Druze Studies Journal

Article

The Status of Druze Studies and Launching the Druze Studies Journal (DSJ)

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Received: 1 July 2024
Revised: 7 August 2024
Accepted: 7 August 2024

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Cite this article (Chicago style):
Hazran, Yusri, Reed, Marianne A., Schäbler, Birgit, Timani, Hussam S., and Zeedan, Rami. "The Status of Druze Studies and Launching the Druze Studies Journal (DSJ)." *Druze Studies Journal* 1 (2024). DOI: https://doi.org/10.17161/druze.2024.22602

Abstract

This essay discusses the evolution of Druze Studies and the inauguration of the *Druze Studies Journal* (DSJ), as well as encapsulates discussions from the "2023 Bilingual Interdisciplinary Virtual Symposium: Druze Studies: Past, Present, and Future." Initiated at the University of Kansas, this event marks a pivotal moment in researching the Druze, addressing the field's expansion over the last two decades, and creating platforms like DSJ and the Druze Studies Project for scholarly exchange. Contributions range from digital publishing innovations to critical reevaluations of Druze Studies' scope and methodologies. Key discussions revolve around enhancing research continuity, overcoming interdisciplinary challenges, and navigating ethical considerations surrounding sacred community beliefs. This collective effort underscores the importance of DSJ as a medium for fostering academic dialogue, broadening Druze Studies' reach, and promoting a deeper, more inclusive understanding of the Druze community's historical and contemporary contexts.

Keywords: *Druze Studies, Digital Publishing, Academic Symposium, Open-Access Journal, Interdisciplinary Research.*

This essay is based partly on the roundtable discussion on "The Status of Druze Studies and Launching the *Druze Studies Journal* (DSJ)." The roundtable was part of the event "2023 Bilingual Interdisciplinary Virtual Symposium: "Druze Studies: Past, Present, and Future," which took place at the University of Kansas on November 15-16, 2023. The essay is divided into six parts. First, an "Introduction to the Status of the Druze Studies" by Rami Zeedan. Second, Marianne Reed discusses "Launching the *Druze Studies Journal* (DSJ) in the Age of Digital Publishing and Open-Access." Third, Hussam Timani discusses "Rethinking Druze Studies." Fourth, Yusri Hazran discusses "The Druze of Lebanon and the Sectarian System in the Lebanese State." Fifth, Birgit Schäbler discusses "The Druzes in Syria." The sixth and final part of the essay consists of a discussion between participants.

Introduction to the Status of the Druze Studies by Rami Zeedan

The "2023 Bilingual Interdisciplinary Virtual Symposium: "Druze Studies: Past, Present, and Future" comes at a time of transition in Druze Studies, following about two decades of increased academic publications on the Druze. The event's purpose was to unite scholars researching various aspects of the Druze communities and fostering a community of Druze Studies scholars. This event was organized by two initiatives that started at the University of Kansas: the *Druze Studies Journal* and the Druze Studies Project.

The *Druze Studies Journal* (DSJ) is an open-access interdisciplinary journal that aims to advance scholarly understanding of the Druze communities, including their history and contemporary affairs (*Druze Studies Journal*, n.d.). The journal provides a platform for scholars who produce scholarship focusing on the Druze to exchange their knowledge, scholarship, and ideas. The journal aims to increase scholarly publications on the Druze, specifically through comparative projects involving communities in various countries, including diasporic communities. The journal will publish discipline-specific research projects and encourage interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research on the Druze in a way that analyzes and synthesizes links between disciplines into a coordinated and coherent whole to explain the Druze's history, present, and future.

The Druze Studies Project is a multi-year project with two major components: the *Druze Studies Journal* and the Druze Studies Reference Portal. In the initial stages of development and pending major external grants, the Druze Stud-

ies Reference Portal will host a digital humanities project to study Druze culture, literature, and history. The project will delve into the rich and diverse aspects of the Druze communities in the Middle East and global diaspora. In this project, we systematically review all existing research conducted on the Druze and identify major gaps in the literature. The content published on the website is freely accessible to students, scholars, and the general public (Druze Studies Project n.d.). The team is also writing a series of systematic literature reviews to be published in an open-access format (Zeedan and Luce, 2021).

The example below showcases the increase in scholarship on Druze Studies. It is based on the progress made as part of the Druze Studies Project until the end of 2023.

Example of the increase in scholarship on Druze Studies

The ongoing research project delves into various facets of the Druze community, spanning history, society, culture, politics, gender, religion, and genetics (Zeedan and Pullum Lindsey, 2024). While the project encompasses a comprehensive examination across Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and the diaspora, a notable trend has emerged over the last two decades. This trend reveals a surplus of published research in English on the Druze in Israel compared to other countries, as illustrated in Figures 1-4 below.

As systematic reviews on specific topics unfold, an analysis of the identified studies is crucial for understanding the overarching trends. The dataset comprises 160 articles and book chapters, primarily focusing on women, genetics, and religion within the Druze community.

Figure 1 showcases the increasing number of articles and book chapters related to the Druze, specifically concentrating on women, genetics, and religion. Notably, the surge in publications has been prominent since the onset of the 21st century. As of 2023, the data indicates a substantial increase, with 42 publications in the 2000-2009 decade, followed by a remarkable 73% increase in the last decade.

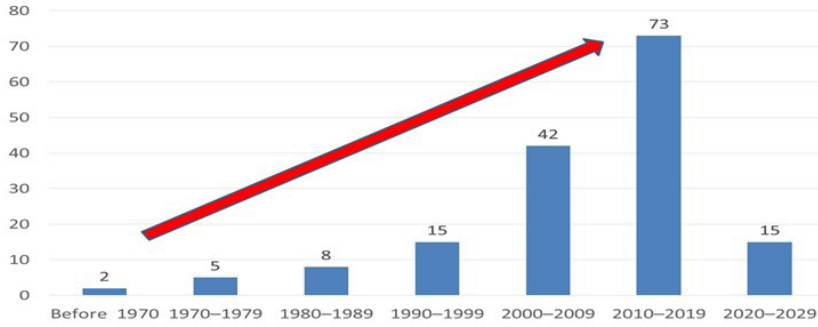

Figure 1. The number of articles and book chapters focusing on the Druze (on topics related to women, genetics, and religion) (N = 160). Data as of 2023.

Examining the regional distribution of publications in Figure 2 reveals a significant concentration on the Druze in Israel. Since 1990, over 63% of the publications have focused on the Druze in Israel. This suggests that the overall increase reported in Figure 1 predominantly pertains to research on the Druze within Israel.

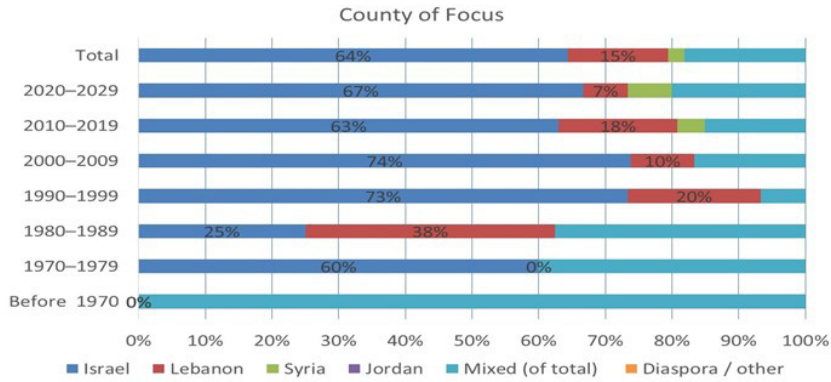

Figure 2. The percentage of articles and book chapters focusing on the Druze (related to women, genetics, and religion, by country of focus of the study) (N = 160). Data as of 2023.

Figure 3 delves into the country of affiliation of the lead authors of articles and book chapters. The data indicates a notable increase in publications from authors affiliated with Israeli institutions. Since 1990, over half of these publications have originated from authors affiliated with Israeli institutions, aligning with the geographic focus highlighted in Figure 2.

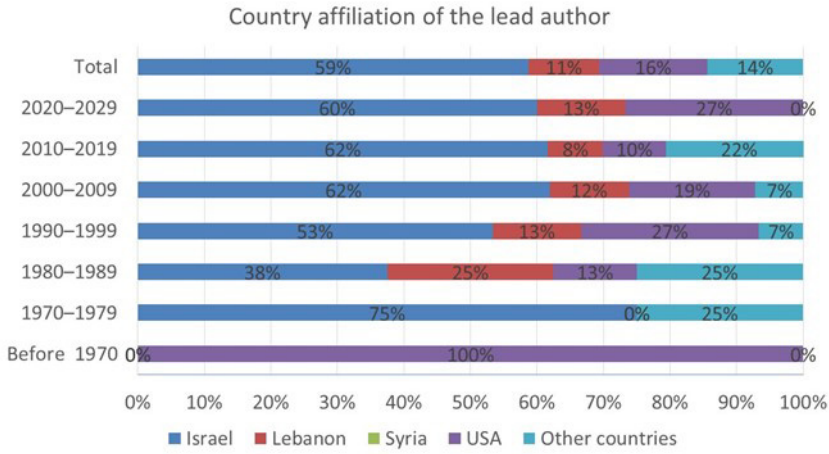

Figure 3. The percentage of articles and book chapters focusing on the Druze (related to women, genetics, and religion, by country of affiliation of the lead author) (N = 160). Data as of 2023.

Figure 4 explores the role of Druze authors in publications, revealing a growing engagement over the years. The data highlights a significant increase in publications authored by Druze individuals, particularly since the early 21st century. Notably, since 2020, Druze authors have surpassed non-Druze authors, constituting 67% of the publications, signaling a shift towards community-driven research.

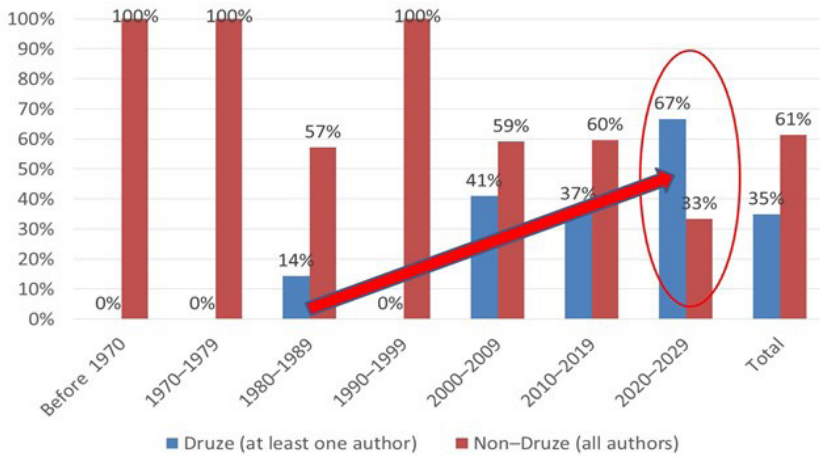

Figure 4. The percentage of articles and book chapters focusing on the Druze (related to women, genetics, and religion, with at least one Druze author) (N = 160). Data as of 2023.

Although incomplete, the data presented above could serve as a basis for further exploration. We suggest these topics: 1) The status of the Druze Studies and research gaps; 2) Identity Dynamics and Research Focus; 3) Impact of Sociopolitical Factors; 4) Collaborative Research Initiatives; 5) Comparative Analysis of Druze Communities; 6) Longitudinal Analysis of Authorship Trends; 7) Exploration of Methodological Approaches; 8) Community Engagement and Knowledge Dissemination.

First, while the study highlights a surge in publications, it would be worthwhile to identify potential research gaps. Examining topics or aspects of Druze society that have received limited attention in academic literature could guide future research endeavors and contribute to a more holistic understanding of the community.

Second, the observed disparity in publications between Israel and other countries is postulated to stem from a nuanced understanding of Druze's identity. The concept of "Druze particularism" in Israel encapsulates this in the context of their distinctiveness within Islamic traditions and Arab culture. In essence, the centrality of the concept of Druzeness itself, elucidating a unique perspective that warrants further exploration, accounts for the surplus of research on the Israeli Druze. This could also be understood within the framework of increased access to education among the Druze in Israel, especially Druze women.

Third, the geographical concentration of research on the Israeli Druze prompts consideration of sociopolitical factors. Exploring the impact of regional political dynamics, policies, and cultural nuances on research trends could provide a deeper understanding of the contextual factors driving the surplus of publications.

Fourth, given the increasing involvement of Druze authors in researching their own communities, there is an opportunity to investigate collaborative research initiatives. Understanding how collaborations between Druze scholars and researchers from other backgrounds contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Druze-related topics could be a valuable avenue for exploration.

Fifth, conducting a comparative analysis of Druze communities across different countries could unveil intriguing variations and commonalities. Exploring how contextual differences shape research priorities and themes within each community might offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of Druze identity and society, including in the diaspora.

Sixth, a longitudinal analysis tracking authorship trends over an extended period could provide a comprehensive perspective on the evolving landscape of

Druze-related research. Understanding how authorship patterns change over time may reveal underlying shifts in academic engagement and community involvement.

Seventh, investigating the methodological approaches used in Druze-related research could shed light on the diversity of research methods utilized. Analyzing whether there are predominant methodologies and their implications for the depth and breadth of research findings would contribute to methodological discussions in the broader academic community.

Eight, evaluating the mechanisms that disseminate research findings within the Druze community can be crucial. This is especially relevant in relation to the language of publication other than English. Assessing the extent of community engagement, the accessibility of academic knowledge, and the potential impact of research on the community's well-being can provide valuable insights into the broader societal implications of academic endeavors.

By delving into these additional aspects, researchers can enrich the current understanding of the relationship between identity, research focus, and the dynamics of academic contributions within the Druze community.

"Launching the *Druze Studies Journal* (DSJ) in the Age of Digital Publishing and Open-Access" by Marianne Reed

Over the years, the realm of academic publishing has undergone significant transformations, and one noteworthy development is the rise of library publishing programs. I will explore the motivations, advantages, and practical implications of such programs, focusing on the recent establishment of the *Druze Studies Journal* by the University of Kansas Libraries.

The journey begins with examining the historical context that led to the emergence of library publishing in response to rapidly escalating journal prices in the 1990s. Library publishing programs were conceived as a response to the challenges faced by libraries and scholars, especially due to the limited budgets in libraries and the increasing costs of journal subscriptions. The necessity to cancel journals due to financial constraints impeded scholars' access to valuable research, prompting the inception of library publishing programs and software that prioritized open access to research and affordability.

The University of Kansas Libraries' Digital Publishing Services program currently hosts 56 journals, with two more expected to come online in 2024 (University of Kansas Library n.d.). Our journals publish high-quality scholarship in the disciplines of herpetology and other biological sciences, philosophy, Montessori

education, intercollegiate and amateur sport, medicine, paleontology, geology, and German, French, African, Spanish, and Russian language and culture. We are supported by the University of Kansas Libraries, with some staffing support from the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. In 2023, readers worldwide downloaded our journal content over 1 million times.

One primary benefit of open-access library publishing highlighted in the roundtable discussion is that their institutions support library publishing programs and, unlike commercial publishers, do not have a profit motive. Our survival does not depend on generating revenue, so we can go where the research and the editor's expertise take us. Library publishing programs welcome journals that explore diverse subjects, feature marginalized voices, and include interdisciplinary, multi-lingual, and international research that might not have a large audience.

Our nonprofit publishing model allows us to host journals free of charge. Authors submitting to our journals also do not pay publishing fees. This removes barriers to journals and authors without the funds to participate in scholarly publishing under different models and allows editors to concentrate on producing high-quality research instead of fundraising. Journals publishing research in an open-access model can also save money by publishing online rather than printing and shipping paper copies. Since our focus is on the quality of the research, not the quantity, we do not require that our journals publish a minimum number of articles each year, as some commercial publishers do. Our journals can publish articles based on their capacity without minimum requirements.

We enhance the discoverability of the published content in our journals by following best publishing practices and using publishing software that follows technology standards, enabling search engines like Google to find and increase the impact and reach of the research. Our publishing program at KU is unusual in that we format the articles for publication, saving our journals time and money and allowing us to ensure that the articles are accessible to all readers, including those with visual disabilities. To ensure the long-term availability of the research we publish, we contract with preservation services such as Portico to ensure scholars can find the content in the future.

Another critical theme in library publishing is our emphasis on inclusivity. The absence of financial barriers ensures that scholars can participate in disseminating their research regardless of their financial capacity. Marginalized voices can finally be heard, and interdisciplinary and multilingual research can flourish and find new audiences.

For example, in the summer of 2023, we worked with Dr. Rami Zeedan to initiate the *Druze Studies Journal*. This journal is interdisciplinary, open access, and licensed so that people can reuse the scholarship for non-commercial purposes. Yesterday, at this conference, Dr. MJ Curry's keynote focused on multilingual scholars. She talked about the importance of scholarly networks. Research that is open access and easily discovered increases the collaborative potential of these programs, fostering networks across disciplines and languages for increased reach and impact. This journal will help scholars of the Druze expand their networks since publications are open to the public without obstacles and will be seen by new audiences. The *Druze Studies Journal* is ready to accept submissions on the journal's website for authors who are ready to explore this publication model (*Druze Studies Journal* n.d.).

In conclusion, the essay underscores the evolving landscape of academic publishing through the lens of library publishing programs. Library publishing is uniquely positioned to help interdisciplinary journals succeed. The establishment of the *Druze Studies Journal* serves as a testament to the adaptability and inclusivity of this approach. As the journey continues, it is hoped that the positive outcomes from this journal will encourage scholars to explore the possibilities offered by open-access library publishing, fostering collaboration and expanding the horizons of academic discourse.

"Rethinking Druze Studies" by Hussam S. Timani

The Druze Studies field faces many challenges that hinder its growth and recognition within academia. I will delve into the existing limitations and propose potential avenues for progress. The narrative revolves around the experiences and insights of an individual deeply engaged in Druze Studies, shedding light on issues such as inconsistent research output, inadequate representation in major conferences, and the need for interdisciplinary exploration. We should acknowledge the current status of Druze Studies:

- No consistency in Druze Studies;
- Little to no representation in major academic conferences;
- Translation of scriptures is inadequate;
- Absence of Druze publishing houses;
- Absence of college courses, at least at the graduate level;
- Research and publications focus primarily on the history and politics of the Druze;

- Philosophical and theological studies are lacking;
- Isolation of Druze Studies from Islamic Studies and Religious Studies;
- Absence of major venues to organize conferences and seminars;
- Little to no funding and grants for research and the development of college courses.

One prominent issue within Druze Studies is the lack of consistency in research publications. Unlike other academic fields, there is a noticeable dearth of regular research publications, hampering the discipline's development. This inconsistency poses a significant hurdle to advancing Druze Studies and diminishes its impact within the broader academic community.

Another issue is the underrepresentation in major conferences. The absence of a substantial presence in major academic conferences, such as the American Academy of Religion and the Middle East Studies Association, further compounds the challenges faced by Druze Studies. This lack of visibility restricts opportunities for scholars to disseminate their research, hindering potential collaboration and exchange of ideas. Here are a few examples. In the American Academy of Religion (AAR), the world's largest academic institution for studying religion, there has been no single paper on Druze in the last ten years. In the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA), the world's largest academic institution for the study of the Middle East and North Africa, there were only ten papers in the last ten years: One in 2023 (anthropological); Two in 2022 (anthropological; literary); One in 2021 (literary); one in 2020 (textual); Two in 2018 (anthropological); One in 2017 (biographical); One in 2015 (historical); One in 2013 (historical).

The third issue is language barriers and limited access to primary sources. An additional impediment is the absence of translated primary sources, limiting the ability to conduct comprehensive research. The unavailability of reputable international Druze publishing houses exacerbates this challenge, hindering the promotion and dissemination of Druze research. Without access to these essential resources, scholars face obstacles in advancing the depth and breadth of their studies.

The fourth issue is the educational gaps. There is a noticeable gap in formal courses dedicated to Druze Studies, particularly at the graduate level. This deficiency highlights the need for academic institutions to recognize and integrate Druze Studies into their curricula, providing students with a structured and in-depth understanding of this field.

Next, I will discuss misconceptions and Orientalism. The misrepresentation of the Druze as an independent religion rather than a school of thought within Islam reflects Orientalist biases. It is essential to dispel such misinterpretations and promote an accurate understanding of the Druze identity and beliefs.

As for future directions and recommendations, I suggest setting three goals: to explore areas that are primarily understudied within the Druze tradition; to reach out in conversation with the AAR and MESA and promote the annual meetings of the AAR and MESA as international venues for sharing research on the Druze; and to initiate an International Symposium on the Druze: Discuss the application of theories and methodologies in the humanities and social sciences to the field of Druze Studies. Here are some suggestions to consider. First and foremost, there is a need for increased research output and conference participation to establish a more consistent presence in the academic sphere. Furthermore, fostering interdisciplinary exploration and collaboration can open new avenues for understanding the Druze from multiple perspectives, including philosophy, theology, and sociology. We need to encourage significant comparative studies and interdisciplinary cross-fertilization, and we hope to explore intersections between Druzism and ethics, theology, philosophy, spirituality, arts, literature, gender studies, sociology, scripture, literary criticism, and liberation studies.

In conclusion, the challenges faced by Druze Studies are multifaceted, ranging from limited research output and underrepresentation to language barriers and educational gaps. By acknowledging these obstacles and implementing the suggested recommendations, the field can embark on a journey toward greater recognition, understanding, and collaboration within the broader academic community.

The Druze of Lebanon and the Confessional System in the Lebanese State by Yusri Hazran

While aiming to contribute to the discussion on the status of the Druze Studies, primarily through the lens of the Lebanese Druze, this section will focus on the history of the Druze in Lebanon vis-à-vis their position within the sectarian system in Lebanon.

Over centuries, the history of Lebanon has been characterized by its association with the history of the Druze, who were the founders of the Emirate of Mount Lebanon. The drastic developments witnessed in Mount Lebanon in the nineteenth century were pivotal in terms of their implications, leading to the fall of the feudal system, the Emirate system, and the establishment of a politi-

cal-administrative entity based on the politicization of sects and the principle of the confessional system. This transformation coincided with the demise of the political role of the Druze, as the establishment of the confessional system was considered by the Druze to be an antithesis to the original heritage of the Emirate. This vision, along with historical awareness and collective memory, which considered the Druze as the founders of the project, formed the fundamental basis for shaping the relationship of the Druze with the Lebanese state and creating a state of alienation towards the political system of their homeland.

The Druze and the Founding Discourse

The history of the Druze in Lebanon is linked to the establishment of a political entity in Mount Lebanon, which gained autonomy under Islamic rule and was based on the combination of doctrinal particularism under the Islamic State and the social-feudal system that continued to dictate the social structure of Mount Lebanon until the mid-nineteenth century. From this standpoint, the Druze consider themselves the project's owners to establish the autonomous political entity in Lebanon based on their historical consciousness and social memory. The beginnings date back to the period of the introduction of the Druze faith, when Lebanon, with its mountain and the Wadi al-Taym region, was an essential center. The emergence of the Druze community in the region was a precursor to the project of establishing an emirate that enjoyed autonomy and gained legitimacy by gaining recognition from the sovereign Islamic state in the region. The Tanukhi Emirate, which played a prominent role religiously and politically, marked the beginning of autonomous rule for the Emirate of Mount Lebanon. This rule continued from the twelfth century until its fall amidst the bloody wars that Mount Lebanon witnessed in the nineteenth century. The Emirate's rule in Lebanon started with the Tanukhis, followed by the Ma'nis (both dynasties were Druze), who expanded it and ended with the Sunni Shihabs (Makarem and Abu Saleh 1984, 133-140).

The emirate reached its peak during the reign of the Ma'nis, especially under Emir Fakhr al-Din Ma'n II, who succeeded in establishing a Druze-Christian partnership, enhancing the stature of the emirate, expanding its borders, building its army, and bringing European modernity to develop his emirate agriculturally and economically. The Ottoman state viewed Emir Fakhr al-Din's project with suspicion, correctly interpreting his relations with the Duchy of Tuscany as a precursor to a separatist project that Christian Europe supported against the Ottoman state. This attempt, which was ahead of its time, ended with the invasion of the emirate,

the overthrow of Emir al-Din's rule, and his and his sons' executions. Despite the tragic end of Emir Fakhr al-Din and his family, the historical writing in Lebanon (except for the Shia case) theorized that Emir Fakhr al-Din is the actual founder of the modern Lebanese political entity. From the writings of Issa Abou Ma'alouf, Aziz el-Ahdab, Sami Makarem, and Abbas Abou Saleh, there is a consensus that Emir Fakhr al-Din Ma'n II is the actual and true founder of the modern Lebanese political entity (Makarem and Abu Saleh 1984, 140-146). The difference in historical theorizing about the political tendencies of Emir Fakhr al-Din Ma'n II does not negate the consensus on considering him a national symbol of Lebanon, whose political project was based on institutionalizing the independence of the Lebanese entity, expanding its borders, developing its economy, and establishing its existence on the harmony between the Druze and Christians in Mount Lebanon. With the fall of the Ma'nid emirate, the leadership passed to the Shihabis, who, although they were Sunni Muslims, their tribal and political affiliation, as part of the Qayssi tribal federation, prevailed from the Druze Qaysi- feudal families, over the religious difference of the Shihabi family. The Druze elite, known as the Maqatta'jiyya, retained their elite and leadership position in the emirate despite the handing over of the emirate itself to the Shihab family. The Shihabis period was characterized by a decline in the status of the Druze, particularly after the battle of Ain Dara in 1711, which led to a Druze migration from Lebanon to Hauran. The Egyptian occupation of the Levant between 1831 and 1840 altered the relationship between the Druze and the Maronites due to the policies of the Egyptian occupation and against the backdrop of the rise of the Maronite Church as a religious, and political player with its religious, economic, status, and international relations.

The Fall of the Emirate and the Demise of Druze Leadership

With the end of the Egyptian occupation era and the return of Ottoman sovereignty to the Levant, civil wars broke out between the Druze and Maronites. These wars, which continued intermittently between 1841 and 1860, ended in a military victory for the Druze, but this military success did not translate into any political achievement. On the contrary, The Druze experienced a setback in political forums, as the political agreements that ended the era of military conflict established a confessional political system in Lebanon, clearly favoring Maronites over the Druze. In 1864, the Ottoman state underwent reform, including establishing the Mutasarifiyya system. In three main aspects, the Mutasarifiyya is rightly

considered the foundation of a new era in Lebanese history. First, it established the confessional system in Lebanon, which is still in place today. Second, it embodied a decline in the political role of the Druze in Lebanon against the backdrop of political settlements, economic transformations, the abolition of the feudal system, and the introduction of the new Land Law. Third, since that period, the Mutasarifiyya system, an external solution to an internal dilemma, has been the model for solving political crises in Lebanon. This model of foreign intervention ending internal conflict has become the mechanism for resolving internal political conflicts in Lebanon (Harik 1968, 35-36).

The Mutasarifiyya ensured a civil peace that lasted for more than half a century and ended with the outbreak of World War I, which led to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the French Mandate era. This era embraced the political project of the Lebanese national movement, which was based on the idea of a national homeland for Christians in the Arab Middle East. The mandate further marginalized the Druze's political role in Lebanon. This role was reversed with the establishment of the National Pact, which founded the Maronite-Sunni duality as the basis of the political system in Lebanon in the independence era. The Druze played a prominent role in the short battle for independence in November 1943, but their embrace of the independent government did not help them. Hence, their integration into the politics of the independent state came through traditional leadership based on the principles established by the National Pact in independent Lebanon.

Kamal Jumblatt and the Revolutionary Project to Abolish Sectarianism

The relationship between the Druze and the Lebanese state and their stance towards its confessional system changed after the rise of Kamal Jumblatt, who entered the political arena through the traditional channels of Jumblattist partisanship. However, he soon challenged the confessional political system in Lebanon by establishing the Progressive Socialist Party and demanding its abolishment as the focus of his political work and activity. From the founding of the Progressive Socialist Party in 1949 until his assassination by the intelligence affiliated with the Ba'ath regime in Syria in 1977, Jumblatt dedicated his political struggle to abolishing the political, confessional system and replacing it with a secular system based on the principles of equal citizenship and social justice. The first Lebanese Civil War of 1958, which Kamal Jumblatt called the Lebanese Revolution, was an opportunity, a shock, and a significant leap in his political activity.

With the end of the war and the restoration of the confessional system, which was based on the principles of "no victor, no vanquished" and improving performance and achieving justice through the existing confessional system, Jumblatt realized that peaceful political system mechanisms were no longer effective. Having missed the golden opportunity provided by the 1958 Civil War, it became necessary to develop methods of political struggle by undermining the confessional system rather than betting on its reform. Thus, Jumblatt developed three axes for political struggle: an alliance with the Nasserist-revolutionary regime on the Arab level, establishing an ideological-political partnership with the Palestinian resistance organizations, and striving to rally all leftist, nationalist, Marxist, and communist forces and organizations within a united front challenging the confessional-political system. Jumblatt's new convictions were based on the belief that the system was irreplaceable and had to be removed rather than reformed, leading to its collapse and undermining. Indeed, with Kamal Jumblatt's appointment as Interior Minister in 1969 at the insistence of the Palestinian organizations, he provided his allies from the resistance organizations with official cover and a haven that gave them complete control over the Palestinian camps and freedom for guerrilla operations against Israel (Hazran 2010, 157-176).

With its ideological and revolutionary momentum, the Palestinian organizations' military presence gave the Lebanese left a substantial boost of courage, which now relied on its popular legitimacy and political ability to mobilize a grassroots movement, in addition to the Palestinian military presence on Lebanese soil. Jumblatt, caught off guard by the sudden outbreak of the civil war, saw it as the last golden opportunity to eliminate the confessional system and rise to a secular Lebanon. Based on this vision, Jumblatt quickly proposed a political project to reform the sectarian system by abolishing confessionalism, reorganizing the army, and establishing administrative decentralization. This project clashed with the opposition from the Phalangist right and the Maronites in general, which the Ba'ath regime in Syria saw as a golden opportunity to intervene in Lebanon and Arabize Maronite politics. The contradiction in visions between the Ba'ath regime and Jumblatt led the right-wing forces to exploit Syrian intervention to strike the left and bring down its project.

The clash between Jumblatt and the Syrian Ba'ath regime dealt a fatal blow, leading to the abandonment of Jumblatt by the Palestinian resistance organizations, the Syrian regime's dominance over the Lebanese left, and the eventual downfall of its project. Subsequently, Jumblatt's assassination in March 1977 was

the culmination of this clash. The Syrian intervention and Jumblatt's assassination were a devastating blow to the political project of the Lebanese anti-establishment left, leading to a retreat in the Druze's political role, who, since the assassination and the collapse of the leftist political project, have aspired to maintain their role instead of seeking to change the entire political equation in Lebanon. Walid Jumblatt, son of Kamal Jumblatt, clearly reflected this orientation in his political activity. His vision, based on an alliance with the Syrian Ba'ath regime to preserve the Druze's status and consolidate their role in the Lebanese political arena, explains the Druze's support for the Taif Agreement despite its re-establishment of the confessional system in Lebanon (Hazran 2010, 157-176).

Returning to the Square of Confessionalism and Merely Preventing Sedition

Walid Jumblatt's policy was based on three pillars: preserving the Druze's political status within the existing political system and the Druze's gains after the Mountain War 1983-1984, adhering to the alliance and coordination with the Ba'ath regime in Syria, and framing the Socialist Party as the political front for the Druze in the Lebanese political scene. After the unconditional Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, these pillars began to crumble, particularly with the continued military presence of Syria and the growing military power of Hezbollah.

The assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005 was the starting signal for a widespread protest movement against the continued Syrian military presence in Lebanon, which indeed led to the "Cedar Revolution" and the withdrawal of Syrian forces after a three-decade military presence. Tensions escalated between the Druze and Hezbollah due to the demographic expansion of the Shia at the expense of the Druze on the one hand and Hezbollah's adherence to its resistance project in Lebanon on the other, reaching a boiling point in 2008 after the Lebanese government decided to dismiss the director of security at Beirut International Airport and dismantle Hezbollah's private communication network. Following these decisions backed by Walid Jumblatt, Hezbollah launched an attack on Mountain Lebanon and, in return, took control of Beirut, the capital. This control resulted in the Doha Agreement of 2008, which granted Hezbollah dominance over the political decision-making in Lebanon (Abisaab and Abisaab 2014; Hajjar 2009, 261-276).

After the Doha Agreement, the Druze's political role receded, mainly as Yazbaki factionalism re-emerged. The Doha Agreement created a new political reality

in Lebanon. Through it, the Druze realized that all they could aspire to was to preserve their existence and position in the Lebanese political scene in the face of dominance. Walid Jumblatt summarized the shifting and the dramatic decline in ambitions with the phrase that the Druze and Maronites had become "Red Indians" in Lebanon, meaning their political role had ended despite their long history in the founding project of Lebanese statehood (al-Akhbar 2010). The Druze in Lebanon still consider themselves the owners of the founding project through their role over hundreds of years in the Emirate (Zahreddine 1994, 91-108). Kamal Jumblatt used this profoundly ingrained awareness in the Druze collective memory as the starting point to re-sort the political system in Lebanon through secularization. However, this project ended with the fall of the anti-establishment left and the assassination of Jumblatt. The policy of those who followed him recognized an inflexible reality: the Druze had lost their political role in Lebanon despite their foundational role in Lebanon's history, and this role no longer advocated for them, and their political aspirations were now limited to drawing strength from their awareness and memory to preserve their existence, rather than changing the reality in Lebanon.

"The Druzes in Syria" by Birgit Schäbler

Thank you for your kind invitation to this important conference and roundtable.

I am contributing here as a Middle East Historian trained in historical anthropology, Islamic studies, and political sciences, with an academic background in Germany and the US. In the early 1990s, I had the opportunity to be the first Westerner to undertake extended fieldwork in the province of al-Suwayda, formerly known as 'Jabal Druze' or, more politically correct in Syria, 'Jabal al-'Arab' - the 'mountain' being more of a highlands, bordering on a sizeable rugged lava field, which served as a hideout throughout history. I am still very grateful for this experience.

I discussed the Druze sociologically as an ethnic group and wanted to concentrate historically on the 20th century, especially the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925. However, it soon became apparent that one cannot understand the workings of politics and society in Syrian Druze society without going back much further in time. Looking at the way this frontier region was settled by Druze peasants who wrestled it from Arab nomadic tribes with whom they then lived and interacted for centuries is essential to explain the unique political and social traits of the frontier society of Druze warrior-peasants, including the local form of communal land

tenure, a variety of *musha'* (Schäbler 2001, 241–311).

The political system they established was a *mashyakha* system, which differed from the *imara* system of Mount Lebanon in that it was internally more dynamic, with several first-rank families vying for power and several secondary and third-rank families vying to move up in rank. This contrasts with the *imara* system, which, throughout centuries, featured only one and then two families, whose control was consequently tighter on their fellow Druzes. The "compact minority" (a term that implies that Druzes were the majority in their highlands but also hints at their cohesiveness) was only socially "compact" in times of external threat. During periods of peace, it showed significant social dynamics: a peasant movement known as *al-'ammiyya* emerged in 1889/90, and in 1949, a popular movement called al-*sha'biyya* called for full integration into the state of Syria and fought against the unionism of the family in power, the Atrash.

My research was ultimately about the specificity of the Syrian Druze as a group and their dealings with the Ottoman, French mandate, and early independent states around them, especially through their well-documented Intifadas. Hardly any other group in Bilad al-Sham put up as much resistance against centralizing states and endured as many punitive campaigns as the Druze in Syria. My sources were oral history, locally written sources, and colonial archives, primarily in France, the UK, the US, and Germany.

This dynamic social structure was also reflected in the religious sphere, where there developed over time three *mashaykh al-'aql* (established to deal with Ottoman authorities), distinct from the large group of "initiated," *ajaweed*, whose authority rests on their spirituality or knowledge of the scriptures, who keep aloof of worldly powers, have an inner hierarchy of rank expressed in their headgear, and are responsible for safeguarding the Druzes and their faith., as well as fighters in the war. The three families who each brought forth a *shaykh al-'aql*, especially the oldest one, al-Hajari, were more independent of the worldly, powerful *mashaykh* than was the case in Lebanon, where the *shuyukh al-'aql* depended mainly on the ruling families. In Israel, only one family provided the *shaykh al-'aql,* as there were not many powerful families to speak of. From the Ottomans onward, the ruling powers preferred the *shuyukh al-'aql* as interlocutors and spokespersons for the group, as they were the most conservative force in Druze society.

However, in Syria, rulers had to contend with the powerful chiefs of a society of warrior-peasants, and the Syrian Druzes developed a tradition of rebellion and a reputation of resistance to what they deemed unjust demands from the state.

Their military prowess occupied rulers from Ibrahim Pasha to Sultan Abdülhamid, French high commissioners, and Syrian presidents after independence.

This tradition of rebellion, transmitted orally in heroic songs and poems from generation to generation in the families, culminated in the person of Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, who managed to broaden what had started as another Druze revolt into a national Syria-wide uprising against the French Mandate in 1925, together with his close urban ally Dr. Shahbandar. It was given the name "Great Syrian Revolt," differentiating it from the previous "Great Arab Revolt," in which the Druzes had also played an important role when they turned their mountain into a refuge for activists of the Arab secret societies of the time, who were planning the Arab revolt against the Ottomans in 1916. This was when an old *imaginaire* of the noble warrior from the steppe was impregnated with the politics of the time, and these early contacts between urban nationalists and Druze, who had lost a number of their shaykhs at the gallows in 1911 in Damascus, laid the foundations for the rural-urban alliance of 1925. This is a little-known and fascinating story of the Syrian Druzes, which I explored in some detail in an article called "From Urban Notables to 'Noble Arabs': Shifting Discourses in the Emergence of Nationalism in the Arab East, 1910-1916," which brought forth new questions, apart from the take on Arab nationalism, which was the ruling paradigm back then (Schäbler 2004, 174-198).

It is equally fascinating how the status of Sultan Pasha al-Atrash as a nationalist symbol, both patriotic and Druze, has been upheld until this very day. Sultan never took any political office and avoided embroiling in the political game. He remained above it, in his village of al-Qurayya, leaving politics to the Suwayda branch of the family, as was explained to me by his youngest brother Zayd, entertaining a significant number of guests in his *madafa* – the most illustrious probably being Egyptian president Gamal Abdelnasir.

The Druzes in Bathist Syria lost their historical position in military prowess to the Alawites under Hafez al-Asad. However, they skillfully used their political capital invested in the heroic persona of Sultan al-Atrash to hold their ground and negotiate with the regime until this very day. Sultan stands for armed rebellion, often expressed as 'revolution,' but also for Arab political values that the Ba'th, whatever is left of it, and the Syrian Arab Republic wish to project. It appears that the Syrian Druzes are still the least studied group among the Druze, despite essential contributions to this conference.

My anthropological research in the Jabal Druze took place in the early 1990s.

Back then, the old discourses and discussions about the separation of the spheres in Druzedom, the religious and the worldly, were still alive with the older men, as was the secular outlook of the young. When I returned at the end of the 1990s and in the early 2000s, large numbers of the young men were clad in religious beginners' gear, with *shirwal* and knitted white wool caps, and historical photos of initiated shaykhs, the *ajaweed* were put up publicly and could even be bought at shops and petrol stations - which would have been deemed deeply inappropriate ten years before. The political discussions that I could witness earlier had stopped. People said, "We cannot talk like this anymore."

These overall shifts need to be researched, it seems, making use of all the disciplines we have at our disposal: anthropology, history, sociology, political science, Islamic studies, religious studies, and gender studies should all be made use of.

Discussion

The section below includes a discussion between the participants in the November 16, 2023, roundtable and answers to questions. We used the original text as captured by the Zoom Webinar automated annotation. After the event, contributors to this roundtable manually edited their responses for better clarity and continued their scholarly exchange, editing the discussion below to maintain clarity and adding additional content.

Rami Zeedan: My first question is for Mrs. Marianne Reed. From your extensive experience helping new journals at the University of Kansas (Reed, 2018), what suggestions do you have for this new *Druze Studies Journal*?

Marianne Reed: My main suggestion is to get high-quality submissions. Then, conduct a thorough peer review process. Whenever anything is published, make sure it is disseminated within your academic networks, whether it is disciplinary or linguistic, in order to ensure its visibility. You can encourage people at this conference to sign up for publication in the journal. Signing up for publication in the journal would be a good start, as it would notify them of upcoming publications. Other than that, I think you are already on the right track. It is just what you do after things are published. You notify people, other associations, and other disciplinary networks, and you encourage others to do the same.

Rami Zeedan: My next question is for Dr. Hussam Timani. In 2000, you published a review of the famous 1999 book by the late Professor KAIS FIRRO on "*The Druzes in the Jewish State: A Brief History.*" You wrote: "*This well-researched book is a welcome contribution to the study of the Druzes, one of the most under-studied religious groups in the Middle East*" (Timani 2000, 432-434). Now that we are meeting 22 years later, do you still think the Druze are "*one of the most under-studied religious groups in the Middle East"?* How would you assess this field today, given that we are launching a unique journal dedicated to studying the Druze?

Hussam Timani: I am pointing out a lack of continuity and follow-up in research and publications. Often, we see isolated studies without connections to other relevant work. Publications emerge, but there is no subsequent exploration or development of the ideas presented. For instance, if a scholar publishes a book, I expect other scholars to engage in dialogue, building on that work. The problem lies in the absence of sustained conversation and consistency. In academia, a publication should mark the beginning of a discussion, not the end. However, in Druze Studies, while questions are posed in publications, there is a noticeable gap in further research addressing them. This hinders the progress of these studies, leading to misconceptions that could quickly be clarified through continued exploration and follow-up research. The key is encouraging ongoing dialogue and exploration rather than letting the discussion end abruptly after a major publication. For example, we can use the platform of the *Druze Studies Journal* we are initiating today.

Rami Zeedan: My next question is for Dr. Yusri Hazran: you are a published scholar on the Druze in Lebanon, with a book and many excellent articles (Hazran 2014). Recently, you published an article on the "*Unrealized Potential: Druze Women in Israel vs. Lebanese-Druze Women*." In this article, you write that "[…] *via comparison with the Druze in Lebanon, the article traces the structural elements that impede Druze women in Israel from taking center stage in internal politics*" (Hazran 2023, 90–105). I think this is a valuable contribution since yesterday, at least one speaker mentioned during the discussion that the situation of the Druze in Israel is much better than that in other countries. Without getting into all the details of this project, could you please tell us more about the challenges and opportunities of conducting comparative research on the Druze? Do you have any recommendations for those interested in expanding comparative approaches?

Yusri Hazran: Thank you for the question. The main idea behind the article is that Druze in Israel are leading the revolutions inside society when it comes to birth rates, education, and employment. Druze women are the most important social force driving this change. Despite that, until our days, we still do not see them employing this potential to get into politics, which Druze men still control.

Rami Zeedan: Could you elaborate on the question of comparative research? What about the Druze in Lebanon versus the Druze in Israel and Syria? Do you have any suggestions for doing comparative research?

Yusri Hazran: Yes. We have the data regarding women in Israel. Unfortunately, I do not have access to data about women in Syria or Lebanon. However, it is crucial to indicate that Druze women in Lebanon play a prominent role in education, the social sphere, and politics. Unfortunately, I do not have the complete data about the education, employment, and birth rate relevant to the Druze in Syria and Lebanon. We urgently need to initiate such projects.

Rami Zeedan: My next question is for Dr. Birgit Schäbler. In 2013, you published an interesting article titled "*Constructing an Identity between Arabism and Islam: The Druzes in Syria*" (Schäbler 2013, 62-79). In that article, you talked about the Druze wanting to prove "their true Arabness," which was brought to full bloom in 1925 with the Great Revolt. You brought a quote from Khayr al-Dı¯n al-Zirikli, who said:

> "*Lineages got entangled, origins got lost and blood got mixed in most places of Bilad al-Sham; but there remained in Bilad Hawran and some places in Lebanon a group (ta'ifa) who guarded its 'Arabiyya, the classical Arabic, adhering to its party spirit ('asabiyya), and in whom is living the Qaysiyya and the Yamaniyya to the very day of these people (. ..) and that is the Arab and Islamic group of the Druzes who are hoisting the first flag streaming in the present Syrian revolution*".

My question is: how would you situate this discourse within the current scholarship on the Druze in Syria?

Birgit Schäbler: Thank you for this question. The 1925 quote from the famous intellectual, activist, journalist, and founder of numerous newspapers and journals, al-Zirikli, is the culmination of a certain discourse on the part of early urban na-

tionalist intellectuals, who in their political shift from Ottomanism to Arabism, reinterpreted the tribal people of the Syrian steppe, *ahl-al-badiya*, including the Druzes, turning them from robbers of caravans and general lawless malefactors into honorable people, who upheld the ancient virtues of the Arabs in their tongue, in their sense of freedom and honor. They were transformed into modern-day Antars, whose warrior spirit would liberate the current Arabs from the Ottoman yoke. This is an ancient *imaginaire*, also evoking Ibn Khaldun, which was infused with the political climate of the time, as evidenced in the writings of al-Kawakibi. The shift in discourse concerning the Druze emerged in the Damascene press, which had slammed the Druzes for decades. With the public hangings of Druze shaykhs in 1911 by Ottoman authorities, editor Muhammad Kurd Ali, who was in a *halqa*, an intellectual circle with Abd-al-Rahman al-Shahbandar and others, slowly changed the tone in the coverage of al-Muqtabas. A few years later, the Druzes would supply these intellectuals and officers with an escape route when they prepared for the Arab revolt in 1916. And they would again partner up in the Great Revolt of 1925. The quote you are asking about thus shows the amount of cultural and political capital invested in the Druzes as Arab heroes and even good Muslims, culminating in the persona of Sultan Pasha al-Atrash.

Rami Zeedan: This question is from the audience. How do we balance the visibility of Druze Studies and the need to respect secrecy about some aspects of their sacred beliefs and community?

Hussam Timani: As academics, we engage in controversy, maintain objectivity, present the facts, analyze them, and present our findings. Secrecy can challenge religion and faith, monopolizing who can speak or what they can say. This is a very sensitive issue, and I am unsure we can present a solution. However, I see that some followers are calling to end the secrecy, and they say, well, this is something that helped in the past and does not fit our days. In class, we have to learn from each other's interfaith dialogue. Understanding the other allows us to communicate with them. If we do not know about the other, we will assume things, and someone else will fill the gaps with false information.

Rami Zeedan: As the editor-in-chief of the *Druze Studies Journal*, I will also respond. Other communities worldwide have this kind of issue with their sacred texts. It is not a matter of the Druze only. This issue extends to other indigenous

communities, for example, here in the USA, who do not like researchers to get their hands on their sacred text or their sacred beliefs and want to keep away from the public eye and research. Therefore, this is a broader topic, focusing more than just the Druze and their specificities. I suggest framing this question in that context, drawing from the experiences of other scholars and other fields. Most importantly, this initiative is a service to academia and the Druze themselves, so we must be sensitive to the community.

Marianne Reed: If you recall, Rami, when you first came to me with the idea for this *Druze Studies Journal*, this was something I asked about. I asked this question about religion and what the community will accept because we run into this. We must acknowledge the ethical concerns about sharing information the community does not approve of. We had a very productive talk. I saw that you were aware of this and that awareness is what will prevent the journal from making mistakes. Knowing the editorial staff of this journal, I do not see that as a problem, but I can understand how it could be viewed from an external perspective. Moreover, we have had these conversations, and fortunately, I think that everyone involved is aware of the situation.

Rami Zeedan: It will surely be challenging, and we will be facing decisions that need to be made at the level of the Editorial Board. Another question from the audience. To Dr. Hazran: What do you make of Kamal Jumblatt's connection on a spiritual level with India? Does that have any influence on the Druze community?

Yusri Hazran: I am not sure there was a connection between Kamal Jumblatt and India. For the Druze, Kamal Jumblatt called for integration within their immediate public sphere. In Lebanon, he wanted the Druze to integrate into and lead the Lebanese state.

Rami Zeedan: My final question is for Dr. Birgit Schäbler. How have the Druze in al-Suwayda invoked the legacy of Sultan Pasha al-Atrash in their struggles, particularly during the Syrian civil war and recent demonstrations in 2023?

Birgit Schäbler: This question relates to what I said before. Druzes in al-Suwayda continue to invoke Sultan in their struggles. During the bloody civil war, the Druzes sought to keep neutrality. In 2013, Druze militias were established to

protect the community, and Druze men were also serving in the Syrian army. Both evoked Sultan Pasha al-Atrash as a protector of the community and as a protector of Syria. Ten years later, in September/October 2023, Druze in al-Suwayda came out openly in large demonstrations with the blessing of *shaykh al-'aql* al-Hajari, calling even for an end to Bashar al-Asad's rule. They did this once again, tapping into the symbolic capital of Sultan Pasha's double role as protector of the Syrian fatherland and the Druzes.

Rami Zeedan: Another question from the audience. Why do the Druze see themselves as the founders of the state of Lebanon?

Yusri Hazran: I say that the Druze are the real founders of the Lebanese entity. I added before that while Christians may agree, the Shiite community does not share this view. Christians and Druze historians genuinely consider Fakhreddine II the actual founder, while Shiites do not share this view.

Rami Zeedan: This is another question from the audience that captures two questions at once. Druze Studies is a growing field, but it remains a relatively small field. Is there a need for separate Druze Studies?

Hussam Timani: I think this is a fascinating question. That is my argument: we must take Druze Studies within the larger Islamic studies. Druze Studies should be studied like Sufism and Shi'ism. That is where books, interested people, and classes can be found. So that is the problem. Druze Studies- some say they are a tiny minority- but who cares about them? No, these Druze communities, like other communities, deserve to be researched within Islamic Studies. Even if the community is small, it does not matter.

Yusri Hazran: I will also add it within Middle Eastern Studies as an obvious connection. In my presentation, I said that we can focus on Druze particularism. At the same time, you need to keep the balance that the Druze are not playing their historical role within the religion.

Rami Zeedan: Thank you for this discussion.

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