down to their most interesting qualities, as defined from a Eurocentric perspective, includes unrestricted speculation, which move assumptions into the realm of stereotypes then further into stigma (M. Najjar 1973:18). While Najjar believed that the practice of taqiyya contributed to such speculation, he also explained that those most learned mushayekh do not decline to share their knowledge due to any kind of pride, but rather a fear of overexposure and reducing it to the mundane (M. Najjar 1973:18-19). And yet, in no uncertain terms, Najjar challenged the presumed status quo stating that: “The time has come to deal objectively with this critical issue, to shake off the accumulated,
thick dust; to examine the various views banging it and floating around it. THERE IS NO EXCUSE TO KEEP THIS FAITH HIDDEN [original emphasis retained]” (M. Najjar 1973:20).

**Mushayekh as the Keepers of Religious Knowledge**

One of the most pervasive themes among the literature on the Druze, is the role of mushayekh in the community. Mushayekh have been portrayed in a number of ways, having been depicted as hermits, older adults that simply live a conservative lifestyle, rigid cultural monoliths and even power-holders who refrain from sharing their religious knowledge. In actuality, any individual sheikh may be any of these things or more. Among the Druze, mushayekh are both men and women (the latter being referred to as a sheikha), making up approximately 15 percent of the community in the countries of origin (Russell 2014:131). It should also be understood that while ‘sheikh’ is a label most often applied to those who have religious knowledge and have been acknowledged by the larger religious community as being privy to the inner teachings of the faith, many exceptions do exist. For example, the label might also be more liberally applied to include older individuals in the community who wish to adopt the conservative lifestyle associated with the designation, as, “the transition from vigorous manhood to old age is ideologically represented as being a passage from secular concerns to spirituality” (Oppenheimer 2009:627). While one cannot be officially accepted as committing themselves to the faith before the age of fifteen, some young children and pre-teens are also regarded as mushayekh and are recognized as being on the path to learning about Tawhid.

Given that Druze religious authority is not truly centralized (even in the office of Lebanon’s Sheikh al-Aql) the somewhat informal title of sheikh has allowed these individuals to play a wide variety of roles in the community. Indeed, confusion about the expected level of
knowledge and depth of indoctrination complicates the collective perception of mushayekh. This is in part due to an unstructured tier system among initiated mushayekh. As well, given daily casual encounters, it is not entirely clear at times who may or may not be among this more select group, although the men will have shaved their heads. Among women however, initiates always wrap the gauzy white head scarf called a mendil, around the bottom half of their face while making sure any part of their hair is concealed as well. It is not surprising that some exceptions exist here as well and that a young woman seeking initiation may begin to adopt this dress in preparation and to present herself more modestly. A few external signs of initiation do exist and indicate with no uncertainty that the individual has achieved a significant level of religious knowledge. Two examples among men in particular include wearing a flat white hat often referred to as a laffi, rather than the white skull cap that mushayekh wear throughout the day, and growing a beard, which indicates that the sheikh has achieved a particularly high level of knowledge.

Explaining how the larger Druze community perceives the societal role of mushayekh, social anthropologist Jonathan Oppenheimer states: “Their knowledge of their religion is often restricted to the vaguest notions; although they are all aware of the doctrine of reincarnation, they generally seem to pay little attention to it. If asked about religion, they customarily say that religious affairs and secret knowledge are safely in the hands of the old men and, to some extent, of the women” (Oppenheimer 2009:625). Here, Oppenheimer refers to all mushayekh as old men and women since the term itself is derived from the root word in classical Arabic for old age, shekhukha (Oppenheimer 2009:625). Positioning these spiritual individuals as keepers of religious knowledge can facilitate a depiction in the literature that can be critical of their lack of initiative to essentially teach the Druze doctrine. In his book The A to Z of the Druzes (2009),
religious studies professor Samy Swayd explained that unlike Christian theologians who studied the Bible, sharing their interpretations with congregations was not a practice among Druze sages. Moreover, *mushayekh* are only prone to discussing their religious beliefs with those that are recognized as spiritual equals (Swayd 2009: xxxi). Oftentimes, the comparison of *mushayekh* to the formal religious authorities found among other faiths can lead to assumptions about their influence and imposed role in society.

Despite their likelihood to adopt the lifestyle of the impassive ascetic, Druze *mushayekh* can wield very potent social power. They can influence community disputes and their social conduct often guides others (Swayd 2009: xxxvi). According to Abbas Halabi, unlike their religious counterparts in the region, “the religious organization of the Druze community is not based on a hierarchy comparable to that of canon law or Qur’anic shari’a, but on custom and traditions derived from the mystic way commended by their faith” (Halabi 2014:44). *Mushayekh* are collectively referred to as ‘*uqqal*, meaning the wise, while the remaining majority can sometimes be referred to derogatorily as *juhhal*, meaning the ignorant (Swayd 2009: xxxv). A less antagonistic dichotomy refers to *mushayekh* as *ruhani*, or the spiritual, as opposed to others who are offered the moniker of *jismani*, meaning those concerned with matters of the body or the tangible and physical world (Halabi 2014:44).

Among *mushayekh*, many have been formally initiated into the faith by having their commitment to the doctrine and austere lifestyle formally recognized by their religious fellows. A few of the most spiritually advanced individuals are referred to as *ajawid*, meaning the knowledgeable ones, and can be the most influential and even politically persuasive members in a given Druze community (Swayd 2009:11). It is crucial to stress that much of the distinctions between *mushayekh* and non-*mushayekh* are subjective and many of the former are largely
distinguished by adopting religion into the practice of their daily lives and not necessarily by the rigor of their doctrinal awareness. In his review of Fuad Khuri’s *Being a Druze* (2004), Kais Firro explains that through his research interviews, Khuri found: “that the division between 'uqqal and juhhal is a very arbitrary one. ‘It does not necessarily reflect the scope of religious knowledge..., a jahil (singular) may know more about the tenets of religion than many of the 'uqqal’” (Firro 2006:165).

Given the loosely interpreted spiritual nature of *mushayekh*, many authors do not overtly identify them as religious authorities in a practical sense (Khuri 2004). Likewise, Druze gathering to read from their holy books do not constitute a traditional congregation since these readings and recitations are not always expounded upon to the uninitiated by the *mushayekh* present. Religious gatherings occurring on Thursday evenings, considered the most propitious time of the week for the Druze, include two separate sessions: “The initial open session is very general, and both juhhal and 'uqqal are permitted to attend. Once the open session ends, the juhhal are expected or instructed to leave …” (Swayd 2009:174). These closed sessions are symbolic of how the inner teachings are kept private and in my opinion, is among a number of arrangements and practices that has worked to preserve the initial interpretations of the religious manuscripts since the faith’s inception. Assuming that sessions such as these include secret religious knowledge that might prove risky for those considered unprepared, or perhaps even dangerous if overly divulged, than it should not be surprising that personal discipline is a key facet of admittance into the circles of trust among *mushayekh*. However, the Druze are not at all distinct in valuing personal discipline. In her research among the tribal Awlad Ali, Lila Abu-Lughod explained that perhaps the most important quality of honor is self-control or restraint, referred to as *agl* or *aql* (Abu-Lughod 1999:90-91). It is also important to understand that *agl* is
similar to the mind or to knowledge in its broader sense, and that the Awlad Ali believe that it increases with age, drawing the same symbolic parallels between wisdom and respect that many Druze reserve for initiated mushayekh, notably the ajawid and ancestral sages.

**Community Cohesion**

The Druze sense of unity, or at least community, is the result of a very dynamic interplay between historical and social factors that produce notions of cohesion, similar to any minority group. The given literature discusses many of these factors and becoming familiar with what these authors have to say is a necessary step to understanding the nature of Druze communities in both the Middle East and abroad. For example, the Druze classical pronunciation of the letter qaf makes their dialect recognizable to other Arabs in the region and sets theirs apart from most contemporary Arabic vernaculars. This pronunciation, along with several other consonants and colloquial vocabulary choices, are distinguishing traits of Druze speech and style of communication, which work to define a more distinct Druze character (Nisan 1991:10; Swayd 2009:132). As previously discussed, the geographic positioning of Druze communities has made them defensible in times of aggression and self-sustainable due to their natural resources, while disposing them to an interconnectedness through physical propinquity. Given the importance of large kin groups, the social pressures of marrying endogamously, and ancestral ties to long-established hometowns, the Druze in Lebanon are predisposed to a strong sense of community, no matter their appreciation of or disinclination towards their community.

The Druze comprise an ethnically discrete people mainly due to a long history of exclusive marriage practices. This is not to say that they are not at once ethnically Arab, but rather constitute a community within a community. There exist some hereditary physical
attributes that might distinguish them from others but these differences tend to be relatively superficial and no specific phenotypic characteristics truly distinguish the Druze from their neighbors. Mordechai Nisan explains that communities stem from kinship and social bonds associated with being part of a clan or specific family with ostensibly unique characteristics. In the case of the Druze, he explains that endogamous relations, “within a more or less closed bloodline provides a fundamental division between those who are part of the same biological tree and those external to it. Without particular ethnic autonomy it becomes all but impossible to speak of separate peoplehood” (Nisan 1991:10). More accurately however, Nisan goes on to identify the most integral facet of a distinct Druze identity: “The cultural particularity of the Druzes is due overwhelmingly to their religion, which identified them from birth. Religion and nationality are interlocked to become one in the Druze experience, and this is true notwithstanding the apparent general ignorance of the faith by most Druzes themselves” (Nisan 1991:80-81).

For the Druze, important decisions are often made once an individual has consulted their immediate and sometimes their extended family (Swayd 2009:58). This is just one example of how the needs of the individual tend to be considered less important than those of the kin group and modernity has done little to change the fidelity of these loyalties (Firro 2002:1, 330). In their presentation at the Australian Sociology Conference, titled Culture Maintenance and Identity among Members of the Druze Community in South Australia, Denice Daou and Giancarlo Chiro explain that even in the diaspora, Druze share the perception that the community is comprised of brothers and sisters (Daou and Chiro 2008:11). Mordechai Nisan came to a similar conclusion, and using the phrase instinctive brotherhood, explained that national border and political
differences have not impeded the Druze community from acting in solidarity at times (Nisan 1991:97).

Commissioned by the Druze Heritage Foundation in England to conduct an expansive ethnography about the Druze community (without delving into issues of theological particulars and modern-day politics), Fuad Khuri focused on social structures in his book *Being a Druze* (2004). One of his key statements is that there are no free-floating Druze, meaning social categories exist for individuals in every stage of life. As adults, Druze fall into the categories of mushayekh and non-mushayekh (or juhhal or ‘uqqal, jismani or ruhani) and even in childhood, connections to ones’ past life might be established, leading to associations that link them to other Druze families and even a history of their previous life. Druze emphasis on brotherhood and sisterhood is literally built into the religious doctrine and has apparent implications on the entire society. Samy Swayd explains that the term hofez al-Ikhwan, or the defense of one’s brothers and sisters, is a primary commandment second only to truthfulness (Swayd 2009:38). This can especially be seen in times of crisis such as the conflicts between Christians and Druze or Muslims and Druze during the Lebanese Civil War or the Israeli invasion in the early 1980s. Whenever Druze communities were threatened in Lebanon, Syrian and Israeli Druze mobilized aid while American Druze raised substantial donations and petitioned United States bureaucrats through the ADS (Atashi 1997; Khuri 2004:99). Given the unprecedented length of Lebanon’s Civil War, Khuri made a very significant statement when he wrote that: “every religious sect, every political party, every parliamentary organization split into warring factions at some point or another except the Druze who took a united stand throughout the conflict” (Khuri 2005:61).

Writing in the 14th century the celebrated historian Ibn Khladun revived the then antiquated term *asabiyyah* to characterize ethnic solidarity and group identity. Regarded as one
of the first practitioners of both sociology and economics, Ibn Khaldun’s *asabiyyah* has since been used to capture the qualities of group conscience and to identify common purpose and shared values. In his review of Fuad Khuri’s work, Kais Firro explains that each of the author’s ethnographic anecdotes and inquiries were entirely intended to illustrate that modernity had not been able to erode this collective sentiment (Firro’s review 2006:166). For communities in the Middle East, the social cohesion of *asabiyyah* is perhaps most pronounced along religious lines. In particular, being a member of a religious minority requires a sense of solidarity that may serve to strengthen shared identity and connections to one’s sect (Halabi 2014:6). The differences among religious groups in the Middle East and especially in Lebanon, are indeed significant: “converting to another religion is not an intellectual choice but a much more profound change, because it usually means leaving behind one’s community and joining a new one” (Russell 2014: xxiv).

In my opinion, the idea of social cohesion does not exist in and of itself, nor does it result from an equally accessible system of shared understanding. Rather, it is a kind of amalgamation of collective interpretations and to best understand it, one must recognize the key role individuals play in the experience, interpretation, and expression of the important symbolic forms that constitute their heritage. Referencing Peter Stromberg’s work, Intisar Azzam states: “consensus is the accomplishment of the community; community is not the accomplishment of consensus” (Azzam 1995:153). One final example of how a particular symbolic form with a diverse range of interpretations can still work to create cohesion can be seen in Marjorie Anne Bennet’s discussion on reincarnation. In one particularly poignant statement she says: “Although for many Druze, reincarnation is a phenomenon that creates tension in terms of how it is understood in religious, scientific, and political contexts, it is important and influential in that it also works on a
social level to contribute to the strength and maintenance of the Druze community” (Bennet 2006:103).

Aspects of Heritage Research on the Druze

This third section includes more works on the Druze but focuses on four that are particularly relevant to any conversation on Druze heritage. In particular, the four discussions below relate to important themes in heritage research generally and to the Druze community particularly. The first of these discussions focuses on the interrelatedness of identity and heritage while the second demonstrates the integral connections between people and place. The third discussion further illustrates the bonds that extend across national borders and the fourth considers the issues apparent in contending with cultural resources.

How Identity is Constructed through Heritage

Since I agree with Laurajane Smith and Peter Howard’s focus on heritage being as the process of meaning making, part of that process is also implicated in the construction of personal identity and the ways in which it relates to group identity. Heritage is an important aspect of identity formation and plays an integral role in how we construct our sense of self since it is largely synonymous with how we perceive our enculturated selves and our shared past (Hamer 1994). Likewise, people socially express themselves through their links to history, their social ties, dialects, national affiliations, and where they call home. In his article in *Anthropos*, titled “The Dynamics of Identity Reconstruction among Arab Communities in the United States” (2006), El-Sayed el-Aswad explains that Arab-American identity has been shaped by the
interplay between their shifting social status in the United States and continued interactions with the homeland. Here, heritage has been implicated in the construction of identity as Arab Americans commonly create a shared narrative of patriotism and traditional values based on their perceptions of how their fellow Americans see them (el-Aswad 2006:119). These perceptions are commonly characterized by perceived cultural differences that might reflect biases based on racist assumptions, contemporary politics, or even a curiosity about the exotic other. In my opinion, for ethnic and religious minorities alike, maintaining one’s heritage constantly involves a negotiation between perceived roots and a sometimes practical need to be accepted by the majority. While there isn’t always a conflict between preserving heritage from the country of origin and adopting certain values and practices of the country in which one resides, cultural assimilation relies on a progressive integration of the forms associated with the heritage of the United States to the point at which any heritage distinct from this narrative is no longer imagined.

A specific example of the interplay between heritage and identity is illustrated in how the history of the Druze is manipulated by both insiders and outsiders with the goal of constructing an ethnoreligious identity that conforms to dominant interests. Among those in Israel, a history of convenience has been established to show that the Druze, who are widely respected for their compulsory service in the Israeli Defense Forces since 1956, have ancient genealogical links to the Jewish community. The Middle Eastern Studies scholar Robert Brenton Betts highlights the state’s agenda: “One of the most blatantly unhistorical theories favored by the Israelis is that a daughter of the Druze prophet Shu’ayb7 was married to Moses, thereby establishing a blood link between the two communities” (Betts 1988:101). While the Druze believe that he did not have

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7 Shu’ayb is identified as the Old Testament figure of Jethro.
children and that the connection is neither historical nor valid, many Israeli Druze are silent about this supposed historical connection that might benefit them by encouraging the perception that their heritage is similar to the Jewish majority. Indeed, Jethro’s tomb is perhaps the most important heritage site for the Druze and has even spurred the Israeli government to permit some mushayekh from Lebanon to cross the border to attend its annual commemoration. This is merely one example of how states actively, “invent tradition, create heritage and foundation myths, construct imagined community, and consolidate national or regional identity” (Chan 2005:66).

To further illustrate how heritage can be used by outsiders to shape another group’s identity, we can also explore how Israel has worked to separate the Druze from other Arabs. Although the Druze have been perceived as “good” or model Arab citizens, as opposed to their Christian and Muslim counterparts, their Arab identity does not conform with the goals of the Jewish state. This distortion has centered on a few domestic rulings, including a change in 1970 when the department in charge of Arab minority affairs no longer had jurisdiction over the Druze. Betts explains this distortion of Druze history and heritage in saying: “Such separation was very much encouraged by the Israeli government, which even went so far as officially to adopt the view that Druze were not really Arabs at all but a separate ethnic entity that had somehow become Arabicized” (Betts 1988:101). Conversely, while the Druze community has preserved their distinction by remaining separate from others, their state-induced (and sometimes personally produced) division from their fellow Arab Israelis has not necessarily guaranteed them the same benefits as Jewish citizens. Rather, as author and former Knesset member Zeidan Atashi pointed out, they tend to have the responsibilities of the Jewish citizens and the rights of the Arab citizens (Atashi 1997:189).
Druze ancestry and ethnic identity have been a matter of speculation well before the state of Israel. In a work originally published in 1928, the preeminent Middle Eastern scholar Phillip Hitti defended the theory that the Druze community has Persian ancestry and has only come to be Arabicized under a long process of concealment. While his theory is hopelessly flawed, he supports it with evidence including anthropometric measures: “Professor Felix von Luschan, the famous anthropologist of the University of Berlin, states that he measured the skulls of fifty-nine adult male Druzes and ‘not one single man fell, as regards his cephalic index, within the range of the real Arab’” (Hitti 2008 [1928]:42). Due to their history of secrecy and distinct values and practices, the community has always been surrounded by wild speculation, some of which has served their need for religious concealment (Abu Chakra 2005).

The fact that the Druze are Arabs is now apparent even to those who may not be familiar with the region’s history. For example, the Druze scholar Eyad Abu Chakra, explains that language has also been an important signifier of the community’s ethnic origins. The Druze in Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Jordan speak a dialect of Arabic that is at once considered pure and supports older Arab roots. This is mainly due to the pronunciation of hard consonants, such as the letter qaf, that are intentionally softened among other Arab groups (Abu Chakra 2005:173). Moreover, since the historic inception of the faith, the Druze have practiced a strict form of endogamy that has resulted in very complex kinship bonds.

Smith and Akagawa say: “Heritage is intimately linked with identity—exactly how it is linked and its interrelationship are yet to be fully understood—however, the key consequence of heritage is that it creates and recreates a sense of inclusion and exclusion” (Smith and Akagawa 2009:7). Both heritage and identity are clearly complex ideas often comprising innumerable social dimensions. In order to take an understanding of these key concepts a step further and to
elucidate a practical application for Laurajane Smith’s postulation that heritage is a process of meaning making, it is important to note that heritage is necessarily shared and represents a common identity for those who associate with the same labels (e.g. race, ethnicity, religious group). Put simply, heritage is a crucial aspect of identity formation.

In relating the idea of heritage to shared identity, heritage is the process of meaning making by which we as individuals link ourselves in meaningful ways to certain people, places, things, or even qualities and traits. We should understand that heritage is susceptible to many of the same assumptions or stigmas that can make what others say about us just as important as what we believe about ourselves. Much like identity, heritage can be both externally ascribed as well as personally subscribed. The process that Laurajane Smith is referring to is the process by which we as individuals connect ourselves to all of those things in our lives that have meaning, whether we are the ones giving those things meaning or their significance is forced upon us by others (parents, friends, the community, the community’s history as perceived by outsiders, etc.). In some ways, we use heritage to make these connections, to show that we have “roots,” or share values and opinions with others or have connections to some epic past. Perhaps, it is the unique combination of the qualities that these connections represent, which allow us to be certain of our individuality. Perhaps, this process is the salient bridge connecting our discrete identities to our shared heritage, allowing us to act as both necessary conformists and inimitable individuals in the shared phenomenon that is culture.
Heritage and the Land

On a micro-scale, perhaps the most important aspect of social cohesion among the Druze stems from the importance of the extended family and its affiliation with particular townships. Oftentimes an individual’s last name is a direct indicator of their place of origin as extended families build their homes proximally and can constitute entire neighborhoods or even towns. On a macro-scale, Druze territory is geographically distinct from the land that surrounds it. As laid out in an account of their early settlement patterns, Mordechai Nisan explains: “When they first sought refuge, they hid in Wadi al-Taym near Mount Hermon. Thereafter, they ensconced themselves in Mount Lebanon east of Beirut, in the Matn, and in the Shouf [see Figure 4.1], and turned it effectively into the Druze Mountain – Jabal al-Duruz” (Nisan 1991:84). He adds that the nearby coastal areas were prone to the mixing of cultural groups and that the mountains allowed the Druze to forego this intermingling. While the Druze of today are certainly not the same as they were generations ago, there has been a conscious effort to maintain their homes in the mountainous regions they occupy in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, and the annexed Golan Heights.

Geography can be a particularly important marker of heritage and identity as land is passed down from one generation to the next and religious and ethnic enclaves are established. The anthropologist John Gulick goes so far as to identify geography as one of four key parameters that shape our social identity, the other three being language, ancestry, and shared history (Abu Chakra 2005:171). In agreement with the prominent Lebanese anthropologist Fuad Khuri, who although from Lebanon’s Christian sects was prompted by Druze in the European diaspora to study Druze society in Lebanon, owning a plot of land has always been an integral facet of Druze identity. In fact: “Until recently, land was not treated as a commercial commodity.
While it was thought to be an honour to acquire property and pass it on to succeeding generations, it was likewise considered shameful to sell it” (Khuri 2004:53)

Figure 4.1 Parts of the Shouf region traveling between Aley and Baakleen.

Writing in an edited volume on the Druze, Fuad Khuri identified what he believed were the four essential facets of their social structure. These included a belief in reincarnation, the role of mushayekh in safeguarding the faith, an emphasis on brotherhood, and geographic proximity (Khuri 2005:62-63). Expanding on this last characteristic, geographic proximity has meant that the Druze in Lebanon have actively worked to maintain their landholdings by ensuring that property is passed down within the family thus maintaining the contiguous homogeneity of Druze villages and townships for a millennium. Druze identity is linked to the land, especially in Lebanon where the first Druze communities were established soon after the opening of the call to the faith, or da’wa, in 996 CE. While many early adherents were subsequently persecuted by the founder’s successor, Az-Zahir, the seventh caliph of the Fatimid Dynasty, others survived in the mountainous regions of the Levant. Land continues to provide a foundation for the community’s roots and its connection to Druze heritage is best understood by examining both how it is shared
through the inheritance of property among relations and how it is perceived through the recognized historical narrative. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines heritage as: “That which comes from the circumstances of birth; an inherited lot or portion; the condition or state transmitted from ancestors,” and “That which has been or may be inherited; any property, and esp. land, which devolves by right of inheritance” (Oxford English Dictionary). Heavily influenced by the Sunni *Hanafi* school of law, “The Druze laws on inheritance are based on the 1948 legal code established in Lebanon and then in Syria and Israel” (Swayd 2009:80). The Druze courts of Lebanon serve specific functions and the regulation of inheritance is among their primary roles (Khuri 2004:119). Via written wills, land is typically passed on to all male children, and in some cases female as well, while the youngest sons are sometimes favored, since it is assumed that they will be the last to marry and are more likely to take care of their aging parents. Khuri explains: “This reflects a general tendency for testators to favor those children, sons or daughters, who most tend to their needs in their declining years” (Khuri 2004:56). Not surprisingly, the division of land among multiple offspring has resulted in increasingly smaller landholdings no longer feasible for the kind of agricultural production that has been the chief historical occupation for the Druze (Khuri 2004:57). This is also reflected in their housing style where offspring inheriting a smaller plot of land or the home in which they were raised, will build or add on multiple floors, keeping the larger family structure under one roof for another generation. It is not uncommon to see five, six, or even seven story buildings perched on the mountainsides of even small Druze villages, making them easily identifiable as the home of a group of agnatic kin.

For many generations terrace farming has been the primary source of economic subsistence among the Druze, especially for *mushayekh* who are encouraged to pursue
occupations in particular trades or jobs often relegated to physical labor or craftsmanship. As previously pointed out, land has not traditionally been considered alienable and to do so would have meant that the seller was in dire straits and or willing to cede the birthright of their offspring and subsequent generations (Khuri 2004:53). However, this does not mean that individual Druze have refrained entirely from selling valuable landholdings or buildings, which often feature desirable vistas in mountainous locations. And yet, across Lebanon, the land is considered sacred and is linked to stories of venerated saints and their memorials or the places they had been (see Figure 4.2). “The saying that land (ard), honour (‘ird), and religion (din), in this order of significance, constitute a sacred trinity among the Druze carries considerable weight … [they] believe that he who has no land cannot protect his honour and he who has no honour has no religion” (Khuri 2004:55). Having conducted the most extensive ethnography among the Druze of Lebanon prior to this research, Khuri’s writing makes it very clear that owning land is an integral facet of Druze identity and is the surest way to validate community membership (Khuri 2004:53).

![Figure 4.2 A large hollowed rock in Btater associated with local folktales of Sitt Sha’wani, an important Druze historical figure.](image)
Geography is a particularly important facet of heritage and a shared sense of identity as land is passed down from one generation to the next and communities become rooted in their religious and ethnic identity. As well, the landholdings of extended families facilitate the family structure as “brothers build their homes on adjacent land whenever possible” (Swayd 2009: xxxv). Since early on, the Druze have faced issues of marginalization, if not blatant persecution, since their communities are easily identifiable. For example, the first Druze converts in the Levant referred to their communities as *jazira*, meaning islands, since they constituted small pockets in an expanse of social adversaries (Swayd 2009:88). As explained, more than one Islamic authority has declared an official fatwa, or condemnation against the community, although conflicts with other religious groups were overwhelmingly motivated by more practical issues and political differences. It should be understood that the problems the Druze have faced with their Muslim, Christian, and Jewish neighbors are largely regional disputes, and don’t always reflect a collective anti-Druze sentiment from their religious counterparts. However, the Druze remain very well-known for the fierce defense of their lands and their communities through the wars and conflicts they faced.

Anthropologist Victor Ayoub likened the Druze to a community of clans and explained that their lack of a method of conversion and their strict practice of religious endogamy has resulted in a resilient solidarity (Ayoub 1970:140). The geographic position of Druze settlements in the Middle East has continued to contribute to their cohesion in that the mountainous regions they inhabit are both defensible and self-sufficient with agriculturally productive terrain. This particular factor is also an asset to other ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East and in Central Asia, considering the Kurds on Mount Ararat and Berbers throughout the Atlas Mountains (Eickelman 1996:367; Nisan 1991:11; Taheri 2005).
In consideration of the feedback research participants offered, attachment to land and to retaining Druze towns and regions, was often discussed as a practical matter rather than a symbolic one. Many individuals mentioned that having predominantly Druze areas was a matter of safety in case of crises. Crises that have forced the Druze to move from towns or give up areas they once controlled have not only occurred throughout their history, but were also commonplace during the Lebanese Civil War and even threatened the community more recently when they clashed with Hezbollah in 2008. Therefore, Druze landholdings are not only a socially useful symbol of tradition, but also offer them one of few practical safety measures.

**Diasporic and Minority Communities**

The concept of diaspora is useful in the context of this research because diasporic communities are in many ways similar to ethnic and religious minorities residing in the countries of origin as they both share the fundamental quality of being defined by their non-majority status (Abdelhady 2011). While Lebanon is symbolically the ancestral homeland of the Druze, they remain an ethnoreligious minority, susceptible to stigmatization and somewhat limited in political power due to their smaller numbers. Moreover, Lebanon is a nation of émigrés as explored in sociologist Dalia Abdelhady’s book, *The Lebanese Diaspora: The Arab Immigrant Experience in Montreal, New York, and Paris* (2011), and the interexchange of people and capital represent significant fiscal and cultural exchanges. More specifically, the following discussion highlights connections to my previous thesis research (which was in some ways developed a foundation for this study) on Druze identity in the North American diaspora while elucidating the integral connections between the community abroad and in the countries of origin. These connections are especially important to understanding how Druze identity is
collectively shaped and how the ramifications of various social problems effect every extension of the community. Referencing a Druze proverb, Mordechai Nisan explained it best: “‘The Druzes are like a copper plate, for when you hit it anywhere, all of it will ring’” (Nisan 1991:80).

In this way, a critical look at the similarities between this diaspora and the minority populations in the Middle East, demonstrates that the entire Druze community may face a similar dilemma, albeit in different ways, than if their heritage becomes antiquated, nebulous or simply irrelevant in their lives.

My previously mentioned thesis research focused on the need to preserve Druze heritage in the diaspora by identifying the means to ameliorate the community’s collective knowledge gap that resulted in part from the religious doctrine being relegated to the few. In my thesis, I explained that while preserving heritage and promoting cultural literacy are problems that impact many transnational communities, the problems affecting the ability of the Druze to preserve their heritage share a reciprocal relationship with their belief in reincarnation, their practice of endogamy, and their kinship ties. I also explained that: “Although it may sound contradictory, this religious group is not necessarily united by adhering to a set of shared religious values” (Radwan 2009:72). Alongside their common religious affiliation and ethnic origins, there exists great diversity in terms of how they construct their Druze identity and contest their heritage. And yet, the fact that the individuals that were part of this research effort quickly recognized a shared notion of Druzeness illustrates that they believed those connections to be real. The group’s ability to imagine their collective interests, lends credibility to the heritage category that encompasses many characteristics of belonging that crosses national borders.

Many diaspora communities and ethnic enclaves have been established by the emigration of minority communities from the countries of origin, compelled by either perceived
opportunities or the force of negative social pressures. Late 19th century émigrés from the Middle East were largely motivated by the economic prospects and opportunities found in regions such as North and South America, and western Europe. Among those from the area that would eventually become Lebanon and Syria, émigrés were more likely to come from religious groups that included Maronite and Greek Orthodox Christians as well as the Druze (Abdelhady 2011). Dale Eickelman tells us that while agriculture became less viable and labor emigration a more sustainable means of economic advancement among Arab communities, popular research in the anthropology of the Middle East also shifted. More research began to focus on the effects of these changes among minority groups in the Middle East followed by a more recent increase in literature on identity and hybridity in their corresponding diasporic populations (Eickelman 1996:368, 371). Writing in Louise E. Sweet’s edited volume Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East (1970), anthropologist Victor Ayoub conducted a case study of a rural village in Lebanon illustrating the social effects of a changing economy. He explained that agriculture was not responsible for the village’s wealth since much of it had come from émigrés to west Africa and South America who retained their social ties to their kin remaining in the village. These close relationships have meant that most of these émigrés have returned in one way or another over the course of their lives. The goal of their successes abroad has been to improve their status back home in Lebanon perhaps more than in their diasporic communities (Ayoub 1970:140).

Many of the early 20th century Arab immigrants to the United States left the Middle East to avoid the draft into the Ottoman army during the First World War (Swayd 2009:169). A large majority of these immigrants came from the Syria-Lebanon area and quickly setup homesteads sponsoring family members and former neighbors who continued to emigrate. Fuad Khuri noted that this form of chain migration allowed many to recreate cultural enclaves in the countries they
had settled (Khuri 2004:88). While many of the earliest to leave their homeland were men: “The imbalance of sex ratio among the early migrants was often adjusted by male migrants returning to the mother country to look for wives - which was, and still is, the most common practice - or wives being sent to grooms in the host country” (Khuri 2004:88). In 1908, Druze immigrants in Seattle, Washington formed a mutual aid society called al-Bakourat al-Durziyya, which laid the foundation for the American Druze Society, or ADS, established in the mid-1940s (Swayd 2009:16).

More recently, similar Druze societies have been established in Venezuela, Canada, Brazil, England, and Australia. Khuri believes that these groups, especially the ADS, are at the forefront of defining a new ethnoreligious frontier wherein Druze identity is being transformed not just for those living in the United States, but for the communities in the Middle East as well. Given their recent efforts to provide cultural resources the community has lacked: “It holds true no longer to say that ‘many Druze are forced to cling to memories of another time, country and culture as they are stranded in America with no majlis, no sheikh, and no sacred books to read.’ Now they have them all, thanks to the ADS” (Khuri 2004:100). I believe that Khuri’s assessment of the ADS’s ability to provide cultural and religious resources is too optimistic. During my thesis research among the ADS and the greater American Druze community, it was apparent that resources are not accessible to all Druze who may lack necessary funds to attend conventions or propinquity to one of the few cultural centers (Radwan 2009). In contrast, one scholarly contributor to the Druze Heritage Foundation in London remarked: “The diaspora Druze are particularly challenged by the problems and dangers that arise from loss of identity, as well as the potential breakdown of traditional communal structures. It is therefore, unsurprising that the
principal impulse for the reform of the Druze faith has come from Druze communities in North and South America” (Schenk 2005:81-82).

In the diaspora, there is an inevitable loss of many social structures that promote community cohesion. Yet, in the United States and other, “Druze diaspora communities, members remain in close contact with their homelands and with their coreligionists in their host countries… To maintain their heritage, these diaspora communities invite speakers from their homelands in an effort to reinforce elements of their shared culture, history, and society” (Swayd 2009: xxxiv). Oftentimes, a kind of cultural reform is required so that cultural identity maintains its relevance in the diaspora community. The best approach to this difficult endeavor is with equal representation of both cultures (American values in harmony with the Druze). Similarly, author Bernadette Schenk says that the goal is: “to find a balance between integration and separatism. On the one hand, the Druze take pride in the specific character of their own community. On the other, they wish to prove to the outside world that they are not seeking political or social isolation but, in fact, just the opposite” (Schenk 2005:84). This balance might best be achieved by an increased integration of some level of engagement with religious and historical knowledge among the younger generations of Druze in Lebanon, strengthening cohesiveness and the ability to pass on a shared identity to subsequent generations.

The case of the Druze in the diaspora is particularly imperative considering they have many opportunities for exogamous marriage and may lack close social ties to the community. Beyond the countries of origin Druze are no longer surrounded by coreligionists as they experience in the commonly segregated communities of Lebanon. Thus, social ties to fellow Druze become even more important in the United States, as well as a personal motivation to learn more about the religion and its history. In his autobiography, From Baakleen to Atlanta,
leading public health expert, Abdullah E. Najjar explained that: “Our younger generations are not going to Lebanon, Syria, [or] Palestine to sit on the doorsteps of the majlis and hope someday to be invited to initiation by the hermetic conservative Elders, holy as they are” (2006:153). As a former president of the American Druze Society in the late 1960s, Najjar has been active in advocating for accessible religious educational materials, most notably those in English. Since then, a number of materials have been published and the American Druze Society has been especially active in recent years developing religious retreats and offering similar discussions at their gatherings. Although not without critics, these efforts have gained attention from the international community as Najjar describes: “People in the old country tell us, ‘You people in America, we have to look up to you now to do any reform and revival of the faith because here we are handicapped by the archaic fundamentalists who have not evolved with the times’” (E. Najjar 2006:162). While situating the condition of the religious faith in the countries of origin as an asset that is controlled by dated parochialism is perhaps reactionary, the extremely cautious or conservative undercurrents are apparent.

In some significant ways, the Westernized diasporic Druze communities can be considered more liberal than their counterparts in their approach to religious knowledge. Gerard Russell, a longtime British and United Nations diplomat to parts of the Middle East, wrote in his recent publication, *Heirs to Forgotten Kingdoms: Journeys Into the Disappearing Religions of the Middle East* (2014): “There is another obvious similarity between Jews and Druze. Judaism doesn’t seek converts. The Druze go even further by refusing converts. Some American Druze want to change this, along with the culture of secrecy that prevents them from learning about their religion and explaining it articulately to others” (Russell 2014:270). The notion of accepting
converts among most Druze is not debatable because it is understood that the *da 'wa*, or proselytizing call, was closed without exception and that no authority exists to change that.

Having studied various minority groups from the Middle East and their corresponding émigrés, Russell perceptively asks: “I wondered whether coming to the West must always be a back-loaded contract for immigrant communities—get the benefit of prosperity now, pay the price of loss of identity later. Or was it up to them to fashion an identity and communal structures that could endure?” (Russell 2014:268). In his interviews among American Druze, Russell recognized that there was sometimes an obvious cultural dissonance, especially among children whose religious identity remained a mystery although they may have been aware that their Druze identity made their faith different from their Christian schoolmates. Speaking to a Druze woman raised in Dallas, Texas, Russell’s informant explained a particularly uncomfortable day at school:

She and the rest of the class had to stand up and describe their religion: What was its holy day in the week? What were its beliefs? What kind of prayers did it have? She said: “I’m a Druze. We don’t have a holy day, I don’t know our beliefs and I never have to pray.” The teacher said, “You’re making it up! I’m going to tell your mother” Of course, when she did, Amilia’s mother could confirm it was all true (Russell 2014:269).

While this quote highlights supposedly eccentric practices, or lack thereof, common to many Druze, it is also important to recognize that the teacher’s assumptions about what constituted a normal approach to religion characterizes the awkwardness for many young Druze who might be at a loss to explain their cultural identity to others.
With the exception of their townships in the Middle East, their smaller numbers ensures their minority status in other places. For them, creating an ethnic enclave is not a realistic option. Rather, maintaining links to the country of origin (e.g. a transnational lifestyle) and being involved in the activities of groups like the American Druze Society, are among the few options individuals have to engage with the community. Moreover, their collective experiences in North America have caused them to actively seek, and in some cases develop, religious and historical materials in order to learn more about their roots. As will be discussed, this has led to a global discussion of sorts, in some cases encouraging Druze in Lebanon to express similar needs and motivating them to become as equally proactive.

Representing, Interpreting, and Owning Cultural Heritage Resources: Ethical and Practical Considerations

As the anthropologist Karen Olwig pointed out: “cultural heritage is not merely a local concern of a particular group of people trying to come to terms with their own cultural identity. It also involves being recognized by significant others, and this entails expressing local heritage in such a way that it will be acknowledged and accepted by others” (Olwig 1999:377). Authority over cultural heritage resources produces power that promotes agency among individuals, their communities, and outsiders with invested interests. Such resources can also be used as a means of control, manipulation, and exploitation, as it is produced both internally and externally. In other words, the cultural heritage to which we subscribe is always externally ascribed with attributes that we do not fully control nor necessarily agree with. For example, I might say that I am proud of my Lebanese heritage. This would entail understanding that Lebanon has been shaped by any number of representations and interpretations that are beyond the purview of the
Lebanese people, who are by no means homogenous. I may have to recognize that Lebanon, in its current form, is a nation birthed from the minds of British and French colonial interests, or that Lebanon’s proud Phoenician past may not be directly traceable to my own ancestry. This complex history works as a national symbol that colors cultural resources both tangible and intangible. In my opinion, it should be understood that cultural heritage is constantly contested among members of particular groups and between distinct groups that strive to make their interpretations and representations the most prominent.

Conversely, heritage can also be manipulated to work against a community’s interests, or more specifically, in the interests of certain power-holders. Most commonly, these include national or local governments, majority ethnic or religious groups, or private corporations. Understanding the motivations to dominate heritage resources sheds light on the relationship between power holders and the potentially exploited. More insidious kinds of manipulation can be motivated by either political or financial gain. As capitalist economies are burgeoning in regions that were once considered extremely rural, increased commodification of culture and heritage is taking place. As Erve Chambers states: “Among the most rapidly growing commodities associated with modern tourism are those of culture and heritage. The marketing of indigenous arts and crafts, of local performances and festivals, and of places and sites associated with a people’s heritage has become a major segment of the tourism industry” (Chambers 2010:96). Moreover, more centralized governments have abundant power in regulating tourism with the people and places they decide to market and the kinds of development projects they pursue (Chambers 2010:45). Likewise, politics can change a community’s history and have allowed both the Druze themselves as well as competing national interests to focus on particular kinds of heritage to promote a more pleasant and accessible tourist product.
The effects of governmental policies are best demonstrated in Susan Greenbaum’s work with the Martí-Maceo Society, an Afro-Cuban ethnic organization established by early immigrant cigar workers in Tampa’s Ybor City. In her book *More Than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (2002), Greenbaum explains that the very idea of black Cubans doesn’t conform to popular American assumptions about Cuban identity (Greenbaum 2002:1). The overarching goal of her research was to make this “invisible” community visible to those in power so that they might gain recognition and financial support from the National Endowments for the Arts as well as inclusion for the society’s building alongside others given Ybor City’s protected status as a historic district. Here, the ethical and moral considerations have been intrinsically linked to the practical support that the society required.

The Martí-Maceo Society has continuously had to face blatant disregard while other ethnically-based mutual aid groups have come together in various committees to pool their collective agency. As Greenbaum explains: “Cultural landscapes are envisioned as architecture embedded in real estate. Unmasked, it is mainly about development and tourism, and Afro-Cuban heritage is not compatible with the marketing strategy” (Greenbaum 2002:5). Conflicts of interest often arise when the approach to preservation relies solely on significant structures rather than the cultural heritage they represent (Greenbaum 2002:322). In this way, living communities become monuments and are preserved as a thing of the past, a convenient slice of history easily consumed on a Sunday afternoon by the affluent, upper-crust, homogenous masses that the tourist industry is most interested in. Many of the ethical and practical difficulties the Martí-Maceo Society has had to face have stemmed from their inability to conform to the representations of authenticity established by various power holders and white Cubans.
Most of the time, the ability of such groups to maintain their grip on cultural heritage resources comes from their capacity to appear authentic, thus legitimating their authority (Gable and Handler 1996:568). And yet authenticity is itself a very loaded concept and isn’t always the deciding factor in terms of offering an agreeable experience in heritage tourism. For example, Edward Bruner’s work among the Maasai in Kenya compared three different sites of cultural performance to illustrate how tourists were often uninterested in the continuity of the heritage narrative (2001). He found that monolithic representations were common among tourist displays of local culture as a result of the perceived expectations of the tourists, whose agency was undermined by scholars that assumed their interests solely lay in only the most authentic cultural performances and heritage spectacles (Bruner 2001:881).

Fredrik Barth’s instrumentalist approach maintains that subjective categories such as ethnic identity and cultural heritage are reconstituted to align with the political and economic interests of those in charge (Eickleman 1989:209). A material approach to heritage resources conveniently lends itself to a model of commoditization that justifies financial gain in markets such as the tourism industry. This is primarily achieved with what I have termed the fetishization of the heritage concept. Playing a crucial role in Karl Marx’s theory of capitalism, commodity fetishism links objectification to economic value. Thus, as social scientists neglect to treat their conceptualizations of heritage to the same rigorous analyses that are applied to concepts such as culture, ethnicity, and race, we inadvertently support a capitalistic value system that literally puts a price on everything. Symbols become reified and are attributed with intrinsic value that makes them appear real and self-sustaining. As many in the fields of the social sciences continue to fetishize heritage, we make the mistake of suggesting that it exists objectively and stands independent of its generative processes.
Conclusion

Literature on the Druze community continues to grow and become more academic in scope and rigorous in methodology. This literature review has been segmented into different categories with the intention of creating critical connections from the larger themes of heritage and identity, to the more particular subjects that illustrate how the various social sciences have approached ethnoreligious minorities and how the nature of various Druze social structures might lend themselves to similar analyses. Rather than stress the differences among the three sections in this chapter, it has been my aim to elucidate the interconnections which allow us to move beyond any notion that the social facets of heritage are exclusive of one another or unique to cultural groups.

While the particulars of Druze heritage and identity sets them apart in many ways from neighboring religious communities, their practical needs and cultural approaches to remain united are wholly relatable to many other ethnic or religious minorities in their countries of origin and in their corresponding diasporas. While the Druze may live in villages and towns that are often populated by their fellows, as only about 8% live in communities where they are the religious minority: “The late Kamal Jumblatt’s contention that ‘the Druze are a minority without minority feelings’ carries much truth” (Khuri 2005:62). What is perhaps most relatable among all religious communities is a shared dilemma that positions them as a simultaneous source of, and advocate for, traditional beliefs. This positioning is made more tenuous as religious communities are challenged by a need to remain relevant to the social, ethical, and cultural worlds that prevail today. Clifford Geertz explained the problem best when he said: “The central paradox of religious development is that, because of the progressively wider range of spiritual experience
with which it is forced to deal, the further it proceeds, the more precarious it gets. Its successes generate its frustrations” (Geertz 1968:14).
Chapter 5 Experiences in the Field
and the Research Methodology

In his book, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*, David Schneider explains that, unlike other social scientists, the reliability of many anthropologist’s work relies most heavily on their informants rather than the samples of respondents they draw (Schneider 1980:8). Logically, ethnographic research does not take place in a controlled laboratory setting but instead in a naturally occurring setting that may or may not easily facilitate anthropological interviews or observations. Anthropological research methods such as research interviews and participant observation do not require a sterile environment and it is the strength of the field, if not its key concern, to understand the objective experiences, interpretations, and expressions of people. As Clifford Geertz once explained: “We hope to find in the little what eludes us in the large, to stumble upon general truths while sorting through special cases” (Geertz 1968:4).

Anthropology is a science that encourages the thoughtful examination of the researcher’s role and the inherent effects we have on those we wish to study. Recognizing and discussing the power that might be afforded the researcher, as well as the difficulties academics face in conducting ethnographic research, allows us to maintain a crucial awareness of the ethical problems that ensue with any and all kinds of scientific inquiries. Having situated this research in the social science literature on heritage and on minority groups in the Middle East, and after providing an overview of Druze history, the following chapter includes a description of the research setting and a discussion of my positionality with reference to the academic arguments.
for and against native anthropology and insider ethnography. I'll then explain the selected research methods by discussing their pros and cons in turn and relating my general field approach to each methodology. After reviewing each method, I detail the research sample and highlight some of the pertinent ethical considerations in conducting research among the Druze.

The Research Site and the Scholar’s Role in the Field

Having conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork among the Druze community in Lebanon throughout most of 2014, my position as a researcher of both Lebanese and Druze descent influenced how I was received in the field as well as how this research will be perceived by others. It should also be apparent that my training as an applied cultural anthropologist, my ethnic background, my gender, and my heritage have a generally similar influence on my positionality and have served as the cornerstone for this research effort. It is imperative that academics both within and outside of the social sciences acknowledge the need to critically examine their role in their research, not only making latent biases apparent, but to elucidate their intentions to engage in the rigorous process of research in their respective sciences. I recognize that as an American of Lebanese and Druze descent, my background is suspect to assumptions that question my ability to conduct objective research. Devoting the following pages to a critical examination of notions of nativity, and insider/outsider status is a necessary discussion that will shed light on the complexity of identity and its multitude of facets. In fact, this discussion is proof in point that my heritage plays an important role in the process of meaning making in my own life.
I am a first-generation American whose parents emigrated from Lebanon before my siblings and I were born. They were both raised in the town of Aley, which was then among the most prominent summer destinations in Lebanon due to its cooler weather and its night life. As well, Aley was well-known for its posh hotels (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2) and the famous Casino
Piscine Aley (see Figure 5.3), which attracted a variety of artists, including some of the most well regarded singers in the Arab world, including Umm Kulthoum, Wadih al-Safi, Fairouz, and the renown Druze siblings who gained their fame in Cairo, Farid al-Atrash and Asmahan (G. Obeid 2015). Given my familial connection to Aley, I was extremely interested in visiting Lebanon yet the opportunity did not present itself until the summer after I earned my first graduate degree. The time I spent in Lebanon conducting the field research for this project, represented the second time I had the opportunity to visit my parent’s home country. Given the extended civil war, visits to Lebanon for leisure or otherwise were nonexistent for the majority of expatriates during the 1980s and 1990s. This however did not impede many parents from enculturating their offspring in the diaspora or reconstructing a sense of Lebanese community in the United States in microcosm. With nearly all of my extended family having previously emigrated, my siblings and I were reared with many of the same family values, as influenced by the Druze religious principles that one would have found in pre 1970s Aley.

Figure 5.3 The Casino Piscine Aley as it stood in the first half of the 20th century (courtesy of the Municipality of Aley).
To say a few basic things about my field experience, I arrived in Lebanon in early 2014 and I stayed with family members for the first few weeks before renting an apartment in the town of Aley. Arabic had been my first language as a small child and I remained relatively fluent despite a thick accent and some lack of familiarity with the classic dialect, which is not often spoken in daily conversations. While living in Aley, I experienced the daily rolling electrical blackouts that Lebanon is known for and made due with rechargeable lanterns and food that didn’t easily spoil. The apartment I rented was too spacious for one individual and was relatively costly, but the choices were slim as an influx of Syrian refugees resulted in a lack of vacancy. Without implying that the “authentic” Lebanese experience had made me one of the locals, after months of freezing showers, trickling faucets and a gas heater that seemed to give off no warmth in spite of the snow outside, I was resolved to speak to as many people as I could and to experience as much of Druze society as was possible.

Figure 5.4 The former train station in Aley where the souk now stands (courtesy of the Municipality of Aley).
Situated on the Beirut-Damascus Road, in the late 1800s, Aley was a vital stop along the railway (see Figure 5.4) and was central command for the Ottoman Empire’s Turkish Fourth Army during the First World War (G. Obeid 2015). Currently, Aley is among the most densely populated Druze townships in the Middle East and its tall buildings appear to hang from every available precipice of its mountain terrain. Aley retains a majority Druze population but has small clusters of Shia and Sunni Muslims as well as a longer established population of Orthodox Christians. Before the creation of the state of Israel, Aley also had a Jewish population large enough to support a large synagogue which remains standing just behind the tall buildings that line the main thoroughfare (see Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5 Abandoned synagogue in Aley behind part of the souks main thoroughfare.
Figure 5.6 A portion of the main souk in Aley.

Figure 5.7 More of the main thoroughfare in Aley.

Given its central location near the Lebanese capital, as well as a long history of being the gateway to the Druze portions of Mount Lebanon, Aley served as the central location for my ethnographic research. Although the participants were in no way relegated to those living within
the city’s limits, residents made up a slight majority of the semi-structured interviews that were collected. Despite not having close family relationships in the city, I took up residence just below one of the main streets leading up to the busy souk and climbed the steep alleyways and main avenues on a daily basis (see Figures 5.6 and 5.7). Immersing myself in the everyday life of the town, which verges towards the label of city, afforded me the opportunity to become intimately familiar with Lebanese culture and with Druze society in particular.

Figure 5.8 Portion of a large statuary on one of the higher points of Aley. This area is a common promenade where locals and visitors might mingle.

Now a prosperous urban center, Aley has become a significant commercial hub (including being home to a large number of financial institutions) while remaining a popular tourist destination for weekend getaways and nights out. Aley is also well-known for its grand views that overlook Beirut and the Mediterranean (see Figures 5.8, 5.9 and 5.10) and is host to the summer homes of a variety of international Arab leaders, including the king of Bahrain, a
Kuwaiti emir, and members of the extended Saudi royal family (G. Obeid 2015). It is not surprising to see the older, modest homes of local families within walking distance of newly built grand estates belonging to wealthy expatriates or the foreign rich. Having many well-appointed...
homes owned by Lebanese expatriates is also a feature in other Druze villages and represents the significant wealth that many émigrés have established in the diaspora as well as their interest in maintaining links to their home towns. For example, during a trip into the Druze countryside, Gerard Russell noted: “On our journey we passed through Druze towns and villages dotting the hillsides. The houses were large, some huge, and yet were used only as summer homes by wealthy Druze émigrés. Many Druze villages had become ghost towns, with maybe only a third of the houses actually inhabited year-round” (Russell 2014:132). While the latter wasn’t the case in Aley, which bustles with activity year-round, the city’s reputation as a summer destination means that a number of the local businesses and restaurants open exclusively during the summer.

As a person of Druze descent, certain social activities were open to me, which readily facilitated my ability to engage in participant observation. For example, during my time in the field, I was invited to a wedding, I attended a funeral, and I took part in other social customs such as visiting a new mother after she’d given birth and group trips to distant religious memorials hosted by a local women’s auxiliary (see Figures 5.11, 5.12, and 5.13). I also had some social clout as an American-born Druze and in some instances, the curiosity of others may have provided an opportunity to explain my interest in conducting research in the community. This is not to say that I was simply regarded as an insider and welcomed into people’s homes. Indeed, I was perhaps even more of an oddity since it was apparent to some that I was not entirely familiar with Lebanese customs and social practices, despite my ancestry. At the same time, others were impressed that I had taken an interest in Druze history and religious knowledge and that I was able to speak Arabic, my overly thick accent notwithstanding, despite having only visited the country once before.
Figure 5.11 Visiting the *maqam* of *Sheikh* Muhammad Abu Hilal, known as Sheikh al-Fadil, the virtuous *sheikh*.

Figure 5.12 People’s personal effects left at the austere birthplace of Sheikh al-Fadil.
Figure 5.13 The researcher in a cave near the *maqam* of Nabi Youb, associated with the Prophet Job, where visitors light candles.

Having been born and raised in the United States carried certain assumptions about my social class that were likely more of an asset than a hindrance. As for being a man, I can only speculate that I was afforded some advantage although I believe that a woman in my position would have faced slightly different barriers rather than fewer. For example, a woman might have been more readily received in the homes of research participants but may have had more difficulty speaking to males, including some *sheikhs*, privately. As a male in my early thirties some potential participants assumed that I was younger and may have been less likely to contribute to this research given some underlying biases towards fresh academics that are perceived to lack the authority to produce meaningful outcomes.

Perhaps the most notable advantage of my Druze parentage was my access to religious discussions, doctrinal lessons, and scripture readings at the *majlis*, a gathering place of religious significance. In the cases of the lessons and the readings, individuals who may not be very
familiar to the *mushayekh* that host such activities (who in some instances are the caretakers of the *majlis*) are asked about their family names to confirm their lineage before being invited in.

Being recognized as either an insider or an outsider in relation to the people I interacted with was never entirely clear although I was constantly aware that my similarities and dissimilarities to others allowed them to situate me in a variety of complex ways. Referencing the debate on native anthropology and insider ethnography (Harden 2011; Hastrup 1993a, 1993b; Jones 1970; Narayan 1993; Ryang 1997), it is my intention to illustrate the nuances of the complex process by which we relate to others while positioning ourselves in relation to our ascribed communities.

**A Native among the Natives**

Anthropological fieldwork is often romanticized as being “among the natives”, thus sharing a common heritage with those natives may be seen by some as limiting a careful approach to one’s research goals (Hastrup 1993b). The authors of *Crucial Bonds: Marriage among the Lebanese Druze* (1980) include both a Lebanese Druze anthropologist and an American sociologist of unidentified ethnic stock. In a brief reflective statement in their preface they wrote: “We hope that this work exemplifies the important advantage such a joint undertaking offers in the effort to know well, yet be able to objectify, a particular way of life” (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:preface). Aside from the issue of claiming a purely objective approach, which seems to always imply a diametric opposition to subjectivity along a dichotomous scheme, the suggestion that their joint authorship offers the perfect blend of insider’s intimacy and outsider’s neutrality implies that the Druze as both individuals and a community are neither complex nor diverse and that a fellow Druze would have an uncomplicated time in understanding them.
On one level the Druze can be seen as a worldwide community with real social and familial ties. On another level the Druze have significant in-group differences and their clan-like affinities may illustrate substantial disparities in their politics and social values. The significant differences within any perceived group illustrates that homogeneity should not be so easily presumed while noticeable factional divisions make the distinction of insider/outsider more complex to say the least. As well, the character of any given individual is judged along countless criteria and like other ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups, the Druze may or may not feel compelled to express an affable affinity for their fellow coreligionists, fellow nationalists, or even their extended kin.

The matter of the Druze community’s openness to others is debatable because it varies so greatly and depends on individual interactions. Alamuddin and Starr go on to explain: “Some assume that the very nature of Druze society has made it virtually impossible for an outsider to achieve a reasonable comprehension of the sect’s way of life. In fact, many non-Druze in the Middle East hold the mistaken belief that the Druze take an oath to do away with any outsider who discovers their religious secrets” (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:1). Despite the extreme example they provide, barriers can and do exist, limiting accessibility to a representative sample of research participants and the likelihood of attracting those willing to share an earnest discussion of sometimes personal matters. For example, if a non-Druze with a similar academic background and personal history to myself were interested in conducting research focused on Druze heritage, they may have had marginal success in speaking to certain sectors of the community, such as other young males or youth that may be liberally inclined to engage a perceived outsider. As for myself, I can only speculate whether or not I was perceived as an insider more often than an outsider. The simple fact is that all interactions are framed somewhere
along a range between these supposed dichotomies. As a fellow Druze I was an insider, although that particular shared facet of my identity did not automatically translate into lots of amenable participants nor an instinctive trust, especially when discussing religious matters.

The term native anthropologist was never fully representative of my position as a son of Lebanese immigrants. Rather, my connections to the Druze community in Lebanon illustrates a very important facet of my shared identity and these roots share a level of familiarity similar to that of a native. Anthropological research conducted from the position of the native has spurred a long debate that continues to evolve as we explore our role in the field and our associations with those we seek to study. Delmos Jones’s article, “Towards a Native Anthropology” (1970), published in *Human Organization*, is an early example of this debate. In defining non-native anthropology, he states that anthropological research is typically carried out by an outsider who finds their way into a community (Jones 1970:251). He explains that this process is often part of the research experience and is incorporated into the anthropologist’s narrative. Early on, native anthropology seemed to be a label ascribed to many anthropologists with non-Western backgrounds, essentially positioning their points of view as discordant with the discipline’s traditionally European inspired values (Jones 1970: 251). That is why for Jones: “The emergence of a native anthropology is part of an essential decolonization of anthropological knowledge" (Jones 1970: 258).

At the time, many anthropologists believed that individuals native to a community could not maintain the objectivity required for rigorous research (Jones 1970:252). However, as a self-described native anthropologist who conducted research among urban-dwelling African Americans in Denver, Jones did not agree that a lack of supposed objectivity was a limitation. Rather, he felt that the point of view of the native anthropologist should be biased and favor
one’s ascribed social group (Jones 1970:258). He states: “Thus, when I seek to ‘set the record straight’ about some of the things which have been written about black people, this is not only justified but necessary” (Jones 1970:258). I agree with Jones but would add the caveat that setting the record straight is generally the responsibility of all researchers and of anthropologists in particular. While the differences between advocacy and neutrality in academic research inspires endless debate, it is agreed that researchers are foremost interested in discovering truths or patterns and in making an original contribution to their respective fields and advancing knowledge as a whole. In acknowledging one’s own perspective, the researcher can offer a more critical approach to their own biases that must be considered in their perspectives towards the research community as well as their field experiences.

In Kirsten Hastrup’s “Native Anthropology: A Contradiction in Terms?” (1993b) the definition of native anthropology has become progressively broader. She takes a relatively critical look at the term and why it is perceived as ‘morally superior’ to research conducted by non-natives (Hastrup 1993b:147). She plainly states that anthropology cannot be native and that the two are logically distinct positions (Hastrup 1993b:147). And yet, Hastrup also recognizes that the boundaries between the academic and potential informants are rarely distinct. She smartly asks: “Where are the boundaries of one’s home-culture, once culture has been dismantled as an entity and rediscovered as an analytical perspective?” (Hastrup 1993b:151). In contrast to Delmos Jones, Hastrup explains that the version of reality reflected in anthropological research need not satisfy informants. However, if the publication or potential application of the research in some ways threatens informants, the anthropologist’s ethical obligation to put beneficence over malfeasance supersedes the advancement of the research itself (Whiteford and Trotter 2008).
More recently, Lanita Jacobs-Huey has also written about native anthropologists and states that their research may be indicative of a further decolonization of the discipline’s theory and application (Jacobs-Huey 2002:791). Similar to Jones, she explains that: “The move by some anthropologists to conduct fieldwork at ‘home’ is a fundamental break from the classic tradition of what Rosaldo characterizes as the ‘Lone Ethnographer’ riding off into the sunset in search of the native” (Jacobs-Huey 2002:792). Jacobs-Huey goes on to say that: “Although this scholarship reveals variation among native and ‘indigenous’ scholars concerning their positionalities as cultural "insiders" and the reflexive nature of their scholarship, a great majority of these researchers coalesce around the goal of decolonizing Western anthropology through more reflexive modes of representation and critique” (Jacobs-Huey 2002:792).

As for my research, decolonizing the discipline has not necessarily been my goal nor did I intend to use my field experience to explore personal connections to my heritage, although this was inevitable as I became intimately familiar with my parent’s hometown. To loosely sum up my perspective, it is at once informed by Western culture and ideology and the values resulting from being raised as member of an ethnoreligious minority in the diaspora. Native anthropologists represent levels of membership that range from sharing a few similar cultural aspects to living their daily lives in their research communities. Like their non-native counterparts, their legitimacy in the field takes significant effort to establish and their scholarship and research intentions distinguish them in fundamental ways from those they seek to understand (Jacobs-Huey 2002:793). And yet, labels like native and non-native change depending on the context of the research and are not fixed positionalities.

The imposed dichotomy between native and non-native anthropologists is especially peculiar since anthropologists often study and are well aware of the ambiguity of cultural
boundaries (Ryang 1997:23). For example, since the 1930s Zora Neale Hurston made explicit her familiarity with her research informants when she studied Negro Folklore among former neighbors, friends, and relations in Eatonville, Florida, where she had spent most of her formative years. Her works of fiction later became known for its dialogic style of prose, while her research in anthropology worked with informants to include their voice in how they were represented in the anthropological literature (Cotera 2008).

In his preface to her work Mules and Men (1975 [1935]:xiii) Franz Boas said that in all of the works on Negro folklore no one had until that point adequately established the setting of the of black social life. He also noted: “It is the great merit of Miss Hurston’s work that she entered into the homely life of the southern negro as one of them and was fully accepted as such by the companions of her childhood” (Hurston 1975 [1935]:xiii). And yet Hurston explained that for all of her familiarity with her childhood community and its tradition of folklore, her perspective as an anthropologist was vital to creating new understandings that represented Negro Folklore more emblematically. Hurston stated that despite the fact that Negro Folklore had been part of her life from the cradle: “it was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn’t see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that” (1975 [1935]:1).

Anthropology is a science whose structure continues to evolve, incorporating a variety of fields and debates, such as feminism, postmodernism, and Marxism, among others (Ryang 1997:23). It has been influenced and shaped by the post-colonialism era, the women’s movement, and any number of local and international political developments among other important historical progressions. As it continuously changes and integrates other points of view,
the field of anthropology mirrors culture itself, its most vaunted focus. In striving to conceptualize the continuously changing, the field has seemingly dealt with an identity crisis in its attempts to cling to traditional boundaries or delineate the borders of its expanding purview. It is my opinion that these internal debates continue to encourage a more inclusive anthropology that recognizes the value of differing points of view within the field.

In response to James Clifford and George Marcus’s *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), Lila Abu-Lughod’s “Writing Against Culture” (1991) focuses on how the position of the ‘halfie’ anthropologists was previously disregarded. She defines the halfie as: “people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage” (Abu-Lughod 1991:137). Although this positionality is different from that of the native anthropologist, both have been framed in opposition to the classic, non-native researcher. In the case of the halfie, cultural anthropology’s distinction between the self and the other becomes blurred and breaks down the hierarchy inherent in the dichotomy (Abu-Lughod 1991:138). Abu-Lughod highlights other assumptions among cultural anthropologists at the time, stating that some researchers, having conducted fieldwork in their own countries, may work to stay true to anthropology’s interest in the exotic by making those they study seem more ‘other’ (Abu-Lughod 1991:139). The assumption that anthropologists necessarily focus on the exotic has also intensified the belief that researchers cannot remain objective in studying their own society, thus leading to generations of Western anthropologists obliging one another to study non-Western societies (Abu-Lughod 1991:139).

One strength of being a halfie as Abu-Lughod terms it, is that: “standing on shifting ground makes it clear that every view is a view from somewhere and every act of speaking a speaking from somewhere” (Abu-Lughod 1991:141). To ignore the fact that both researchers and
their research participants have complex positionalities that often overlap, overlooks the
hierarchy commensurate with the differences we create. It was Arjun Appadurai that highlighted
the power involved in this hierarchical relationship when he stated: “natives are a figment of the
anthropological imagination” (Abu-Lughod 1991:146). The differences imposed on natives,
native anthropologists, and even halfies can represent the result of ethnographies that seek to
reproduce supposed boundaries that suggest discrete groups on both micro and macro levels
(such as Edward Said’s distinction between the Orient and Occident for example). Abu-Lughod
suggests “writing against culture” if in fact our ethnographic work leads to the construction of

Discussing Evans-Pritchard’s work among the Nuer, social anthropologist Sonia Ryang
highlights the issues surrounding a general indifference towards the position of the non-native
anthropologist as his seemingly unquestioned positionality disregards his very British presence
in a very British colony (Ryang 1997:30). Her article, “Native Anthropology and Other
Problems” (1997) responds in several ways to that of Kirsten Hastrup’s, which positioned the
native anthropologist as necessarily biased and the non-native anthropologist as having a more
objective approach. Ryang explains that: “no text escapes the angles of cultural and ideological
lenses worn by the author” and, “when Evans Pritchard selected certain data, omitted others and
interpreted aspects of Nuer life, he was already exercising his authorial intervention” (Ryang

Ryang creates an analogy for the distinction between native and non-native
anthropologists by illustrating how the former is positioned as writer rather than author of the
text. The difference being that the writer is allowed to remain unmarked while the author
embodies their connections to those they study, which is to say their fellow natives (Ryang
The unmarked status of writers also ignores the reciprocal exchange in any given field experience. For example, Bronislaw Malinowski was heavily influenced by his research in the Trobriand Islands and despite his academic inclination to separate his personal diary from his field notes, his opinion of and experiences among the Trobrianders shaped much of his subsequent work (Ryang 1997:26). I share Ryang’s opinion that all anthropologists should consider their respective backgrounds since we all have forms of cultural self-knowledge, which characterize the ways in which we perceive, interpret, and learn (Ryang 1997:27-30). Thus: “The difference between studying one’s own society and studying another society lies in the epistemological terrain, not in a simplistic matter of cultural affinity or distance between the researcher and the society concerned” (Ryang 1997:24).

While the works of Jones, Hastrup, Jacobs-Huey, and Ryang are only part of the ongoing debate over the notion of the native anthropologist, Jacalyn Harden’s article “Native Like Me: Confessions of an Asiatic Black Anthropologist” (2011) highlights the lack of discussion about the assumption that nonwhite anthropologists must necessarily be native anthropologists. In particular, the research of the nonwhite anthropologist is presumed to be a decoding of the “other” for the non-native, in this case white anthropologist (Harden 2011:139). The nonwhite anthropologist carries certain assumptions about their positionality, their research interests, their approach, and their relationship to informants. It is as if the default position of the anthropologist is subconsciously represented in the man or woman of European descent. Given the assumptions which surround native anthropologists it seems that those ascribed such a position, including myself, must be careful in situating themselves as overly engaged with or sympathetic to the causes of those they study, or else risk having their work marginalized.
Harden asks if the work of the non-white anthropologist is intended to provide an intimate familiarity with the perceptions of the insider, or if it is possible that the non-white anthropologist can be situated alongside their white colleagues (Harden 2011:150). If so, the field may benefit from their perspectives and from their perceptions of “otherness” (Harden 2011:150). The fact remains that potential research participants rarely see the researcher as a fellow insider, nor do they tend to be so possessed with situating them. For myself, some individuals saw me as a peculiarity, placed somewhere along the line of religious insider and international outsider. At times I felt like I had to “go native” while in the field, accommodating others as best I could by changing my style of dress, adapting my social conduct, and learning to communicate more like those around me. It is my opinion that the field of anthropology has continued to become well suited to adapting to the global changes that ensure the increased participation of those situated as natives with non-Western perspectives. In his book *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (2003), Michel-Rolph Trouillot offers the field a poignant piece of advice, stating: “To ask where anthropology is – or should be – going today is to ask where anthropology is coming from and to assess critically the heritage that it must claim. But it is also how these changes should affect our use of that heritage, and what is best left behind as obsolete, redundant, or simply misleading” (Trouillot 2003:117)

**A Few Comments on Conducting Insider Ethnography**

Since the time Malinowski conducted his fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, many anthropologists have utilized cultural relativism to achieve the “native point-of view” (Hastrup 1993a:174). Kirin Narayan states that: “Those who diverge as ‘native,’ ‘indigenous,’ or ‘insider’ anthropologists are believed to write about their own cultures from a position of intimate
affinity” (Narayan 1993:671). These assumptions carry contradictions that position insiders as inescapably local and their research as less legitimate, while validating the belief that ideal ethnographic experiences must achieve this same native position. Narayan explains that the supposed dichotomy between foreign and native researcher is not as concrete as many academic discussions would have us believe. Having experienced this myself, I was consistently aware of how other’s perceived me while in the field while remaining aware of the ways in which those perceptions influenced interaction with potential participants.

Oversimplified dichotomies such as insider and outsider only polarize anthropologists, placing native researchers as somehow lesser than imagined and idealized traditional anthropologists. The credibility of non-native anthropologists carries the assumption that objective academic positionality can easily be achieved. Meanwhile, native researchers are always qualified as insiders while their research bares the label of “insider ethnography.” And yet, the fact that we are in communities asking questions and conducting research is an unavoidable facet of any academic inquiry. It is these methods which make us stand out as academics with particular intentions and goals, rather than simply sharing in the daily life of the community, if in fact neutral and objective experiences exist.

As an American-born Druze, I was not recognized as a total insider or even a full member of the community since it was clear that I was not native to Lebanon. However, as a Druze I am especially invested in the community’s well-being and I attempted to maintain a semblance of awareness of my assumptions based on previous experiences. Before beginning my fieldwork I had stated that there was no doubt that a non-Druze would find it nearly impossible to conduct research focusing on access to religious resources within the Druze community. I explained that not only would their motives be suspect, but their access to religious knowledge
would be very limited. In retrospect, this statement was reasonably accurate, particularly among the Druze community in Lebanon given the political climate and tensions that the region has continues to bear.

Before leaving to conduct research, I detailed some autoethnographical notes to critically examine some of the latent assumptions coupled with my personal investment in the group. I was aware of the possibility that participants may not have recognized any serious social issues in the community or may not have been invested in the preservation of a distinct Druze heritage. Indeed, such was the case among a handful of individuals while the diversity of opinions concerning a lack of educational resources and interests in learning more was astounding. Although contradictory opinions were especially rare, a few individuals even expressed their opinion that the religious and historical educational materials were accessible and sufficient. I worked to refrain from having the intentions of the research project be reflected in my communication with others as well as my interview questions. It has been important to remember that much like the natural sciences, we approach our research by identifying a perceived problem, which carries with it a host of implications that may or may not be true.

Having conducted research among Druze in the United States, it was apparent that some individuals were reserved in their decision to participate, citing thinly veiled concerns about the accessibility of religious information and divulgence of some of the more controversial elements of the doctrine. Some of these concerns stem from the fact that the Druze are a relatively vulnerable minority in a region of the world currently known for religious disputes. While one of the goals of this research is to make their discrete religious knowledge more accessible to the Druze community in general, I have been cautious since excess reform can be regarded as threatening. Oftentimes, this has included a kind of negotiation between wanting a more
informed community while maintaining a respectful distance from topics considered esoteric or overly metaphysical. The kinds of knowledge that the community might benefit from include an understanding of the basic tenets of the faith and its shared history. The apparent gaps in these forms of knowledge are further explored in chapters six and seven where I discuss the feedback I received during my field research.

The issue of conducting insider ethnography has the potential to become a significant dilemma, illustrating the conflict between cultural relativism and universalism. Using myself as an example, as an American my beliefs lead me to assume that disseminating religious knowledge is an acceptable notion of beneficence, rather than an opposing belief that limiting religious knowledge continues to be wholly beneficial to the protection of a vulnerable community. This particular approach to limiting these types of knowledge within the community represents a very conservative point of view that is held by some of the Druze in Lebanon but to varying degrees. While sharing or limiting religious knowledge may be a relatively contentious issue, there were not many individuals that actively opposed an organized and sincere effort to facilitate inquiry by improving the educational resources available to interested individuals.

As both a student of anthropology and a Druze, I was inclined to participate in and observe a number of social and religious functions. When conducting applied research with the intention to identify problems and understand existing power structures, maintaining a constantly objective approach rather than participating in advocacy is not a simple task (Stanton 2005:416). In my opinion, a balance between these two extremes was warranted and framed the best approach for this particular research study. Fortunately, applied anthropology focuses on addressing social issues and discerning how they might best be ameliorated. While anthropologists have various roles in the field, such as practitioner, participant, or advocate,
Reciprocity is especially important to applied anthropologists that participate in the daily affairs of their informants (Greenbaum 2002:308). I agree with Cathy Stanton’s view that we are de facto participants since we are engaged in the cultural materials of those we study (Stanton 2005:415). I believe that my anthropological background provided a sensible approach to recognizing how this research might best be applied and to understand the scope of the issues at hand and the potential impact of application. The balance between objectivity and advocacy defines the applied aspects of this work and will be discussed in detail in the final chapter.

Research Methods

Ethnographic methods often have the potential to create very intimate exchanges between researchers and those they wish to study, especially for traditional ethnographers or for those conducting some manner of ethnographic research (Angrosino 2002:1). The four main methods I employed in the field included semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, oral histories, and participant observation. This last method involved both daily interactions in the community in which I lived as well as actively pursuing accessible informative materials and attending educational events particular to the Druze.

Each of these methods played a crucial role in understanding what Druze heritage meant to the community and how they identified potential threats to its preservation while balancing the means by which they facilitated social change. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to apply particular sets of questions to a sample of both individuals considered experts on the doctrine and those who may be lacking religious knowledge. Focus groups prompted engaging dialogues and worked as a catalyst to encourage small groups to offer creative and critical perspectives on Druze social issues. Oral history interviews focused on a variety of themes associated with Druze
identity in Lebanon (e.g. reincarnation, nationalism, etc.) and allowed me to explore important individual experiences in an unrestricted format. Throughout the entire research process I actively pursued opportunities to utilize participant observation, which is perhaps the primary method of developing the crucial relationships and conversations necessary to gaining a more profound understanding of the community’s heritage. Moreover, participant observation allowed me to identify and further engage in the available cultural resources making the gaps in their accessibility more apparent and shedding light on how they were utilized.

My previous research shared similar qualities to this endeavor and focused more exclusively on assessing a communitywide knowledge gap identified by the Druze in the Unites States and Canada. I explored conceptualizations of Druze identity in these diasporic communities and found that individuals of all age groups expressed an interest in learning more about their cultural identity (Radwan 2009). In particular, first generation, younger Druze adults were the most important segment of the population to consider as they were the least informed group concerning traditional Druze culture yet certainly the most motivated to learn. In conjunction with this current study, it has become increasingly apparent that among Druze born in the United States, Canada, and Lebanon, younger generations may find it more difficult to embrace a traditional heritage with which they have increasingly less in common. Of course not all young people shared similar sentiments concerning their Druze identity or heritage, but common themes were emergent and often similar in both studies. My approach to understanding how Druze heritage is constructed or preserved has taken into account different beliefs by working through the collective opinions of all participants. In having to consider sometimes conflicting viewpoints, it was clear that common ground exists and that there is considerable support throughout a diverse section of the population for improving knowledge of Druze history.
and religion. Such support was common amongst both men and women, younger and older individuals, and mushayekh and the uninitiated majority of the Druze community.

While mushayekh are often the most doctrinally well-informed, many do not actively embrace the role of expert or teacher themselves since it is widely agreed that a teacher is very much responsible for how a potential student interprets and internalizes the lessons. In some ways, such activity may be seen as proselytizing the faith or may be considered forceful among those who are neither interested nor prepared to learn in a manner the teacher deems appropriate. It has often been said that to embrace the Druze religious teachings, one embarks on a personal journey or path to Tawhid, accepting the philosophy and the lifestyle that is commensurate. As participants’ feedback in the following chapters highlights, many notions of the need to adopt traditional values as a prerequisite for receiving religious instruction were viewed contentiously. This issue was among many that participants pointed out in many research interviews that were conducted. All of the selected interview methods worked to complement each other, providing a triangulated, dialectical approach that produced a shared narrative representative of many Druze individuals.

Some of the methods I decided to forego due to constraints on time and limited accessibility included structured surveys, kinship diagrams, formal archival research and constructing a cultural inventory. While I had previously considered distributing a survey, it became increasingly apparent that many people would not likely take the time to offer their carefully considered input. While surveys are the prime method of reaching participants en masse, they are also less robust than interviews and do not typically facilitate responses that represent real-life discourse (Ervin 2005:194). Early on, I also considered creating diagrams to provide specific examples of kinship among the Druze. However, the kinship of particular

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families was not indicative of the role of family in individuals’ lives and the greater social relations it creates in the community worldwide. For example, the diagrammatic organization of specific families would not have provided a clearer understanding of how the Druze imagine themselves to be one large family around the world, which defines the most significant boundary of marrying within the group. Kinship reckoning for the Druze is best understood by a thoughtful consideration of their belief in reincarnation and their practice of endogamy within the greater Druze community while diagrams would have added very little value. Moreover, the Druze have much in common with other Arabs in determining kinship groups and there exist a number of anthropological studies which devote a great deal of pages entirely to that subject (Abu-Lughod 1999; Barth 1970; Eickleman 1989; Lancaster 1987).

Although archival research is considered non-reactive, as the researcher cannot influence the data unlike one’s effect on the responses of first-hand informants, archives carry their own biases (Angrosino 2002:65). Oftentimes, the fact that a particular archival source has been preserved and remains accessible may be predicated on the fact that it is representative of the author’s compliance with the prevailing opinions of the time. This is not to say that all surviving texts are representative of a dominant discourse, but the works of Michel-Rolph Trouillot remind us that researchers must take special precautions by understanding context and sources as much as possible. In his book Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (1995), Trouillot took great effort to illustrate the manipulation of Haiti’s historical records while many researchers may not have the means to look into the veracity of dated archival materials. While my theoretical approach places substantial significance on historical context, any archival material beyond the literature that can be accessed by most Lebanese Druze was not as essential as current conceptualizations of society and history.
Constructing a cultural resource inventory was among the methods I had also considered before pursuing fieldwork. As defined in Antoinette Jackson’s book *Speaking for the Enslaved: Heritage Interpretations at Antebellum Plantation Sites* (2012): “The cultural resource inventory includes the natural, historic, cultural, educational, scenic, and recreational resources of the National Heritage Area related to the stories and themes of the region that should be protected, enhanced, managed, or developed” (43). The structured inventory categories, foremost divided into tangible and intangible cultural heritage, were not particularly applicable to the expressed needs of the Druze community. For example, many participants identified a common demand for expanded knowledge through educational resources. They often associated interest in these resources based on a need for a stronger public image and a desire for more robust social supports within their communities. In working with Gullah/Geechee communities along the southeast coast of the United States, Jackson noted the static representation that cultural inventories might suggest: “The production of a cultural resource inventory means an engagement in an exercise that mandates distilling an entire culture – in this case, the entire Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor and an entire group of people and their cultural and heritage resources down to an itemized list organized within predefined categories” (2012:43).

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews have been this research’s principal tool of collecting data due to their open structure and malleability. In particular, semi structured-interviews are best suited for allowing individuals to articulate the nuances of more loaded concepts such as identity, heritage, dissimulation, community or religious philosophy (Ervin 2005:168). To better understand how participants perceive these ideas, this research will focus on a discursive
approach that encourages open dialogue through discourse (Columbo and Senatore 2005). This approach to the method is defined as person-centered interviewing and is described as being a mixture of questions which situate the interviewee as both an informant and a respondent (Levy and Hollan 1998:337). For example, an informant mode of inquiry situates the interviewee as someone that is proficient in their familiarity with the topic at hand and capable of reporting its essential qualities. In contrast, a respondent mode of inquiry emphasizes the personal interpretations or experiences of the interviewee. In Russell Bernard’s edited volume, *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (1998), Robert Levy and Douglas Hollan explain how both of these modes of inquiry work together to produce robust person-centered interviews: “These oscillations between respondent and informant modes illuminates the spaces, conflicts, coherences, and transformations, if any, between the woman [being interviewed] (either in her own conception, or in the interviewer’s emerging one) and aspects of her perception and understanding of her external context” (Levy and Hollan 1998:336).

Concerning my research, interview questions that sometimes situated participants as informants did not assume that their understanding of particular aspects of Druze history, culture, or tradition, was always accurate or representative of the larger society. Conversely, other research questions encouraged personal opinions but refrained from fully situating participants in the respondent mode of inquiry by not focusing entirely on self-anecdotes. Referencing their field research, Levy and Hollan state: “Questions such as ‘What does it mean to be a Tahitian?’ and ‘In what way are you like, or different from that?’ directly probe aspects of categorization of self and, in defining contrast, others” (Levy and Hollan 1998:343). Similarly, I began each non-expert or regular semi-structured interview by asking individuals, “What does being Druze mean
to you?” In this way, participants, be they informants or respondents, provided their opinions about the salient qualities they associated with their Druze identity and that of others.

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher the flexibility of including probes, which can either be pre-established follow-up questions or simple spontaneous elicitations to have the respondent continue with a certain explanation or further explore some vague thought. One of the issues with having a large assortment of probes is that the feedback becomes too varied and difficult to compare, while standardized questions allow the researcher to obtain more consistent data across interviews (Weller 1998:366). To account for this, I utilized standardized question themes across all interview types, including the relatively unstructured oral histories. I maintained the decision to cover all of the core research questions in the guides but was more flexible with applying the probe questions to avoid the pitfall of having conversations that were too structured and limited to my interests. As well, using open-ended questions circumvented the possibility of predetermining participants’ responses.

I utilized the flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews to incite beliefs or opinions of respondents on the themes I intended for them to explore: “beliefs may be examined in greater depth by administering a series of related questions on a single topic” (Weller 1998:367). Semi-structured interviews lose their focus if there are not enough intracultural similarities among interviewees (Weller 1998:399). This was certainly not the case with the Druze in Lebanon even with a sample that included a broad cross-section of different age groups, socioeconomic statuses, and levels of education. The common sociocultural qualities among the Druze in Lebanon allowed me to incorporate supporting responses to explore their shared cultural beliefs (Weller 1998:399).
Semi-structured interviews included both regular and expert interviews, the latter of which were tailored towards respondents considered to be experts on the religious and historical educational resources relevant to the Druze. While there was simply no litmus test by which to identify individuals knowledgeable about Druze history and doctrine, including one’s status as an initiated *sheikh* or *sheikha*, those who were particularly versed had reputations which often preceded them. While not all initiated *mushayekh* might be considered experts in this regard, nor can the remainder of Druze society be considered uninformed, I identified possible expert interviewees based on their reputations for having either a high-level of formal, as in the case of some *mushayekh*, or informal knowledge about either Druze history or doctrine. The resulting sample of thirteen individuals included both very well-known and lesser-known *sheikhs* and *sheikhas*, as well as three non-*mushayekh* that were equally proficient in their knowledge.

In total my sample included 112 participants with six individuals that took part in both a semi-structured interview and a focus group. The total number of individual participants was thus 106, taking part in a total of ninety-one of the various interview types. Participants ranged in age from eighteen to ninety-six with an average of just over thirty-nine years. Of this sample, fifty were female and fifty-six were male, including nine male *sheikhs* and six female *shiekhas*. I conducted fifty-one semi-structured interviews, thirteen expert interviews, twenty-one oral histories, and six focus groups that were comprised of four to six participants. This large number of in-depth interviews, ensured that a variety of different points of view were included. In general, participants offered feedback that considered a comprehensive assortment of topics while the diversity of people I interacted with provided ample opportunity to gather a representative sample. All interviews were recorded using a small and relatively unobtrusive digital recorder. The majority of interviews lasted between thirty to forty-five minutes with just a
few going over an hour. Most interviews were conducted in the privacy of peoples’ homes and some individuals became familiar enough to visit me in my rented apartment and were interviewed there.

As previously mentioned, most of the expert interviews were conducted among mushayekh and included questions that were focused on gaining an understanding of their perspective on the educational resources available to non-mushayekh in the community. Certainly not all mushayekh are in a position to offer religious knowledge and it was apparent that some non-mushayekh had made great efforts to learn more. As will be discussed, the non-mushayekh who participated in expert interviews provided incredibly astute perceptions with their religious knowledge and provided excellent commentary on the larger issues affecting the preservation of Druze heritage. Although only three of the thirteen expert interviews included non-mushayekh, many other very knowledgeable individuals made up the sample of the twenty-one oral history interviews. More specifically, many of the individuals I encountered that were very knowledgeable about Druze society and the social condition of the faith had remarkable experiences that allowed them to bypass certain barriers and to negotiate their status as non-mushayekh in order gain their particularly valuable insights. These individuals warranted oral history interviews which allowed me to customize their questions to best capture their individual discourse.

The semi-structured interviews included two distinct guides, the regular and the expert which included eighteen and thirteen questions respectively. As the primary method of collecting data, the interview questions and probes were guided by the six core foci of this

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8 See Semi-Structured Interview Guide in Appendix A and Semi-Structured Expert Interview Guide in Appendix B.
research, as outlined in the introduction chapter. These foci frame the general scope of the research project and incrementally form a progression of inquiry which ranges from working with individuals to define Druze heritage to identifying practical approaches towards amelioration.

While most of the regular semi-structured and expert interviews were conducted one-on-one, a handful of regular semi-structured interviews included two participants to accommodate the request of some individuals who were more comfortable in a setting that included more than myself and them. It was my experience that such participants were in no way stifled by their partners and were instead encouraged to provide a more careful consideration of their responses to each of the questions that were posed.

Focus Groups

Comparable to the semi-structured interviews, I conducted focus groups with questions that were based on the six themes that framed this study. Foremost, focus groups offered a different dynamic than the individual or paired semi-structured interviews since participants often encouraged, and even incited, one another to offer more critical feedback. I carefully considered both the benefits and weaknesses of the method since any group’s dynamic is not predictable even if participants know one another or are complete strangers. Focus groups tend to address a smaller number of related topics so as to concentrate the discussion at hand (Trotter

9 1. What are the key aspects of Druze heritage amongst members of the community and how is it discussed/defined?
2. What do Druze individuals know about their history and religious?
3. What do Druze individuals want to know more about/where do they find information and resources lacking?
4. Do Druze individuals perceive threats to the continuation of their shared heritage? What are the identified causes and are there suggestions for amelioration or improvement?
5. Can heritage preservation be reinforced with improved cultural resources?
6. Who might help shape, support, and implement these new or improved resources?
and Schensul 1998:715). The smaller focus group question guide\textsuperscript{10} was a distilled version of the semi-structured interview guides and drew more heavily from the fourth, fifth, and sixth themes, addressing the Druze community’s social problems, the utility of educational resources, and the means to improve those resources.

While focus groups are popularly employed in marketing research, applied anthropology has noted their utility in studies concerning interventions or advocacy (Trotter and Schensul 1998:723). Writing in Bernard’s book on methodology, Robert Trotter and Jean Schensul say that as a method, focus groups might be problematic in that the questions they include are limited to those topics which individuals would feel comfortable talking about in public (Trotter and Schensul 1998:715). At the same time, provocative topics are often something that people do like to discuss with one another, including social issues and opinions about their differing viewpoints on their cultural identity. Some overly intimate anecdotes may be left out among certain company but the discussion can remain relatively personal. Focus groups tend to produce more natural discourse through the interchange of ideas and interactions of informants. These exchanges offer the researcher the opportunity to understand how opinions on particular topics might differ when individuals are having frank discussions with their peers rather than providing responses directly to the interviewer. The researcher can also gain a better appreciation for the general style of communication, especially if certain topics elicit different reactions.

While the focus group guide included fewer questions the dynamics of these group discussions provided a unique addition to the semi-structured interviews. As the interviewer, I also moderated without interjecting too often so as not to interrupt the conversation, but I occasionally had to direct attention towards more reluctant participants and away from others

\textsuperscript{10} See focus group interview guide in Appendix C.
that were too voluble. The focus groups included a set of nine questions which were either addressed in their entirety or tacked on as follow-ups or probes. Among each of the six focus groups I conducted, participants tended to know one another or have something in common. This however did not detract from the variety of their viewpoints given the diversity of their backgrounds. For example, one group comprised of six female participants included individuals that ranged in age from twenty-two to fifty-nine with different educational, economic, and social circumstances. Even if focus group participants shared some uniting quality, such as one group of college students I was able to gather, their family backgrounds, towns of origin, and personal politics were considerably divergent creating a unique assembly each time.

Participants were recruited through personal contacts I established while in the field. I typically refrained from asking individuals who had been previously interviewed to take part in focus groups since the question guides drew on similar themes. There was however two focus groups that included individuals that had taken part in a semi-structured interview beforehand. In these instances these individuals helped to coordinate the focus groups and thought that the new participants would feel more comfortable taking part if they were themselves involved. All of the focus groups included people that were previously acquainted, such as friends or classmates. Their pre-existing relationships defined their interactions and often lead to very informative dialogues. Yet in one focus group, it was apparent that the participants held one particular respondent in high esteem and refrained from interjecting into the prolonged response of that particular individual.

Focus groups were used as a tool to validate some of the collected responses from the oral history and semi-structured interviews and were mostly implemented towards the end of my time in the field (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999:248). For example, individual notions
of heritage and experiences with cultural resources were discussed in these group settings to see if consensus was easily reached. Furthermore, focus groups served as excellent think tanks to identify useful suggestions for ameliorating the social issues consistently identified as those most concerning (Ervin 2005:175).

Upon completing the proposal for this research project, I approached the field wanting to conduct focus groups but not being entirely sure about the feasibility of bringing together willing participants. Aside from the difficulty of coordination, I was hesitant to assume that individuals would be interested in sharing their thoughts on their Druze heritage with one another. Although difficult to coordinate, once participants were situated they were more than willing to discuss their viewpoints in detail and they did not hesitate to address their community’s social issues as they recognized similarities in their experiences, if not in their opinions. Since there were fewer questions to be addressed, I primarily guided participants to define the social issues that the community faced and explored their suggestions to address those issues.

**Oral History Interviews**

The third key research method was the oral history interview. Rather than discuss the broad life experiences of individuals, the oral histories I conducted focused on themes such as the participants’ Druze identity and their personal experiences with the doctrine and the community. Oral histories worked to compliment the more comprehensive semi-structured interviews by providing in-depth discussions on particular topics related to the participants’ life. Furthermore, this method helped supplement the semi-structured interviews by allowing me to
go off-script to detail important, ancillary topics that were not necessarily covered in neither the semi-structured interview questionnaires nor the focus group guides.

The oral history interview works with informants to verbally express their perceived roles in particular events and to think critically about shared aspects of their identity (Angrosino 2002:35). In his book *Exploring Oral History: A Window on the Past* (2008), Michael Angrosino explains that oral history interviews can validate individual perspectives regardless of personal status, so long as the individual is willing to express their opinions. As oral history interviews do not necessarily constitute the formal recording of history, the main goal should be to understand the individual’s experiences so that perhaps a larger message can be revealed (Angrosino 2008:12). The oral histories I conducted were distinct from the kind of life histories which include an extensive record of the personal experiences of the individual (Bretell 1998:526). While this latter method might be more focused on capturing the narratives of perceivably threatened cultural groups, my oral history interviews were informed by my intention to delve into particular life experiences that were pertinent to the larger themes connected to Druze heritage. For example, many of those I chose to do oral histories with had at some point in their lives been involved with educational resources focused on Druze history and doctrine.

Referencing Bernard’s book on methods in anthropology (1998) once again, Caroline Bretell explains that oral histories offer an important contrast to historical archives (1998:530). However, situating this method at the interstice of personal memory and the historical record limits the participant’s experiences by measure of their veracity. There is some risk in this approach since conflating legitimacy with accuracy might over emphasize a canonical or authorized history, made to seem ideal or implicitly authentic (Bretell 1998:530). Although human memory isn’t always accurate, the point of this method is not to discover particular facts
but a careful consideration of the interview in its entirety unveils deeper meaning in the manner by which the respondent relates to their history. My approach however was to further explore some of the important themes rather than compare life experiences with records or texts. The focus of each oral history was to facilitate personal narratives and constructions of Druze heritage, identity, and community. I began each oral history interview by explaining to the participant my interest in hearing about particular experiences in their lives (Angrosino 2008:12). Those I spoke to had a broad range of perspectives and were a very diverse group, sometimes offering untraditional perspectives and narratives that might be considered non-privileged narratives.

When selecting participants, researchers should be mindful of whom they interview and should be cognizant if they gravitate to people who are socially important or powerful since they rarely represent the communities to which they belong (Angrosino 2002:37). They offer an effective way of including those who have been marginalized to address elisions in the community’s overall narrative (Angrosino 2002:38). The oral histories I conducted were not intended to be a representative sample of either powerful individuals nor of the community overall, but provided descriptive information of particular knowledge and involvement. For Antoinette Jackson (2012), oral histories were the key ethnographic method in her research that included addressing misrepresentations of antebellum era plantation life at three different heritage sites in the Southeastern United States. This method allowed Jackson to have in-depth conversations with local descendants of African slaves in order to gain a better understanding of their daily lives on the plantations. This allowed led to the development of a more inclusive understanding of plantation life rather than the superficial depictions marketed at such sites that often focus on the life of the plantation owners with only a cursory treatment of the enslaved
who lived and worked there (Jackson 2012:13-15). More than this, their stories contribute to a retelling of American history, where the enslaved are recognized as more than just slaves, illustrating that their lives as teachers, artisans, and other skilled laborers were not as identical as their perfunctory historical treatment suggests.

The oral history method requires a more significant amount of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee, which may also require a heavy investment of time. Oral histories provide in-depth descriptions that are rich with details and allow the incorporation of a more varied perspective into the general narrative that frames any community past or present (Jackson 2012:40). They are a particularly valuable tool to anthropological research concerned with heritage as they allow us to understand the broader themes associated with loaded concepts and to look at individual experiences within a scope of interrelated life events (Angrosino 2002:36). While oral histories have been widely used in anthropological research: “it is now no longer so easily taken for granted that the individual biography represents the culture in microcosm, or, conversely, that the group ethnography is the individual personality writ large” (Angrosino 2002:37).

To be more specific, I conducted oral histories with individuals that had a particularly relevant personal story to tell that added to the collective discussion of heritage. Referencing the literature on the Druze, I created a short list of topics that required further inquiry than the interview guides permitted. When I learned of individuals whose personal experiences allowed them to speak on these topics in unique ways, I sought them out to conduct oral history interviews. Oftentimes, what made their stories particularly relevant was either their personal involvement with religiosity or a unique understanding of an important facet of Druze society in Lebanon. Essentially, their personal narratives offered particular examples of social commentary
on the Druze community but were not used to either validate or invalidate the feedback from the larger group of respondents. Examples of the themes of other oral history interviews were varied and provided information on a number of branching topics allowing me to branch out into important topics and themes such as political involvement in the state, social support systems, belief in reincarnation, and the power structures in place that relegate the availability of faith-based educational resources.

**Participant Observation**

Participant observation included being a part of both everyday life in the community and attending any religious activities that I had access to. The second aspect of participant observation is discussed separately in the next section since it required a concentrated approach different from my daily interactions at my main research site throughout the urban center of Aley. While many anthropologists recognize that participant observation is the central and defining method of cultural research, there is no definition that is fully agreed upon (Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland 1998:259). Anthropologists Kathleen and Billie Dewalt and Coral Wayland define participant observation as: “a method in which an observer takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of the people being studied as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of culture” (Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland 1998:260). They go on to say that tacit culture includes things that we are not often conscious of while participant observation works to bring these aspects to our attention through the enculturation that results from time spent in the research field.
Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland explain that participant observation is an analytic tool, allowing the researcher to not only collect further data alongside their other methods, but to improve their ability to interpret that data based on an increased familiarity with the research community (Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland 1998:264). This method also offers a more comprehensive understanding of the people being studied, avoiding a focus that is too narrow or research themes that are arbitrarily separated from the broader social contexts (Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland 1998:261). Ruth Behar was a proponent of ethnographic fieldwork that retained the experiences of the researcher as observer while Barbara Tedlock said that the anthropologist should not remove themselves from the constructed narratives (Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland 1998:263-264). Tedlock believed that to erase the researcher from the research only served to mystify ethnographic fieldwork (Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland 1998:263-264).

Perhaps the biggest problem with participant observation as a method is the researcher’s bias. Sometimes these biases are reflected in the ways in which the community perceives and receives the researcher and one’s gender, age, nationality, or social standing may limit the kinds of things they can participate in. There are many accounts of anthropologists conducting ethnographic research on similar topics among the same groups yet coming to very different conclusions. Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland also state: “As interpretive anthropology makes clear, all of us bring biases, predispositions, and hang-ups to the field with us, and we cannot completely escape these as we view other cultures. Our reporting, however, should attempt to make these biases as explicit as possible so that others may use these in judging our work” (Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland 1998:288). They recommend moving beyond the postmodernist’s attention to our own psychological experiences and to systematically explore, through ethnographic fieldwork, how our positionality might affect our observations and our
opportunities to participate (Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland 1998:289). For these authors, reflexivity is a starting point before being able to determine social causes, cultural patterns, or any other aspect of people’s lives that the researcher is attempting to study. To contend with any biases I might have had, I was overt about my positionality in the field, having learned from other anthropologists that had studied the Druze such as Fuad Khuri (2004; 2005) and Intisar Azzam (1997; 2007).

Having lived in Aley for nearly six months, I was able to develop a rapport with a large number of diverse individuals and became familiar with the lifestyle and interactions of residents. By immersing myself in local life, opportunities to participate in social gatherings presented themselves with some frequency (Ervin 2005:161). For example, I walked everywhere on foot and got to know a number of people while buying groceries in the souk, or working out at one of the local gyms, or joining group trips to important Druze historical sites. This kind of engagement was crucial towards facilitating a deeper understanding of all aspects of Druze heritage beyond the religious facets. Participant observation ensured that I had the chance to engage with a comprehensive sample of both men and women within the community rather than being relegated to a self-selected group that participated in the limited religious activities I attended.

In his book *Applied Anthropology: Tools and Perspectives for Contemporary Practice*, Alexander Ervin explains that participant observation is an omnibus strategy that is requisite of all ethnographic fieldwork and is itself a methodology inclusive of a variety of data collecting techniques (Ervin 2005:161). Throughout the research process I actively pursued opportunities to utilize participant observation to develop the crucial relationships necessary to gain a more profound understanding of what constitutes contemporary Druze heritage. Looking at Michael
Angrosino’s discussion of anthropological methods, he adds: “Participant observation is not just the collection of data, but a way of thinking about those people from whom one collects those data” (2002:12). In considering how cultural relativism is intimately linked to participant observation, thorough consideration for the research community’s viewpoints is crucial to achieving a close understanding of their cultural values and perspectives. However, cultural relativism does not necessarily require full integration into a community, which I believe isn’t necessarily possible. And yet, participant observation goes beyond all other ethnographic tools in its attempt to familiarize the anthropologist with the emic perspective and to incite personal discovery for anthropologists who attempt to bridge the gap between themselves and those whose culture, identity, and heritage they intend to study.

The participant observation I conducted resulted in copious notes that covered a range of social topics and events I was a part of. These notes ranged from specific episodes, including a both a traditional wedding and funeral I attended, to prominent topics which repeatedly came up in daily discussions (such as miscommunication among different generations to a lack of structural supports or social programs available in Lebanon). My habit was to expand on my field notes each night so as to reflect on them in privacy. This was an especially important routine that allowed me to focus on more interpersonal and exchanges while attending various religious seminars or in sharing conversations generally.

Taking Angrosino’s advice, I maintained an awareness that my research agenda was not always particularly important to participants even though my intentions have been to produce research that benefits the whole community (Angrosino 2002:13). Humility and a sense of humor were both important to becoming comfortable and more easily accepted in my various social settings. As an academic, it was important to embrace humility and to refrain from assumptions
that positioned me as a cultural expert whose formal education provided knowledge superior to my informants. In her research efforts to make the Afro-Cuban Martí-Maceo Society in Tampa more visible to the public and various power holders, including those involved in the National Park Service’s historic districting, anthropologist Susan Greenbaum conducted participant observation in many settings and often moved between positions of researcher and advocate during her ethnographic observations as she worked with the community for over fifteen years (Greenbaum 2002:4). In my opinion, extensive participant observation creates strong bonds between the researcher and the community whose vested interests become similar. For example, Greenbaum was not only an advocate for the preservation of the Martí-Maceo Society, but was clearly and increasingly invested in the validation, continuation, and preservation of Afro-Cuban heritage in Tampa.

In her book *More Than Black* (2002), Greenbaum referred to her work as a collaborative project in applied ethnohistory (4). Indeed, participant observation can often lead to participatory collaborations to implement the kinds of social projects that might be the focus of any applied research. To add to this, anthropologist Erve Chambers believes that, in studying cultural heritage, any kind of meaningful change must be achieved by engaging with the representative communities and facilitating community-based initiatives (Chambers 2006:41). Given the uniquely intimate nature of participant observation, the researcher must always be mindful of protecting the interests of their informants. This method involves a great deal of subjective experience and expression, even as the researcher insists on maintaining some sense of objectivity. While overtly subjective experiences may not always be deemed appropriate in attempting to understand the shared heritage of a community, I tend to agree with those
academics who believe that culture, history, and heritage are always subjectively experienced and expressed, to once again: “find in the little what eludes us in the large” (Geertz 1968:4).

Assessing the Relevant Resources Using Participant Observation

A second aspect to the participant observation I conducted involved an active pursuit of the available seminars, lectures, prayer sessions, and places of religious significance. Although I did not construct a traditional cultural inventory by organizing these resources into predefined categories, I became increasingly familiar with the range of resources centered on Druze history and the basic tenets of the faith. During my visits to these important sites and events, I also collected educational reading materials in Arabic and in English to see what others had access to. As will be discussed in the following two chapters that review the data from these methods, the events I participated in represented a set of cultural resources that in part inform Druze identity. In particular, I observed how other attendees experienced these resources to gain a better understanding of the issues concerning the accessibility of and interest in particular forms of knowledge.

I learned about the educational resources others were familiar with during my daily conversations with the people in Aley. Daily treks through the busy souk resulted in conversations that lead to suggestions about particular reading materials, knowledgeable people, and group trips to sacred Druze sites. My constant interactions allowed me to maintain a grounded perspective on everyday activities and to stay informed about events that were relevant to my overall research goals. Once I had introduced myself to some of the local shop clerks, bakers, hair stylists, and others, I made my research intentions clear and was constantly advised.
to speak with various people, including certain *mushayekh*, or to attend religious seminars that took place in various Druze communities. The people I had met all eventually began to refer me to the same individuals, many of whom I was able to contact, and to the same events, many of which I was able to attend.

The religious and historical curricula that I was especially interested in reviewing were not archived nor indexed with any formal record. Rather, relevant resources included books and pamphlets often available during religious seminars or devotionals. Participant observation allowed me to understand how educational materials and events were made available, if they were being engaged with, and why they were considered either useful or inadequate. Whether or not these resources were accessible and beneficial played a part in the construction of Druze identity in Lebanon. For instance, the stories about revered historical figures often referenced in lectures or written about in published materials, have served as lessons in morality to promote shared values. Having participated in many activities of the American Druze Society, I also took into consideration educational resources developed outside of Lebanon. Over the years, the work of the American Druze Society has resulted in various tools and efforts which have included programs to teach children Arabic, weekly internet seminars concerning ethics and morals, and publications that explain some of the philosophical foundations of the faith.

The resources I engaged with allowed me to consider both the production and consumption of cultural heritage. Much like any other subjective source of information, I remained aware of the potential biases of those involved in the seminars and events I attended. Some printed materials were not always easy to locate and certain events were not always easy to attend, but in general I was most interested in those things that were accessible to the majority of Druze individuals. Esoteric and deeply philosophical texts, of which few exist, were not relevant
in their scope since theological debates were not the focus of this study. In particular, engaging with the *Kitab al-Hikma* or other religiously significant texts, such as the doctrinal interpretations written by al-Amir as-Sayyid in the 15th century, was neither within my capability nor in my academic purview. Simply put, Druze mysticism and existential philosophy remained beyond the range of the research goals while these religious materials did not receive astute treatment herein.

I recorded notes on the range of material resources I encountered. This allowed me to understand if and how the community valued these material resources and offered some direction for the applied implications of this research. Participating in specific educational events and visiting significant historical and religious sites allowed me to identify some key aspects of Druze culture to frame what might be at stake for the group. To be more specific, I engaged with a significant number of educational resources firsthand and observed how other Druze were utilizing these. I noted that some segments of the population were more likely to attend certain events and that not all of these were well received. This helped inform my continued inquiry into the collective perceptions of Druze educational resources to attain a careful consideration of what held the most meaning for Druze individuals.

**The Research Sample**

The inclusion criteria for my sample were simple. I interviewed both men and women over the age of eighteen who were of Druze descent, through both of their parents or solely through their father, and who possessed Lebanese citizenship or maintained their primary residence in Lebanon. Concerning Druze parentage, descent is traced through the patriline while a significant majority of marriages in the community in Lebanon remain endogamous.
Exogamous marriages between a Druze woman and a non-Druze man were not very common and the children are considered to inherit the father’s religious identity. My sample, included individuals residing in predominantly Druze villages as well as those who did not. I also conducted expert interviews, and a handful of regular interviews, among male and female mushayekh (nine male and six female to be exact), who were defined by their status as initiated members of the religious community. The process of initiation requires that individuals make clear their intentions to become a sheikh or sheikha while fellow mushayekh inquire about the potential initiate’s moral character. The potential initiate continues to attend sessions at their local majlis and adopts the symbolic dress code and modest lifestyle associated with mushayekh. Initiated mushayekh know one another and are known throughout their communities and differ from some older adults who live a similarly austere lifestyle and who share a symbolic connection to mushayekh as they study Druze theological philosophy.

In order to meet potential research participants, I began by referring to previous contacts I had made through my involvement in the American Druze Society and distant relations living in the town of Aley. In some instances, these individuals helped me to cultivate social connections that lead to a number of research interviews using a snowball sample, also referred to as chain referrals or reputational selection (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999:269). However, the majority of my sample included individuals I met at random or in attending various religious seminars and social events. This helped ensure that my sample did not focus excessively on a specific group of individuals and those they knew closely. Most notably, my connections and personal contacts helped me to establish communication with notable individuals whom I sought out after learning of their expertise on subjects pertinent to the research themes.
Susan Weller explains that nonrandom sampling might be disadvantageous in that it is more difficult to estimate the bias of respondents that might not be representative of the general population (Weller 1998:374). Yet these issues are not always significant when the researcher has a number of respondents to choose from, allowing them to draw on specific segments of the community (Weller 1998:374). My sample was neither entirely systematic nor based on convenient connections. While the snowball sampling I utilized is considered somewhat of a convenient approach to sampling, the people I was referred to were very diverse and in many instances I actively pursued particular segments of the population that were being less represented (e.g. males or females or individuals from a variety of age ranges) and this helped ensure a diverse and representative sample.

Robert Trotter and Jean Schensul say that random sampling should be supplemented with other sampling methods, such as convenient and snowball samples that help guarantee a representative sample of the group (1998:703). I also utilized saturation sampling which Trotter and Schensul define as: “the process of interviewing a succession of individuals to the point where no new information is obtained from a subsequent set of interviews” (Trotter and Schensul 1998:703). They also explain that saturation sampling is important when studying larger aspects of culture, such as heritage and identity (Trotter and Schensul 1998:703-704). For me, saturation sampling involved reaching a point of “sufficient redundancy” wherein semi-structured interviews did not significantly yield new ideas. This was also reflected in terms of participating in the range of available educational events and in being referred to individuals involved in those events (Trotter and Schensul 1998:704).

In pursuing particular potential respondents, I was aware of possible sources of variation on the important themes and I worked to have these topics covered by including a spectrum of
diverse individuals, including *mushayekh* and people from different towns or from different families (Trotter and Schensul 1998:704). In pursuing specific interviewees or in deciding to conduct oral histories with other participants, random sampling was not integral since talking with people about cultural phenomena could potentially yield similar responses (Handwerker and Borgatti 1998:553). Penn Handwerker and Stephen Borgatti explain: “The socially constructed nature of cultural phenomena, however, means that any one person who knows about a particular cultural phenomenon participates with other experts in its construction” (Handwerker and Borgatti 1998:553). They also state that ethnographic research does not require a massive sample size and that the findings of such research have demonstrated both reliability and validity (Handwerker and Borgatti 1998:554). Although replication of this study may not lend much credence to the validity of the interpretive feedback that participants offered, a comparable approach to these topics would likely result in similar themes and responses.

Particular attention was given to groups that may be considered relatively marginalized and I sought a balanced sample that included diverse age groups and equal representation from both men and women. For example, early on in the field it became apparent that more male contacts were willing to participate. This may have been due to any number of factors including being comfortable with inviting a relative stranger into their homes and sharing their opinions in a semblance of privacy. Such exchanges may have been an issue particularly among *sheikhas* who are expected to maintain their privacy when in public and to avoid private interaction with males that are not in their agnatic kin groups. Whatever the case may have been, I focused on recruiting potential female participants and resulted in a nearly even ratio.

In general, I was not necessarily interested in any one category of the Druze population and aimed for a sample that was representative of the community as a whole. I gained the
majority of respondents from a sample that included chain referrals which are important in Druze communities where individuals are familiar with much of the population based on their extended relations. I also reached out to contact potential participants for oral histories and expert interviews based on a reputational selection process which allowed me to assess how particular individuals were regarded in the community and what their roles were perceived to be.

Ethical Considerations

Having worked with the Druze community in the diaspora, I was somewhat aware of many of the possible ethical implications that might have arisen from this proposed research. Some of the larger ethical considerations stemmed from my positionality as an insider or member of the same religious community, although many recognize the apparent differences between these communities in Lebanon and the United States. My position as a religious insider didn’t necessarily ingratiate me to many who labeled me as an American foremost. This was especially the case with me since I had previously visited Lebanon only once and the novelty of their culture was likely apparent in the way I carried myself and communicated. The principal issues I was concerned with were misrepresenting myself as an expert in doctrinal knowledge and negotiating to make some religious information more accessible while maintaining a respectful distance from the more esoteric and hypercritical elements of the faith.

As an academic, I knew that it was important to remain humble and to refrain from assumptions that positioned me as a cultural expert whose formal education provided knowledge superior to my informants. My chosen methods and approach to the data, which centered on the importance of individual discourse in identifying the issues at stake, helped ensure that any
proposed application of this research stems from the opinions of the research participants and stakeholders themselves.

Before heading into the field I spent time learning about the research protocol established by the university’s institutional review board, which detailed the processes in protecting the rights and confidentiality of research informants. Participants were consistently advised about any potential risks involved in taking part in research interviews, oral histories, and focus groups. Individuals were asked for their consent to participate once I reviewed the details about where and how their opinions would be shared (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999:183-184). Informed consent forms were offered in both English and Arabic and I explained that their feedback was to remain anonymous. To do this, informant’s names and other signifying characteristics were removed and their interviews were associated with assigned number codes. Only generic identifiers such as gender or age and some specialized roles (e.g. mushayekh) have been referenced in subsequent chapters but do not provide any overly obvious identity markers.

Informant confidentiality was further protected by placing digital audio files and interview transcripts onto a personal external hard drive that remained in a secure location. Each research participant was associated with a unique code while transcribing their audio interviews and no names were associated with their feedback in anyway. Participants were also given the option not to have their voice recorded and a total of six individuals requested that I simply take notes. Although most research informants said that they wouldn’t mind being identified in the write up of this project, I did not provide an option to use real names. As Jean and Stephen Schensul and Margaret LeCompte point out: “it is never possible to assess adequately in advance which data, if revealed, might become harmful to an informant” (Schensul, Schensul, and
Informants were always made aware of their right to withdraw from participating at any time during the interview process but none chose to do so.

I did not recruit identifiably vulnerable populations including those under the age of eighteen or those with cognitive issues that might impair their ability to give their full consent to participate. While the risks of participation were relatively minimal, some of the topics are somewhat personal and may be considered sensitive. I also made sure that interview locations suited participants’ needs and offered a relatively private venue. It was important to consider that unlike other scientists conducting research: “The long-term presence of ethnographers in the field may also be confusing to study participants because the boundaries between friendship and professional research conduct become blurred” (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999:193).

Throughout my time among the Druze in Lebanon, I made plenty of research contacts and friends but strove to make sure people were aware of my vested interest in the research project so as not to misrepresent myself. This is not to say that my interest in the success of my research trumped the interests the community. Rather, my interest in the earnest needs of the community has always been my first priority and it frames the fundamental focus of my research, to preserve Druze heritage and shared identity and to promote an active interest in religious and historical knowledge.

Conclusions

Rather than privilege the representations of heritage that are embodied in specific sites of historical and cultural significance my methods have allowed me to focus on the people that attribute these places with meaning and the qualities linked to this process. Taking an important point from Cathy Stanton: “anthropologists studying heritage should be bolder about doing what
we have always done in other settings—talking about specific social characteristics and relationships and how they are linked with discursive practices and the workings of power” (Stanton 2005:429). Participant observation, oral histories, and semi-structured interviews are among the most indispensable approaches to understanding the social organizations and power structures pertinent to any applied project and are essential to comprehensive and robust ethnographic research.

As will be illustrated in chapters six and seven, I used a discourse oriented approach to develop a discussion that weaves together a diverse data set. Since the interview methods I employed were largely semi-structured, I took liberties to offer probe or follow-up questions which stimulated further discussion into topics that research participants felt the need to further discuss. Diverging from the question guides was not problematic and themes relating to power, status, and stigma constantly came up. As well, the flexibility unstructured, oral history interviews provided further opportunity to share discussions with people about their personal lives and the subjects of their particular interests or private experiences.

In his book *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai explained that Western nations: “have become host to populations (typically from the Third World) that carry the primordial bug – the bug, that is, that makes them attached in infantile ways to blood, language, religion, and memory.” (Appadurai 2005 [1996]:143). In my opinion, these communities represent tenacious individuals whose very identity has been shaped by their heritage and the veracity that characterizes their complex proclivity to retain what they know and to pass it on to subsequent generations. While modernity and the supposedly natural progression of an increasingly globalized world is often depicted as being in conflict with the preservation of traditional knowledge, cultural heritage endures. As discussed in my review of the academic literature in
chapter two, heritage has been treated with a myriad of approaches, which despite their differences collectively illustrate the complexity of this most integral cultural concept.
Chapter 6 History, Religious Knowledge, and Druze Identity

The following two chapters present the data from this research project and are essentially an extension of one another. Given the copious amounts of information culled from the 91 interviews I conducted, the feedback from participants was divided into four central topics that include: Druze identity, historical and religious knowledge, the community’s social issues, and identifying resources and means of amelioration. While these four topics build on one another iteratively, the focus of this chapter will be on the first two with the second pair following in chapter seven.

In particular, each question from the three structured interview methods (i.e. semi-structured interviews, expert interviews, and focus groups) was associated with one of the four mentioned topics and then clustered together. The following discussion also includes references to participant observation notes to provide further detail and expand on personal experiences in the field. The collective feedback of participants from each of the interview methods was then supplemented by the oral history interviews, which had differing thematic foci based on the experiences of the individual being interviewed, in addition to notes from my field journal that included participant observation.

Druze identity and historical and religious knowledge are the two topics which represent the larger sections of this chapter. Both of these broader sections include a number of subsections based on the more specific themes that emerged during transcription and the subsequent
categorization of audio interview recordings. As the reader will notice, these subsections are not strictly constrained to the topic area in which they are first discussed. In other words, many themes overlapped one another and were intrinsically related. For example, a theme such as the role of family in encouraging interest in educational resources focused on Druze history, was a topic that came up repeatedly, even if it may not have been an anticipated response to a particular cluster of interview questions. In fact, the often non-linear nature of participants’ responses illustrates that individuals recognized the connections among a variety of questions. In other words, individuals often explicitly recognized the relationships between questions asking them to discuss their Druze identity to those inquiring about shared educational resources or possible social threats to the community’s future.

The intricacy of the interplay between the following sections and subsections, represents the complexity among the theoretical approaches and perspectives on heritage that were discussed in the second chapter, including authenticity, performance, collective memory, and public versus private. The focus of this research has remained on an intangible cultural heritage that is not divorced from the facets that allow individuals to construct their shared identity, including all of the things that culture is associated with. It is my intention that in discussing the collective feedback of research participants, the impenetrability of nebulous topics such as identity, culture, and community will begin to yield and allow us to reach an understanding of how the Druze construct and relate to their shared heritage.

As a final note before beginning to explore the data, the following discussion is comprised of the feedback that individuals based on their opinions and insights. The accuracy or inaccuracy of some statements represents the realities of particular individuals. I have attempted
to situate their opinions in contrast to others as well as in relation to the given literature and even my own experiences living in the community and conducting participant observation.

Druze Identity

The questions included in this section encouraged individuals to explain how they perceived and defined Druze identity. The first questions for each of the three structured interview types asked participants to discuss how they conceptualized the community, the salient features of their Druze heritage, the shared qualities of Druze identity, and the features of historical and religious knowledge they believed to be most significant. The following four subsections address each one of these points in turn but not as discrete discussions.

Identity and Meaning Making

When asked to define their identity, some of my informants started by explaining the importance of referring to the community as Muwahideen rather than Druze. As previously discussed, it is widely recognized that the name Druze was externally ascribed to the community early in the 11th century as a derogatory moniker taken from the namesake of the foremost apostate Nashtakin Ad-Darazi. Despite a number of unconvincing theories to the contrary (Hitti 2008 [1928]), the name Druze is taken from the name of the reviled Ad-Darazi, who attempted to manipulate the faith’s principal message by recruiting his own followers. Indeed, the Druze do not look kindly on Ad-Darazi, who was put to death by Al-Hakim for his treasonous behavior, and their alternative name of Muwahideen is certainly more accurate in non-academic settings. Muwahideen is the plural form of the term Muwahid, which loosely translates into Unitarian.
More specifically, a *Muwahid* is a follower of the path to oneness with God, or *Tawhid*. More specifically, the root of the word *Tawhid is waahid*, or the number one in Arabic. While the name Druze has always remained the more widely accepted moniker, distinguishing it from the name *Muwahideen* is an especially important point as participants discussed their shared cultural identity.

Some individuals explained very directly what Druze identity meant to them, including one 47-year-old man from a town near Aley who stated: “It helps me that it’s my identity, I feel like I belong to a specific group, I have history and roots and heritage and we know who we are.” Others equated being Druze directly with their religious identity and explained that losing your religion was tantamount to losing everything in life. Druze identity was also identified as a basic set of guidelines that defined right from wrong. In these instances, it was intentionally situated as a generic set of guidelines, no different from other religious value systems. For these individuals, being Druze did not represent an identity distinct from other religious sects that shared similar values including the repudiation of lying, stealing, or cheating. Druzeness was often framed as: “a set of norms that could apply to any other religious sect like do’s and don’ts. If you compare it to any other sect in Lebanon, it’s the same basic tenets.” One 27 year old woman who commuted daily from Aley to her job in Beirut put it in similar terms when asked what being Druze meant to her: “Only not to lie, to be honest, to respect our self and to respect the society. But I'm not living like Druze, and I only know these few things about the Druze. I just know what my family taught me.”

It was apparent from the start of the research interviews that significant numbers of individuals expressed dismay with Druze identity generally and were quick to associate their consternation with a personal disconnection from the community as a whole. This disconnection
was repeatedly accompanied by further explanation that they lacked historical and religious knowledge that they believed was in some way essential to group identity. For example, a young graduate instructor at one of the Lebanon’s most prestigious universities explained that being part of the Druze community in his hometown meant: “Conforming to the mainstream idea of Druze, which is basically like the star and having that on, or knowing the five tenets of the faith. A lot of people don’t even know what that is.”

A few individuals expressed indifference stating that they were simply born Druze and that it was an obligation placed on them rather than something that they saw as significant in their personal lives: “It doesn't mean something in particular. I was born like this. I’ve never been really into the details of the tradition.” Some individuals expressed a more severe criticism in that being Druze was meaningless to them. Such statements were accompanied by further opinions that indicated that Druzeness was irrelevant to what did in fact have meaning in their lives. For example, one middle-aged man said that it didn’t mean anything to him while all that mattered was being honest and treating people the way you want to be treated. Another person said: “For me, all religions take you to the same place but in a different way. Some people in the Druze religion think I am crazy. Other religions are open-minded but Druze people are not open-minded. They want to stay close into their society.” In both examples, respondents affiliated being Druze with some negative characteristic such as being closed-minded or as not espousing honesty in some way. In contrast, other individuals used these same exact concepts to describe how they perceived the value of being Druze, stating that the first of the doctrinal precepts is honesty, written as *sidek al-lisan*, which loosely translates into truthfulness of tongue.

Seemingly contradictory notions of Druzeness illustrate the complexity of shared identity and the process of meaning making that informs individuals’ perceived heritage. While some
saw the lack of religious traditions as a weak point in the community others saw it as a strength. For example, as one middle-aged mother and elementary school teacher said: “I am proud because we have a lot of beliefs and the way the religion is organized it’s very open. For example, we don’t fast and pray like other religions because it’s based on your relationship with God which makes our religion more open.” Others explained that the religious doctrine encourages values such as love and respect for others. The value placed on family was among the most commonly cited positive characteristics, which for some included more than just kin. One 21 year old woman who lived in Aley and attended college in Beirut discussed the Druze as an extended family of sorts. For her, being Druze meant: “To work hand-in-hand, to be brothers and sisters, to be one. In Verdun, nobody talks to each other, nobody likes each other. Here you feel close, you feel everybody is your family in the jabal [mountains], like everybody is best friends. I feel like everybody is family.” She went on to explain: “Since we’re a small people, I feel like everybody is related to each other. Even if you don’t know somebody, they know your mom or your grandma, they know your loved ones, so you just feel safe with them.”

The most pervasive theme that participants related to when discussing what being Druze meant to them was a belief in reincarnation. Reincarnation is a formative belief in the Druze doctrine and its importance among my informants in Aley was apparent. It was commonly mentioned here due to the fact that it is a distinguishing feature of the Druze community in Lebanon and in Syria, Jordan, and Israel: “To me all the religions are the same but there is only one thing that makes me think the Druze are special, which is reincarnation. Aside from this, I believe that Druze are the same as any other sect or religion, Christian, Buddhists.” While the similarity among Druze, Christian, and Buddhist faiths is debatable, the respondent highlights

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11 Verdun is an affluent neighborhood in Beirut which borrows its name from the town in France.
reincarnation as something that has significant meaning to her. Similarly, remembering one’s past life was discussed here as a means of providing proof for the legitimacy of the belief in reincarnation. This same young mother of two from a more rural town in Lebanon went on to say: “I've witnessed many reincarnations in my society. When I was a small kid I used to say things about people and they would tell me that I was a woman living in a neighboring village but now I don't remember anything. But I believe, I don’t have any doubt.” When I prompted whether or not the specific woman had been identified as her previous incarnation, she affirmed that this was the case.

As reincarnation continued to emerge throughout other research questions and interview types, individuals often went out of their way to legitimize their beliefs in a number of ways, including one man who was a self-proclaimed atheist. Others explained that reincarnation was a scientific fact, even citing Albert Einstein as a proponent. However, more commonly people said that other religious groups shared the Druze belief in reincarnation, even as an esoteric interpretation of their faith. References to similarities in philosophy with Buddhism came up a surprising number of times and when individuals were asked whether or not they believed the Druze belief in reincarnation was the same as Buddhists they recognized the dissimilarities, mainly that the Druze relegate reincarnation to human beings and believe that males and females retain their gender across lives.

Connections with other faiths were always discussed in a positive way and many interviewees, including mushayekh, elucidated the historical and philosophical connections which show how the doctrine of Tawhid represents their esoteric interpretation. These connections were strongest among the monotheistic faiths of the region, collectively called the People of the Book in reference to the other Abrahamic faiths. The relationship to modern-day
Islam is especially important and opinions concerning the degree of its differences as a separate faith or sect were largely a point of semantics. In other words, both those who stated that the Druze are an entirely unique faith and those who stated that their differences are relatively minimal, rarely offered any substantive differences in their interpretation of the Druze history or the religious doctrine. A prominent librarian in a large Druze majority town put it like this: “I don’t consider Druze a religion but a doctrine, a part of Islam. The Druze doctrine is a philosophic combination, it’s a path, a theory that appeared in a period when Islam was going through a problem and there was a gap between people and religion.”

Finally, one of the last prominent themes to emerge from the questions regarding Druze identity were references to the secular sense of the label. In Lebanon, each person’s identification card states their religious affiliation, which is determined by birth although religious conversion can change this (aside from conversion to being Druze). Thus, religious identity is often conflated with sectarianism, especially among the youth who see this as divisive. As will be discussed in detail further on, Druze identity was sometimes situated as oppositional to a patriotic sentiment concerned with the unification of the various religious sects within the Lebanese state. One young man explained: “First thing I look at myself as a Lebanese and then I’m a Druze. Druze, my religion, comes second. Most Lebanese don’t think that way.” He went on to say that given their history in the region, Druze were likely to have a strong national pride and that not being patriotic was giving in to political, sectarian divisions which he saw as the source of constant civil conflict: “the Druze have a stronger national pride. Politics is killing this country. It’s killing Lebanon. Everyone in Lebanon wants to live together and is living together… Lebanon is tired of problems. Every single Lebanese person is tired of war.”

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12 Here the phrase path was translated from the Arabic maslak. Some scholars and mushayekh referred to the Druze religion as maslak at-Tawhid, meaning “Path to the oneness of God,” to highlight Tawhid as a philosophical way of living. This distinction is further discussed in the next section.
Borders of Druzeness

My informants often reflected upon what makes a person Druze. Continuing with the theme of sectarian identity, a number of respondents said that politics were linked to every religious group: “It’s a political way of conforming rather than a person’s relationship with God. It’s more political than it is religious in that sense.” This informant explained that each sect constantly competed for political power and that the lack of a strong central government ensured that this struggle would continue. By 2016, Lebanon’s parliament had been unable to come to a consensus to elect a president since May 2014. When asked about the significance of having religion associated with one’s identity in the state, a 33 year old man explained: “It’s very important yes, unfortunately. That’s how the Lebanese system works because if you need a job then you have to go get wasta [a favor or personal reference] from someone who is a political leader in your community. That's why I’m saying it’s political.”

In stark contrast to the previous, a significant number of my informants discussed the importance of faith in identifying a person as Druze as a 24 year old man said: “It’s about belief. You have to respect the rules and go by them to be Druze. Druzeness is not only by blood but by practicing the faith as well.” The notion of sincere faith also came up and in a couple of instances respondents mentioned the mithaq, which, as previously explained, is considered to be the figurative contract wherein early adherents had accepted the calling of the faith. One person said that Druze are those who still follow the mithaq without hesitation, recognizing that they are still responsible to be faithful to the truths they accepted in their previous incarnation.
Reincarnation was once again cited as an important defining aspect that set the Druze apart from other groups. The notion that the Druze today remain the same as those who originally accepted the faith nearly one millennium ago, sometimes triggered a discussion about population growth, since some believe that the number of individuals has remained the same over the course of innumerable incarnations: “We are born to each other, our number don’t go up or down, no more people can come into Druze religion. Druze are reincarnated to Druze.” It seemed unclear to me if there was any consensus on this point but those who mentioned it often weren’t convinced that the population remained stable. Some explained that reincarnation played an important role over the course of time and allowed the soul to continually purify itself by living different lives and in different situations to learn from those experiences. One 20 year old student of biology explained that the Druze accept death differently from others and tend to not overact since they know that their loved one is at that moment being reborn to Druze parents. Towards the end of my time in the field I attended the funeral of an older woman who had been in ill-health for the duration of my stay. Given my experience with her mourning daughters that had taken constant care of her, the belief in reincarnation did seem to influence their grief by shaping what they believed was the eventual fate of the deceased. A belief in the process of reincarnation may offer comfort to some but the reaction to the loss of loved ones remains sorrowful. However, when I asked a focus group whether or not the Druze perceived death in the same way as others, they all agreed that the fear of death was mitigated by the belief in reincarnation as a 29 year old software engineer stated: “We do act similar to other religious groups but we think of it differently and some people don’t show grief at all when a loved one has passed away.”
Parentage was among the most important facets of being Druze since there is simply no method of conversion. Similar to other ethnic and religious identities, Druzeness is viewed as inherited from Druze parents. The importance of both parents being of Druze descent was also mentioned. For those born to a Druze father and non-Druze mother, their Druze identity is sometimes called into question. For those born to a Druze mother and non-Druze father, the lineage remains determined by the patriline, thus Druzeness is seen as an inherited quality. However, some Druze in the diaspora that might consider both lines of descent equally important might still ascribe to their Druze identity through their mother’s lineage if they feel that it provides value in their lives. While there might be a marked difference in the reckoning of inherited cultural identity between Lebanese Druze and some in the diaspora, I did not encounter any conversations contesting the lineage of such individuals. For a young man of religiously mixed parentage, the differences were mostly insignificant, although he recognized that others sometimes called his identity into question: “I am free to do whatever I want, I know what’s right and wrong and my mom is Christian, I took from both religions, how Druze treat each other and how Christians think and treat each other, I think I took the best of both.”

As will be discussed further on, opinions concerning endogamy varied greatly and a generational divide seemed apparent. One young lady that had lived in the United States for many years and who was recently engaged to a young Druze man explained: “Marriage is probably hard enough without having two different religions in the house. It's just easier to live with people of the same nature and the same belief system. I have a lot of friends in America, Mexicans or Indians or American Chinese, they would always go back to what they know, even if they're American citizens.” For both the Druze in diasporic communities and those in the
countries of origin, endogamous marriage is considered any marriage between fellow Druze, since parallel cousin marriage has become progressively less common.

There is a significant amount of social pressure on both young men and women and their parents to marry within the Druze community. Indeed, parents can certainly be faced with anger, gossip, or even exclusion from other family members if they allow their son or daughter to marry outside of the faith. One young man who I conducted an oral history with had married outside of the faith a couple of years prior. In raising him, his parents had been relatively liberal and he had attended grade school with Christians and Muslims and they had turned a blind eye when he dated outside of the community. Early on when his relationship to the lady that is now his wife became serious, he and his family faced significant social pressure: “I was shocked how serious it got. You know when you die, people will come to your parents and say, ‘God preserve those that still remain.’ People actually told that to my parents. So people were giving their condolences for me. So it was that serious. I was equated to a dead man.” Certainly more moderate opinions of exogamy were mentioned alongside a great number of examples of aunts, uncles, and siblings that had married out. One mother of a young boy offered her shifting pinion on the subject: “I understand it for social reasons and not a religious reason, for marriage to work it has to have a lot of common culture and social background. If not it will be difficult. I didn’t mind my son to marry who he wants, but now living in the community, in this society, I would rather him marry Druze.”

Some people were critical of the limitations of inclusion. Oftentimes, these same individuals discussed a lack of a distinct Druze identity and expressed indifference as well. One man extrapolated on his experience as a young adult: “My parents did not teach me about Druze history or religion. I still don’t have interest to learn more. I lived in Kuwait 15 years… My dad
was very knowledgeable and he used to write and he didn’t care, it didn’t affect him. And my mom didn’t have too much knowledge either, even though at the end she became a sheikha.”

More critically, another person said that aside from birth, he considered conformity as the key aspect that made people Druze: “The ability to accept things blindly… Fear of not conforming to what everyone else would actually think, the mainstream and the norm.”

During focus groups, participants were asked to discuss what kinds of attributes, values, and knowledge they associated with their own Druze heritage. Similar to Druze identity, Druze heritage was discussed in terms of ancestry, culture, religion and history. In a focus group full of her peers, a 38 year old woman from Aley who owned a marketing and public relations firm said: “I define it as my identity and my approach to being human. My parents had a good role in that but also because I was raised in a religious school. So there were many lectures about this.” Religious identity was also discussed as an important facet of Druze heritage. Some participants said that it was instilled in the home since childhood and that having religiously inclined family members, especially mushayekh, strengthened religious identity and knowledge. When prompted to explain how they defined a strong Druze heritage, another woman in the same focus group offered the following perspective:

We were thinking that we were so strong, they don’t teach you religious beliefs, they teach you the stories of strength and battles, history of heroism of Muwahideen and difficulties that make you look up to those people who were defying everybody else as a minority. So you forge this identity that we are not scared. Having the hope of living forever through reincarnation, it breaks your fear. That’s the strength.

This focus on historical accounts mostly related to battle and heroism, was a defining characteristic of respondents’ historical knowledge and was often brought up as a point of pride.
During another focus group which included college-age men and women, one person said that Druze heritage is tribal. For him, the label implied that Druze heritage was outmoded and required conforming. He explained that his mother was a sheikha and had considered not driving since some of her fellow mushayekh might consider it sinful, although he also recognized that many did not. He said that this issue of limiting how and where sheikhas could drive was a problematic part of his heritage while a female participant explained that this was a modern misinterpretation of the teachings of al-Amir as-Sayyid who lived in the 15th century. The teachings of al-Amir as-Sayyid stem from his explanation of the Hikma and is an integral source of learning and indoctrination for all religious Druze. She went on to extrapolate: “We can say that al-Amir as-Sayyid explained the epistles, but they are not understanding it. So when he said women should not go out on their own, that was because it was when Druze were trying to hide. These are not Tawhid values. Tawhid has great values, like respect for women and freedom.”

In yet another focus group, others offered somewhat similar criticisms stating that they believed Druze heritage was limiting in one way or another. A young man and woman agreed that it separated people in a practical sense: “Druze heritage holds you back from learning other religions to a certain extent. There is a gap between religions. Religion separates people, creates a gap between people.” This stood in stark contrast to what another person mentioned during the final focus group I conducted: “I was raised in a Catholic school and I was taught the same things. It complimented my home education.” More often than not, individuals cited personal examples of being able, if not encouraged, to learn about other faiths. Druze heritage was said to simultaneously have firm boundaries while being conceptually malleable and open to the integration of various socioreligious interpretations. This is in part due to the fact that,
doctrinally, the faith has progressively built upon Gnostic philosophy, and an inner interpretation of Abrahamic religions, including the Sufi tradition.

For the Druze, the roots of Druze heritage include meaningful connections to ancient Greek philosophers, including Plato, Socrates, and Pythagoras. These connections encouraged many Druze to view the teachings of the doctrine as a philosophy or way of life rather than a religion: “Tawhid means to see yourself within your three dimensions. You are not only body, you are not only mind, and you are not only soul. We are not a religion; we are a philosophical group that understood Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in a very innovative way.” For these individuals, the importance of distancing the doctrine away from religion was likely due to further negative associations with that term. In Lebanon, religion has a debauched reputation for many, especially among the younger generations that view religiously-divided political parties as corrupt and divisive. Thus, positioning the Druze doctrine, which was often discussed as the most essential part of shared heritage, as something not religious, allowed them to remove these negative values.

For one very prominent sheikh who participated, the phrase “Druze religion” was a misnomer for entirely different reasons. He added that the phrase maslak at-Tawhid, meaning “Path to the oneness of God,” was more accurate. His reasoning was that Tawhid is the way of worshipping while Islam, which includes the essential elements of Judaism and Christianity, is the religion. His succinct statement nicely summarized his perspective on the connections between the Druze and other Abrahamic faiths:

Islam is the last holy message and includes the realities of the others. Druze is not the religion but the path and method of understanding and living Islam. There are three steps or levels. The first step includes reading and knowing and recognizing God’s sovereignty.
The second step is faith or belief in your heart. The third level is to worship God as if you are seeing him all the time, and this is the *Tawhid*.

**A Sense of Community**

To preface this discussion on community, it is important to understand that using the term “community” might imply a unified social structure with little interpretive variety. The notion of depicting a neat and tidy Druze community free of hierarchy is not at all the goal. Rather, the processes of relating to the historical past and the cultural present both offer a means of constructing the Druze sense of community, connecting participants to a shared identity and a communal past through the processes of heritage. For a group as distinct as the Druze, a strong sense of community was not necessarily a given. Respondents were asked what it meant to them to be part of the Druze community where they lived. While much of the total sample of research participants were living in Aley at the time I conducted interviews, some were also living in Beirut or in towns of varying sizes and demographics throughout the mountainous regions of southern Lebanon. Differences in the overall sense of community were sometimes apparent and will be highlighted in the following discussion where relevant. It is also important to be reminded that belonging to what is seen as a specific religious community in Lebanon is a central facet of the national structure as a 29 year old reported: “In Lebanon you can’t live alone. You need to be part of a sect to be a citizen because you can't be a citizen if you are not a part of some group that defends you, that defends your rights.”

My first interviewee identified a strong sense of Druze community where he lived. He gave as an example the fact that all the Druze residents attend and show their support at
weddings and funerals. Indeed, the funeral I attended included hundreds of attendees even though individuals are traditionally buried the very next day after they have passed. Funeral attendees included very distant relations who shared their family name with the deceased, even if those connections stretched many generations back. Having become acquainted with a number of residents in Aley, it was apparent that even those who didn’t see eye-to-eye had put aside their differences in a display of familial solidarity at the funeral. For the Druze, having a large number of people attend one’s funeral and witness their last rites is a testament of belonging to the community.

A 23 year old woman born and raised in Aley perceived a strong sense of community: “It means safety and everything to me. You feel safe, like you’re between your family. We are all like a family, the way we treat each other. If you need them they are there for you.” Another 56 year old man who rented a home in Aley with his family to work seasonally as a restaurant manager agreed that even with differing political views the Druze still came together in times of crisis, recognizing the second doctrinal precept, hofez il-ikhwan, which translates into “preservation” or “protection of the brethren.” This religious principle in particular has often translated into a rallying cry of sorts whenever Druze face an imminent threat from those defined as outsiders. A number of specific examples arose as respondents referred to more recent incidents including the conflict that occurred with Hezbollah, a largely Shia political party with militant power in Lebanon, in May 2008. One 36 year old woman who had a position of some importance at the local community college said: “Druze felt the sense of pride in May when they fought Hezbollah and stopped them from coming into the mountains even without having the weapons they have. No other religion did anything. Even a person like me who is not very religious, but my defense mechanism kicks in when someone talks wrong about Druze. We feel
we are unstoppable by living in this community.” Other more dated examples were also mentioned in some cases, including the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

Support in times of conflict was also said to be positioned as an exception to typical social relations where, despite their apparent ferocity and military prowess, the Druze are more likely to avoid armed clashes if given an alternative. A 32 year old from the neighboring town of Btater said: “We don’t like to interfere with any problems, politics or religious problems, that’s why we stay away. But one good thing about us is that when we’re in need, we’re like barbarians. We’re worse than barbarians.” Another 38 year old man living in a semirural, predominantly Druze town called Kobbeih said that usually the Druze are occupied with fighting one another, although it was apparent from his tone that he was implying competitiveness or bitter rivalry. However, when there are outside threats, they unite in an impressive display of strength.

His reference to contentions within the community was further described by others who thought that social support was weak. Even before this question was asked, one 28 year old man who had lived and worked for a number of years in Australia explained that many people may not be able to help one another due to lacking the necessary finances. He added: “It’s very rare to see people helping each other in the Druze society… If someone dies there are a lot of people that still remember their obligations to attend their funeral but they don’t help each other in school, to graduate, or build homes.” One woman originally from the primarily Druze city of Suwayda in Syria said: “There is a strong community in Aley, but they are against each other. I have been here for 45 years, married at fifteen years old. It wasn’t like this before. The intentions changed, they changed to the worst, not only in Aley. It’s the whole world that changed.” This reference to the influence of globalization was alluded to by others, especially when discussing
what they perceived as excessive contact with other religious groups. As will be discussed later on, the influence of the urban society of Beirut on nearby Aley was sometimes situated as an enticing metropolitan center that promoted behavior contradictory to traditional Druze values.

Participants also said that the community didn’t mean much to them in general and that working outside of their Druze communities resulted in significantly less interaction with others. These same individuals mentioned that the majority of their coworkers and friends were non-Druze, clearly having making a strong impression on their social lives. One young professional in his mid-20s working in Beirut expressed disappointment that his detachment from the Druze community in which he lived would likely make it more difficult for him to connect with young Druze women as possible marriage partners. Another young man serving in the Lebanese military said that Druze particularism was no longer apparent and that he could discern no difference between Aley and other large predominantly Christian cities like Ashrafiya and Zahle when walking in their souks. He said that people dressed and spoke the same and that there used to be more mushayekh in Aley. With specific reference to speech differences among groups, others had mentioned that the Druze largely retained an accent wherein the Arabic letter qaf was stressed. This linguistic inflection can be used to identify Druze throughout Lebanon and can also be negatively associated with the backwater and the rural, giving those who would rather blend in a reason to alter their accent. While the Druze are known to speak with the stressed qaf, it was also mentioned to me that a few Christians residing in the predominantly Druze areas might also share this trait.

In comparison to other Druze towns, Aley may have been a somewhat different case although it was not the only bustling Druze city that bordered the expanse of Beirut. A woman in her upper 20s working in journalism articulated the unique character of Aley: “But they have
more flexible mentality here and they love each other more. I don’t know why this is the case
exactly. Maybe because there is a combination and mix of culture between village and city. They
are mixed together. This is what makes people lost and not knowing how to treat each other.”
Aley was described as having a more open society than Druze villages and even more open than
the similarly large Baaqline, situated in the more pastoral regions of Lebanon’s Shouf
Mountains. While the notion of being an open society refers to less Druze particularism and, in
some instances, a greater Western influence, it was not always related to the strength, or lack
thereof, of the so-called community.

Quite frequently, participants also compared the general situation of the Druze in
Lebanon to those in the diaspora. Some said that those overseas, referring mainly to the Druze
communities in Canada, the United States, and Venezuela, from the younger generation are more
connected to the religion and to their identity. Having lived in the United States for a number of
years, one individual said that young people overseas had more respect for mushayekh and for
their elders while their Lebanese counterparts took them for granted. When I prompted her to
explain what exactly she thought her Lebanese peers were taking for granted, she explained that
Druze in the United States wanted to learn more and asked mushayekh more questions when
presented with the opportunity to talk to a sheikh at the events organized by the American Druze
Society. She went on to say that since Aley is mostly Druze, it lacked a sense of community
unlike those Druze living in Beirut, surrounded by Christians or Muslims, who went out of their
way to construct “community,” in her words: “It’s already a community so you don’t feel like
it’s a community. It’s not emotionally, it’s not like mentally, a community. It’s like ‘We’re
Druze, move on.’” While the Druze are without a doubt a minority in both the countries of origin
and the diaspora, the lack of minority sentiment in majority Druze towns throughout Lebanon seems to some Druze to have weakened attachment to a “community.”

One of my interviewees, who had also lived a significant amount of time in the United States, shared very similar ideas about the differences she saw between younger Druze there and in Lebanon. She said that people in the United States were more Druze in her view and that the differences lie in the values taught in both school and by parents at a young age:

In the States you are taught in the school about being an individual and asking questions, always questioning everything, never taking anything for granted. So in the States, because of this mentality, we all go and we ask questions. Here they just believe whatever their parents tell them without even looking it up or actually asking someone who is knowledgeable on the topic whether this is true or not. I don’t feel like they would explore or try to understand it better. They just go by what everyone tells them.

Whether or not the majority of Druze youth lacked a critical approach to learning about their community remains an arguable point. However, this seemed to be a common perception even among those that had lived in Lebanon the entirety of their lives.

Other respondents distinguished between the social and religious facets of the Druze community, usually expressing their lack of attachment to the former. They elucidated that there is a sense of Druze community but that some didn’t care that much, mainly as a result of lacking interest in knowing more about the religion. They went on to say that people in the community had more freedom to pursue outward interests or even marry non-Druze. A 21 year old woman from a Druze town near Beirut known for having a proportionately large number of mushayekh illustrated the interconnection of many of the important facets that shape their sense of a
community identity: “We have freedom. But when you know people in Beirut, for example, you see that they have more freedom and that’s when clashes start with our parents when we ask for more freedom.” As we will see in following sections of this chapter and the next, the interests in learning about Druze history and the doctrine, or maslak at-Tawhid, is a complicated endeavor influenced by societal opinions that stand at the intersection of social freedom, available resources, and the authority to define the valid and the authentic.

Defining Significant Facets of Historical and Religious Knowledge

In order to better understand how individuals defined what they thought to be the most essential kinds of knowledge that constituted Druze identity, they were asked what aspects of Druze history and religion are important to know. Beginning with the former, participants identified a plethora of historical figures and events that they believed were pivotal, even if their own familiarity with the details was lacking. This included the Druze’s connections to Islam as well as what they saw as the fundamental differences between Islam and Druze religion. Many with whom I spoke were curious to understand the circumstances by which the religious ideas were founded by Al-Hakim bi-Amrillah and how they spread through his selected messengers. They also mentioned the importance of understanding the translation of the religious message or mithaq, which is said to have been accepted by the faith’s original adherents.

The stories of the religious messengers and other pious historical figures, among which were the first proselytizers as discussed in the historical overview, are told in many Druze households and the stories of their lives and deeds continue to shape the sense of collective history of the Druze. Some of these individuals are associated with certain places called maqams
(see Figure 6.1) which are visited by many Druze throughout Lebanon as well as those living in the diaspora. *Maqams* mark places of significance where these important historical figures stayed, or experienced something miraculous, or in some instances are interred.

![Maqam in southern Lebanon of Nabi Ayoub, associated with the Prophet Job.](image)

**Figure 6.1** *Maqam* in southern Lebanon of Nabi Ayoub, associated with the Prophet Job.

Some *maqams* are also associated with the more recently deceased, such as particular *mushayekh* that were known for their piety and devout lifestyles. Despite the prevalent reputation of many of these figures, and the fact that their *maqams* were popular sites for family gatherings or contemplative visits, a significant number of people did not know much about their lives and efforts. Even if these same individuals admired these figures, this didn’t suffice for some as a 26 year old newspaper editor explained that the generation of her parents did not teach their offspring about important historical figures like the father of the historical Abraham\(^\text{13}\): “They don’t teach us anything… Some of them don’t even know who he is but just that he was

\(^{13}\) The same figurative patriarch of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
someone who was important in the religion. They use all of these names and they call out the names of these people but I don’t know who any of these people are.”

During my fieldwork, I took advantage of every opportunity to visit these important places, even joining trips with one of the local women’s social groups that pooled money from each attendee to rent a bus for trips that spanned the entire day. Of the seven I was able to visit, six included a stone bier as the focal point, even if it was understood that the important person was not buried there. Each maqam was maintained by a number of local mushayekh who tended to the building, which often included large patios or forested spaces for picnicking. For many, these are gathering places of social and even spiritual significance, symbolically grounding Druze history. However, the sometimes shallow understanding of these important figures was problematic for some respondents. One father of four girls expressed his disappointment at the zeal of some who didn’t take the time to reflect on why these figures remain important: “Stories of prophets don’t do any good. But we have to take the example of the prophets’ lives, not worship them.”

A mother of two living in Aley said that she learned a lot about history of the Druze during her time at certain Druze religious lessons but criticized these classes for consistently focusing on battles and wars. Despite another individual that explained that the Druze were not hostile and always fought for their own defense, the critique that history so often emphasizes major events like war, was often expressed. In my experience with speakers at events hosted by the American Druze Society, I had heard similar complaints wherein the seminars were difficult to understand due to a lack of previous knowledge, or were not interesting to some because of their focus on historical dates and innumerable conflicts.
Nearly every respondent agreed that knowing more about history was an important step to knowing more about the doctrine. Concerning the types of religious or doctrinal knowledge, participants listed beliefs that included reincarnation, the five cosmic principles as represented by the star, and strict monotheism or belief in God’s oneness. While some identified the importance of knowing and or sharing these beliefs, many others directly expressed their interest in learning more by stating their response as a question. Many asked questions like why the Universal Mind takes precedence in the faith, why was the da’wa, or call to faith, closed, or why should we fast before Eid al-Adha, the holiday which commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son. Eid al-Adha is the only religious holiday for the Druze and represents a time for families to get together and for people to visit one another in their communities. It was frequently referenced as an example of something of significance within the community that needed clarification, especially because some believed that the Druze interpretation of Abraham’s role in history is different than that of Muslims, who also celebrate the same holiday.

Although respondents identified certain customs or beliefs that defined the community, they often believed that they lacked traditions comparable to Christians and Muslims in Lebanon: “In my opinion, any religion has their own rituals…Christians pray, hymn, when they go to church they feel God’s presence. You go to mosque you hear Quran and prayer. As Druze we don’t pray or fast and we don’t practice religious rituals to get attached to our religion.” In contrast to the participant’s last point, a few other individuals, including a sheikh whom I interviewed, stated that the Druze faith didn’t place significance on houses of worship while the presence of God is apparent in all of creation and not more or less in a church or mosque. Understandably however, houses of worship serve as gathering places that emphasize at once social cohesion and symbols of the faith, not so different from the magams.
Despite the common sentiment that the Druze lack specific prayers or religious traditions and rituals, people frequently provided examples of all of these things. These were not cases of self-contradiction, but the paradox existed because many were uncertain about what constituted Druze-specific beliefs and customs. Moreover, their shared perspective that these things did not exist was actually an issue of access and interest. Expanding on this idea, one young man said:

When I compare Druze to any other religion, I would say we don’t have a clear vision of what we are. Say, for example, I would wish to raise my children as Christians because you have the nativity story. You have a story to tell. You have certain things everyone knows. We don’t have this for our children. When growing up you just can’t tell your children to watch a movie about Jesus but then we don’t have a Druze thing to tell a child. We don’t have any particular Abrahamic stories.

It often seemed that both Christian and Muslim historical and religious narratives were more prominent in Lebanese society, even among the Druze. One young woman living with her family in a predominantly Christian part of Beirut told me exactly that, while referring to the openness and transparency of Christian religious belief in comparison to her own.

The issues of lacking educational resources focused on their history and faith was often discussed alongside its perceived ramifications. When I asked one individual what aspects of the Druze religion she thought were important to know, she responded: “I can’t say anything about that because I don’t know any aspect of religion. I wish we can have something that you can pass on and teach your kids, I wish they simplify things for a five year old for example... We need to have something to explain to our kids why they should marry Druze.” For her, a dearth of knowledge about the religion would clearly result in a lack of intention for her son to marry endogamously. One woman in college believed that although it seemed closedminded she
supported the notion of endogamy since it kept the community close together: “Let’s say I marry a Christian. Then I would lose my Druzeness and maybe become more Christian and that’s not the point of our religion. Where religion is to understand different beliefs but be in our own religion.” For my informants, the point of religious as well as historical knowledge wasn’t something easily agreed upon. However, the process of learning about these things, incorporating them into one’s life and personal identity, and enculturating them among the youth, was consistently associated with preserving Druze heritage and culture in general.

**Historical and Religious Knowledge**

Many of my informants were concerned with Druze history and the basic tenets of the faith. The following conversations begin with a personal look at the kinds of knowledge particular to the Druze that participants felt they lacked. This intimate consideration of self-knowledge exemplified the existing state of affairs so that issues of interest in and access to historical and religious knowledge could further be explored. The second and third of the following subsections deal with interest and access from the perspectives of sheikhs and non-mushayekh respectively.

**Identifying Personal Knowledge Gaps**

I asked my informants if they were knowledgeable about Druze history and religious tenets and what they might like to learn more about. Individuals were first asked to consider whether or not they were familiar with Druze history. Some immediately expressed their interest in learning more even if they considered themselves more informed than their peers. A handful
said that they had attended recently-offered classes conducted by a well-known sheikh in a neighboring town. One woman said that she had completed the first two levels that the sheikh offered. She also believed that the second level, which explored perhaps more esoteric religious concepts, had since become strictly relegated to those individuals that had begun the process of becoming a sheikh or sheikha.

Many individuals identified a personal knowledge gap regarding Druze history. Some said that the problem begins at home and that their families hadn’t taught them much. After growing to adulthood it seemed difficult to start or find the time to learn more and some mentioned that it was simply easier not to bother. A young professional with her own business in Aley added: “I barely know one percent. In comparison to other people, I might know a little more, but I feel I don’t know enough, because I never opened the Hikma to be able to know and understand. I would start reading and then stop, I was hesitant to read because I couldn’t understand the old nahawi Arabic.” This respondent was not only referring to the classical form of Arabic but also to the fact that the religious texts may be difficult to understand for many without proper instruction.

During my time in the field, I had the opportunity to interview people representing a variety of age groups. One woman in her upper 70s said that she learned about Druze history from her father and continued to read books by prominent historians over the years. She said that she always went out of her way to obtain and preserve her books and she seemed to have a substantial collection despite having lost what she had collected when her home was burnt during the Lebanese Civil War. As well, another elder that I interviewed who was in his upper 90s and had remained living in the same town his entire life described his upbringing: “My grandfather lived 105 years. He was a sheikh, as well as my father and brothers. Our house is a house of
ajawid. At seven years old, my dad taught us the mithaq. He started teaching us religion when we were seven years old for me and my brothers and sister.” While certain generational differences clearly existed not all of the older adults I spoke to had been encouraged or instructed by their families to learn more.

When asked what they would like to learn more about, participants sometimes offered specific examples such as why the faith split from Islam and what developments made it different from the other faiths being practiced at the time of its inception. A few individuals said that once you began to learn Druze history, you learned more about yourself. The connections between history, personal identity, and a sense of group belonging seemed obvious to them even if they admitted to being altogether unfamiliar with history. Some believed that once men and women became initiated their learning process was still self-motivated. One man that spent a great deal of time and energy helping young men in his community articulated this point:

Druze history is like sea water. The more you drink from it, the more you get thirsty and you want more of it. You don’t get enough. Any information about the Druze, you get proud of it because you are knowing your roots and history and that’s something a person is proud of and can cherish. The person who doesn’t have a history and a past won’t have a present and a future. That’s why we have to learn lessons and morals from history and the past so we have a planned path forward towards a bright future with hope and honor.

The idea that having strong roots would lead to a bright future may not be as ideal as the sentiments expressed in this quote. Aside from the practical relationship between attachment to ascribed identity and our own histories and beliefs, it should be recognized that there is an
emotional component in the process of meaning making that defines attachment to one’s heritage.

When asked if they knew much about the basic tenets of the Druze faith positive anecdotes were not as forthcoming. Participants similarly replied that they learned some things from parents and grandparents but none expressed a genuine satisfaction with their level of knowledge. They described books and online resources with the caveat that those kinds of sources weren’t always reliable, especially the latter. Indeed, internet webpages were said to offer misleading information some of the time (but it is also important to note that the same can be said of a number of academic articles which emphasize the exotic, misinterpreting and misrepresenting the issues on which they focus). Online resources were mentioned often enough to have been utilized by many of the respondents. The same woman living in a predominantly Christian section of Beirut also said that she had learned what she knew about the Druze faith from her peers from the more rural mountainous regions of Lebanon whom she saw as being more knowledgeable than other Druze she socialized with.

The informants who expressed the most interest in Druze history may have already been better informed than others. Some stated that they were unsure about the meaning of some of the most basic religious ideas including the symbolic star, what its colors signified, and who it represented. In the absence of a clear understanding of these things, some people had expressed forming their own approach to faith that included a focus on Buddhism, Greek philosophy or a broadly theist approach. Concerning the label theist, it sufficed for some to simply say that they believed in God and the details of doctrine didn’t concern them. Others added to this by incorporating what they did know about the Druze faith, including the precepts that place the most importance on being honest and supporting one’s fellow Druze. Others offered a more
cynical view when asked if they knew much about the basic religious tenets: “No, I don’t know. I make fun of it. Today religion is a joke and a lie. Religion is looking at the person based on his honesty, but there is no support for one another.”

The lack of support that individuals sometimes reported spanned across different social, economic, and class structures and was most often discussed in terms of a difference between mushayekh and non-mushayekh. For the woman who had attended the Druze religious and history lessons, her interest in learning more had been stunted since she decided not to pursue the religious lifestyle of a sheikha. She explained that in the more advanced class, those in charge became stricter about students’ clothing and although she had no issue with the austere dress of mushayekh, she did not intend to don the garb herself. She went on to express her opinion that there were a number of groups interpreting the religion differently and that in order to gain an accurate understanding for yourself, one would have to seek religious authorities, namely the mushayekh. Essentially to her, the interpretation of anyone else was not entirely trustworthy.

In contrast to these sentiments, a 28 year old man that had some years earlier begun the process of becoming a sheikh by expressing his sincere interest in learning more to seasoned mushayekh, seemed to disagree. While he said he had stopped after a few months due to differences of religious opinion, he appeared to be content with learning on his own, although his pursuit of what he said was “traditional” religious knowledge was no longer a significant goal. To be considered a serious student of the doctrine among mushayekh, one has to go to the majlis for a period of at least a couple of months and listen to prayers and oration. He said that once your commitment is apparent, they will provide one with more religious knowledge and consider them an initiate. The status of initiated mushayekh is represented by their devotion to learning the doctrine and is not the result of an actual formal ceremony of initiation. In a few instances even
knowledgeable mushayekh willing to take the time and effort to teach others cannot encourage some individuals to see the utility of learning more. One respondent told me that her cousin who was raised in Venezuela had been seeking answers to religious questions. When he visited the family in Lebanon, they took him to see a very prominent sheikh but that for whatever reason, the sheikh’s answers were not satisfying to the young man. Instead, the visit distanced him further and he later converted to Islam after being attracted to that faith through his majority Muslim friends in Venezuela.

A particularly important theme that emerged as individuals discussed the best approach to learning more was the need to think critically. Rather than memorize prayers by rote or review historical dates, they said they needed to make meaning out of the material in ways that made sense in their own lives. Some specified an interest in engaging with the sources themselves, such as the Kitab al-Hikma and the interpretations of al-Amir as-Sayyid. This is not to say that many had the confidence to traverse those dense sources by themselves, although a few people did state that they had done exactly that. On the contrary people overwhelmingly believed that the path to learning would necessarily involve mushayekh but that the style of instruction was not well suited to their interests and needs. Disparities of opinion arose in terms of the responsibilities of those who were already knowledgeable to teach those who were not, and vice versa, attentiveness and commitment from those considered unlearned.

Social Roles of the Learned and Expectations of the Unlearned

During my field experience, I interviewed a number of mushayekh of different statuses and knowledge levels. For many Druze in Lebanon, these individuals represent living symbols of
the faith and can be seen as a sort of archetype that is connected to values such as dedication, austerity, and moderation in all things. The social pressure on these individuals is apparent and is engendered by both their religious peers and non-mushayekh alike. In many respects, the ascetic standards and corresponding criticism is equally applied no matter their age or level of knowledge.

I explored knowledge about history and the faith differently during these interviews. For example, rather than being asked about themselves, participants were asked what aspects of Druze history and religion are most important to know for non-mushayekh. Aside from the usual host of historical figures previously discussed, participants also mentioned the importance of the mithaq and said that even some people who had accepted the calling during the years of disclosure later diverged. They also talked about the community’s historical roots in Ismaili Islam. More specifically they stressed that Tawhid is the deeper interpretation of the revelations of the faiths which preceded it. A prominent sheikh emphasized that Druze history was a history of fighting, which included assisting Salah al-Din’s forces against the Crusaders that came down the east coast of the Mediterranean.

For the Druze, Tawhid is as old as history and is considered the spiritual truth that was present at the time of creation. One individual who had taken great efforts to learn and teach others about the doctrinal principles of the Druze mingled history with spiritual significance:

History can be the last one-thousand years or millions of years. The former is only full of wars wherein we were defending our lands. To be honest, we must look at the history of humanity which is equal to that of the Druze. To know God and the order and the system on which the universe was built, we should be faithful and honest. To protect humanity and let go of the ego, we can begin to reach unity.
Other respondents related Druze history to that of Lebanon and the ancient Levant. They said that the Druze have always been a part of the region but never thought to make an independent state as nation building began to define the modern era. As a people, they expressed their patriotism, by fighting for the state in which they lived and their hostility towards others was always in the interests of preserving their lands. Non-mushayekh explained to me very similar ideas as one person said that this was why the Druze in Israel had acculturated to the society there. Although it was more than pure patriotism that informed the Druze community’s move to side with the Israeli state after clashes with fellow Arabs (Firro 1992:327-349), the lack of expansionist intentions was often cited.

Respondents said that it was the responsibility of the youth to read accurate historical books and find knowledgeable people to explain these resources to them. Although this seems like common sense advice, the barriers, both structural and self-imposed, to stimulating enough personal interest to read books about history are indeed great. Moreover, it was not uncommon to hear people pointedly refer to one book or another as imprecise, illogical, or even rubbish. Various authors on these subjects were castigated for their perspectives or intentions by some of the educated members of the society who might claim that they had personal agendas or that their knowledge was somehow tainted. Couple these issues with the stated effects of globalization, such as what was seen to be a newfound fixation with technology and an increasingly “materialistic” culture, and the result is a situation where neither the learned nor unlearned are motivated to bridge the resulting communication gap.

During my time in Lebanon many people spoke at length about the threats posed by globalization or an increasing value on what they referred to as materialism, which they meant as an increased desire for the consumer goods being imported from abroad. Discussions about an
increasingly materialistic Druze society came from all ages but were fleshed out among a few of my informants in their 20s who were able to articulate their personal experiences. Another important aspect of the material-centric society was the emphasis on personal image, which many mushayekh discussed as an obsession with the ego, or an increase in individualistic or selfish behavior. Some offered overt critiques of an overly narcissistic Lebanese pop culture or the continually larger role that social media plays in their lives. With technology offering an overabundance of factoids and other information at their fingertips, critical thinking skills and depth of analysis may be diminished for some. Collectively, these shifting social aspects will continue to shape the dynamic of communication across generations and perhaps the disparity in what they value as well.

With this same theme in mind, one sheikh offered his opinion: “Some people don’t care. Some parents, they think of the materialism. As long as they have money and a house and all the material things, they don’t teach their kids religion. But the soul needs religion.” In defining the important aspects of religious knowledge for non-mushayekh, a majority of respondents said that religious manners or propriety provides the base for learning. Before religious knowledge can be sought in sincerity, individuals should be exemplars of decency and morality, or the ideal Muwahid. These values are demonstrated in the stories of the Druze historical figures whose lives should be emulated. One sheikh went on to say that even among his peers, a lack of religious manners is a lack of faith, since respecting yourself is the equivalent of respecting God and knowing yourself, was the path to knowing God.

A sheikh from the neighborhood of Ain Hala, a somewhat industrial section of Aley where mushayekh tended to congregate and work, said that people should begin by recognizing that they accepted the doctrine of Tawhid through the mithaq. Another sheikh said that the
heartfelt sincerity by which one sought religious knowledge is what mattered the most. He explained that Druze heritage cannot simply be taught through words since its meanings revealed themselves when they were incorporated into one’s life. He offered the following story:

One individual looking for the truth went to a Buddhist monk and asked him to teach him the truth. He took him by the hair and dipped his head in the water for a while. When he took his head out he asked him “what did you need when you were under water?” He answered that he needed air. The monk said “You have to want the truth the same way you wanted air so I can teach you.” You have to ask for the truth of Tawhid from inside. Ask for the virtue from inside. The sheikh will share the information with you if he sees you are eager to know and not just asking for it.

While the parable offered by the sheikh might seem zealous, it illustrates his point that knowing more simply for the sake of knowing more would not result in meaningful knowledge for the proverbial student.

Anticipating a strong emphasis on the responsibilities of those seeking religious knowledge, in my interviews with sheikhs I asked, how might non-mushayekh prepare themselves to learn more about their faith. Some responses included more allusions to sincerity and an emphasis on being virtuous while other responses were practical and straightforward. One of my expert interviewees who was not a sheikh explained that in Tawhid individuals were required to be eager to learn and to take the initiative to search. In order for knowledge to be revealed, one had to achieve internal discipline through the ethical system. Another informant said that it was always necessary to ask a number of people the questions that concerned you since any one person might not offer you the right answer. An older sheikha added that not all mushayekh were especially knowledgeable but that certain ones were clearly educated. In her
opinion, even if someone appeared to be a sheikh or sheikha, and went to the majlis regularly, they may not know how to answer questions properly.

![An older Druze lady, who is not an initiated sheikha, wearing the mandil.](image)

**Figure 6.2** An older Druze lady, who is not an initiated sheikha, wearing the mandil.

Some said that the majlis and the khalwat were important resources. Although the Druze do not have formal places of worship, the majlis is often used as a gathering place to hear scripture read and sometimes extrapolated upon. Yet many believe that studying the scripture without instruction in its inner-meanings would not result in religious knowledge or an accurate understanding. There are a number of majalis in any given community where Druze people can attend evening prayers. Attendees are asked to dress modestly and women and men that are not mushayekh should cover their heads, men with a small white skullcap called a kalusi and women with a loose, gauzy scarf called a mandil (see Figure 6.2), or niqab if also used to cover the lower half of a woman’s face.
Different from the *majlis* is the *khalwat*, which offers a kind of hermitage or compound where *mushayekh* might go to study. They often offer *sheikhs* a place of residence for to stay while they learn and some of them can be very secluded. These gathering places allow younger *mushayekh* to learn from those more experienced both in terms of their personal conduct and the recitation of religious statements. Moreover, *mushayekh* have reasoning sessions where they discuss the philosophies of the faith amongst one another.

The main function of the *khalwat* is to offer a place of study and internal reflection for *mushayekh*. During my time in the field, I was able to visit the most prominent *khalwat* for the Druze called Khalwat al-Bayada (see Figures 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6) near the town of Hasbaya (see Figure 6.3) in southeastern Lebanon. Non-*mushayekh* are welcomed as visitors and can roam the *majlis* at the center or the austere living quarters that branch off. As an aside, there was a small circle of low slung stones near the central *majlis* that was described to me as a “strange place.” People take turns standing in the middle and are told to whisper their prayers. The result is
indeed strange and the vibration of one’s slightest murmur resonates in the body while those standing just outside of the circle, simply a few feet away, sound extremely dim or muffled (see Figure 6.6).

![Figure 6.4 Part of the main complex of Khalwat al-Bayada.](image)

While there are a much smaller number of khalwats, other than the most important one depicted here, the majlis is very common and much more accessible for non-mushayekh. During my time in Aley I attended evening seminars at one majlis in particular and would certainly not have been admitted if the sheikh that coordinated attendees did not recognize my family name. Some scriptures were recited melodically and sometimes those in attendance joined in the recitation. The leading sheikh would offer some discourse for a while before accepting questions and when he was done, most attendees would leave while some mushayekh would remain to have a private religious discussion. Those who were in attendance were a mix between mushayekh and non-mushayekh and women and men were separated into different areas, partitioned by a simple curtain. During the handful of times I was able to attend it seemed the
vast majority of attendees were mushayekh, identifiable by their clothes. While any Druze could have attended, it was not common to see a significant number of non-mushayekh take the time to be present and listen attentively for what was a three to four hour event. The two sheikhs I spoke to that were involved in one of the two Druze private religious schools (each with a handful of branches) in Lebanon both offered very candid advice about how individuals might prepare themselves to learn about the faith. One of these sheikhs recommended that parents enroll their children in one of the private religious schools while they begin to attend seminars at the majlis and other religious lectures. He even recommended making use of email and other technologies to increase awareness of seminars and lectures. He added that there should be ongoing meetings between young people and mushayekh and that they should develop a plan to have specific hours at the majlis dedicated to this. The other one began by saying: “It is the responsibility of the
Figure 6.6 One of the dormitory type residences where *mushayekh* live while studying at Khalwat al-Bayada.

Figure 6.7 The stone circle at Khalwat al-Bayada.
family first then the responsibility of the Druze sheikhs and of the establishments. There is a lack of educational establishments in the Druze community.” He said he has seen great improvements over the last few decades and that in the last 40 years, a number of centers and schools have been established. In his opinion, learning about Druze history and faith doesn’t result in a degree that you can hang on your wall. Rather it will always take a great deal of personal effort to read and learn more.

The Perceived Role of Mushayekh in Doctrinal Education

Taking a closer look at the position of mushayekh in Druze society, it was important to further inquire about their perceived roles as educators of the Tawhid doctrine. This inquiry is fundamentally problematic in that it positions mushayekh as educators in one form or another. It also homogenizes a very diverse group of individuals that functionally have no responsibility towards their peers. And yet, those who are not sheikhs often do expect mushayekh to be an integral part of the learning process. Even before I asked research participants about the roles of sheikhs and sheikhas, they brought up a slew of opinions and even grievances. Given the propensity to make generalizations about a visually discernable group with some common traits, it was not a surprise to hear the criticisms that sometimes arose between these supposedly distinct groups within the Druze community. In truth, the differences are not as great as many believe but are reinforced by both the ascetic dress code, which stands in stark contrast to what seems to be a very fashion-conscious majority, and the symbolic labels, such as uqqal and juhhal, that create a dichotomy of sorts.14

14 As a reminder of these labels see the section in chapter four titled, Mushayekh as the Keepers of Religious Knowledge.
Some individuals explained that you needed to be a sheikh or sheikha to access religious knowledge or even have access to the religious books. Others said that you could learn quite a bit and that only the more esoteric interpretations were relegated to mushayekh. One 33 year old woman described it as small secrets that would help unveil the deeper philosophy of the religious texts. As it stands, the religious books are not simply for sale in common bookstores, but are often transferred within the family or obtained at the majlis or maqam. Some mushayekh devoted their time to making handwritten copies in exchange for donations while printed versions can be found at the maqams and khalwats. Accessibility to these texts may not be relatively simple but nor were they forbidden to the non-mushayekh.

Participants were asked what kinds of knowledge they thought mushayekh had that non-mushayekh might not. Many believed that the gap was significant and that although people tended to know some things, and have a curiosity to know more, they were frequently unsure if their knowledge was accurate. This doubt may stem from not having read the religious texts for themselves, which many believe they could not interpret without proper instruction. Many sheikhs agreed with this viewpoint and added that it was necessary to lead a morally upstanding life before attempting to engage with the Kitab al-Hikma. One 25 year old elementary school teacher that was considering becoming a sheikha said something very similar: “They must live what they read. If they don’t want to live it and they just want to talk about it to others, then why read it? If you don’t want to live it, don’t read it…But if you’re going to live it and you’re true about it, they let you read it of course.”

Specific examples about the limits to the level or types of religious knowledge that non-mushayekh had access to included not being privy to the philosophical discussions which took place among initiated mushayekh at a majlis or in their homes. A young man that had attended
one of the religious schools in Aley said that he was excluded from religious readings since he was not wearing the clothing that signified his start on the path to becoming a sheikh. The attire that male sheikhs wear is called zay and I was told by many informants, including mushayekh, that it is actually a leftover of the Ottoman period that the Druze had adopted to show their loyalty to the Turkish Sultanate. The symbolic importance placed on the attire is significant and one older man criticized this: “The quality of Tawhid comes with the soul not the uniform. No human was born in this religious uniform.” Another 78 year old woman who was relatively knowledgeable similarly said that if you were not wearing this attire, then they would not answer your questions: “But if you go there wearing a mandil and wearing a long dress, they will tell you everything, even if you don’t ask a question. They think your mind is in your mandil, that’s the problem.”

Conversely, many individuals have grandparents, or other family members that are mushayekh, and given their familiar relationships they often share their beliefs. A significant number of participants said that if they had the proper motivation, they could know as much as mushayekh and that the main difference was a willingness to learn. While motivation and willingness are certainly up to the individual, they stem from personal interests shaped by our collective culture. For example, if value isn’t placed on something early on or shared by our peers later in life, it will likely be difficult to adopt later on. Religious knowledge is an important part of identity in Lebanon and many were concerned with not knowing enough to explain this facet of their heritage to others. Many informants recommended that especially knowledgeable mushayekh should expand their communication particularly with the youth and gather with them regularly to have discussions and offer advice.
Criticisms generally directed at mushayekh also followed. One mother who works as a student coordinator in an elementary school said that religious people should feel comfortable with anyone and not treat others as if they were privy to exclusive information. She said that some saw themselves as separate from those who were not initiated and only adopted the precept of hofez il-ikhwan, support of the brethren, amongst themselves. Another criticism was that many people were not considerate of the times. Mushayekh were often said to have to follow what they were taught without interpreting or applying it to modern life. Whether or not individuals truly looked at mushayekh as embodied examples of the faith, disparagement and criticism was certainly common when someone suspected that a sheikh or sheikha had acted out of character. Conversely, some individuals did mention that the piety of virtuous and well-known sheikhs was encouraging. When I asked mushayekh what their ideal role should be in the Druze community, many responded that the life of a sheikh or sheikha should set an example for Druze and non-Druze alike. For example, a sheikha and mother of three said that the virtuous life of sheikh Abou Hassan Aref Halawi, whose 103 years spanned the entire breadth of the 20th century, should be emulated by others (Hassan 2006).

Another important theme that emerged in my interviews, were references to the ajawid, spiritually advanced mushayekh who are recognized for their devotion. They were often discussed as a point of contrast to those who were considered much less knowledgeable or dedicated, including some that were described as possibly being illiterate or from the war-generation, which simply meant old-fashioned. Ajawid are thought to be knowledgeable about many other religions, having closely studied their texts. It seemed that they comprised a relatively small fraction of the total number of mushayekh and there are no reliable estimates of the number of these individuals in Aley or in Lebanon. Ajawid seemed to my informants to truly
represent the ideals of the faith and some felt that their austerity didn’t lend itself to the public attention that would inevitably be focused on those mushayekh who work to disseminate religious knowledge.

Among mushayekh the most important facet of a good religious teacher was their faith. They said that an individual had to have strong faith or else their message would never resonate: “If he tries to teach someone without being convinced and believing himself, the other person can’t understand and won’t be affected by what he says.” A religious person should abstain from worldly things and spend their time reading and studying, even if they lived in Beirut. A sheikha I spoke with said that they should always respect themselves and the zay, and use the stories of the important religious figures to teach others. Lastly, someone added that a sheikh should set their spiritual pace with that of the community and share their knowledge to help others progress: “It’s easy for an individual to cut off all attachments and fly, but this will not represent Tawhid or the role model of being a sheikh.”

Conclusion

Generally speaking, the Druze should be regarded as an example of a strong community despite the examples of intercommunal conflict. In other words, there isn’t always a homogenous notion of community and notions of what makes them similar and different from other groups are not always things that were easily agreed upon. And yet, the Druze believe that Tawhid represents a religious doctrine that is distinct from others. There is some fluidity that represents the ways in which many Druze express their faith since there is some common understanding that it has roots in Gnosticism and embraces Sufist traditions and shares a belief in reincarnation with religious groups throughout central and East Asia. Other distinguishing characteristics,
including the pronunciation of *qaf*, were seen as distinctly Druze traits that formed a commonality if not membership within the group.

Questions of Druze identity can be condensed down to one’s parents, thus naturalizing Druzeness. Certain ideals seem to variegate acceptance and participation in particular social circles, including those that engage with educational resources. Put more simply, those who see themselves as distant from an ideal, were certainly less likely to express an interest in attending religious lectures or reading about Druze history. This figurative ideal of the model Druze man or woman was difficult to capture considering the variety of critical perspectives offered by research participants. Nearly everyone to some degree expressed some personal deficiencies that they believed could be improved upon if the goal was to realize a stronger community.

*Sheikhs* and *sheikhas* were often understandably perceived as having religious knowledge that was not easily acquired by others. Many thought that the *mushayekh* are able to regulate what it means to be a Druze in a religious sense. Although the option of becoming an initiated *sheik* or *sheikha* is not out of reach for others, it comes with the responsibilities of social decorum and austerity that many have shied away from. Much of the concern about *mushayekh* as either guardians or gatekeepers of religious knowledge, stemmed from an overarching belief that they reserved a special knowledge of interpreting the religious text, the *Kitab al-Hikma*. It is well-known that the *Hikma* requires an esoteric understanding that obliges anyone hoping to understand its classical scripture to work with a trusted and knowledgeable teacher. Dedicated *mushayekh* do precisely that, committing a significant amount of time to their studies. A few of the most dedicated may be supported by donations to live and study full time at a *khalwat*.

While the Druze as a society represent a relatively discrete group, fundamental differences exist within it. For example, wearing the *zay* clearly denotes a fundamental
distinction in terms of one’s approach to learning about the faith. While the cultural roots of the zay clearly reach back to appeasement of the Ottoman authorities, its retention still plays a role in maintaining a tradition that distinguishes mushayekh from their peers. Other differences also existed and were sometimes more conceptual. While interacting with many people in Lebanon beyond the scope of research interviews, it became apparent that religion was a loaded term, sometimes taboo and often able to conjure up assumptions, stereotypes, and even certain stigmas. Younger people in particular exhibited a stronger patriotic sentiment, believing that religious differences had fueled sectarian divisions, which many believe are among the root causes of the social, political, and economic problems that Lebanese society faces. Some young peoples’ hesitation to consider an interest in religious knowledge may also have stemmed from the connotations religion carries with a traditional or antiquated national identity, which diametrically opposes the modern. Put simply, younger adults continue to be dissatisfied with the religious, political and social state of affairs and may be reflecting their dissatisfaction on their conceptualizations of Druzeness.

Others who presumed to be more knowledgeable about Druze tradition saw religion as too concerned with the world of the mundane, rather than with the esoteric, the spiritual, and the philosophical core of the doctrine. These two distinct strains re-categorized religion as a life-philosophy were both in part a semantic representation that disassociated the faith from the negative connotations that surrounded the word “religion,” even if the motivations to do so were altogether different. With consideration for how this particular term was contested, I have repeatedly approached the Druze dogma with references to words like “religion,” “doctrine,” and “faith.” These terms remain salient in discussing this phenomena because they remain largely representative of the processes of faith among groups and offer a way of understanding the
Druze in relation to other groups. Certainly a more nuanced understanding of these terms, as mentioned here, facilitates a more detailed understanding of how concepts like faith are differently perceived and how they should be critically examined when applied to any framing of Druze identity.
As an ethnoreligious minority in Lebanon, the Druze community has a number of concerns about the preservation of their cultural heritage. This chapter seeks to expand upon the previous discussions that illuminated Druze perspectives on their shared identity, sense of community, perceived knowledge gaps, and social roles in doctrinal education. Specifically, this chapter further focuses on identifying what the Druze see as social issues and possible avenues or resources that might offer means of improving those issues.

The Community’s Social Issues

Without presuming that individuals would identify the kinds of social issues I set out to investigate, research participants were encouraged to discuss any number of facets of their Druze identity, heritage, culture, and community. The semi-structured questions and follow-up probes refrained from over implying the presence of social problems and respondents were encouraged to think critically about the meaning of certain phrases and terms. For example, in our dialogue, participants often defined what they considered to be a strong Druze community or what historical and religious knowledge entailed.

The subsequent sections begin by identifying how an understanding of Druze history and the basic tenets of the faith shapes Druze identity. This is followed by an expansive discussion
about the community’s current issues as well as perceptions of its future. The final section concentrates on the impact of community and family on the issues participants identified most.

**Does Knowing more Strengthen Individual Druze Identity?**

Many of the Druze I spoke to believed that knowing more about Druze history would help individuals have a stronger sense of Druze identity. They often told me that knowing the history of the community you come from resulted in a better understanding of oneself. Some said that lacking basic history of the Druze was similar to missing a fundamental piece of personal identity. They also explained that knowing more about your ancestors meant knowing more about who you would become and how you might best raise children. More specific than this, some cited the need to raise children well-informed in both their history and religion. As one teacher said: “Like any other thing, the more you know about it, the more you can relate it to yourself or interpolate it if you want into your own identity and be more comfortable with it.” He also mentioned a need to learn these things in a way that makes sense to the individual and added that: “If you know your roots, you would be more comfortable in your faith rather than blindly accepting what people tell you. So, yeah, I do think that some access to the faith or the history or the philosophy of the faith, even if it’s just basic, would help a lot.” His response illustrated that even if the information is at an elementary level, what was most important was that the individual engage with history and relate it to their sense of group identity.

In some instances having knowledge about history was equated with having strong roots or a solid foundation: “If there’s no foundation, the soil will move and the building will fall down. It will crash.” Some used the term “ignorance” to describe this lack of familiarity with
Druze history, which situated it as a problem while a lack of interest or casual indifference was not discussed as explicitly. Rather, the opinions about how this knowledge gap was problematic emerged later in interviews as a consequence of hectic, modern life. In two cases, respondents said that it was easier for their Druze peers to not know more because it might entail changing the way one lived their life. They said that for some, it was preferable not to know than to know and not follow. Clearly these informants conflated knowledge of history with the Druze doctrine, which was a common occurrence in many of the dialogues. History and religion are intrinsically interwoven for relatively insular groups like the Druze in terms of the demographics of their communities, their tendency to reside in mountainous regions, their practice of endogamy, and their tradition of religious dissimulation (Abu-Lughod 1999; Nisan 1991). In fact, explaining that history and religion could be separate concepts was an exception that warranted explanation for the few who thought it was worth mentioning.

A young man living in another large Druze town just outside of Aley explained that learning about Druze history was how one would learn the values of religion. According to him, a greater familiarity with Druze history was not only associated with a greater familiarity with Druze religious values and incorporating them into one’s life, but also with social identity generally speaking. For example, a young woman studying in college connected these ideas stating that with history a Druze person, “has the background information of what his religion means. If others asked him, he knows. He feels better about himself by knowing who he is, because humans in general fear everything that they don’t know.”

Given Lebanon’s religious diversity, it is likely that in communicating with Christians and Muslims, Druze individuals are often asked to explain what makes their faith unique. At the same time, the curiosity of others might be exacerbated since the Druze have long been
stigmatized as a secretive sect. One woman said that some of the Christians and Muslims she worked with believed that the Druze have no faith or religion and that they believed this because they noticed their lack of worshipping places and ritualized prayer. Another young woman who also worked mostly among non-Druze offered a similar response and added: “The matter of not having enough information, or just being Druze because you’re born Druze, I think that makes a problem. I am 100 percent for getting more knowledge about us, at least to know who we are, our identity, not just because we’re born so. And we do have a problem with this because we are not having information.” Personal responsibility was also a factor and some discussed the importance of being inquisitive or taking the initiative to seek out older, more informed people. One of my informants who felt this way hadn’t taken her own advice about reading, explaining that many people were busy with their jobs, hobbies, and social lives and didn’t find an interest in books. She went on to articulate her point: “We grow up just not knowing about it. We get our children. We don’t teach them that much about it. As things go forth, it goes on and on and on, and I’m not happy about it.”

An 83 year old sheikha whom I interviewed reiterated the points made by many non-mushayekh: “The more they get deep in the knowledge of religion, and how the Druze religion was born and how the da’wa started, that adds to the attachment to the doctrine and the Druze identity, the Tawhid identity.” When the same question was asked in expert interviews, similar themes came up but the respondents were also concerned with the accuracy of the source material or the teacher offering the lesson. A sheikh said that the history of Lebanon remained extremely contested and was concerned that generations were being given false information. Another respondent called for an accessible reference list of acceptable sources since in his assessment some works represent the negative views so often placed on minorities.
Some mushayekh I spoke with expressed an obligation to share what they knew with others. One person said that his faith wouldn’t be complete if he were not taking care of his fellow Druze spiritually as he took care of himself. It was important to teach history in a meaningful way that preserved the intention of the principals of the doctrine. More than describing certain historical accounts as entirely problematic, they often placed emphasis on a broader approach to history that included the faith’s roots in ancient Gnostic philosophy. As mentioned, the doctrine of Tawhid includes other religious and Gnostic philosophies and was situated as having a complex logic which was important to preserve in transferring knowledge to fellow Druze.

Similarly, both mushayekh and non-mushayekh informants thought that knowing more about the Druze faith would help individuals have a stronger sense of Druze identity. A father of two from a town not far from Aley called Ras el-Matn explained that people are naturally antagonistic to what they don’t know and that if they don’t know their religion, they couldn’t develop attachment to their Druze identity. Along with others, he said that parents had a fundamental obligation to teach their children or at least instill in them curiosity since many adults may not have been familiar with the religious principles. It was commonly expected that people were to have faith and some felt an almost instinctual attachment to their community, but doubt or cynicism was also apparent. An especially clever young woman expressed to me her frustration about her efforts to learn more and being rebuffed with rudimentary lessons about being honest, and not cheating or lying. Throughout all of the research interviews participants believed that much of what was offered was elementary among all religious groups while a more in-depth knowledge of the dogma was less forthcoming.
The Mushayekh with whom I spoke agreed that unfamiliarity with the faith had led to an aversion for some. One sheikh went further saying: “So if you know your belief and religion by the right knowledge, you will feel belonging, power, and love. But there is a condition that the teacher should be competent and the material should be right.” Another sheikh said that the religious theology is sensitive but that there was much to learn from the ethics of important historical figures which he referred to as a spiritual heritage for the Druze. An especially pragmatic response from one respondent advised that the sacred texts should be interpreted as a kind of educational program to encourage young people to feel a sense of belonging to their culture. More recently, in Lebanon there appears to be an increased interest in formalized educational programs about history, ethics, and doctrine. In the United States, and to some degree in other Druze diaspora communities, attempts have been made to establish a curriculum for children and younger adults. Although this particular project has been stalled, other activities, including religious retreats and educational sessions offered online have continued to gain traction.

What Issues are the Druze Facing?

A dominant theme running through everyday conversation in Aley centered on the kinds of threats or social issues the Druze community is facing. The concerns that were expressed can be broadly categorized as “internal” and “external.” Starting with the latter, one of the most commonly cited issues included a perceived threat from other religious groups. Being considered too divergent from mainstream Islam was problematic for many of the Druze’s neighbors, including both orthodox Sunni and other various branches of Shia Islam, according to the Druze. Being labeled as outsiders to Islam in general, or simply different from the religious practices of
other sects, was presumed to be a source of problems for the Druze. Indeed, their reputation for being mysterious or secretive in their faith has in some instances served as a means to stigmatize the Druze as heretics, atheists, or apostates at various points throughout their history. Being positioned as a minority external to other Muslims has often worked against the community although the notion of Druze particularism has also served to preserve their perceived uniqueness.

My fieldwork took place in Lebanon from the beginning of 2014 until August of that same year, when the presence of the Islamic State in the Levant, or Daish, developed into a more serious menace and clashed with the Lebanese Armed Forces in the Battle of Arsal (Dziadosz 2014). Yet, just prior to the more imminent danger presented by Daish, my informants in Aley argued that the Druze in Syria were oppressed in their opinions. This was particularly true of those who lived outside of the predominantly Druze area in southern Syria, such as the young man with whom I conducted an oral history interview. He discussed many of the differences between the Druze communities in both Syria and Lebanon and said that for those who work or go to school in Damascus, as he had, refraining from talking about one’s Druze identity was emblematic of their position in the capital city. Something similar was mentioned among those Druze who had lived and worked in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait. Throughout the Middle East, prejudices against the Druze have made them particularly vulnerable and hiding their heritage has become common practice.

The Druze of Aley expressed their concern regarding a number of “internal” issues including what they saw as a lack of cultural resources, the occurrence of exogamous marriages, and political divisions. Political parties tend to be associated with particular religious groups in Lebanon, although not strictly so. The two foremost political parties mainly comprised of Druze
include the Democratic Party and the Progressive Socialist Party. The leaders of these groups, Talal Arslan and Walid Jumblatt respectively, come from families that have held political power for centuries. Past aggressive actions against the Druze community in Lebanon have often worked to bring both sides together although factional differences are substantial and it was implied they could negatively affect social supports. A man living in another predominantly Druze town explained: “Druze people don’t help each other as much as other religions do. It’s more politics than religion, that’s why hofez il-ikhwan is not there. Everything is based on political interest.”

A lack of accessible Druze social institutions, such as hospitals (see Figure 7.1) and welfare programs, was also identified as a significant problem. During my fieldwork, I became aware of a handful of Druze charitable organizations including an orphanage and a unique group of young individuals that organized events to fund projects that offered a variety of support to children and families in the Shouf Mountains. I had the opportunity to conduct an oral history interview with one of this group’s members who explained that the project began when, during the Eid al-Adha holiday, his peers considered how they might help others. In keeping with what one respondent said, I was not aware of organizations capable of providing charities on the level of churches or mosques. There were however organizations based on kin groups while each of the predominant family names in any Druze town share a mutual building akin to a civic center that can be rented out during weddings or other social occasions for a nominal fee or donation. For example, the Radwan family home was also used for funerals of individuals from the several branches of the family and also included a modest library and a karate school. It was not clear whether or not these organizations offered any significant assistance to those belonging to the families they represented.
Although I was told on more than one occasion that you cannot find homeless Druze, it was apparent that there was no shortage of Druze in Aley who lived very modest lives. One young man who was recently engaged and who drove a delivery truck said that it was harder for Druze people to find jobs outside of the community since they were discriminated against. However, many Druze manage to make ends meet by keeping their expenses low, which makes inheriting a home, or the property on which to build a home, especially important. It was a point of pride for some to say that the Druze never sell their property to non-Druze. One wealthy young man who had inherited a large amount of property said that this custom may be changing as some Druze living in poverty have had no choice but to sell their land: “There’s a lot of Druze that are really poor and they’re selling their property to other than Druze. I don’t find it as a problem but it is a problem when our religion is closed. Not now but maybe in one hundred years we’ll become like nomads without property.” The value of property in Lebanon is seen as significantly high and in the town of Aley it was excessively so. Certainly a number of individuals, perhaps with property
to spare, have sold both buildings and plots of land to non-Druze as people would point out one mansion or another and exclaim that it belonged to a wealthy person from a Gulf country or an anonymous celebrity.

The second theme surrounding internal social issues expanded on the previous discussion concerning a lack of religious knowledge. Some research participants described the Druze as going in the wrong direction and disappearing, associating this with a lack of the ability to adapt to the larger society. One person expressed this viewpoint by saying: “The older generation who knows about religion is passing away and the new generation is not knowledgeable and do not care. The percent of mushayekh is becoming lower and lower, especially in cities like Aley. There’s a big knowledge gap. We have to have some kind of a program to educate people on religion.” Other young people voiced similar concerns and said that the religious leaders were not taking the youth into consideration. The religious institutions within the Druze community were not constructed to have the capacity to educate the younger generations. A young mother in Aley with her own business said that she had searched for answers to her religious questions without the help of others. She said that when she asked questions from mushayekh, they were unable to answer her: “The main thing that you hear from those sheikhs is to dissimulate, that we should do as the society around us. That as a Druze you should see what the social trend is around you and you should go with it, that people should not know that you are Druze. That's the basic belief, because when the Druze began their mission here in the Middle East, they witnessed a lot of murder.” The dissimulation that she referred to is defined by the Arabic term taqiyya, but is also commonly captured by the phrase istitār bil-matloof, which very loosely translates into covering up to fit in with the common or the public. This phrase came up rather frequently and will be discussed further along in terms of its value to the survival of the Druze way of life.
The obligation to marry within the Druze community was also a commonly discussed issue. Endogamous, or in-group marriage, is customary in Lebanon where the confessional system of government means that religious institutions have authority over marriage, which is always relegated to same-faith marriages. Social pressure influences the decision to not consider marrying exogamously and parents often play a key role as 32 year old mother explained: “If we don’t educate more of our people, we are going to lose them. My dad allowed us freedom, it felt wrong for me to stab my parents in the back to marry a guy that is not Druze.” A woman who professed to know very little about Druze history or religion offered that it was normal to marry from those whom one lived among even if they were not Druze. As a widow, she said that although she wouldn’t prefer it for her family members, she understood how young people raised abroad would be likely to do so. A 28 year old who worked in the media similarly illustrated the same point stating that the Druze do not live on an island and that others would necessarily affect their behavior and mentality.

A 21 year old woman that had been raised in the United States before moving to Lebanon for college, thought that the need to socialize beyond what some conservative Druze deemed appropriate was among the reasons why younger people might rebel against their culture. She explained life in the mountain communities was more “grounded” and that those youth who didn’t get to experience that became unrestrained:

They get too Americanized, because Lebanese people have that mentality about Americans or international people in general. They just drift because of the people around them. It’s because of the social life here [in Lebanon]. It’s twenty-four/seven partying. So they get to meet in those places people that are more open-minded, more
than usual. They like that, because it’s different than what they’re used to and they’re probably sick of their life.

Having something of a double perspective, she conflates an overzealous interest in having fun with drifting away from one’s Druze roots. More than this, the kind of fun she refers to is positioned as antithetical to Druze values while implying that young people are actively seeking a means of expressing themselves outside of the confines of their typical lives. In contrast to this, another Western-educated younger man who studied in Europe said that although newer generations had dissimilar perspectives and expressed themselves differently, this was not a threat to the Druze faith. He said that faith is itself an idea and that ideas never fully disappear.

Some mushayekh with whom I spoke discussed external threats in terms of the Druze community being a minority in the Middle East. One sheikh said that minorities all over the world face threats to their future while the Druze have always been at risk for being labeled as atheists by other religious groups. He said that aside from this, the Druze also faced two other interconnected problems in his view. First: “We don’t have a unified identity and vision that a Muwahid uses to talk to other people, so each one says something different than the other and that makes us look like liars. Second, we have not found a middle ground between faith and the life in the modern era.” For him, this was an especially poignant threat from within and that a balance between being current while respecting the past was integral to the Druze’s future.

One sheikh criticized his fellows saying that he didn’t think they were taking enough responsibility for the future of the youth. He said that some were concerned that young people would be likely to go share what they learned with others without having a firm understanding of the doctrine. If someone were to marry out of the community, there would be no recourse for them even if they believed their exogamous marriage was a result of a neglected interest to learn
more about their heritage. Another sheikh who had previously worked with the Druze Spiritual Council under Sheikh al-Aql, the religious figurehead for the Druze in Lebanon, agreed that mushayekh should play a role in raising spiritual awareness and that many have been doing just that. He said that the community faced many other problems including a rise in alcohol and drug addiction and that family values were disintegrating. He explained that even the focus of certain traditions like weddings had changed quite drastically and that many of these issues were examples of increased superficiality. However, he remained faithful that the principal virtues were still intact at the core of society.

Another prominent sheikh that has been involved in attending to many of these issues offered an extremely insightful expose and began with the point that many Druze didn’t believe they had anything equivalent to the Muslim’s Quran and the Christian’s Bible, or holy places like the Jewish synagogue. He said that he was asked many times, “What do we have?” For him the issue was that there exists kinds of knowledge that are not teachable that might help one understand how to live the religion and embrace its philosophy. He said that the Druze religious organizations in Lebanon were working to affect some change, which included publishing educational resources. Similar to the previous respondent he said that they found it difficult to harmonize between keeping their values and adjusting in tandem with globalization. Change could be incited by creating a kind of culture that invested more resources in teaching the youth.

This seemed to get to the concept of cultural heritage. In one group, a pair of young men said that modernization and technology meant the loss of social traditions. They said that they lived very close to one another and despite the fact that they were cousins, they hardly ever saw each other. In a focus group conversation, another young man said that traditions and beliefs are not forced on them and that he saw this freedom as a good quality even though it might make
preserving heritage more difficult. Another man that worked in television said that the Druze lacked organization and were disconnected. He said that this was particular to the Druze community and that other religions have what he called “social heritage,” like Christmas or Ramadan. For him, *Eid al-Adha* didn’t compare since so many people were not necessarily aware of its meanings. He went on to add: “Some people say that religion is not the skin, or the outside cover, but I believe that the outside cover is very important for kids, families and society. Religion is social relations.” A 24 year old college student from the mostly Druze town of Bakaata continued by saying that the Druze community was moving towards ignorance more than education and that social relations were increasingly superficial. She provided examples wherein attending funerals was just mandatory for many rather than providing sincere support to the family of the deceased. Similarly, weddings could be especially contentious events that offered the opportunity to criticize the new couple. During my time in the field, people often compared the costs and glamour of the weddings they had attended which seemed to be overblown affairs put on to satisfy the expectations of attendees, particularly the bride’s and the groom’s families. The new standard required a big affair and seemed to incite competitiveness and an excessive burden for young potential grooms who would have to bear the costs of the wedding. Given what the meager salaries appeared to be for so many young people I encountered, it wasn’t possible to host such a dazzling event without incurring debt and this may have led to hesitation for many young men and their families. Another respondent summed up the basis of these social pressures when she said: “The problem is not only in people who judge but in people who are scared of being judged.”

Throughout all of the interviews I conducted, younger participants often said that they appreciated the freedom to choose to learn about the religion even though they also provided
many examples of pressure by both their families and the society in general to conform to certain beliefs and practices, such as choosing to marry a Druze partner. Interaction with non-Druze was sometimes positioned as an issue that might affect marriage choice, or even attachment to another faith, but in many instances it was also seen as another positive facet of Druze openness to other religious ideologies. One example of this came from a 22 year old man that said: “I have more Christian friends than Druze and I go to church more than to majlis but it doesn’t erase all the values I got and erase my mind. Every time you learn something new you don’t lose your values.” The issue arose when respondents spoke about the lack of motivation to learn more, which is cyclical in that familiarity with historical and religious knowledge was often described as encouraging one’s attachment to Druze identity and to the community more generally. In one exchange, three Druze informants said that younger generations couldn’t be forced to learn and that there were entire families that didn’t know anything to teach one another. To this one added: “There’s no motivation to learn more.” Another one said: “If you don’t go to them, they’ll come to you in other religions. With us, we need to go after it all.”

Globalization was continually discussed in terms of preoccupation with technology and with the shifting of values. A young man explained that some mushayekh were being reclusive while young people were engrossed in their technology and distancing themselves from religious and historical knowledge. Referencing the flood of information that technology has made available, he added: “Everything’s so accessible now. The youth are having more attractions and more temptations to go out and be taken away from their roots, and thus away from religion.” This theme was expanded upon in a focus group conversation when one person said that things were changing very fast and that the community was not developing its thinking or traditions. He felt that this threatened their collective heritage and that these things needed to be updated.
An example of the need to change often emerged when respondents spoke about their interaction with mushayekh. More specifically, issues arose when it became apparent that some sheikhs or sheikhas were hesitant to speak about the faith around them because they had not decided to become mushayekh themselves. The adoption of the zay and niqab, or religious dress, is a symbol of dedication for many. A college student from the Shouf region said that: “Druze in general, they don’t have enough knowledge of their own religion, they are focused on the appearances, most of them, few people know about the doctrine and try to preserve it. Some people think that in clothes, the sherwal, that’s our heritage.” This was certainly a commonly expressed sentiment. I heard others saying that adopting the zay, which also meant shaving your head as a man or covering the lower half of your face with the niqab as a woman, was made contingent upon learning more. An extremely intelligent young woman actually said that some religiously conservative people make it contingent to being Druze even though it was apparent that the garb has Turkish origins. This slightly different phrasing illustrates the point that the barriers to religious knowledge could result in being seen as less of a Druze in her estimation. Her response to her distant cousin’s subsequent remark was similarly expressive: “Tell me and I’ll decide. The concept is decide and I will tell you. And this makes it hard. How can I decide and I don’t know?”

One of the examples of changing the more strict approach to wearing the religious clothes was a number of people that were proactive about learning more about the religious precepts but did not adopt the traditional clothing. Some of these individuals held professional careers, which was not common among mushayekh who abided by certain social rules that relegated them to fields such as craftsmen, bakers, shopkeepers, mechanics, seamstresses, and educators, to name a few. One group of bright young men and women that I met was engrossed in learning the Hikma
and some considered one another *mushayekh* even without having donned the *zay*. The label *mushayekh wasat*, meaning halfway to a being a *sheikh* or *sheikha*, was sometimes applied in this context although there level of knowledge was likely more advanced in relation to others. This same label also held a separate meaning and was applied to those individuals that were becoming initiated *mushayekh* through the more standardized paths, or even older people that had adopted the lifestyle of *mushayekh* and modesty in social life. The latter group was sometimes marked by their conservative dress while women would loosely lay the *mandil* over their heads and not use it to cover their mouths. Alongside references to these details, my informants seemed to retain the opinion that if they wanted to learn about the tenets of the faith and its history, they needed someone to explain it to them.

**How Does Community Impact the Stated Issues?**

Most Druze in Lebanon reside in towns where they represent a majority and oftentimes an overwhelming majority. It was important to understand what impact this had on their concepts of heritage and Druze identity since it seemed to make a difference for my informants. For example, a group of young men from Aley told me that their home was almost a city that included people from different religions while small towns made one feel more connected to Druze traditions and heritage. Another group of young people from Aley responded to my query with the same exact remarks although it seemed to me that the vast majority of those living in Aley were of Druze descent. They said that young people in particular were being exposed to the outside world in the wrong way because they were distracted with what they thought others had. One young professional who commuted to Beirut for work, said that young people with this mentality change a lot when they go to the city. She saw them as mixed up and without a good
point of reference while her parents raised her with a strong base and that she knew who she was and what her limitations are.

Others said that parents were responsible for providing a solid foundation at home by transmitting what they know about the religion and its ethics. One young man said that transmitting this knowledge through affection was especially important, rather than through fear which was how his grandmother, who was very devout, had approached religion. He provided the analogy that you build on rock instead of sand and continued by saying that the increase of divorces had led to an increase in children that were overly impressionable or confused. Remark ing on the younger adults who are easily distracted by the Western culture pervasive in Beirut, another respondent provided the following explanation: “In simplest terms, it’s because we are pushing them away from learning about their religion and that’s why they want to learn about the religions of others and get caught up. And it’s not their fault. It’s our fault as a group.”

I heard other Druze from Aley mention its geographical proximity to Beirut, which is less than a 30 minute drive, as a possible obstacle to preserving their heritage. It was said that people changed when they lived in Beirut or its urban areas beyond the mountains where Druze towns were mostly located. It was also said that if they moved there from their family’s home, their values changed and they became more distant: “They don’t go up and see their family, they get more distant. I feel like if you do live in Aley it’s a lot different. If you walk down the street ‘Hi, how are you? Say hi to your mom.’ In Beirut nobody talks to each other. There’s a total culture difference.” Others who agreed that living in a Druze community helped to preserve heritage said that it was about being in contact with your religious environment. A recent college graduate quoted the saying “Show me who your friends are and I’ll tell you who you are” before explaining that he didn’t have an interest in knowing more about his religion until he had gone
away to college where he had the opportunity to mix with others. A man raised in the nearby town of Sawfar noted that living in a Druze community was a reminder of “Who you are” and that those who emigrated often sought out coreligionists to be reminded of their country back home. Lastly, a father of two said that this helped kids become more curious since they were disposed to asking questions about religion when they saw the way symbolically distinct dress of mushayekh.

Yet, other Druze disagreed with these sentiments and believed that living in a Druze community didn’t necessarily help to preserve Druze heritage. Aside from recognizing the garb of mushayekh, they said, religious symbols are not that prevalent. One woman who had been born and raised in Aley mentioned that she could hear the prayers from competing mosques five times a day but didn’t hear anything that was Druze. She was rather knowledgeable and understood very well that the Druze didn’t proselytize or have any kind of call to prayer, but her point was that the Druze lacked public expressions of heritage. An elementary school coordinator said that even though the faith espoused logic and philosophical knowledge over prayers and fasting, parents were not mandating that their children learn more.

An 84 year old man that had lived in the United States when his children were younger explained to me how he had raised them in the same spirit in which he was brought up. He eventually brought them back to Lebanon where each of them got married to Druze spouses before moving back to the United States to start families of their own. For him the most important thing was the education about Druze principles that he and his wife had provided at home, which he says built their immunity to outside influence.

A rural town not far from Aley that was essentially populated completely by Druze was said to have no religious gatherings and very few mushayekh, suggesting that these things
sometimes developed in reaction to other faiths. A newly engaged couple said that Christians and Druze had been living among one another for centuries and that this did not have either a positive nor negative effect on preserving Druze heritage. The husband went on to explain how financial problems and a lack of social resources had pushed people away. He said that there was a collective absence of universities, hospitals, technical schools, sports and clubs and that all of these things lead people to leave the mountains and to lose their symbols and their heritage.

A few mushayekh with whom I spoke felt that the Druze are more obliged to keep their traditions in areas where they represent the majority. One sheikha said that those Druze outside of Lebanon had also tended to establish their communities in the more secluded mountains, including Jabal al-Azrak in Jordan, the Galilee in Israel, and Jabal al-Arab in Syria. This last region has recently seen an unprecedented influx of non-Druze Syrians fleeing the conflict throughout the rest of the nation and remains one of the least volatile areas. Another informant said that what mattered most was awareness of one’s Druze heritage and that this might be stronger in the diaspora as opposed to in Lebanon. Diverging from these opinions, one person said the seclusion was like imprisonment and saw it as a detriment to preserving heritage. He said that in Lebanon the diverse religious groups had developed a phobia of interacting sincerely with one another and that this attitude threatened all involved. For him, being exposed to and learning about others remedied ignorance and feelings of helplessness.

Two sheikhs living in Aley both mentioned the phrase istitar bil-matlouf. The first of these individuals said that the phrase implied living like others in your community while preserving your beliefs within. The second sheikh felt Druze heritage was threatened because the Druze had inadvertently been overly influenced by the cultural ideas and practices embraced
through this principle. Having stated that his clothes represented Turkish heritage, he said that the native dress was the *kumbaz*, a long simple robe cinched at the waist.

The larger connections between *at-taqiyya*, religious dissimulation, and *istitar bil-matlouf*, blending in with the popular mode, relate to the need for concealment that has been integral to Druze survival. As discussed in chapter four, *at-taqiyya* allows the Druze to conceal their faith should they be threatened. It is likely that this practice has exacerbated the lack of religious educational resources among non-*mushayekh*. While this is among the factors that have resulted in an apparent scarcity of resources, it does not stem from any strict edicts that control the doctrine or limit its dissemination solely among *mushayekh*. Rather, alongside other concerns, such as the accuracy of resources, the legitimacy of teachers, and sincerity of students, it seems to have resulted in an overall hesitation to accept the responsibility to teach or to learn.

I asked some of my informants how parents might encourage their children’s interest in their Druze heritage. Aside from recommendations that included taking children to the *majlis* and teaching about the important historical figures one group discussed the imbalance between families with a significant number of *mushayekh* and those with fewer. One person said that in this regard, Druze society was divided into two distinct parts and that those individuals who were not closely related to *mushayekh*, would have nothing to draw their interest to the faith. As for households with *mushayekh*, they preserved the chain of knowledge, which was still in danger of being broken if the following generation decided not to pursue it, or became engrossed in their profession, or married out. Some believed that the newer generation along with formally educated individuals, were increasingly interested in learning more. Wanting to learn however was not enough for one young woman who explained that knowing about the faith and applying
it to one’s life were two entirely different things, the latter of which was not a prevalent mindset in her estimation.

Parents also fortified their children’s attachment to their Druze heritage when they inculcated a belief in reincarnation. Perhaps without specific intention to do so, stories of relatives that remember their previous life instill the belief in the cycle of reincarnation. Even if parents aren’t familiar with the details about the Druze specific approach to this belief, and it seemed as if many were not, they can pass on an unyielding conviction. When I asked one focus group how a belief in reincarnation promoted interest in heritage, nearly every respondent related personal stories of remembering some fraction of their previous life or some telling habit that they had as children. For example, one participant said that she had dreams of the young son and daughter that she left behind from her previous life. She said that her parents tried to make her forget these memories as a young girl since they believed it would cause her grief. Another woman from the same focus group added that her older sister knew precisely who she had been in a previous life and was convinced that she had been killed by a man that was not held accountable for the murder. Her older sister, now married and living in the United States, had reestablished connections with her father in from her previous life and had visited him on occasion.

Identifying Resources and Means of Amelioration

As we saw above, many were preoccupied with what being Druze meant to them and identified the characteristics of Druze history and religious knowledge they felt were important to know. In the first half of this chapter we heard them point to what they defined as the social problems their communities are facing and how a gap in knowledge might affect further
strengthening Druze identity. This final section of the chapter will further explore how educational resources focused on the history and the basic tenets of the faith shapes attachment to the community. As well, the last two subsections work in tandem to ascertain what my informants described as an educational resource deficit and how it might be improved.

**How Do Educational Resources Reinforce Community Identity?**

For Druze in Aley, their identity and community are conceptualized in relation to the role of educational resources. When I asked my informants if they thought that having more of these resources might help an individual have a stronger Druze identity, they described what each of these terms meant to them. In other words, in their responses, they associated the specific characteristics they thought fundamental to their Druzeness and their conceptualizations of a strong Druze identity and community. Some respondents said that educational resources should likewise be aimed at parents so that they could be educated to educate their children in turn.

One man said that young people who attend religious seminars or visited the *maqams* became more attached to the Druze faith and to their identity more specifically. He said that the connection to both of these things gave people a relief from the pressure of their daily stress. The seminars he referred to were not necessarily those offered at a *majlis*, but instead might include lectures focused on the Druze faith and history. These seminars or lectures, referred to in Arabic as *muhatherat*, included any variety of people who gathered to learn about Druze ethics or religious ideas or other facets of what my informants conceived of as their heritage. During my time in the field, I attended a handful of *muhatherat*, which met regularly and took place outside of the setting of the *majlis* and while some were led by *mushayekh*, another two were led by highly educated individuals considered very knowledgeable. Although the setting was typically
informal and the dress-code relaxed, one seminar was rarely attended by young adults while another was almost entirely comprised of those in their 20s and thirties, perhaps representing the considerable learning differences between these generations. Some of the groups seemed self-selected and relatively close-knit often with a few mushayekh in attendance. I also was aware that some older individuals met in similar fashion in people’s homes forming a kind of study group.

There existed a number of gaps between segments of the Druze population. This is not to say rivalries, such as on the political level, nor hierarchies based on variances in religious knowledge, such as the apparent differences between the initiated mushayekh and others, but differences that were much more subtle. More specifically, there is a tendency to identify individuals as belonging to a specific generation (e.g. the war generation, the youth, the “old-timer”), each discrete and replete with its collective values and hallmark characteristics. Rather than essentializing these groups, it is important to understand what some of the differences that particular age-sets might have in common in order to recognize potential breaks in communication. Returning to the role of educational resources, one respondent described a crucial gap when she said: “For the new generation you can’t just say ‘You should do that.’ They kind of have more questions about things. We’re more open, people are reading more, and they’re getting open to other cultures. They’re getting more open to the ‘why.’ Previously, maybe they don’t dare to ask why, it was simply, ‘You should be like this, you should be like that.’”

Some informants used the phrase “war generation” to refer to their parents and other older family members. The protracted Lebanese Civil War (approximately 1975-1990) changed the life of every Lebanese citizen and every emigrant that had family back home. Another young
respondent, age 25, said that in Lebanon an entire generation developed a severe mistrust of one another. Relating this back to notions of Druze identity and community, it is certain that these concepts have changed in dramatic ways for those who experienced the daily conflict that framed Lebanese society for over 15 years. A working mother in her 20s added to this image by stating: “The war generation lack guidance. They feel lost more than us.”

Whatever the psychological differences amongst older and younger individuals, the civil war shaped the idea of Druze particularism. Simply being told that you were Druze was enough to distinguish the community in the past, and most notably during the years of conflict wherein social interaction amongst religious sects had been diminished. The approach to learning about Druze history and religious precepts has continued to evolve and there is an escalating need among Druze in Lebanon to gain a deeper understanding and to build upon what some Druze were taught at home as children. An example of the changing needs for younger adults was captured in the following quote: “I don’t think that most Druze youth will accept religion to be dictated to them. I believe that the basics should be given to them so that they can form their own beliefs based on their convictions. They should be convinced, not dictated to.”

In considering my social interactions with those above the age of 50, their religious convictions were especially strong despite the fact that many described being raised with only bits of religious knowledge. Supplementary to this, many in this age range were somewhat familiar with Druze history, especially the ethical lessons that are so often related to specific historical figures sometimes considered saint-like. They seem less likely to question the integrity of anything associated with Druze identity. It was difficult for some to imagine why a researcher was interested in their sincere viewpoints on these topics although they rarely lacked strong opinions about preserving their Druze heritage. Juxtaposed to those in their 20s and 30s, it took a
significantly higher amount of effort to encourage some individuals to relate their opinions more earnestly and refrain from evoking the caricature of the Druze community that they might typically offer an outsider or a young child. Put more simply, the resulting issue is often miscommunication between older adults and younger adults.

The same question about educational resources and individual Druze identity was put forward to the focus groups I formed to get at these issues. In one, a student studying architecture offered the saying: “Who doesn’t have a past doesn’t have a future,” explaining that when history is shared, it can bring people together. She said that we should think critically about what community meant and how not having a unified cause could be detrimental. Others responded that the main issue was that their grandparents had lived simple lives while the newer generation was Westernized, creating a “culture gap” that leads to an abundance of freedom and lack of direction for the youth.

The perceived freedom and independence of the younger generation was often regarded by my informants of all ages as both advantageous and detrimental. As mentioned previously, the phrase “Druze religion” is considered by some to be a misnomer given its integration of Gnostic philosophy and the significance of incorporating this philosophy into your daily life and your general outlook. This philosophy is often situated as a path while the Druze emphasize the individual right to choose this path. As one informant said: “Each person chooses the path they want. The teacher opens the door, and you decide if you want to enter or choose another door. But basically you should have the curiosity to know what’s behind that door.”

One conversation in particular demonstrated just how comprehensively heritage was perceived and that what was considered trivial for some had symbolic significance for others. A 21 year old said that Druze heritage included a great variety of things such as the pronunciation
of the letter qaf, the attachment to Lebanon for those living in the diaspora, and the drinking of mate tea which has been a common pastime almost exclusively among Druze when it made its way to Lebanon via Argentinian return migrants many decades back. She went on to say that learning more about what she saw as her religion allowed her to make sense of Druze cultural rules, such as endogamous marriage. A young man responded that there were many more important things to learn other than trying to understand why endogamy had become part of their social practice. For him, religion’s potential to explain God and concepts like the afterlife were more meaningful while subjects like relations between men and women might influence human rights in the modern-day.

I also asked my informants whether or not they felt that expanded educational resources would strengthen the sense of community and not just an individual’s attachment to their Druze identity. A 28 year old man that had nearly become a sheikh said that once people had learned about their religion, they would become more aware that they had to help each other. Citing the precept that required one to protect their coreligionists, he said that people would be encouraged, if not obligated, to support their fellow Druze and not just during weddings or funerals. The same individual went on to say that learning more about reincarnation would similarly lead to a greater attachment to the “community”: “Because you understand that there’s a chance you can be born to this individual in the next life, and you believe in reincarnation, you know that we are one society, as one person, we’re all one community.”

Other respondents said that the programs or educational resources should provide more than just religious knowledge. They said that Christians did more than teach their children about Christ when they took them to church and that they offered fun activities, which resulted in a stronger sense of connectedness. An older lady likewise said that Muslims had mandatory alms,
fasting, the hajj, and ritual prayer that drew them together while we didn’t have those things. She said that even if these things didn’t necessarily strengthen one’s faith, they did strengthen the community. Unique to most of the other responses one person said that among the most imperative steps to strengthening the Druze community was to increase the tolerance for others that were seen as different: “Accepting others would help us flourish if that's the word for it. Because the thing that’s been threatening us is closing our society. So we need to learn that the ‘other’ isn’t that frightening and the Lebanese War is over.” To this he added: “We don’t have to give them the shore and take the mountains,” referring to an oft-used saying wherein the Druze made themselves safe by securing themselves in the mountainous regions of Lebanon while giving up their landholdings to Christians along the shores of the Mediterranean.

My informants had ideas of what kinds of educational resources the community might benefit from the most. One of a handful of my informants that had lived in the United States suggested that something similar to the seminars available at the American Druze Society’s gatherings should be offered in Lebanon. A sheikh living in Aley said that the two religious schools, al-Ishraq and al-Irfan, were principally designed to teach Druze children about their heritage while religious seminars for others needed to be expanded. A very prominent sheikh said that mushayekh in general needed a better approach and better resources to get the message to people in a more relevant way. He said that many people were confused by books that falsely interpreted the doctrine of Tawhid and added: “The youth’s knowledge in religion is very limited and when they see contradictions they will rather stay away and they will alienate themselves.” He called for accurate publications on Druze history and ethics produced in conjunction with academics and said that such a resource had been requested among Druze in the diaspora and in Lebanon. Another prominent sheikh said that an accurate religious and cultural curriculum
needed to be agreed upon and standardized, and that such a tool would surely strengthen belief in
and belonging to the community. However, he didn’t know if this was a realistic goal and said
that political posturing was among the greatest barriers to such an effort. What the community
needed was an important sheikh who could both court and challenge the divisive politics in the
community and be the custodian of this effort.

Identifying the Effects of a Perceived Cultural Resource Deficit

When I asked my informants to describe the kinds of educational resources that are
available to the Druze community and what might be lacking, some said that there should be
more seminars or a series of lessons focused on history and religious tenets. However, there was
specific emphasis on a need to stay away from anything too strictly “religious” however since
the term held unenticing connotations for many. The subtle aversion to things labeled “religious”
reflected the sometimes publicly contentious image that religion has for many in Lebanon and
will be discussed in more detail in this section. Here, my informants associated a strict approach
to religion as narrow-minded and one woman was afraid that focusing on religious edicts that
dictated what was right and wrong was a bad way to make an impression on children. Like
others, she said that lessons should focus on culture and history and should be just as accessible
as learning about the history of Lebanon as taught in schools.

Participants also discussed some of the shortcomings of the existing seminars or lectures.
One person said that one of the seminars offered in Aley was not age-specific and was repetitive
in terms of what they were saying. Another person explained that the seminars she had attended
were not straightforward and were focused on philosophical points that were difficult to
understand. She said that when the focus was on ethical lessons, she and her peers were not
being taught anything that they didn’t already know. The readings and prayers that often took place at the majlis were seen as insufficient. Considering what was offered at the majlis among other cultural resources, very little were intended to instruct children or younger teenagers: “In Lebanon, I haven’t seen any Druze centers where kids can go and learn. I always wish we had things like Bible school where you can actually learn.” My informants were quick to emphasize the need for an instructor that was interesting, engaging, and approachable. People of all ages, including former understudies, referred to the late Sami Makarem as an exemplary teacher who represented both the academy and the faith-based institutions. Makarem was a very knowledgeable scholar on the Druze and on Arabic literature and poetry and was a professor at the American University of Beirut and worked closely with the offices of Sheikh al-Aql in Lebanon to publish his book, The Druze Faith in 1974. Over the course of many years, he held seminars on the Druze in Lebanon and was a popular speaker at the events of the American Druze Society.

Many of my informants seemed optimistic that other Druze were interested in learning more about what they saw as their Druze heritage in general and might be willing to attend lectures and seminars if there were more available. Some of the younger adults said that word spreads very quickly and people might motivate each other to participate. There was one example of an educational series that seemed to be rather unique in Lebanon. Offering regular weekly lectures, a leading sheikh had in recent years begun a program which included a variety of lessons that ranged a gamut of topics on Druze history and faith. Located near Aley, in the town of Aabey, this particular educational resource was lauded for both its compelling instructor and the logical progression of lessons that offered his students the opportunity to reach a deeper level of knowledge.
Many people I spoke with had a very positive impression of the classes being offered and I was told that any Druze person could attend without necessarily registering in advance. The two times I was able to attend the men’s classes, offered on alternating nights with the women’s classes, I immediately noticed that the setting and structure of the lessons were more akin to a university seminar rather than the evening sessions at the majlis or the weekly muhatherat in Aley. Those in attendance took notes and sat at desks, and I was told that they were also periodically tested on what they had learned. The sheikh that hosted the sessions offered a practical approach to his theological and philosophical lecture. He presented lecture slides and cited specific verses of the Kitab al-Hikma before expanding on each phrase and main theme. A number of attendees appeared to be sheikhs and there were a variety of all ages that filled nearly every available seat. The format of these classes and the skill of the lecturer illustrated lessons that attendees saw as vibrant and interesting.

Although it wasn’t common to hear that there were not enough books which focused on the Druze, criticisms of the authors and their limited availability illustrated that there was room for improvement according to my informants. While some books were not available at bookstores, they could be found at a khalwat or maqam. The bookstores I visited in Lebanon offered very few books and the few they had were very expensive, focusing instead on printing and scanning services, and there were exceptionally few libraries. One person suggested that they needed one history book written by a small group of mushayekh so that its content could be agreed upon to offer the basics, which would incite people to learn more. Even if such a popular and uncontested book existed, encouraging younger people to read was also cited as a problem: “Reading is the best. Now, the new generation, they don’t read, only on their phones. If a person is not interested in knowing, nothing helps.” This last point in particular became a common
theme throughout the research process and during interviews I suggested that participants think critically about how the interests of individuals are shaped by our home environments and by our social lives.

Simply positioning others as not spiritual or un-academic or just uninterested offered an incomplete picture of society and made individuals seem less complex. I sometimes asked why some people were interested in learning more about their Druze heritage and others not. A young professional working in Beirut offered this recommendation:

We need to create something to tell each other. It doesn’t even have to be a real story. It just has to reflect the values that we hold to be very worthy or precious to us. I’m not asking them to produce a Hollywood movie. It can be just small stuff like anecdotes just to tell the children. Telling the children these things is very important. When you know a story that your friends at school know or your neighbors, for example like Superman. You and your friends can interpret Superman because you relate it to your entire life. Especially since religion is more of a story than anything else. When they tell you about Jesus, they tell you a story, when they tell you about Muhammed, they tell you his story.

He went on to explain that his mother was a sheikha and that he came from a family that was good about reminding him that he was Druze and he wanted to preserve that. However, he lacked these references. His reflections demonstrate his lack of familiarity with historical figures important to Druze history and its mythos and suggest that such stories are almost nonexistent. Yet, it is also true that the Druze have a plethora of narratives and folktales that are particular to them, ranging from epics about the lives of the first promulgators of the doctrine to tales of modern-day miracles occurring in the lives of the exceptionally pious.
One informant recommended social events and evening outings for families to socialize, even referencing the activities of the American Druze Society despite never having visited the United States. He added that, in his opinion, he wasn’t fond of the idea of confining the *Tawhid* doctrine in a scholastic format and said rather that it should be approached through introspection: “*Tawhid* is not about looking for something missing but about unveiling the truth we have inside us.” When a similar question was put to focus group participants a similar point was raised as one set of participants discussed the importance of engaging with the Gnostic philosophies of Plato and Socrates whose teachings are part of the Druze tradition. Rather than private introspection, however, they recommended an open forum in keeping with Plato’s dialectic. They said that the seminars and the *majlis* did not offer much room for discussion even if questions were sometimes fielded. To them, the *Tawhid* doctrine was based on the principal of using your mind to come to a logical understanding of the unity of existence.

A pair of sisters in one focus group said that there were seminars offered in Beirut and that they had encouraged their friends to attend. But they were averse to the idea because they saw these seminars as a reflection of the religious divide in Lebanon. The sisters disagreed, however, and said that what the seminars offered was neither contentious nor divisive. Some of my informants mentioned conducting their own research on the internet to learn more about Druze history and religion. They seemed well aware that online sources were not reliable but some said that it was still a good place to start. One person said that the internet was a good resource to understand what other people thought about the Druze, including the inaccuracies. To that, another person responded: “When you have knowledge, even if it’s wrong, you can ask questions and that might lead you to the right knowledge.” This statement shows that although wanting improved and reliable books, seminars, and other resources was understandable, using
the interest to research and ask questions might be an important first step. Realistically, even if individuals were engaging with inaccurate information, the risk of them being so alienated by it was not likely. Rather, in all probability their personal research or active inquiry would lead them to ask more questions and to pursue discussions with people they perceived to be knowledgeable.

Some of my informants said that those most familiar with the faith depicted it as introverted rather than open and compassionate. It might be possible, they felt, to learn the basic tenets but answers to particular questions were hard to come by. One person said that non-
mushayekh were asked to leave the room when details were discussed. Once a college student said that mushayekh should collectively accept them as they are, such as his uncle who was very open with him whenever he asked religious questions. Along with others he said that even if there was details that should be relegated to the initiated, there could still be books towards them.

Some of my informants emphasized the social divide between mushayekh and non-
mushayekh. One very intelligent young man provided this example: “I see two stories, musheykh and non-mushayekh. We have these religious classes; they take the few mushayekh in the class to study Hikma in a separate room as they teach us ethics and things like that.” Another young man responded by saying that there were not two different roads. He said that everyone was somewhere along the same path to knowledge and that each person was developing differently but that he didn’t agree with the criteria that lead to formal initiation for mushayekh. Connecting these points of view to the strength of the community one person stated: “Maybe they can heal the gap. If everybody has the equal opportunity to know the information, then there is no one who knows more than the other.” To this, another person responded: “People will feel like one family, one community.”
Some of my informants felt that there was an increasing need among their fellow Druze for religious knowledge. One said: “Ten years ago I didn’t hear about so many lectures being given as there are nowadays. I know three sheikhs that are open to everyone. They hold a lecture or two a week and everyone who's interested can go.” Relatedly, over the last two decades a burgeoning scholarship on the Druze has begun to emerge, building on and responding to the work of a handful of earlier authors dating back to Philip K. Hitti and including Sami Makarem, Abdullah M. Najjar, Robert Brenton Betts, and Fuad Khuri among others.

Many of the mushayekh with whom I spoke shared the opinion that there was a lack of a variety of resources, including printed materials, seminars, and instructors. One sheikh who worked at one of the Druze schools in Lebanon previously mentioned said that many of the books available did not have a methodological approach or focus, and added that: “There is no movement, no plan to make the people of the community desire to read these books. You have to have a plan to make the books go from the library to every house.” Another sheikh said that it could be problematic when reading early history books since Druze perspective is missing. He said that as he studied religious precepts he learned history through the works of prominent historians like Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Khallikan, and Baha ad-Din ibn Shaddad. A similar warning about the subjectivity of historians came up in a different context as a longtime attorney who was very knowledgeable on the subject remarked: “In Lebanon history is politics and everyone writes history the way he sees fit. Technically the history here is full of politics unless you are studying history from someone outside of Lebanon.”

\[15\] Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 CE), Ibn Khallikan (1211-1282 CE), Baha ad-Din ibn Shaddad (1145-1234 CE), are all well-known Arab historians and scholars. In particular, Ibn Khaldun’s multi-volume book, \textit{Muqaddimah} is widely considered the first work to focus on historiography.
Specifically addressing what the Druze community’s needs, one sheikh who had been offering lectures said that those who were knowledgeable didn’t have a united opinion about many things. He asked me to consider the confusion which results for many in having their religious questions answered in considerably different ways. He said that one should know their heritage but that we should also consider who what the nature of our heritage is and who is defining it. From his perspective, this included two things: The Druze sect and the path to Tawhid, which are integrated but never fully the same. He said that in order to become familiar with both aspects of heritage, one could start with a history of the Druze, which he referred to as an earthly rather than spiritual heritage. When I urged him to explain what he hoped to accomplish with his efforts, he said that he was essentially reminding people of their morals. He said that the knowledge of Tawhid comes from deep within and all he could hope to achieve was to incite people’s awareness.

One sheikh who had authored many books said that the philosophy of Tawhid helped him deeply understand the lessons of the Quran, the Bible, as well as Greek philosophy but understood that not everybody would be interested in them. He recognized that it was difficult to find the harmony among these theologies and saw a need to promote academic research on these subjects. Another interview participant said that the lack of an educational plan in Lebanon resulted in few experts that specialized in Druze history and in lecturing in general. A local sheikh working in Aley identified an acute lack of authors willing to write about such subjects and a librarian I spoke to said that those who had written about the dogma had often found themselves isolated for various reasons.
The Paths to Knowledge

When the issue of enhancing religious knowledge comes up among the Druze in Lebanon, opinions are offered about the practical ways this goal might be achieved. A variety of people with whom I spoke said that they thought community leaders should help or help more than they already do. A list they produced included existing resources such as the Druze religious schools and a variety of social organizations that vary among communities. Some of the social organizations commonly found in Druze communities include the family centers that host community functions, which participants said should be more active about inviting knowledgeable speakers. A mother of two said that any useful curricula would have to be relegated to the Druze schools since all of the rest were mixed with other religious groups. While there was a professed need for some discretion, participants also expressed their opinions about working with religious schools to offer Druze children lessons even if the children were not enrolled there. Children were continuously the focus of many of the recommendations people offered and it seemed that there exists a dearth of age-appropriate materials on Druze history and religious ethics.

Once again, participants said that they lacked a reliable book to teach their children or by which to learn themselves. Considering young adults around her age, one person said that she wasn’t advocating to delve into the Kitab al-Hikma by oneself, but wanted to see more books like that of Sami Makarem’s The Druze Faith (1974), which she thought was straightforward. Others cited the need for the politically powerful and the wealthy to do more. Druze mayors could incite other affluent members of the community to play a bigger role in financing programs and speakers when needed. The same was said of more powerful political figures who are in a position to help financially without personally endorsing specific religious activities.
More specifically, many people said that the community relied largely on the efforts of Sheikh al-Aql (the foremost Druze religious leader in Lebanon). Although there are sometimes more than one Sheikh al-Aql, since others can share the title in other countries, this was generally a reference to the Sheikh al-Aql in Lebanon who is the central religious representative. He works with a cadre of other mushayekh in a number of capacities which have included the production of publications, a few of which he shared with me. Many people said that Druze educational resources need to come from the proper respected authorities and that mushayekh who offer seminars should be similarly approved by those who work with Sheikh al-Aql. Some said that making Sheikh al-Aql responsible for these tasks would reduce risks of contradictory or confusing messages. An especially astute respondent recommended the formation of a formal committee to identify the best possible way to deliver a unified historical and religious message to people, which could be overseen by Sheikh al-Aql. As the most prominent official religious institution among the Druze, the position of Sheikh al-Aql was seen as the best possible reference for setting the standards for expanded, improved, or new resources.

My informants continued to profess a need to learn about the faith through knowledgeable mushayekh. They explained that there was a significant difference between those who had become mushayekh as a result of their strong religious devotions rather than others who may be less reverent. It was believed that their sincere faith could inspire an interest in others and that sharing their convictions would be an asset. A young college instructor said: “I think it has to be the mushayekh themselves because it’s a matter of trust. People trust the mushayekh. If I was to stand up there and talk about spirituality, people will always view you like coming with a certain agenda or bias.” Echoing another popular opinion, he said that it was important to him
that these mushayekh were also formally educated so that they might talk impart a logical message rather than teach blind faith, which didn’t make sense to people in the modern-day.

Others participants said that parents and the home environment were most responsible for encouraging interest in Druze heritage at a young age as well as transmitting knowledge. One individual said that she believed that if the family was indifferent, then no amount of lessons at school would make a difference: “The parents and the grandparents need to be the basis. My mom used to give me talks all the time. If my mom didn't talk to me like that, I would not even ask questions.” She went on to explain that she viewed learning as a cycle wherein the adults at home encourage children’s interest, while their resulting questions would embolden parents to learn and ask more questions so as to be prepared. Parents were seen as a kind of first school for children and the primary source of learning before children might decide to ask questions of mushayekh on their own.

Some younger adults said that if their peers intended to learn more, then they should be active and begin a social movement to learn and discuss more among themselves. They said that there was need for younger people to become leaders. A young banker pronounced: “We need a new generation, a person who’s really interested in the Druze community. Not interested just because he learned to be or from his parent’s background, but something coming from the heart, someone who really wants to know. It has to be someone with more influence.” Some young adults echoed these frustrations and said that their requests for seminars that address their educational needs had been ignored. They sometimes felt disenfranchised and unmotivated at the lack of what they perceived to be willing and knowledgeable instructors. Someone deduced that perhaps many people were afraid to offer the wrong interpretation of what they knew and that this hesitancy had resulted in a deficit of instructors. Such fears seemed generally misplaced as
respondents consistently said that they wanted to learn the basics of the Druze doctrine and history. It is possible that the criticisms that continue to halt the attempts of potentially enthusiastic instructors are produced almost exclusively by those who are already well-informed rather than the majority of individuals awaiting more sources that offered the fundamentals.

A sheikh who had extensive expertise in Druze religious curricula said that these resources are mostly under the purview of Sheikh al-Aql and the religious committee of mushayekh. He said that the Druze religious schools in Lebanon, and organizations like the American Druze Society outside of Lebanon, should be the ones to coordinate plans that can be implemented with a common goal. The two mushayekh with whom I spoke who worked at religious schools in Lebanon offered a similar approach. One in particular said that efforts to coordinate between international Druze organizations and those in Lebanon were paramount. Referring once more to the American Druze Society he said that such efforts, “will create a root change to the Druze youth in the United States. The awareness in the States will maybe then reflect on the Lebanese Druze and the cultural message will shift from America to the homeland and not vice versa.”

It was also suggested by a sheikh that there should be more coordination among his fellow initiated peers so that they might present a united image and more integrated ideas. He recommended pooling charitable resources to sponsor a handful of mushayekh to dedicate themselves to studying the faith and explaining it to the youth. One set of focus group participants gave a similar suggestion but said that these informed individuals should probably not be mushayekh as to be more relatable and able to connect with younger generations. In a different focus group, other young adults said that those capable of delivering this type of knowledge should be able to collaborate with them and should have both a religious and business
background: “They should be connected to both worlds so he knows how to communicate and collaborate with us. We can’t understand them if they don’t understand us. They have to relate to us.” In agreement, one participant responded that a good instructor should be familiar with their students’ concerns and that they shouldn’t be expected to leave their jobs or their modern lives behind.

Further focus group discussions offered a sort of reasoning session in which all involved shared their ideas about the best possible approaches to ameliorating the most pervasive issues their Druze community was facing. Those with backgrounds in media, architecture, finance, and marketing among others, all suggested the need for academic research and analysis. Although respondents focused on particular methods and types of people that could improve the landscape of existing resources, this shouldn’t imply that they believed the community’s issues stemmed from one particular group or facet of society. Many clearly recognized the interconnectedness of all of these facets and the responsibilities of both potential educators and purposeful students. As will be discussed in the concluding chapter, participants’ collective recommendations represented an interwoven diorama, just as complex and multi-faceted as the valued heritage they sought to preserve.

Conclusion

Many of the participants in this study, as well as those that I spoke to outside of the interviews, said that there was a genuine need to learn more about their history and the basic tenets of the faith. These kinds of knowledge are however not easily obtained. They expressed a need to know about Druze history and described it as informing contemporary Druze identity. In terms of this research study, determining the exactitude of the accessibility and quality of each
and every educational resource was not as significant as understanding how those resources were perceived. It was apparent early on that the Druze in Lebanon do not have the religious structures in place that might facilitate structured curricula or encourage people to pursue more active inquiry. However, what was not so clear at the beginning of this study were the shared sentiments of the Lebanese Druze in relation to the scope of their available resources.

Frankly put, the majority of individuals were dissatisfied with what was available to them. Criticisms were also often internalized and people stated that their effort, as well as that of their peers, was often greatly lacking. Druze identity was still particularized by these same people who often positioned it comparatively along in-group/out-group relations. Their social identity was thus juxtaposed with how they believed other religious groups were perceiving them as Druze. In some regards, this was described as a burden despite the value that so many placed on their Druze heritage. In Lebanon religious identity is the most prominent means by which people are recognized and in so many ways, the consequences of these labels are unescapable. The Druze are associated with stereotypes that may at first glance seem positive but also have a more insidious undertone. Some of their popular labels include ostensibly contradictory stereotypes such as being gracious hosts but being untrustworthy, or having a reputation as fiercely defensive and insular while also being seen as shifty and opportunistic.

All minority groups in the diaspora and in their countries of origin are especially susceptible to externally constructed discourses that have the power to damage and threaten them directly and indirectly. As for the latter, the ascribed negative connotations to the Druze have shaped their constructions of identity and of self on an individual level. This interplay of internal and external forces of reification shows that identity is not one thing but a series of contestations and constructions from all sides. Simultaneously, the social barriers the Druze can impose on one
another are no less distressing and there are a significant number of challenges that they face in terms of preserving their heritage.

Aside from the current conflict in Syria that has had a serious impact on Lebanon and Jordan as well as strategic implications for Israel, the Druze face a number of serious challenges. This includes a lack of clarity in how best to approach learning the *Hikma*, which is not considered a simple way to gain knowledge and necessitates proper instruction. In this regards, some resources have been developed by certain religious authorities, including the current Sheikh al-Aql. Meanwhile, other potential resources have been contested by many individuals with clout and the quality of unrealized efforts may never be known. The questions remains as to who will play a key role in inciting substantial change, as well as what that change will entail and how it will be expressed.

Another important challenge includes an increased likelihood of exogamous marriages. People had different opinions on this topic and their strategies to pursue or encourage endogamous marriage were also varied. For example, in this chapter, I related the story of an 84 year old man that had spent the majority of his life in the United States but had made sure to return to Lebanon with his children when they became old enough to marry. From his perspective, his children valued marrying fellow Druze in Lebanon despite their cultural differences because he and his wife had made sure to preserve certain Druze values in their children’s lives when they were young. Not having spoken directly to his children, their motivations to finding endogamous marriage partners cannot be verified but it was commonly known that his children had all returned to the United States with their spouses soon after marrying to start families of their own.
Returning to the idea that being Druze may be seen as creating obligations and burdens for individuals, the secrecy of the religious tenets, both basic and profound, has been perceived as a burden on the community. The ability to sensationalize their beliefs and their culture has left them politically vulnerable in some regards. Combined with the stigma that Druze loyalties are easily swayed, misinformation about the community has allowed others to misrepresent them as a dated, provincial group or even a heretic sect of Islam. Therefore, the lack of formal educational resources is doubly damaging in determining how Druze identity is externally ascribed by others and internally subscribed from within.

While the other issues that also came up in participants’ feedback were similarly vital, including the increasing culture of materialism resulting from the processes of globalization, their implications on the central research question should also be elucidated here. When I asked how improved resources concerning the fundamentals of their history and faith might influence Druze heritage, it was apparent early on that the feedback I received would be as varied as the individual conceptualizations of heritage. While this was true, the commonalities in the responses were clear and addressed the six themes that I had focused on. Thus, when asking what the key concepts of heritage were, or inquiring about the level of traditional knowledge for non-mushayekh, a predominant response to the fifth and sixth themes also emerged. Collectively, respondents strongly stated that they perceived threats to their shared heritage and identified what they believed to be some of the root causes.

Preserving Druze heritage and improving cultural resources, as defined by participants, are positively connected. Not only is cultural heritage associated with the kinds of resources discussed here, but many individuals clearly stated that a marked improvement in the accessibility of books, seminars, lectures, and even engaging mushayekh, would increase their
sentiment of belonging and perceptions of a more resilient Druze community. In response to the sixth and final theme I focused on, which asked participants who might help shape, support, and implement new or improved resources, people referred to existing power structures and to figurative movements that might bring about substantial social change. Although a metaphorical revolution does not seem imminent, there are some considerable opportunities to improve educational resources within the given social structures. With consideration for all of the important feedback that research participants provided, it is clear that improved educational resources are the key to empowering Druze individuals to learn more about their shared heritage.

Of course, the other important facet of preserving the Druze community that participants identified was the practice of endogamy, which was constantly situated as an essential aspect of continuity for the Druze. When sociologist Mounira Charrad studied the differences in how Islamic family law was reformed as the states of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria were established, she noted that the changes, “challenged identities that historically had been based on extended patrilineal kinship ties and that had served as a major anchor for social solidarity, social control, and collective political action” (Charrad 2001:6). Certainly the same thing could be said if Lebanon’s confessional system were to be considerably altered, resulting in weakened barriers towards exogamy. And yet even when those barriers are lacking, as is the case in most diasporic communities, endogamy defines the marriage practices of a majority of Druze and returning to the individual’s or their parents’ country of origin to find a spouse is relatively common.

Simply put there is no definitive answer to explain how an individual’s values might change to promote this practice and further discussions would wander perhaps too far into the realm of speculation. The processes of how we are synthesized into and further enact our cultural values are perhaps unique to each of us; although culture and community form the base and context of
any internal development. Knowledge of Druze history and religion may or may not lead to a stronger likelihood of endogamy but it does translate into greater enculturation and that is indeed an important starting point. It is up to the individual to decide how a better understanding of their historical and religious heritage translates into personal practices that promote their relation to the community and its continuity.
Chapter 8 Conclusions and Research Applications

In his pivotal book, *The Druze: Millennium Scrolls Revealed* (1973), the late Lebanese Ambassador Abdullah M. Najjar wrote: “For centuries, pens have been quite busy dealing with our subject but, strange to say, they failed to really lift off the cover for true and satisfactory inspection. They did not give Druzism its due in research and analysis. The various writers looked long and hard at the face behind the veil, then let their guess and fancy complete the job drawing and adorning the images as they pleased” (18).

Over 40 years after Ambassador Najjar made his observation, a new Druze literature based in academia has more recently begun to emerge. However, there still remains an absence of applied research focused on any number of issues the Druze are facing. The task of gathering primary data is daunting and a firsthand study of the Druze entails many issues of accessibility while structural barriers present additional challenges. As an American Druze and a student of applied anthropology, I recognized an opportunity to develop and implement a research project that utilizes the tools of the social sciences to understand how the Druze construct, express, and attempt to preserve what they see as their shared heritage in Lebanon. In particular, conducting the kind of traditional ethnographic fieldwork that remains a hallmark of anthropological research, facilitated a comprehensive approach to the salient themes. The two goals of this final chapter are to discuss how this study contributes to anthropological theory and applied research.
topics, and to further describe and explore participants’ combined suggestions towards ameliorating the issues they identified. Between the sections on theoretical contributions and the implications of this research on the Druze community, I also offer a discussion of the shortcomings of this project with personal recommendations for future research.

Contributions to Applied Anthropology

In the second chapter I began with a discussion of the various approaches to studying heritage. The literature that focused on this relatively broad topic represented an assortment of fields within and beyond anthropology. As we saw, common themes based on the diverse facets of heritage framed each researcher’s focus and theoretical approach. In reviewing a significant sample of literature on tangible heritage resources, tourism, public display versus private experience, notions of authenticity, practices of silence and elision, and the interrelatedness of history and memory, I recognized a deficit in research that embraced the holistic perspective most appropriate to the study of an inclusive heritage. This was particularly the case when focusing on intangible aspects of cultural heritage.

For me, the most complete, and perhaps even logical, approach to the study of cultural heritage was to be found in Laurajane Smith’s *Uses of Heritage* (2006). In it, she defines heritage as the process of meaning making and says that while meaning can be made at physical sites of historical and cultural significance, which have an authority of their own: “the idea or substance of ‘heritage’ is not itself innately embedded in a physical relic or place” (L. Smith 2006:87). To this she adds: “the cultural and political work or consequence of heritage is to negotiate and define cultural and social meaning in the present” (L. Smith 2006:87). This approach framed my methodology and the dialectical process I utilized to construct a narrative with the data I had
collected. Recognizing deficiencies in what she termed the “new heritage studies” Smith called for an increased awareness of the absence of theorization. In a coauthored, volume published in 2009, Smith further called upon researchers to be attentive to the ways in which all of heritage is contested and acquires meaning. Regarding this, she noted: “Heritage conservation and safeguarding in such circumstances can only be understood as a form of cultural politics and this needs to be reflected in heritage practice, be that in educational institutions or in the field” (Smith and Akagawa 2009: foreword).

In my opinion, Smith’s approach to understanding cultural heritage is informed by a unique combination of political economy and symbolic anthropology, two theoretical approaches often situated in contrast to one another. The intersection of these theoretical approaches is not so much a relationship of contrasts as it is one of compliments. Beginning with the latter, William Roseberry highlights the sometimes contrived differences between the symbolic and cultural materialist approaches in his article “Balinese Cockfights and the Seduction of Anthropology” (1982:1014). Recognizing the hostility between anthropologists from each of these theoretical schools, Roseberry takes a critical look at Clifford Geertz’s influential essay “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” (1973). He says that with his expressive prose, Geertz depicts the importance of the symbolic approach but neglects to offer a meaningful way to interpret the symbolism of the cockfight within the changing historical context. Moreover, the significance Geertz attributes to meaning making emphasizes the individual agency of those involved to such a degree that other important societal structures become ancillary. For example, the economic factors which lead women to tend to the stalls on market days, leaving a surplus of men to partake in cockfighting, are pushed to the periphery of significance, subsumed by the symbolic interpretations of those involved.
In some ways Geertz’s symbolic approach, and emphasis on the meanings we attribute to facets of our social worlds, seems very similar to the perspective I have put forward. Borrowing from political economy’s emphasis on historicism, I worked with research participants to incorporate discussions of a number of important social structures that provide the political, doctrinal, and economic contexts in which meaning is made. In contrast, Geertz focuses on calling attention to the metaphorical meanings of the cockfight in order to position this facet of Balinese culture as a text to be interpreted (Roseberry 1982:1019). Indeed, my own research has also concerned itself with the personal stories and opinions of its research informants and, parroting Geertz’s language, I can state that the discursive data are a Druze reading of Druze experience: “a story they tell themselves about themselves” (Roseberry 1982:1018-1019). And yet these stories remain a part of the larger cultural dialogue and the social systems reproduced therein.

According to Roseberry, Geertz certainly recognized that the cockfight had changed in significant ways over the course of decades but may not have given adequate consideration of the larger social processes at play (Roseberry 1982:1021). The key issue was not that Geertz situated cultural understanding as text, but that he did so without recognizing how that text is implicated in larger, structural contexts. Roseberry explained that research must ask why some individuals enacted culture differently than others while considering who is creating the cultural forms being interpreted: “To see culture as an ensemble of texts… is to remove culture from the process of its creation” (Roseberry 1982:1023).

To say a bit more about the utility of political economy, Don Robotham explains that when culture and ideology are positioned as stabilizing or perhaps controlling forces, a political economy of culture becomes apparent (2012:46). Robotham attributes this perspective to the
Italian Marxist and theorist, Antonio Gramsci, who used the term hegemony to identify how powerful ideologies are made to seem like commonsense beliefs. Robotham explains that political economy has long suffered from two central assumptions, the first of which insists that objective reality exists absent of our subjective interpretations, our awareness of its forms. The second assumption conceptualizes the development of society in a predetermined progression or evolutionary sequence (Robotham 2012:48). I agree with Robotham’s criticisms having recognized similar essentialist pitfalls within the literature on heritage and among other anthropological works. He says that a more dialectical approach to historicism would accommodate an anthropological approach to political economy that is more humanistic, leading to an increasingly accurate and thoughtful understanding of political and economic forces without devaluing worthwhile principles often associated with the bourgeoisie, like freedom of speech and assembly (Robotham 2012:54).

While a stricter application of political economy would have put more emphasis on the economic structures in the Druze community, restricting participants’ opinions to this particular social facet would have only represented a portion of their concerns. Rather than try to understand economics or politics as causalities of the issues surrounding heritage preservation, I did not try to locate causality in any particular social structure. To do so would have been to strategically position such a structure as the foundation to everything else. Insisting that either politics, economics, traditions, or doctrine (or some assembly of these), is self-sustaining and is the pivotal means by which other structures are shaped, would have undermined any individual or collective agency and imposed a cultural deterministic ideology (Robotham 2012:51).

In her widely-cited article (1984), Sherry Ortner argued that political economic approaches in anthropology overstressed capitalism and were too materialistic, neglecting to
include the daily lives of the individual (Roseberry 1988:162). However, she also believed that the strength of political economy lies in, “its openness to symbolic analysis, its regional focus, and its historical attitude” (Roseberry 1988:161). Roseberry explains that the approach began to emphasize the importance of history as a response to Julian Steward’s political ecology, where global processes were the central theme (Roseberry 1988:163). Through both world systems theory and dependency theory, political economy continued to situate those being studied as impacted by their environments, while some anthropologists recognized that these same people were in turn creating their environments. Offering advice to political economists, Roseberry says that scholars attempting to understand the tensions between the: “global/local, determination/freedom, structureagency… must avoid making capitalism too determinative, and they must avoid romanticizing the cultural freedom of anthropological subjects. The tension defines anthropological political economy, its preoccupations, projects, and promise” (Roseberry 1988:174).

Talal Asad explains how some anthropologists have created self-serving ideologies which conveniently accommodate the “meanings” of those groups being studied (1979). Including the work of Bronislaw Malinowski, these ideologies are positioned as a priori structures of meaning in which discourses are forcefully situated (Asad 1979:608-609). Asad explains that both rationalists and empiricists (in this case political economists and symbolic/interpretive anthropologists) have tended to work backwards by approaching their research as a means to validate the authenticity and ascendancy of particular cultural forms (Asad 1979:609). Considering the research on cultural heritage, these insights mean that anthropologists should lay bare their assumptions about the thematic approach as much as possible. If one were to study notions of authenticity or perhaps public display, the researcher would need to explain how their
perspectives have been influenced by their theoretical approach before insisting on the essential quality of any social facet. This should be followed by a methodological approach that includes discursive opportunities for research participants to define those integral themes.

Asad goes on to say that the anthropological treatments of ideology limit conceptualizations of social change (1979:607). This is because authority always equals hegemonic power, which is both a precursor to and reproducer of ideologies and social order. Not only is social change not accommodated, but fixating on particular ideologies further neglects the role of political and economic factors in society (Asad 1979:607). From Assad’s perspective, anthropologists in general have been unable to create a theory of social change because the object of change is conceptualized in a problematic way and not just because societies are very complex (Asad 1979:609). The problem begins with the assumption that the social object, which in the case of this research is heritage or shared identity, is constructed by the anthropologist as an essential meaning. Even the natural world becomes a product of human cognition, which insinuates that people have total control over how they conceive their societies and project those conceptualizations on their material environments (Asad 1979:610).

While it is the goal of the anthropologist to reproduce the narrative of informants in their text, positioning that narrative in an “essential system of meaning” precludes research participants from fully expressing their points of view. This approach to any study of heritage stems from a limited theory of culture: “which gives logical priority to the system of authentic meaning supposedly shared by an ideologically-defined community, and independent of the political activity and economic conditions of its members” (Asad 1979:614). In studying how the Druze preserve their heritage, it was apparent that an ideal Druze heritage was not readily agreed upon, even though participants consistently offered their concept of positive and negative traits.
Basically, ideologies attempt to predict real social forms but fail to recognize that they are producing and reproducing these same forms by working to establish their authenticity based on their preconceived standards (Asad 1979:621). Asad asks: “to what extent do anthropological texts construct an essential system of meanings in their attempt to present the ‘authentic’ structure of social life and of discourse of the people studied?” (Asad 1979:613). In response to his own question, he discusses Ernest Gellner’s work among the Berbers to illustrate his point. Gellner researched living saints among the Berbers, whose social role it is to offer mediation while their authority stems from the power of their blessings and their connection to God (1970). From his perspective, however, Gellner states that their political authority is in reality based on the ignorance of their fellow tribesman whose faith in the manifested powers of the Divine is clearly illogical (Asad 1979:622). Thus, the narrative that Gellner creates represents the legitimate understanding of the power of these saints having imposed his own criteria of validity. He insinuates that the Berbers fail to recognize this reality and makes their beliefs seem parochial (Asad 1979:622). His lack of a more culturally relativistic approach positions the Berber community as grossly mistaken about their own political structure.

In reviewing the literature on heritage, it became apparent that researchers focused on specific aspects of identity and heritage, such as tangible symbols, cultural practices, or touristic products, without fully representing or including the social processes that create value. This is not to say that researchers who focus on a specific aspect or theme of heritage, such as tourism, necessarily have restricted perspectives. However, unless social scientists recognize the process of how meaning is constructed within the historical context and in relation to the full gamut of structural influences, researchers run the risk of representing heritage as fixed or two-dimensional. Smith’s approach to heritage as a process by which we make meaning best
represents the holistic approach that some researchers have adopted and can be applied to any of the prominent themes identified in chapter two (Bruner 2001; Chambers 2009; Clifford 2004; Greenbaum 2002; Howard 2003; Hyatt 2012; Jakcson 2012; Shackel 2005). Moreover, this approach accommodates the theoretical frameworks of both political economy and symbolic anthropology without overemphasizing individual agency or essentializing heritage by restricting it to material processes.

Future research on heritage should investigate the implications of their often fixed approach to shared interpretations of social structures, including heritage, identity, and culture as examined here (Roseberry 1982:1023). Despite a span of over 30 years between their works, Assad and Robotham mention that political economy has consistently been the forte of social anthropologists throughout Britain and France while symbolic or interpretive anthropology has been the realm of their contemporaries in the United States (Robotham 2012:48). This research exemplifies the utility of an increasingly integrated approach, where the political economy couched in European Marxism incorporates Geertz’s symbolic anthropology to emphasize meaning making as a structural process shaped by our social worlds.

Asad states that meaning is fused together with the cultural and political pre-conditions in which meaning is constructed in the first place (Asad 1979:618). He states: “Nothing can be said or done with meaning if it does not fit into an a priori system, the ‘authentic’ culture which defines the essential social being of the people concerned” (Asad 1979:618). Oftentimes, researchers in the social sciences base their inquiry on predetermined or a priori systems related to the sometimes narrow facet of heritage on which they are focused. For example, the efforts of cultural resource managers may be so focused on managing those resources as to conveniently bypass any consideration of who is defining what as actual resources (McKercher and du Cros
Conversely, cultural anthropologists in specific, might place a critical priority on systems of human meaning without asking how authoritative systems influence or even maintain a variety of discourses. If anthropologists pay close attention to how discourse is expressed within various social structures, then their research can deal with the assumptions that are so often inherent in their veiled ideologies. As I have illustrated, a more inclusive and systemic approach to cultural heritage necessitates a participant driven discourse rather than an anthropology wherein systems of ideology and social facts represent the principal organizational mode.

Any anthropologist or social scientist that studies heritage should always operationalize the term to have a more nuanced understanding of the implications of their analysis. Any assessment that neglects to elucidate how the different forms and functions of the processes of heritage provide meaning in the lives of individuals, only serves to reify its own ideologies and contributes very little value to a critical understanding of culture and other social phenomena. With a comprehensive discourse-oriented approach, this study offers a clear example of how qualitative research contributes meaningful insight into shared understandings of intangible cultural heritage. Coupled with a political economy approach, this study hopes to build upon the works of Peter Howard and Laurajane Smith, whose nuanced discussions of how heritage and identity reflect processes of personal and shared value, establishes a foundation for understanding heritage in both its tangible and intangible expressions.

**Contributions to the Druze Community**

Lila Abu-Lughod said that focusing on discourse and practice moved the anthropologist away from idealistic concept of culture, or studying culture for cultures sake (Abu-Lughod 1991:147-148). Having been trained in an institution where applied anthropology is the focus,
the implications of this research study are intended to make a contribution to the Druze community in Lebanon. This section includes two subsections wherein I discuss the most salient issues facing the Druze community before offering participants’ collective opinions about the means to ameliorate these concerns.

The utility of applied anthropology has continued to remind me that the foremost goal of this research has been to benefit the Druze community. Therefore, expecting fellow Druze to be amongst the readers of this text, I have worked to directly address social issues that they should find familiar. In considering the potential readership, my position as an American-born Druze, or “halfie” to borrow from Abu-Lughod (1991:142), encourages me to write for two audiences: other anthropologists (especially Western ones) and my fellow Druze. This is a complex feat especially for applied anthropologists whose research necessitates remedial goals that must navigate the given social structures while engaging with perceived power holders. Indeed, “The constitution of readers today is highly diverse and no longer can we talk only about anthropological readers, the ethnographer’s colleagues, or even more generally, academic readers as a specified target. To recognize this allows practitioners of anthropology to have less fixed and more movable positionalities …” (Ryang 1997:45).

Since the inception of the faith, the Druze have practiced religious dissimulation for a variety of reasons. Until more recently, this has allowed individuals to deny their faith in times of crisis and in many ways has assisted the community in adapting to outside pressures by adopting certain practices that may not have been native, such as the influence of Islamic Hanafi law (Betts 1988). Druze heritage has been preserved in part due to its ability to become insular in terms of relegating much of the doctrinal knowledge to the few. While this strategy has benefited them throughout their history, it has resulted in consequences that have left many dissatisfied.
The themes of this work might also be expanded beyond the Druze since there exist many other ethnic and religious groups throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia that share many similar aspects of heritage, group identity, and social practices. As such, many of the themes concerning the Druze sense of community, their contemporary process of enculturation, and their dynamic relations with neighboring communities, reflect a superfluity of social issues common to so many other groups. Author and columnist Amir Taheri (2005) identifies a number of these diverse groups and explains their commonalities with the Druze. Some of these include Heydaris, Zoroastrians, and Baha’i in Iran, Yazidis in Syria and Iraq, Nusayris in Syria and Turkey, Ibadis in Oman and Algeria, and Ismaili’s, which includes several separate groups such as the Nizaris, in Saudi Arabia. Among others, most of these schismatic religious groups are situated both historically and theologically (with the exception of Zoroastrians whose recorded history dates back to the 5th century) as offshoots of Shia Islam and are referred to by that majority as ghulāt, meaning extremist (Taheri 2005:184).

The Middle East in particular is more religiously diverse than is often portrayed and a great variety of religious interpretation exists both within and alongside Islam. All of the religious sects mentioned have doctrines based on the fundamental principle of God’s oneness and all have developed traditions of secrecy, which Taheri defines as a “defense mechanism”, in reaction to the persecutions that frames their early histories (Taheri 2005:185, 189). Future research that might address the risks to these community’s cultural heritage should not avoid positioning such groups as “fading historical curiosities” and facilitate notions of particularism that frame their distinctive qualities (Taheri 2005:194).

Taheri explains that even decades of communism throughout the nations of the former USSR, or the sever rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan, did not deter the deep sense of in-group
unity that many of these communities continue to express and experience (2005:187). He
describes their community sentiment as reflective of a nexal identity, as opposed to a serial
identity, which: “melts away as soon as one is removed from its context. A nexal identity, by
contrast, is interiorized as a second nature and is not dependent upon proximity” (Taheri
2005:188). Like the Druze community’s relation to the Progressive Socialist Party, many of
these groups have also tended to play a very large role in secular political movements including
pan-Arabism: “In every case, the aim has been to promote political unity in the hope of
safeguarding religious diversity. In other words, opening oneself to a broader political identity
was a means of ensuring one’s right to a closed religious identity” (Taheri 2005:187). As well,
the focus on ethnic identity as the key facet of cultural heritage as opposed to a religiously
prominent identity, has also been especially important among Arab Christians. Other
commonalities that influence the construction and contestation of ethnic heritage can be found
between the Druze and so many other ethnic and religious groups including Alawites in Syria,
Syriac Christians in Lebanon, Chaldeans in Egypt, Berbers in Morocco and Algeria, Kurds in
Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, and smaller Jewish enclaves in Iran, Morocco, and the countries of the
Caucasus.

During previous research, I asked: “How can a community, whose religious tenets remain
clandestine even to its adherents, remain distinct in the diaspora?” (Radwan 2009:8). In terms of
this research project, assimilation is an issue pertinent to the Druze in Lebanon as well as those
abroad. As will be discussed, secrecy was among a number of issues that influenced and shaped
notions of Druze heritage. Access to resources relating history and fundamental beliefs can lead
to a greater understanding of the religious principles and an appreciation of the shared values that
provide a foundation for the Druze community throughout Lebanon.
The Barriers and Other Problems to Preserving Druze Heritage

In developing this research project, I maintained an awareness for the possibility that some Druze in Lebanon might not perceive the same issues I believed to be evident. While this was true, none of the people I spent time with believed that their Druze community does not face some semblance of social issues. Nor did anyone overtly state that Druze heritage was not worth preserving, or disassociated it entirely from knowledge of the community’s history or doctrine. The vast majority identified what they believed to be a cultural identity at risk with few social supports within the community. In general, it was my experience that the Druze may be experiencing a collective, heightened anxiety about their heritage. The following discussion highlights these issues, focusing on particular themes which include a lack of public identity, few educational resources, and the implications of secrecy and miscommunication.

For many Druze in Lebanon, a lack of a public image comparable to that of Christians and Muslims lead many to perceive their Druze identity as somehow lacking. Referencing my interview question, one young man explained: “We don’t have an image to present to the world if you wanted to explain to someone who asked you. You just asked me, ‘Tell me what being a Druze means to you?’ I don’t have a proper answer. We should agree upon something that you would say to someone who would ask.” The point that the Druze did not have a clear, shared public image because they saw themselves as lacking knowledge about their history was a sentiment that was echoed by others I interacted with while in the field. His recommendation that the community should come together to agree upon what Druzeness should represent should not be taken literally, but should serve as a reference to what was perceived as an overarching lack of familiarity with distinct Druze cultural forms. Without insinuating that the Druze are entirely unique, the facets of culture which distinguish one from one’s neighbors construct group
identity. In this context, group identity may refer to public identity and an awareness of the differences that may or may not exist between how the group sees itself by any consensus and how it is viewed by outsiders. The perception of a lack of public image is problematic in constructing a cultural identity that is resilient. A public image also necessitates perceivably unique characteristics particular to the Druze. This often included a belief in reincarnation, which was frequently cited as a strong example, representing a shared value that influenced their social world in very practical ways.

The Druze community does not lack traditions or history but a relatively pervasive unfamiliarity with traditional cultural forms resulted in a common belief that these things were absent. Likewise, Druze beliefs remain relatively mysterious to others in Lebanon and misinterpretations are widespread. For example, having heard about my academic interest in the community, an acquaintance asked me to share a conversation with his Christian friend who wanted to learn a bit more about the Druze. His friend was an accomplished journalist who had studied theology and Islamic law at his university and was raised in a town that was predominantly Druze. Given his career choice he had opportunities to ask questions of very prominent figures in the Druze community but had come away without a clear understanding of what the basic precepts of the Druze religion entailed. His experiences were reminiscent of the anthropologist Fuad Khuri, who related his lack of familiarity with the Druze despite having spent his formative years among them (2004). A 79 year old man who had emigrated to the United States in his youth but still maintained a home in Aley related an especially poignant example of this: “The people who used to come and spend the summer here were all Francophones and for 70 or 80 years there was no communication beyond superficial greetings,
hello when they come in the summer and goodbye when they leave. We rented our house for 30 years. That is the extent.”

Religious identity continues to represent the most fundamental identity marker in Lebanese society. Perceptions that lead individuals to believe their community lacks a public image can be a detriment in more than one way: “The problem is that Druze are closed and hiding from other religions... If others don’t know what we believe, they will believe whatever they hear about us. We appear flexible from outside but actually from inside we are not.” In comparing practical and cultural resources available to them, many Druze in Lebanon also felt like the community had a deficit. Similarly, they compared themselves to Christians and Muslims and in many instances also compared themselves to other Druze communities, especially those in the diaspora. For example, whether or not they had ever traveled outside of Lebanon, many were aware of other Druze communities in the diaspora, most likely because nearly everyone had a sibling, cousin, aunt, or uncle that lived abroad.

In particular, many were familiar with the Druze community in the United States and the many activities of the American Druze Society. These activities include a number of regional and national conventions each year, which serve as a gathering point for extended relations and friends throughout the United States and other countries to come together and socialize for a few days. Along with the cultural and educational programs that are offered at these events, younger Druze network and socialize, creating the opportunity to make friends or even meet potential spouses. Furthermore, although participation in the American Druze Society has waxed and waned at various points since its establishment over a century ago, participation and attendance at events has been at record highs in recent years. The efforts of the ADS have often been the catalyst for new efforts to create educational materials and publish informative articles to educate
people of all ages about their Druze heritage. In his memoirs, Abdullah E. Najjar explained how a growing Druze awareness lead to early efforts to provide educational resources during his work in the American Druze Society and its Committee on Religious Affairs:

The search for direction became the agenda for the early 1970s. It took the form of an awakening of the need to formulate a sense of Druze identity. “Who are the Druze? What are their beliefs? What is our role in the American society? What are our ties to Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and the rest of the Arab world?” These and other questions circulated throughout the community, especially related to the question of how to inculcate the youth with an understanding and appreciation of their heritage. Many members wanted to know how they could learn more about the Druze religion. Young people in the community were questioned to find out what kinds of things they wanted to know about their own faith and heritage so that materials could be developed attempting to provide answers to those questions (2006:155).

Although progress in this area has been slow and halting over the past three to four decades since Najjar made his statements, more recently, many have expressed a common interest to continue to advance these resources with the hope that they might serve as a template for their peers in Lebanon.

Assuming that every people have access to some resources or method of learning more about their Druze heritage, another common issue which emerged was general apathy. However, when research participants mentioned a lack of interest, it was always offered as a generalization of others. Many who spoke to me tended to describe themselves as eagerly awaiting students who simply lacked the means by which to learn. Judging the sincerity of their interests was
neither possible nor in the purview of my role as a researcher. And yet it seemed clear that the complex relationship between the availability of resources and the curiosity of their intended audience was not an inverse one. Newer generations have expressed the need to learn about their faith and history in a way that is different from the manner in which their parents were enculturated. It is likely that their perceived lack of structured resources has greatly influenced their willingness to be proactive about learning more. It is not difficult to imagine how an abundance of materials and social activities relating to the Druze community might inspire more active inquiry.

A dearth of structured resources was discouraging for many and there was no shortage of criticisms for those that did exist. Research participants explained that many seminars or printed materials were not accessible or difficult to understand. A more common issue that was often identified by the academics and the mushayekh I spoke to was the possible inaccuracy of both speakers and texts. This relates back to the growing number of both mushayekh and non-mushayekh that are willing to teach others what they know but are perceived by their peers as having a private agenda. Even if their motivation to teach was not called into question, their doctrinal acumen would be. Thus, the barriers that knowledgeable people within the Druze community have presented to those who might attempt to teach or write on the subject have dissuaded some individuals from their efforts.

Without victimizing these would-be authors and instructors, a fear of misinformation is not unfounded and is seen by many to be even more of a detriment than a pervasive knowledge gap. In fact, the issue of philosophical and supposed dogmatic differences, as well as the tendency to defer to a specific lineage of thinkers, is at the forefront of issues which negatively affect access to accurate educational resources, especially when considering the basic tenets of
the faith. It may seem strange that knowledgeable individuals may disagree on even these fundamentals of the doctrine, so as to cripple their peers’ efforts, but social rivalries can lead to repudiation or gossip that can affect anyone’s reputation. For example, it is not difficult to cast doubt on the intentions of anyone willing to put themselves in the spotlight. The truth of their statements aside, saying that others might covet the attention and the recognition that they are a source of knowledge has worked as a means of social control.

During one of the oral history interviews I conducted that focused on the social structure of the given knowledge gap, the research participant stated: “The gap is very big, very big. That makes the new generation kind of resistant to the old generation. This generational struggle is growing because of this… You have that educational gap. The older generation was not exposed to the new theoretical way of thinking.” She added that older adults were satisfied with an interpretation of the Druze faith that many younger people see as superficial. Compounded with a tendency to value secrecy, some parents found it difficult to fully understand the indifference of some teenagers and the critical perspectives of younger adults.

Referencing his cousin whose quote opens this concluding chapter, Abdullah E. Najjar very poignantly wrote: “The world has changed and the time for secrecy is past. Traditional Elders who continue to hoard the most esoteric beauty of Tawhid are banking their fire against the night. Come morning they will be left to stir the cold ashes of irrelevance” (E. Najjar 2006:162). Indeed, since the early 1970s when the Ambassador Abdullah M. Najjar believed that change had come, the world continues to transform but whether or not tolerance has increased universally is debatable. But to return to our focus, denying those who are interested in learning more is not an acceptable means of safeguarding the community (M. Najjar 1973:20).
One’s approach to actively teach fellow Druze about what are seen as central tenets has become relatively divisive although the debate truly rests on the degree to which some believe knowledge should be disseminated. Almost nobody I spoke with, including the mushayekh, believed that everything should be off limits for uninitiated Druze, or non-mushayekh. Asking whether or not the risks might be worth the reward unrealistically situates the debate and disregards every relevant context. In a recent publication, the former British diplomat Gerard Russell aptly noted:

Threats abound. Lebanon is unstable, Syria is bloody, and Israel has confiscated a large proportion of Druze land to house the country’s Jewish immigrants. The ignorance of lay Druze about their religion ill suits them for maintaining it abroad. Yet in every region their clergy and secular leaders have succeeded in maintaining the unity and distinctiveness of their community. Having seen how wrong Carnarvon was to write off the Druze, I came back from Moukhtara and Hasbaya unwilling to do the same (Russell 2014:145).

Both real and imagined issues continue to affect the Druze community and the latter are no less potent than the former. It is the objective of this research effort to offer a clearer understanding of these interconnected issues and to suggest practical approaches towards improving the educational resources of the Druze community so that the perceived knowledge gap might be bridged and a more resilient Druze identity can emerge.
Suggested Means towards Amelioration

Returning to William Roseberry, I agree that social change is largely determined structurally rather than through individual agency, but add the caveat that a theoretical framework that leans too much in either direction risks either neglecting the historical context or alienating the discourse of research participants (Roseberry 1988:171). Essentially, the agency of individuals often rests within the boundaries of structural forces that include political, economic, and cultural contexts. The structural impediments to the changes that the participants in this research study have offered are as diverse as the individual participants themselves. The barriers to change are always complex due to the complicated subject matter at hand. Attempting to understand the social mechanisms at play in preserving Druze heritage has necessitated a meaningful inquiry into the construction and contestation of Druze identity in Lebanon. The application of this research project is potentially implementable by either traditional structures and organizations or groups of committed individuals. The selected methodologies have focused on the importance of the discursive approach to facilitate participant driven discussions of the issues that the community faces. Furthermore, this strategy has resulted in suggestions for proposed remediation that is a result of the popular opinion of all stakeholders.

My efforts have concentrated on intangible cultural heritage resources, which include any educational resource, organization, or structured materials that might help preserve Druze heritage as defined by the community. The feedback from the research interviews offered a variety of recommendations that can help construct new, or restructure existing, educational resources pertaining to Druze history and the basic tenets of the faith. Throughout these chapters I have continued to refer to these types of knowledge as educational resources rather than talking about the cultural capital of the Druze community or utilizing other convenient framings. I have
also contextualized the relevant religious tenets as “basic,” which stand in contrast to the deeper and more esoteric interpretations of the doctrine as defined by research participants. The following discussion focuses on interrelated themes that include enculturation at home, the scope of resources and optimal traits of improved resources, and identifying the essential characteristics of key players in Lebanon’s Druze community.

Both parents and young adults expressed a need for better communication between the generations but there was a larger issue that loomed. While young adults often related a variety of childhood experiences where they felt that they did not learn much about their Druze heritage at home, parents affirmed that they often lacked important knowledge themselves. An elementary school teacher and mother of three teenagers explained to me that as a young child her mother did not work outside the home and had the time to relate stories about important Druze historical figures. While she had attempted to do the same in her home, and even though her stories had sparked a great deal of curiosity in her children, she believed that they did not spark a similarly strong faith as she had experienced. She recognized that teenagers and young adults were taught to think critically about the subject of faith and philosophy and that an effective way of teaching them must involve a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Many parents felt ill-equipped to answer their children’s questions and unable to devote the time to accompany them to the majlis.

Religious education had also become less common in the home as extended families would gather on Thursday evenings to read from the Kitab al-Hikma and ask questions, in a similar tradition to mushayekh. This same mother of three explained that it used to be more common to have gatherings with the whole family to learn from grandparents and that this had been a powerful tradition for her during her formative years. Certainly a revitalization of this
tradition could make a positive impression on young children and encourage all age groups to learn more. When I asked another parent of two children, who was actively pursuing more religious knowledge, how parents might encourage their children’s interest in their Druze heritage he simply said that they should begin with their own ancestry. He believed spending time with children to tell them about their family history connects them to Druze history more broadly.

The perspectives of younger people on the same issue were similar but more nuanced. A younger, recently married man stated what he believed to be the most prominent problem by asking: “So how can you, as a group, get people, especially the youth, to be interested in knowing about their origins or their beliefs without affecting their political views about where the country should go or what is our interaction with others?” He highlights the important issue that parents or knowledgeable people in the community should not situate Druze heritage as Druze particularism. As previously discussed, Druze youth, along with their non-Druze Lebanese peers, sometimes saw religious history and knowledge as forces which widened sectarian rifts. Embracing a more liberal ideology and strong national sentiment could be viewed as opposing traditional cultural forms. Other respondents had said that this perspective is fueled further by the perceived narrow-mindedness and insularity of some older adults. If some in the community were less inclined to represent Druze history and culture as secretive, then younger generations could appropriate their Druze identity in ways they deem more suitable and it was apparent that many younger individuals were doing precisely that.

Many of the younger adults I spoke to ranging in age from 18-30, had felt that they were at a loss since their parents did not have the knowledge to answer their questions as young children. Parents who are not mushayekh oftentimes don’t have answers and feel ill-equipped to
sincerely encourage their offspring’s interest in their cultural identity and in Druze traditions. This particular point relates to an apparent distinction between mushayekh and non-mushayekh, which is neither fully a social gap nor a significant discrepancy in knowledge in all comparative instances. The differences are apparent beyond the symbolic dress and may be creating a rift that has negative consequences on how young people are constructing their perceptions of Druze community. One person explained the problem in this way:

How can you keep a family when you have people who are preferred and people who are not preferred? So even from an anthropological or social aspect, some people are left out. So they are left out all of their lives and then at certain points in time, they are expected to behave equally with those who were preferred. I’ll give you an example. You grow up as a kid and people tell you that you have a choice that you don’t have to be religious: “live your life, do whatever you want.” You have nothing to follow, they don’t give you any information about the religion, etc. You hit a certain age and you want to get married and then boom. You are only expected to marry a Druze. Why? Because it’s something in the religion. A religion which you were told you don’t need to follow all of your life until this point.

With the reference to endogamy, the participant illustrates how the expectations of non-mushayekh can conflict with daily life. Moreover, it becomes apparent that parents who are mushayekh are often able to offer their children knowledge about the Druze faith which is not as common in other households. Structured resources, such as the religious seminar or perhaps new publications, should seek to equip parents with basic information and the best means to relate this information to their children no matter their age.
When participants shared their opinions about what was wrong with the landscape of available cultural resources, they often explained what could be done better. Without being prompted, many said that they were not aware of any serious efforts by the existing Druze institutions to try to teach the youth about their history or faith. Some exceptions do exist however and mushayekh that work with Sheikh al-Aql, the religious figurehead of the community in Lebanon, have published books intended to teach the Druze. An author I spoke to remarked: “Sheikh al-Aql to his credit, in the last book he did, it was a very good one. It was a great effort... I think he is probably the only one, in a series of Mushaykht al-Aql, who looks at it as a gap that he has to fill.” However, he also echoed a very common grievance that the community was missing a single book and widely accepted book that offered specifics about their history and the faith’s philosophy.

As participants expressed a similar need for an established text, they offered many recommendations which other texts had lacked. Such a book didn’t need to survey the whole of Druze history or offer generalities about religious ethics and moral codes, which are topics that authors seemed to have previously addressed with varying degrees of success. While these topics were sometimes seen as superficial, what was lacking was a sincere attempt to deliver a basic interpretation of the doctrine. If religious authorities worked to agree upon what constituted an acceptable interpretation of the faith in the format of a curriculum or other educational tool, it seems that a great deal of conjecture could be put to rest, namely questions about what is and is not acceptable for non-mushayekh to learn.

The single most important piece of advice that informants offered about developing a text that would provide the community with a clear foundation for learning was the need for the author’s to be infallible in their knowledge. For many, this meant that the efforts would have to
come from mushayekh and in particular the offices of the Sheikh al-Aql in Lebanon. The social and religious authority of the text is paramount and would establish it is a reference point for any other educational efforts which followed. Another recommendation that followed concerned making both published materials and seminars age-appropriate. For example, a seminar which focused on ethical conduct would not be of much interest to young adults who were familiar with religiously inspired moral codes that they viewed as elementary and common amongst all religious groups. As well, readings at the majlis are not likely to be geared towards children generally speaking, as attendees sit quietly for hours, listening and reflecting.

For those who are aware of the essential contributions to the Druze doctrine made by philosophers like Plato, Socrates, and Pythagoras, the Gnostic philosophies offer a useful means of understanding more about their heritage. Texts like Plato’s Phaedo, The Republic, and Apology are available in Lebanon but may not be interpreted as particular to the Druze if individuals are unaware of their essential roles. Formal schools that might offer the Tawhid interpretation of philosophers are virtually non-existent. However, there are a number of smaller community-based efforts and some mushayekh have become well-known for their seminars. For those who are less socially connected to others who are involved with religious seminars, there is a lack of familiarity with what is available. Many young people said that whatever resources existed were not well marketed and although the use the marketing strategies may seem objectionable, there is a need to expand people’s familiarity and to make existing resources more approachable and better known.

The opportunities to advance new or improved educational resources should likely come from the Druze institutions in Lebanon. Some of these include Khalwat El-Bayadah, the religious training center for mushayekh in the town of Hasbayah, Il-Irfan and al-Ishraq private
schools, or the Dar at-Tayfi Druze center in Beirut that serves as a meeting place and forum for Sheikh al-Aql. Such institutions see it as their duty to safeguard the Druze heritage and would certainly be pivotal in influencing further efforts. Smaller and more community specific institutions are also important, such as the neighborhood majlis and the maqam. There are also community houses maintained by extended family groups that serve as social centers for a variety of activities.

In general, young people said that it was important that anyone who presented themselves as knowledgeable about the faith not be overly judgmental. This was both intimidating and discouraging as some thought that it was simply easier for them to stay away. They also described an insidious kind of fear in the community that the Druze were increasingly assimilating with their neighbors. For some, this lead to an increasing strictness that exacerbated some people’s reluctance to develop an interest in their heritage. Conversely, those considered more knowledgeable about Druze faith and history sometimes positioned the issue as a problem with the student rather than the potential instructor. One person explained that if mushayekh were to be seen as the gatekeepers of the faith, then people should recognize that the gate is open.

Opinions were very split about whether or not some mushayekh would deny answering sincere questions from non-mushayekh and a multitude of personal experiences accentuated points on either side. However, the willingness of mushayekh to teach what they know and feel is very complex since they have varying levels of knowledge and may not wish to accept the responsibility of that is commensurate to teaching a subject very important to them.

Those willing to teach these subjects and make their wisdom available, must be seen as role models within the community. As well, the internal conflicts among some formally knowledgeable people have made a bad impression on those who might otherwise have
attempted to learn. Borrowing from the Socratic Method, there is a need to have critical
discussions while learning. A man who had waited until his later years to begin to learn about his
faith stated the need for more convincing teachers:

You want to teach me faith, you have to convince me. You don’t go and read to me. I
don’t want you to read to me. I can open any book and read. So if you want me to believe
in my faith, you have to explain it to me. You have to teach me why I'm different from
others. What makes me different? What makes what Hamza said different from what
Mohamed or Jesus said, or Moses? As a Druze, as a Muwahid, I have the right to know.

Those who made the effort to teach others often had very positive and charismatic reputations
and some were recognized for their logical and even scientific approaches to the doctrine. Even
among those who described themselves as entirely ignorant about the Druze faith, its perceived
logic was a declared point of pride for many.

Some people believed that the given lack of educational resources is structural and that
institutions of significance have become complacent with this. They related a need for plans at
the grassroots level and said that social change should come from the bottom up rather than the
top down. It was implied that social pressures had limited impartiality and independent efforts
and that those outside of popular influence should be the ones to promote a new pathway. Others
said that there needs to be a group of mushayekh or other knowledgeable individuals committed
to working together to develop an educational program for the Druze community.

A majority of the people I encountered while in Lebanon framed a great deal of the
community’s issues as a result of not having social mechanisms in place to adapt to the modern
needs of the society. Likewise, people also described having very little time and making
inadequate efforts to accommodate the kind of active inquiry crucial to learning more about the cultural forms they related to their heritage. In light of the criticisms that provides the crucial first step in addressing what were perceived to be the community’s social problems, there is an increasing interest in a deeper understanding of Druze history and doctrine and more resources have inevitably begun to emerge. Having recently published on the Druze, professor of law, Abbas Halabi stated: “At present, the lack of Druze interest in recording their history is decreasing as they are showing a marked preference for historical documentation and expressing a greater interest in registering what they have endured throughout the past centuries, not only for being an essential part of their own identity but also of Lebanon’s history” (Halabi 2014:15).

The recommendation to address the issues the Druze face have in some ways been presented with a broad approach to an otherwise diverse group of people. Certainly, the differences between genders, and among social statuses and age groups are significant enough to warrant unique approaches in new and improved educational resources. This study provides a plethora of important examples and vignettes that illustrate how these differences are conceived and how they might impact individual perceptions of efforts to learn and to teach Druze history and doctrine and they should be considered in future studies that focus on specific educational resources within the community. Some differences, such as age and the communication gap among different generations, have a clear impact on the appropriateness of the educational material being offered, while others are perhaps less salient. For example, there is no facet of the doctrine that is relegated to either gender as men and women are considered spiritual equals in the pursuit of knowledge of Tawhid. Even though there is a physical division of space in the majlis that separates men and women, the ways in which both genders experienced these and other religious seminars was discussed in very similar ways. However, the need for such a
barrier is just one example of how some traditions in the process of learning are being contested since many agreed that this division, which is intended to prevent the inevitable distraction of being in the company of the opposite sex, is antiquated or pointless. And yet this was ancillary to other concerns which situated lessons and scriptural reading at the majlis as being a resource that is unlikely to attract young people in general since they often felt less engaged with some of the messages and the methods of delivery.

While considering the best possible approaches to improve or expand new or existing educational resources, among the most prevalent issues to emerge was creating heightened awareness among people of all ages. While there weren’t many examples of educational efforts that had failed due to lack of participation, there was a collective anxiety about reaching out to younger adults. Assuming that willing instructors and volunteers existed, there was an apparent disconnect in communicating and encouraging individuals to attend religious lectures and seminars. The result was an overarching viewpoint that contradictorily situated people as wanting to learn more about their heritage but not having the motivation to put forward the effort since their situation was considered so pessimistic.

Since I have proposed that history and faith might lead to a more meaningful sense of Druze heritage, then I will conclude by adding my belief that the community will continue to adapt. The social problems they face internally and their externally ascribed stigma have continuously produced a cultural resilience that has ensured their ability to thrive for a millennium. As one respondent described the insight she gained when she began to learn more about her faith: “It makes you know that you are the person who chooses and make decisions. It’s not only your destiny, it’s how you think you can live. I learned that I’m responsible for my decisions in life, not that my life is set in a certain way. When I knew religion, it made me
stronger to make my own decisions to change things.” Alongside access to resources, interest, empowerment, and responsibility frame the means to social change for Druze individuals in a system that places upon their shoulders the “sweet burden” that is heritage.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

A closer look at the limitations of this study might contribute to the improvement of future studies on the Druze or other ethnoreligious minorities both in the Middle East and beyond. While there are a few earlier works of ethnographic research that include a comprehensive approach to the Druze community (Betts 1988; Khuri 2004), there are virtually none that attempt to directly address social issues using applied research. This study hopes to fill that gap and to provide a foundation for future research that may focus on particular aspects of Druze society, heritage or the apparent lack of educational resources focused on history and doctrine.

All applied research is limited by the resources and capabilities of researchers themselves. For me, limited Arabic reading skills meant that I was unable to engage with some important texts. While this was certainly my principal constraint, it is also important to note that a majority of academic works have been published in English. The same can be said of a handful of texts considered to be educational resources for the Druze (Kasamanie 2011; 2014; Makarem 1974; Moukarim 1997; Sayegh 1983) as well as more critical texts (Hitti 2008 [1928]; Najjar 1973). In particular, some of the texts that were beyond my skill to understand, given the classical form of Arabic in which all literature is written, were those of historian Abbas Abu Salih. While I was able to obtain a copy of his book Modern History of Lebanese Foreign Policy: Pursuing Independence 1943-1958 (2014), there were others that individuals had
recommended which were not translated into English. Along with a number of other books, or locally published articles, these texts might certainly have contributed to a more detailed understanding of Druze history than what has been presented here.

Of the Arabic texts lost to my lack of skill with the written language, it was apparent that there was no proliferation of work which highlighted or articulated the elementary forms of the doctrine. A few of these works do exist in English however, as formal efforts to enculturate Druze youth have become increasingly common in the diaspora. Aside from these, the popular and sometimes philosophical works of Kamal Jumblatt, the late father of Walid Jumblatt, were also beyond my skill.

Every anthropologist might ask for more time in the field and wish they had engaged with more people and perhaps increased the sample size of their research participants. In my field experience, I believe that I engaged with a significant number and variety of individuals, both on a daily basis and as part of my qualitative methodology. Towards the end of my time in Lebanon, many of the same themes continued to be discussed in the research interviews, focus groups, and even the oral histories. Perhaps one shortcoming of this study was a small number of focus groups, which were especially difficult to organize without any further incentive than helping a fellow but foreign Druze. Of the six focus groups I conducted, five were completely comprised of young adults throughout their 20s with a few in their mid to early 30s. One focus group included six women from a broad variety of backgrounds and age groups and I would have liked to organize more equally diverse groups.

It may also be seen as a shortcoming of this research that aside from staying in the town of Aramoun during the first three weeks of my field experience, I remained in Aley for the duration. I was able to call on local friends to commute to Beirut and other areas to speak with
people but I did not experience other towns as intimately and drew a disproportionate number of my sample from Aley. I established myself in that particular town to build a rapport with fellow Druze. Although I shared an ethnoreligious identity with those who I sought to study, the fact that I have always lived in the United States and had only visited Lebanon once before, did not ingratiate me so easily. While I believe that non-Druze anthropologists have and continue to produce meaningful research on the community, working from within is not always comparable. As one fellow Druze researcher pointed out: “Who’s going to get this information from a secretive community like ours? Fuad Khuri wrote a book. It is exactly what they wanted to tell him. I respect his work, it’s excellent but it’s what they wanted to tell him… To refuse this insider’s perspective is just a farce. It does not have to be an outsider looking in at a community. The world is different now.”

The methods I employed were especially valuable to the kind of cultural heritage preservation that defines the goals of this research. Antoinette Jackson defines this kind of cultural preservation as: “the act and activity of sustaining living communities or creating an environment for communities to sustain cultural practices and traditions in a manner they deem appropriate and representative of their interests” (Jackson 2012: 36). There were however other available methodologies to achieve a similar set of goals. This might include broadly disseminating a survey if the researcher is working with a particular Druze institution, or conducting methodical archival research. I also considered the utility of diagraming kinship but decided against this since my focus wasn’t to provide details about the structure of Druze kinship reckoning or to compare it cross-culturally. As discussed in chapter six, I assessed the educational materials and events in the Druze community to understand their available cultural resources. However, there are more formal methodologies to creating cultural inventories.
through archival research which might benefit future studies focused on critiquing or improving specific educational resources including seminars, publications, or curricula.

Future studies might also take the form of a needs assessment to identify where cultural resources are lacking. The resources discussed herein have in some ways situated heritage as a commodity with intangible facets (e.g. identity, community, religion, history) that are often manifested into tangible expressions (e.g. the majlis, khilwat, maqam, educational publications, etc.). The previously offered criticisms of approaches that neglect to fully situate tangible cultural heritage within the intangible processes of meaning making should not be misunderstood as a denial that material expressions, including educational resources, play a crucial role in influencing the ways in which the Druze construct their shared identity. On the contrary, it has been my intention to highlight that understandings of tangible heritage commodities compliment intangible cultural heritage (Porter and Salazar 2005:362). New resources might take apply a variety of forms, including weekend classes for young adults or weekend gatherings for children to play together and families to get to know one another outside of their typical social circles. As well, workshops that educate people about Druze history or religion might also promote a stronger sense of community through team activities and general comradery. This research has shown that social events where Druze identity is the focus are lacking, with perhaps the notable exceptions of weddings and funerals.

Any new or expanded educational resource (or more generically, events particular to the Druze) will have to learn the ways in which existing educators walk a fine line between offering knowledge to the larger Druze public while maintaining a need to preserve its integrity. This ability to arbitrate between public and private aspects of the Druze faith and even history has and will continue to be a challenge for all involved. For example, those involved in current
educational seminars have done the best they can to preserve the veracity of the doctrine for those students that are believed to have taken a sincere effort to learn. Although the risks associated with non-Druze achieving a deeper understanding of the theological messages seems a relatively minor hazard for some, the practical and ideological threats to the community are substantial.

This research project hopes to set the foundation for further applied research on the Druze community in the Middle East and around the world. It also makes a unique contribution to the anthropology of the Middle East, especially among minority groups, as anthropological research in this part of the world does not comprise as strong of a tradition as it does in most other regions. The anthropology of the Middle East is generally referenced in the greater literature as classic examples of studies focused on honor, kinship reckoning, and a generally mystical quality which seems to cloud discussion on religious convictions. It is my intention to pull back this persistent veil of mystery and to illustrate how an inclusive approach to complex ideas such as heritage, faith, and community can have meaningful value for the society being researched and for academia at large.
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Turnpenny, Michael
UNESCO


Urry, John


Weiner-Levy, Naomi


—


Weller, Susan C.


Westheimer, Ruth K. and Gil Sedan


Whiteford, Linda M. and Robert T. Trotter


Wilkie, Laurie


Wolf, Eric R.


—

Yelvington, Kevin A.

—

Yenemus

Yong, Kee Howe

Zebiri, Kate
Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

[Follow up probes are denoted by an index space]

1. What does being Druze mean to you?
2. In your opinion, what makes a person Druze?
3. What does it mean to be part of the Druze community in [name of hometown]?
4. What aspects of the Druze religion are important to know?
5. What aspects of Druze history are important to know?
6. What kinds of knowledge do you think mushayekh have that non-mushayekh do not?
7. Considering Druze history, do you consider yourself very knowledgeable?
8. Considering Druze history, what kinds of things would you like to know more about?
9. Do you know much about the basic tenets of the Druze religion?
10. Considering the Druze religion, what kinds of things would you like to know about?
11. Do you think that the Druze community faces threats to its future? If so, what might these threats include?
12. Does living in a Druze community like [name of hometown], help to preserve Druze heritage?
13. Do you think that knowing more about Druze history might help individuals have a stronger sense of Druze identity?
14. Do you think that knowing more about the Druze religion might help individuals have a stronger sense of Druze identity?
15. What kinds of resources (programs, educational tools, etc.) might be useful to the Druze community in [name of hometown]?
16. Do you think that having more educational resources available about Druze history and the basic religious beliefs might help an individual have a stronger Druze identity?
17. Do you think that having more educational resources available about Druze history and the basic religious beliefs might help strengthen the community? If so, why, if not, why not?
18. [Considering the respondent’s response to the previous two questions] Who might help shape, support, and implement these new or improved resources?
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Expert Interview Guide

[Follow up probes are denoted by an index space]

1. What does the Druze religion mean to you?
2. In your opinion, what should be the ideal role of a sheikh in the Druze community?
3. How might a Druze individual prepare themselves to learn about their faith?
4. What aspects of Druze history are most important to know for non-mushayekh?
   5. What aspects of the Druze religion are most important to know for non-mushayekh?
6. Do you think that the Druze community faces threats to its future? If so, what might these threats include?
7. Does living in a Druze community like [name of hometown] help to preserve Druze heritage?
8. Do you think that knowing more about Druze history might help individuals have a stronger sense of Druze identity?
   9. Do you think that knowing more about the Druze religion might help individuals have a stronger sense of Druze identity?
10. Do you think that having more educational resources available about Druze history and the basic religious beliefs might help strengthen the community? If so, why, if not, why not?
11. What kinds of educational resources exist in [name of hometown] to help the Druze learn about their history and religion?
   12. What kinds of educational resources are lacking in [name of hometown] to help the Druze learn about their history and religion?
13. Who might help shape, support, and implement new or improved educational resources focused on Druze history and religion in [name of hometown]?
Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Guide

I would like to hear from each of you during today’s focus group. I want you to talk to each other rather than to me. I will start each discussion with a question but after that, I will let you share your thoughts, ideas and experiences. I may jump in from time to time to keep us on track or to bring up an issue that we haven’t discussed yet. You should feel free to disagree with what others have said or to give a different opinion. There is no right or wrong answers to these questions; the more ideas we hear, the more information we will have to work with. Your opinions and beliefs matter. We will be conducting similar discussions with fellow Druze in Aley, and all of the information we gather will be used to help improve our understanding of resources in the community and our Druze heritage. Today, we will be covering a few broad topic areas over the course of about one hour and 30 minutes, but before we begin, let’s quickly go around and let you introduce yourselves.

1) While it is ok to disagree with something another participant says, we ask that you are respectful of other people's opinions even if they differ from your own.

2) This focus group is much like a group conversation, there is no need to raise your hand, feel free to offer you opinions at any time.

3) Please speak loudly enough for other people and the moderator to hear you.

4) While we understand that you may want to talk to your friends and neighbors about things that come up in the focus group today, we ask that you do not reference anyone by name or identify anyone that is here in the focus group today.

5) Please turn off or silence your cell phone.

6) Please do not record or take any notes during the focus group.

1. What does Druze heritage mean to you? More specifically, what kinds of attributes, values, and kinds of knowledge do you associate with your own Druze heritage?

2. What kinds of issues do you think the Druze community is facing in terms of preserving its heritage?

3. Do you think that any of these issues are particular to the Druze community in Aley?

4. If a Druze individual wanted to learn more about their community’s history or the basic tenets of their faith, what might they do and what kinds of educational resources are available to them?
5. How might parents encourage their children’s interest in their Druze heritage?

6. Do you think that having more educational resources available about Druze history and the basic religious beliefs might help an individual have a stronger Druze identity?

7. Do you think that having more educational resources available about Druze history and the basic religious beliefs might help strengthen the community?

8. Given the existing educational resources focused on Druze history and basic religious beliefs, are there enough, are they accessible, and are they being engaged with?

9. Who might help shape, support, and implement new or improved educational resources focused on Druze history and the basic religious tenets?
Appendix D: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

November 18, 2013

Chad Radwan
Anthropology
Tampa, FL 34654

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00014988
Title: Knowledge and Continuity: Preserving the Ethnoreligious Heritage of the Druze in the State of Lebanon

Study Approval Period: 11/18/2013 to 11/18/2014

Dear Mr. Radwan:

On 11/18/2013, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Research Protocol

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
**All granted a waiver of informed consent documentation

Focus Group Informed Consent Form
Focus Group Informed Consent Form [Arabic]
Interview Informed Consent Form
Interview Informed Consent Form [Arabic]

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s). ** Waivers are not stamped.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve
only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your study qualifies for a waiver of the requirements for the documentation of informed consent as outlined in the federal regulations at 45CFR46.117(c) which states that an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board
Appendix E: Interview Informed Consent [English]

Informed Consent Form

Dear Prospective Research Study Participant:

Thank you for your interest in participating in a research project that will examine the educational resources focused on Druze history and the basic tenets of the faith in Aley, Lebanon. The official study title is: Knowledge and Continuity: Preserving the Ethnoreligious Heritage of the Druze in the State of Lebanon (University of South Florida Institutional Review Board #14988). The Principal Investigator is Chad Radwan at the University of South Florida’s Department of Anthropology. I am currently conducting interviews in this community and invite you to participate. If you have any questions about your rights as a person who is taking part in this research study, I can provide you with that information. In addition, we will provide you with a copy of this form for your reference.

Volunteers in this study will participate in an interview during course of the research project from December 2013 until August 2014. The interviews will be conducted at a location of convenience for the volunteer. This study does not pose any foreseeable risks to you. If there are any questions you do not want to answer, simply state that you do not wish to answer that particular question. The benefits to you will be that in answering questions related to this study you will review your own thoughts and behaviors related to your Druze heritage in general, while the potential benefits to your community, and to other Druze communities, from the completed study include a review of the available educational resources focused on teaching Druze individuals about their shared history and heritage.

The privacy of all participants will be maintained at all times and records will be kept in a secure file. Authorized research personnel, and the USF Institutional Review Board (IRB), its staff, any other individuals acting on behalf of USF, and the Department of Health and Human Services, may inspect the records from this research project. The results of this study may be published. However, the data obtained from you will be combined with data from others in the project. Our intent is that the published results will not include your name or any other information that would personally identify you in any way. If you do volunteer personal information that you believe could identify you, we can remove it entirely or provide a pseudonym. Interviews will be audio recorded with your expressed permission. However, these records will be for the use of the research study personnel only and, in accordance with USF IRB regulations, will be kept in a locked facility.

Your decision to participate in this research study is completely voluntary. You are free to participate in this study and to withdraw at any time. If you decide that you do not want to participate or choose to withdraw, there are no penalties or loss of benefits. Subjects of informant interviews can expect to spend between 30 and 120 minutes for a single interview. However,
follow-up interviewing would be a possibility if the initial interview generated further questions of interest. Subjects would be solicited via e-mail, telephone, or in person requests and provided with the proper consent forms should they agree to a further interview. If you are willing to participate in this study, please say “yes.” If you are unable or unwilling to participate, please signal by saying “no.”

Thank you very much for you attention and help. If you need additional information please contact:
Chad Radwan
8930 Sharon Dr.
New Port Richey, FL 34654
(727) 364-1490
cradwan@mail.usf.edu

USF IRB Office
(813) 974-5638
حضرة المرشح للمشاركة في الدراسة:

شكرًا على اهتمامك في المشاركة في مشروع بحث لدراسة الموارد التعليمية التي تركز حول تاريخ الدروز والمبادئ الأساسية للعديدة في منطقة عاليه في لبنان. العنوان الرسمي للدراسة: "العربية والإسلامية: المحافظة على التراث الدينية الديروزي في لبنان" (جامعة جنوب فلوريدا). الباحث الرئيسي هو شاد رضوان من جامعة جنوب فلوريدا.

أي أقوم حاليًا بمقابلات في هذا المجتمع وأدعو للمشاركة فيها. يمكنني أن أوفر لك المعلومات التي تتعلق بحقوقك كمشارك في هذه الدراسة عند الطلب. بالإضافة إلى ذلك سنزودك بنسبة من هذا التموذج كمرجع.

سيشارك المتطوعون في هذه الدراسة في مقابلة أثناء مسار البحث وذلك في الفترة الممتدة من كانون الأول 2013 وحتى أب 2014. ستتم إجراء المقابلات في مكان ملائم للمتطوعين. لا تشكل تلك هذه الدراسة أي مخاطر متوقعة. في حال لا تريد الإجابة عن أحد الأسئلة المطروحة، عبر بساطة عن عدم رغبتك بالإجابة عن ذلك السؤال بالتحديد. ستستخدم البيانات التي قدمتها مع بيانات مشاركين آخرين في البحث. والتي من ذلك لا تضمن النتائج المنشورة إسمك أو أي معلومات أخرى من شأنها أن تحدد هويتك بأي شكل من الأشكال.

سيتم الحفاظ على سرية جميع المشاركين في جميع الأوقات وسيتم الاحتفاظ بالسجلات في ملف آمن. قد يقوم العلماء المختبراء في جنوب فلوريدا وموظفون أو أي فرد بالنيابة عن جامعة جنوب فلوريدا وإدارة الصحة والخدمات البشرية، بإصدار سجلات هذا البحث. قد يتم نشر نتائج هذه الدراسة في أماكن متعددة. سيتم تجميع البيانات التي قدمتها مع بيانات مشاركين آخرين في البحث. والتي من ذلك لا تضمن النتائج المنشورة إسمك أو أي معلومات أخرى من شأنها أن تحدد هويتك بأي شكل من الأشكال.

سيتم استخدام البيانات الشخصية أثناء المقابلة عند الحصول على موافقتكم مع العلم أنه سيتم استخدام هذه البيانات من قبل العلماء على هذه الدراسة فقط وفقًا لقوانين مجال المراجعة المؤسسية في جنوب فلوريدا.

سيتم الاحتفاظ بها في منشأة مقفلة.

إن مشتركتك في هذه الدراسة هو قرار احتكاري تماما. تراجع لك حرية المشاركة في هذه الدراسة أو الإسحاب في أي وقت. في حال قررت في هذه الدراسة أو إتمام الإسحاب فلا يترتكب على التحقيق أو خسارة فوائد. يتوجب على المشاركين في المقابلة أن يوافقوا إستمراها بين 30 و 120 دقيقة. لكن في الممكن إجراء مقابلة أخرى مما يتطلب في حالة نتاج أسئلة مفيدة عن المقابلة الأولية. سيتم الإتصال بالمشاركين عبر البريد الإلكتروني أو الهاتف أو شخصياً وسيتم تزويدهن بنسخة المقابلة المقدمة.

في حال موافقتكم على إجراء مقابلة أخرى. إذا كنت على استعداد للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة، الرجاء الإجابة ب "نعم". إذا كنت غير قادر أو غير راغب بالمشاركة، الرجاء الإجابة ب "لا".

شكرًا جزيلًا على الاهتمام والمساعدة. في حال أردت معلومات إضافية الرجاء الإتصال ب:

شاد رضوان
8930 Sharon Dr.
New Port Richey, FL 34654
(727) 364-1490
cradwan@mail.usf.edu

مكتب مجلس المراجعة المؤسسية (IRB) في جامعة جنوب فلوريدا
(813) 974-5638
Appendix G: Focus Group Informed Consent [English]

Informed Consent Form

Dear Prospective Research Study Participant:

Thank you for your interest in participating in a research project that will examine the educational resources focused on Druze history and the basic tenets of the faith in Aley, Lebanon. The official study title is: Knowledge and Continuity: Preserving the Ethnoreligious Heritage of the Druze in the State of Lebanon (University of South Florida Institutional Review Board #14988). The Principal Investigator is Chad Radwan at the University of South Florida’s Department of Anthropology. I am currently conducting focus groups in this community and invite you to participate. If you have any questions about your rights as a person who is taking part in this research study, I can provide you with that information. In addition, we will provide you with a copy of this form for your reference.

Volunteers in this study will participate in a focus group during course of the research project from December 2013 until August 2014. The focus groups will be conducted at a location of convenience for the volunteers. This study does not pose any foreseeable risks to you. If there are any questions you do not want to answer, simply state that you do not wish to answer that particular question. The benefits to you will be that in answering questions related to this study you will review your own thoughts and behaviors related to your Druze heritage in general, while the potential benefits to your community, and to other Druze communities, from the completed study include a review of the available educational resources focused on teaching individuals about their shared history and heritage.

The privacy of all participants will be maintained at all times and records will be kept in a secure file. Authorized research personnel, and the USF Institutional Review Board (IRB), its staff, any other individuals acting on behalf of USF, and the Department of Health and Human Services, may inspect the records from this research project. The results of this study may be published. However, the data obtained from you will be combined with data from others in the project. Our intent is that the published results will not include your name or any other information that would personally identify you in any way. If you do volunteer personal information that you believe could identify you, we can remove it entirely or provide a pseudonym. Focus groups will be audio recorded with your expressed permission. However, these records will be for the use of the research study personnel only and, in accordance with USF IRB regulations, will be kept in a locked facility.

Your decision to participate in this research study is completely voluntary. You are free to participate in this study and to withdraw at any time. If you decide that you do not want to participate or choose to withdraw, there are no penalties or loss of benefits. Focus group participants can expect to spend between 30 and 120 minutes for a single session. However, you
will only be asked to participate in a single focus group. If you are willing to participate in this study, please say “yes.” If you are unable or unwilling to participate, please signal by saying “no.”

Thank you very much for your attention and help. If you need additional information please contact:
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8930 Sharon Dr.
New Port Richey, FL 34654
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USF IRB Office
(813) 974-5638
نمذج الموافقة المسبقة

حضرتك المشارك للمشاركة في الدراسة:

شكرًا على اهتمامك في المشاركة في مشروع بحث لدراسة المواد التعلمية التي تركز حول تاريخ الديروز والمبادئ الأساسية للعيلة في منطقة عاليه في لبنان. العنوان الرسمي للدراسة: "المعرفة والأنشطة: المحافظة على التراث الدين من الديروز في لبنان" (جامعة جنوب فلوريدا مجلس المراجع، رقم 8846). الباحث الرئيسي هو شاد رضوان من جامعة جنوب فلوريدا قسم الأنتروبولوجيا (علم الإنسان). لا تضمن هذه المجموعة بحثية في هذا المجتمع أو داعمو المشاركة فيها. يمكنني أن أعفي تلك المعلومات التي تتعلق بحقوقك كمشارك في هذه الدراسة عند الطلب. بالإضافة إلى ذلك سئودك بنسخة من الأتمتة كمرجع لك.

سيشارك المتطوعون في هذه الدراسة من خلال مجموعة جمعية أثناء مسار البحث وذلك في الفترة المحددة من كانون الأول 2013 وحتى آب 2014. سيتم إجراء المجموعات التدريبي في مكان ملمع للمتطوعين. لا تشكل تلك هذه الدراسة أي خطر متأخر متوقع. في حال لا تريد الإجابة عن أحد الأسئلة المطروحة، غير موصى ببعضك بالإجابة عن ذلك السؤال بالتحديد. سنتخذ من هذه الدراسة على المستوى الشخصي عند قيام أفكارك وسلوكك المتعلقة بالتراث الديروزي بشكل عام عبر الإجابة على الأسئلة المطروحة. فيما نستعمل الفوائد المحتملة لمجتمعك والمجموعات الدورية الأخرى من الدراسة عند إنجازها، في استعراض للموارد التعليمية المتاحة التي تركز على تعليم الأفراد عن تطوير وتاريخهم المشترك.

سيتم الحفاظ على سرية جميع المشاركين في جميع الأوقات. وسيتم الاحتفاظ بالسجلات في ملف آمن. قد يقوم العاملين المحول لهم في مجال البحث أو مجلس المراجعة المؤسسية (IRB) في جامعة جنوب فلوريدا والموظفين أو أي فرد بالنسبة عن جامعات جنوب فلوريدا ووزارة الصحة والخدمات البشرية، بتكمل سجلات هذا البحث. قد يتم نشر نتائج هذه الدراسة. سيتم دمج البيانات التي قد ت يتعلق بين شاركين آخرين في البحث. ونأمل أن تلك النتائج المشتركة أثرت أو أي معلومات أخرى من شأنها أن تحدد هويتك بأي شكل من الأشكال. في حال تقدمنا طلبًا بمعلومات شخصية، إلزمنا على الحفاظ على الواردات للتدريبي بعد الحصول على موافقتكم.

بهذا نحن أن نستطيع استخدام هذه النتائج في تحمل العائمين على هذه الدراسة فقط ووفقًا لقوانين مجلس المراجعة المؤسسية في جامعة جنوب فلوريدا. سيتم الحفاظ عليها في منشأة مغلقة.

إن المشاركات في هذه الدراسة هو قرار اختياري تمامًا. تراجع لك حرية المشاركة في هذه الدراسة أو الإسحاب في أي وقت. في حال قررت عدم المشاركة أو إسحاب الإسحاب فلا تتردد على ذلك أي عقوبات أو خسارة فوائد. يجب على المشاركيين في المجموعة التدريبي أن يتوقعوا إسحاب الجلسة الواحدة بين 30 و 120 دقيقة. إذا لم تطلب منك المشاركة سوى في مجموعة تدريبي واحدة. إذا كنت على اعتبار لاستعداد المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، الرجاء الإجابة ب"نعم". إذا كنت غير قادر أو غير راغب بالمشاركة، الرجاء الإجابة ب"لا".

شكرًا جزيلًا على الاهتمام والمساعدة. في حال أردت معلومات إضافية الرجاء الإتصال ب:

شاد رضوان

8930 Sharon Dr.
New Port Richey, FL 34654
(727) 364-1490