

# Deprivation of Existence

The use of Disguised Legalization as a Policy  
to Seize Property by Successive Governments of Syria



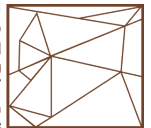
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# Deprivation of Existence

## The use of Disguised Legalization as a Policy to Seize Property by Successive Governments of Syria

A special report sheds light on discrimination projects aiming  
at radical demographic changes in areas historically populated  
by Kurds

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice



## Acknowledgment and Gratitude

The present report is the result of a joint cooperation that extended from 2018's second half until August 2020, and it could not have been produced without the invaluable assistance of witnesses and victims who had the courage to provide us with official documents proving ownership of their seized property.

This report is to be added to researches, books, articles and efforts made to address the subject therein over the past decades, by Syrian/Kurdish human rights organizations, individuals, male and female researchers and parties of the Kurdish movement in Syria.

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) would like to thank all researchers who contributed to documenting and recording testimonies together with the editors who worked hard to produce this first edition, which is open for amendments and updates if new credible information is made available.

To give feedback or send corrections or any additional documents supporting any part of this report, please contact us on [editor@stj-sy.org](mailto:editor@stj-sy.org)

## About Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ)

STJ started as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organization committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts committed by all parties to the conflict. Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, regardless of their perpetrator and victims, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.



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## 1. Methodology

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) started working on this report in mid-2018. Ahead of field work, a team of researchers discussed the report's methodology, set up a plan, and defined target villages and regions. In early 2019, the team embarked on obtaining testimonies and conducting interviews — 31 witnesses were interviewed in person throughout northeastern Syria, particularly in the villages where lands were seized. The researchers conducted 12 online interviews, reaching out to witnesses several times in 2020, as to obtain additional accounts and information.

In addition, a number of witnesses provided STJ with 27 exclusive documents, that are to be published for the first time, which indicate the areas of properties confiscated by the subsequent Syrian governments. A different set of documents, however, reports incidents related to the subject matter, not to mention the maps, which depict the target region, under the Ottoman Empire and the French Mandate.

For the aim of this report, the researchers also cited 77 references, including 34 books and 43 research papers, studies, magazines, articles and reports, which addressed the report's subject matter or included related materials.

Furthermore, STJ sent a mission to the French city of Nantes, which examined materials of the French archive. Another researcher made a thorough reading of Turkish documents, some of which were written in the Ottoman Turkish language, and quoted them when necessary.

## 2. Executive Summary

24 June 2020 marked the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of one of the large-scale projects aimed at bringing about demographic changes, which have been in the planning since before 2011. This was also the day the National Command of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party passed resolution No. 521 in 1974, which provided for the effective implementation of what was termed the 'Arab Belt' project. At that point, thousands of Arab families who lost their homes to the creation of [Lake Assad](#), were prompted to move and settle in 'model villages', that were built on lands seized earlier under the Agrarian Reform Laws, starting with Act No.161 of 1958, the year of the establishment of the unity between Syria and Egypt.

Towards the promotion of Arab nationalism at the expense of the Kurdish identity in Syria; as described by international human rights organizations, the Syrian Arabs were transferred by government to settle in the Kurds' home areas with the aim of establishing the 'Arab Belt' along the length of the border strip with Turkey, which meant to separate the Kurds of Syria from those of Turkey and Iraq. The planned demographic change also included deporting the Kurds residing in villages within the scope of this 'Belt' to other areas.<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to what is commonly said, it seems that the memorandum submitted by Muhammad Kurd Ali, Minister of Education in Taj al-Din al-Hasani's first government,<sup>2</sup> to the heads of ministries, dated 18 November 1931, was one of the first official recommendations, which explicitly called for the deportation of the Syrian Kurds from their areas along the northern borders for national reasons. Talking about the situation of al-Hasakah province (then called Jazira), Kurd Ali referred to the migration of Kurds, Syrians, Armenians, Arabs and Jews to the border area adjacent to Turkey, saying that the Kurds, who were the largest in number, should be displaced to areas far from the borders of Kurdistan, proposing to grant them lands around Homs and Aleppo and to integrate them with the Arabs there.<sup>3</sup>

Also, in the context of the initial application of the Arabisation policy, the Central National Government appointed in late January 1937, Emir Bahjat al-Shihabi, who manned the military administration during the period of the Arab government, as a governor of al-Hasakah. Al-Shihabi came with a plan in his pocket, which he quickly launched. That plan aimed to 'cleanse' the small government administration of local employees from the Syrians and Armenians, affiliated with the previous regime, and recruit new staff from the Arabs of Aleppo.<sup>4</sup>

Since the Ottoman era at least and until the declaration of Agrarian Reform Law No. 161 on 11 June 1958, the form of ownership throughout present-day Syria was feudal, as large areas were in the hands of a few people who were mostly notables, sheikhs of clans and princes.<sup>5</sup>

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1 "Group Denial: Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria", HRW, 26 November 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/11/26/group-denial/repression-kurdish-political-and-cultural-rights-syria> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

2 "The First Government of Taj al-Din al-Hasani", Syrian Modern History, <https://syrmh.com/2018/10/21/%d8%ad%d9%83%d9%88%d9%85%d8%a9-%d8%aa%d8%a7%d8%ac-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%af%d9%8a%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d8%b3%d9%86%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d9%88%d9%84%d9%89/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

3 Muhammad Kurd Ali: "Almozakart/The Diaries", the second part, Dar Adwaa al-Salaf for publication and distribution, book number 2775/2010, pages 440-442. To download the book please visit: <http://www.dimoqrati.info/?p=52101> (last visit: 4 September 2020). It is important to note that Muhammad Kurd Ali mentioned in one of his diaries that he was born to a Kurdish father and a Circassian mother.

4 Muhammad Jamal Barout: «The modern historical formation of Syria's Jazira - Questions and problems of the transition from Bedouin to urbanization», Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies, first edition, Beirut, November 2013, pages 416 and 417.

5 Azad Ahmed Ali: "The Role of Agriculture and Grazing in Mapping the Population of the Euphrates Island", Medarat Kurd, 22 March 2020, <https://www.medaratkurd.com/2020/03/%d8%af%d9%88%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b2%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%a9-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b1%d8%b9%d9%8a-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%b1%d8%b3%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ae%d8%a7%d8%b1%d8%b7%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%83/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

Law No. 161 determined the maximum admissible land ownership and provided for the confiscate of excess areas. However, the implementation of the law in al-Hasakah, specifically in areas historically inhabited by the Kurds, count on political considerations; this was illustrated in the projects carried out in the following years, which consisted of arbitrary seizing of properties, especially that of Kurds, and giving them to Arabs of clans who lived in the vicinity and/or to those who were later transferred from other Syrian regions.

By looking at the facts and events which followed the unity between Syria and Egypt in 1958, one can tell that the first building block for the demographic changes in areas of northern al-Hasakah province, western Tell Abyad town, Raqqa province, and Afrin region in Aleppo province, was laid at the stage of establishing the United Arab Republic (UAR).

In the political period that was named by historians as the ‘separation era’, specifically in 1962, a special census was conducted in the province of al-Hasakah, whereby tens of thousands of Syrian Kurds were stripped of their nationalities, which resulted in:

Impossibility of proving ownership of lands which belong to persons rendered stateless.

Kurdish peasants who lost their nationality didn’t entitled to lands distributed according to Law No. 161 and its subsequent amendments.<sup>6</sup>

In parallel, successive Syrian governments focused on suppressing the Kurdish identity, by restricting the overt use of the Kurdish language in schools and/or in the workplace, with the prohibition of publications in the Kurdish language, and the celebrations of Kurdish holidays, such as Nowruz, for decades. This was led to the Kurds in Syria being subjected to serious human rights violations, just like other Syrians, but, as a minority group they suffered identity discrimination.<sup>7</sup>

The ‘Arab Belt’ project was effectively implemented in the 1970s. That belt stretches in a length estimated at 300 kilometres along the Turkey-Syria border strip (starting from the far northeast of the Dêrik/al-Malikiyah district to the administrative borders with Raqqa province, west of the Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê), with a depth of 15 kilometres at its innermost point. Thus, about 4000 families from the Arab tribes in the countryside of Raqqa and Aleppo – especially from villages flooded with water that gathered

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<sup>6</sup> “Syrian Citizenship Disappeared: How the 1962 Census destroyed stateless Kurds’ lives and identities”, STJ, 15 September 2018, <https://stj-sy.org/en/745/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

<sup>7</sup> “Syria: Kurds in the Syrian Arab Republic One Year after the March 2004 Events”, AMNESTY International, 28 February 2005 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE24/002/2005/en/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).



behind the [Euphrates Dam](#)/Tabqa Dam – were transferred and settled in model villages within the belt. That was done under the banner ‘building the new society’ uttered by the late Syrian president Hafez al-Assad in a speech he gave at the opening of the dam, addressed to the people of al-Ghamr area,<sup>8</sup> and others who will start a new life in the Euphrates basin.<sup>9</sup>

An ad hoc committee was established for the implementation of the ‘Arab Belt’; it was called ‘al-Ghamr Committee’ by the Ba’ath Party. One of the goals of this commission was to induce the Arab tribes in the flooded area to move to the new housing areas. For the completion of the plan, security and executive authorities were ordered to prepare the ground in [al-Hasakah](#), thus, visits to representatives of these clans were organized throughout a whole year, in order to inform them of the areas where they were to be settled and the land they would invest.<sup>10</sup>

The al-Ghamr Arabs refused to bury their dead in their new residential areas, but rather moved them to Raqqqa until the early 1980s. Further, quite a few of them refused to build mosques without the approval of the original owners of the land, while others refused to use the siezed lands income to travel to Hajj, without the consent of the original owners. This indicates that the Arab tribes rejected this plan.

Besides its political aims and disastrous effects – especially social ones – the ‘Arab Belt’ project constitutes a flagrant violation of Syrian laws themselves; the permanent Syrian constitution of 1973, under which the bulk of the project was implemented, provided in its article 15:<sup>11</sup>

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8 The term ‘al-Ghamr area’ was used during the preparation and implementation phases of the project by its designers themselves, and this was subsequently led to the Arabs who were transferred being named as ‘Maghmurin’ or ‘Arab al-Ghamr’ which means the affected by flooding.

9 President Assad website, (The attached link was active until the research team’s last visit on 27 March 2020, but it became invalid on 9 July 2020), [http://www.presidentassad.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=352:5-7-1973&catid=255&Itemid=493](http://www.presidentassad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=352:5-7-1973&catid=255&Itemid=493)

10 Abdul Samad Dawood: ‘Arab Belt in Jazira, Syria (Qamishli- Syria, issued by the Kurdish Party of Yekiti in Syria, 2nd edition 2015, page 53.

11 This article is also contained in Syria’s 2012 Constitution, and in the same number, the full article reads:

Article 15: Collective and individual private ownership shall be protected in accordance with the following basis:

1. General confiscation of funds shall be prohibited;
  - a. Private ownership shall not be removed except in the public interest by a decree and against fair compensation according to the law;
  - b. Confiscation of private property shall not be imposed without a final court ruling;
  - c. Private property may be confiscated for necessities of war and disasters by a law and against fair compensation;
2. Compensation shall be equivalent to the real value of the property.

For more info, please check: [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Syria\\_2012.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Syria_2012.pdf)

Private ownership shall not be removed except:

1. In the public interest by a decree;
2. Against fair compensation;

However, neither of the two conditions were met in the implementation of the ‘Arab Belt’ project, as the expropriation was for the benefit of other Syrian citizens, who are different only in terms of language and nationalism.

Moreover, this policy, which has been pursued by successive governments of Syria, violates the principle of equality between citizens in rights and duties

in accordance with Article 25 of the 1973 permanent constitution.<sup>12</sup>

As removing ownerships from Syrian Kurds and granting it to Syrian Arabs without any legal justification or court ruling, is a clear discrimination and favouritism. This policy also violates Article 771 of the Syrian Civil Code promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 84 of 1949, which affirmed that no one may be deprived of his property except in cases determined by law, and in return for fair compensation.

### 3. Recommendations

Property restitution should be viewed and implemented in the light of the current political process in Syria, since that will have political and fateful dimensions that will positively affect millions of Syrians. The success of this process will contribute to the success of Syria’s peace process, which will provide a safe and neutral environment and will encourage Syrians to participate in public life, especially in elections, and will also build confidence in the constitution that can be drawn up later. Therefore, STJ would like to address recommendations:

#### A. To the United Nations (UN)

- To ensure inclusiveness, fair and genuine representation of all Syrians – regardless of their affiliations – in all political negotiations, especially those related to the Syrian constitution, to assure that all issues of individuals and

<sup>12</sup> Article 33 of the Syrian Constitution of 2012 stipulates that citizens are equal in rights and duties, and there is no discrimination between them on the grounds of sex, origin, language, religion or belief.

Article 33 Text:

1. Freedom shall be a sacred right and the state shall guarantee the personal freedom of citizens and preserve their dignity and security;
2. Citizenship shall be a fundamental principle which involves rights and duties enjoyed by every citizen and exercised according to law;
3. Citizens shall be equal in rights and duties without discrimination among them on grounds of sex, origin, language, religion or creed;
4. The state shall guarantee the principle of equal opportunities among citizens.

the groups to which they belong are included.

- To ensure that the new Syrian Constitution guarantees equal rights for all Syrians and prohibits any kind of discrimination – particularly on the basis of race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin – having the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by all persons, on an equal footing of all rights and freedoms.
- To work seriously towards a wider representation of civil society organizations, especially those active in documenting human rights violations and restitution of property and whose work is inclusive and non-discriminatory, in all areas.
- To provide equal technical and logistical support to Syrian civil society organizations and initiatives working on documenting cases of expropriation, in all Syrian regions, and to support the creation of a unified national database for the entire Syrian Republic.

## **B. To Constitutional Commissioners**

- To pledge to include all discriminatory projects, that was taken before 2011 against the Syrian Kurds and other Syrian citizens, on the agenda of the current Constitutional Committee and in the negotiations to find a political solution, and to propose fair solutions to all victims without exception.
- To pledge to ensure the writing of a non-discriminatory constitution based on equal rights and citizenship to all Syrians, along with ensuring the return of expropriated property to its original owners in any part of Syria, and ensuring the safe, dignified and voluntary return of all displaced persons and refugees to their homes and forming special committees to assess and provide fair compensations for them.<sup>13</sup>
- To place the so called ‘Arab Belt’ project and similar discriminatory projects on the negotiating table of the new Syrian constitution (to be written), so that they will be taken into consideration in the drafting process.

## **C. To actors in the Syrian conflict (the United States - the European Union - the Arab League - the Russian Federation - the United Kingdom)**

- To ensure the prohibition of current and future discriminatory projects that are taken against the Kurds or other groups of Syrian people in any part

<sup>13</sup> In one of its reports, AMNESTY International explains in detail how the Kurds in Syria have been subjected to serious human rights violations, as other Syrians, and how, as a group, they suffer identity-based discrimination, including restrictions placed upon the use of the Kurdish language and culture. It also said that large proportion of the Syrian Kurds are effectively stateless. For more info, please check: “Syria: Kurds in the Syrian Arab Republic One Year after the March 2004 Events” AMNESTY International, 28 February 2005, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE24/002/2005/en/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).



of Syrian.

- To determine the dimensions of the Turkish plan aiming at demographic changes in the Syrian territories it occupied along the northern border strip, and to ensure that projects help in this are not funded.
- To ensure the return of all forcibly displaced people from Afrin, Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, and all other Syrian regions, to their homes, and also to ensure the return of expropriated property to its original owners, and the accountability for all those involved in human rights violations.
- To work to restore Syrian citizenship to those who have been stripped of it under the extraordinary census of 1962.

#### **D. To owners of expropriated property**

- To keep the originals of all court decisions and any other documents proving ownership in a safe place.
- To keep copies of all documentation with a reliable, honest and known third party if necessary.

#### **E. To the current Syrian government and/or future governments**

- To form a neutral, independent and impartial Syrian national committee to study how to end the so called the 'Arab Belt' project and other similar discriminatory projects which resulted in the seizure of people's property, and also to study the ownership documents submitted by claimants, and decide their cases fairly and expeditiously, provided that the decisions of the aforementioned committee are subject to appeal before the competent courts in accordance with the Syrian laws, and that all results are published in full transparency in the public and in official newspapers.
- To entitle any formed committee to study both; the issue of the landowners who were deprived from their lands and that of people whose lands were flooded and thus transferred to Jazira – we actually see them as victims of the racist project conducted by the Ba'ath government – and to ensure fair compensation for all.
- To not to neglect the social dimensions of discriminatory projects on any Syrian component, and to work seriously to make real reconciliations between all parties, as well as looking forward to building a peaceful future which ensures full equality of rights and duties in Syria.

#### **F. To the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)**

- To Ensure inclusiveness during the documentation process of violations committed by all parties to the Syrian conflict, especially those that led to the forcible displacement of millions of Syrians from their home areas.

## 4. Introduction

A real understanding of the events that took place as part of the implementation of the ‘Arab Belt’ project requires insight into Syria’s history. This report thus delves into the past. Although information tends to be fragmented, sometimes lost, we endeavoured to provide our reader with an overview of the history of Jazira.

To that end, it was necessary to adopt an interdisciplinary approach. This means to explore first and foremost historians’ works, but also to investigate sociologists’, geographers’ accounts, both modern and contemporary of the events related.

We also conducted a scientific field mission to Nantes’ Archives in Loire-Atlantique province to the west of Paris, France, that keeps and gives access to archives from the French mandate in Syria, that were both fascinating and valuable.<sup>14</sup>

The overview would not be complete would it neglect travellers’, explorers’ and missionaries’ works, whose interests in the depiction of the area must always be borne in mind in order to assess their credibility, but that nonetheless provide with relevant information. Because the topic is complex, we also got in touch with academics who were kind enough to dedicate some of their time to clarifying the most intricate aspects.

### 1. Jazira

A comprehensive history of the Jazira, its culture, economy, and populations, could only be the result of an interdisciplinary work, involving historians, anthropologists. Nonetheless, our research demonstrated that the genuine identity of the region is deeply ingrained in multiculturalism, conflicted by rigid borders inherited from its colonial past.

#### A. History

An understanding of the region requires to delve into the history of its population, but also the geographical features characterizing the area, and its relevance to the economy, that explain the political will by the Ottoman Empire and the French mandate to impose their control over an era historically populated by nomad and semi-nomad tribes.

In the past few years, a substantial number of documents on the history of the Syrian

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<sup>14</sup> The Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN) gathers archives of external services, including embassies, consulates, as well as those of Protectorates of Tunisia and Morocco and the mandate of Syria.

Jazira have appeared, allowing researchers to order historical events and put them in context to ward off confusion about the origins of the groups who have a centuries-old presence on this land which was divided and where new borders were drawn by external forces. History of this land, that was governed by a tribal system, experienced intermingling among ethnic groups, dictated by security and economic factors. Thus, the then tribal alliances were not always based on consanguinity. The most important example of this was the Melli Tribal Alliances, which brought together Kurds, Arabs, Christians, Yazidis, and some Turkmen. This Alliance was formed in the early 16th century and became most active in the late 19th century. Ibrahim Pasha al-Melli was assigned a leader for it with the blessings of Sultan Abdul Hamid.<sup>15</sup>

Before the Ottomans came and during their rule as well, the tribes in the area were at ongoing wars, for defining the boundaries of each, which led to the repositioning of the dominant tribal forces. That was before the rise of the notions of national affiliation and international boundaries. Solving these ethnic conflicts eluded the states that emerged after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Turkey and Syria, for example), preventing them from creating a unified identity for this region, whose government system is still – to this very day – subject to tribal and ethnic considerations, at the expense of citizenship considerations, that are the only guarantor of the rights of all citizens regardless of their affiliations and beliefs.

In his study of the Ottoman collection archive, German historian, Stefan Winter, who specialises in the Syrian history during the Ottoman era, found a significant quantity of documents related to the history of Kurds, that had, until then, not been adequately studied.<sup>16</sup> The history of Kurdish Emirates goes back centuries prior to the oldest documents found, but was lost as a result of the severe damages caused to them by the Mongol invasion of the region between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The oldest Kurds-related document found in the Ottoman archives thus dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup>

The decisive turning point in the history of the region is the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514 AD, that saw the Kurds siding with the Ottomans against the Safavids. Nevertheless, the tide of the battle favored the Ottomans and that led to a peace agreement between the Kurdish prince Idris Al Badlisi and the Ottoman Sultan Selim I, allowing the latter to extend his control on the countries of Kurdistan and the Euphrates island, in 1516 AD,

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15 Stefan Winter, "Syrian Kurds in the Mirror of Ottoman Archives Sources during the Eighteenth-Century AD.", translated from German by: Dr. Nidal Mahmoud Haji Darwish, the research was published in the Ottoman Archives Journal No. 27, 2010, Medarat Kurd website, 17 February 2015, <https://www.medaratkurd.com/2015/02/%d8%a3%d9%83%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%af%d8%b3%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d9%85%d8%b1%d8%a2%d8%a9-%d9%85%d8%b5%d8%a7%d8%af%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d8%b1%d8%b4%d9%8a%d9%81-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d8%ab/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

16 Ibid.

17 Mohammad Ali Ahmed, "Kurds and Kurdish Tribes in the Ottoman Archives", Medarat Kurd, (The study was published in the Qalamoun Journal for Studies and Research, Second Issue - August 2017, and it was also published on the Swedish Kurdish Centre for Studies website), 30 December 2017, <https://www.medaratkurd.com/2017/12/%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%83%d8%b1%d8%af-%d9%88%d8%a7-%d9%84%d8%b9%d8%b4%d8%a7%d8%a6%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%83%d8%b1%d8%af%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%a7-%d9%84%d8%a3%d8%b1%d8%b4%d9%8a%d9%81-%d8%a7%d9%84/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).



after another battle with the Safavids at the axis of Mardin/Urfa.<sup>18</sup>

No real agreement was decided upon. The Kurdish Emirates thus pledged allegiance to the Supreme Porte in exchange for allowing them to taxes and independence, and indeed the power in the Kurdish Emirates used to pass down from father to son without interference from the Porte. This independency was reflected in pages of the Ottoman collection archive of the eighteenth century and earlier in the commentary presented by the Ottoman explorer Evliya Çelebi, which he wrote on his trip to the lands of the Kurds in 1655 AD,<sup>19</sup> providing a distinct analysis of the demographic and economic reality, as well as of the nature of the system of government in the Kurdish Emirates, the subject which was addressed by multiple studies, among them are those of Stefan Winter and Muhammad Ali Ahmed, who both mentioned the population distribution of the tribes that lived on the present-day Syrian Jazira and the names of the neighbouring Kurdish and Arab tribes that established the urban points between the Euphrates basin and the central Jazira.

The foregoing is consistent with what Turkish historian Ahmed Aq Kunduz presented about the existence of a form of Kurdish state during the reign of Selim I, who gave recognition to an independent Kurdish state in eastern Anatolia, but with its foreign policy in the hands of the Ottoman Sultan and an administrative system similar to that of the Ottoman state.<sup>20</sup>

Dominance of the Kurds over their state whose land extended between the upper and middle Jazira continued until the last moment of the rule of the Mallian Emirate led by Ibrahim Pasha (1843-1908), who made [Viranşehir](#) town – 50 km north of [Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn](#) – the centre of his power. Ibrahim Pasha was the originator of the Kurdish independent state notion and was an outspoken opponent to the Ottoman power's projects. That was confirmed by the German ancient historian and archaeologist, Max von Oppenheim, in the commentary he provided of his visit to Ibrahim Pasha in 1899, when he asked the latter to help him in excavating [Tell Halaf](#), now within the Syrian territories.

The Kurdish Emir (prince) lost his power after the sudden fall of Sultan Abdul Hamid and the rise of the Turkish federations who turned against him. His wife who succeeded him concluded a peace agreement with the Turks and handed over weapons, and tribes who were under the Melli rule were distributed on both sides of the new border line between present-day Syria and Turkey.<sup>21</sup>

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18 Muhammad Jamal Barout: «The modern historical formation of Syria's Jazira - Questions and problems of the transition from Bedouin to urbanization», Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies, first edition, Beirut, November 2013, page 51.

19 For more info, please read: Evliya Çelebi: “Evliya Çelebi trip in Kurdistan”, translated by Rachid Fendi, Khani Press, Duhok, 2008.

20 Ahmed Aq Kunduz & Said Ozturk, “the Unknown Ottoman Empire”, translated by Orkhan Ali & Awni Lotfi Oghli. publications of the Ottoman research endowment, Istanbul 2008, page 219.

21 Dr. Nidal Mahmoud Haj Darwish, “Tell Halaf and Jazira through the observations of Baron von Oppenheim 1860-1946, Medarat Kurd, 30 June 2020, <https://www.medaratkurd.com/2020/06/%d8%aa%d9%84-%d8%ad%d9%84%d9%81-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ac%d8%b2%d9%8a%d8%b1%d8%a9-%d8%a3%d9%88%d8%a8%d9%86%d9%87%d8%a7%d9%8a%d9%85/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

In addition to the Ottoman collection archive for the 18th century, that accurately documents the tribes that used to rule and reside in the Kurdish-majority regions of Karadağ/Afrin, Tell Abyad and Jazira, the imperial decrees (firmans) found show the then forced displacement and resettlement of tribes from different ethnic groups, considered to be the first demographic changes carried out in the region against the population's will. It is worth mentioning that borders of present-day Syria and Turkey used to move according to every agreement signed – for instance, the boundaries drawn in the First Ankara Agreement of 1921 are different from those defined in the second Ankara Agreement of 1926 – and according to the distribution of positions of power between Turkey and France. Later, the frontiers became defined on the basis of the German railway line between Baghdad and Istanbul, and it was not until 1939 that the borders of present-day Syria were stabilized. In 1978 the US State Department published a study on the great difference in the depth of the border line separating Syria and Turkey, and the instability of the number of columns that were erected for this purpose.<sup>22</sup>

In 1919 the Syrian Parliament issued a unanimous resolution on defining Syria's natural borders, that extended from Taurus to Aqaba and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean.<sup>23</sup> The Kurdish areas in the north east were not part of the Syrian map at that time. The historian and Russian orientalist Lazarev found that the Kurdish issue in 1919 was the subject of a conflict between French and British interests, not between Turkish and French ones, as in that year, France was seeking to obtain southwestern Kurdistan – the Kurdish areas in present-day Syria,<sup>24</sup> while the British plan was to establish itself in southern Kurdistan and not to give the French legitimate reasons to intervene in its southwestern side.<sup>25</sup>

The Political Security Lieutenant Muhammad Talib Hilal wrote a security report in 1963 in which he attributed the limited presence of Arabs at the Syria-Turkey border-line areas to their constant moving, a result of them being new to urban life.<sup>26</sup> The same reasoning is found in Muhammad Jamal Barout's reading of the demographic distribution, but in a slightly different words, the latter linking the reason for the Kurdish population density in the Syrian Jazira to the Kurds' ability to achieve more rapid stabilization than the Arabs.<sup>27</sup>

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22 Omar Rasul, "A study of the international borders between Syria and Turkey", Medarat Kurd, 6 January 2015, <https://www.medarat-kurd.com/2015/01/%d8%af%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d8%af%d9%88%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%af%d9%88%d9%84%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a8%d9%8a%d9%86-%d8%b3%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a7-%d9%88%d8%aa%d8%b1%d9%83%d9%8a%d8%a7/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

23 Jordi Tejel, "Syria's Kurds History, Politics and society", translated by Dr. Musallam Talas, Routledge Advances in Middle East and Islamic studies, 2009. U.K. Page 14.

24 Lazarev. M.S., "the Kurdish Issue", translated by Abdi Haji, Dar Al-Farabi, Beirut 2013, Page 265.

25 Lazarev. M.S., "the Kurdish Issue", translated by Abdi Haji, Dar Al-Farabi, Beirut 2013, Page 271.

26 Muhammad Jamal Barout: «The modern historical formation of Syria's Jazira», Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies, Beirut 2013, page 725.

27 Muhammad Jamal Barout: «The modern historical formation of Syria's Jazira», Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies, Beirut 2013, page 725.

Modern nationalist currents in Syria have been influenced by the racial nationalism theory in Nazi Germany in particular, as the emblem of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party was identical to the swastika of the Nazi party and its slogan ‘Syria above all in the world’ was the same of that ‘Germany above all’. This led to a dispute over Syria’s identity between the radical Arab movement and civil groups that participated in the formation of present-day Syria. We also cannot ignore the prominent influence left by the then Syrian Minister of Defense and founder of the Young Party, Akram al-Hawrani, through introducing the idea of Arab racial purity, as he considered those who did not adopt Arab customs aliens to the nation. That was in 1932, in times when Antoun Saadeh was calling for a Syrian nation that embraces all its citizens of Arabs, Kurds, Syrians and others.<sup>28</sup>

The Kurdish historian, politician and academic Îsmet Şerîf Wanly (1924-2011) provided an extensive comparative study between the Nazism as seen by Hitler in his autobiographical manifesto *My Struggle/Mein Kampf* – in which he presented his ideas on race and on how to view the different others – and the security report by Muhammad Talib Hilal which involved a racist project against the Kurds, which he submitted to the Regional Congress of the Ba’ath Party in 1963. The report was circulated secretly, and the Kurdish political movement did not see it until 1968.<sup>29</sup> Besides, the talks that took place at that time between the Syrian government and leaders in the Kurdish movement about the ‘Arab Belt’ project were vain.

From the 1930s to the date of the report by Muhammad Talib Hilal in the 1960s, the Syrian government established a sustained racist strategy against the Kurdish population, embodied in discrimination projects like that of seizing the lands of Kurdish owners, under the so-called Agrarian Reform Law, the special census of 1962, and the ‘Arab Belt’ between 1974-1985. That resulted in an ‘authoritarian populism’, in which the French historian, Jordi Tejel, found racist spirituality which then prevailed in Syria preventing the Kurds from becoming part of the Syrian people and subjecting them to various kinds of racial discrimination.<sup>30</sup>

## B. The population of Jazira

The Jazira has long been characterised as a place of richness and diversity. Situated on the territory of Mesopotamia, the Jazira has been home to a variety of ethnic and reli-

28 Sami Dawood, “Controversy over democratic federalism in northern Syria, Rojava”, *Orient 21* French magazine, 724, <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%84%D9%8C-%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8E-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%91%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%91%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A.1352.1352> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

29 la Persécution du Peuple Kurde par la dictature BASS en Syrie/ Ismet Cheriff Vanly. Janvier 1968 p7.

30 Jordi Tejel, “Syria’s Kurds History, Politics and society”, *Medarat Kurd*, 1 January 2014, [https://www.medaratkurd.com/2014/02/%d8%a3%d9%83%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%af-%d8%b3%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a7-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%ae-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a9-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%ac%d8%aa%d9%85/?fbclid=IwAR2mEOpBfgqDnBXDIkT\\_roVU9r4\\_qxQqW9eSh9coOFIzeFjO9\\_C6yb5P7hI](https://www.medaratkurd.com/2014/02/%d8%a3%d9%83%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%af-%d8%b3%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a7-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%ae-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a9-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%ac%d8%aa%d9%85/?fbclid=IwAR2mEOpBfgqDnBXDIkT_roVU9r4_qxQqW9eSh9coOFIzeFjO9_C6yb5P7hI) (last visit: 4 September 2020).



gious groups over the centuries, as a result of migrations, wars, trades, and massacres.

The region of Jazira, the Mesopotamia, has seen some of the earliest progress of humanity. Populated for thousands of years, it has been home to populations who forged alliances and distinctions on so many criteria, including ethnicity, but also, as put by Lewis:

They differed from one another in their ethnic origin, history and size, in the proportion of sheep to camels in their inventory of livestock, in their migratory habit, economic status and social standing.<sup>31</sup>

As pointed by MacDonald, the identities populations today refer to, including their ethnicity, while legitimate and fully based on their history, rely on characteristics that can hardly be based on objective historical analysis. Thus, MacDonald raises the difficulty for historians to reflect upon the history of Arab people, as a result of the term Arab being, according to him, “one of the most difficult to define of any in the ancient Near East.”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, as a result of the evolving concept behind the Kurdish identity, it is equally unsatisfactory to endeavour to date the presence of Kurds in the area.<sup>33</sup>

Before the rise of the national identities’ notion, each human group used to have special characteristics which identified it and distinguished it from others. For instance, the identity of Europe after the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, which produced 300 administrative units on a feudal basis, is not the same identity it gained after the two World Wars. Here, it is more worthy to study – from the same perspective – how the emergence of national human groups within Mesopotamia changed its identity.

Although numerous references are testament to the presence of both groups in the area for thousands of years, an objective analysis can only take us back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, specifically following the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, when the region fell under a new rule, which establish its dominance over indigenous groups under the umbrella of religion, and also when, in part as a result of Colonial Powers, and the rise of nationalism, groups started perceiving themselves as they did at the time of the implementation of the ‘Arab belt’, topic of this report.<sup>34</sup>

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31 Norman N. Lewis, *Nomads and Settlers in Syria and Jordan, 1800-1980* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Norman N. Lewis first published his article *The Frontier of settlement in Syria, 1800-1950* in 1955 after spending years in Syria conducting his research between 1942 and 1955. *Nomads and Settlers in Syria and Jordan, 1800-1980* is the sequel to this article.

32 M.C.A. Macdonald, “‘Les Arabes En Syrie’ or ‘La Pénétration Des Arabes En Syrie’. A Question of Perceptions?,” *Topoi. Orient-Occident* 4 (2003): 303–18. Macdonald works on the languages, inscriptions, and history of pre-Islamic Arabia and the ways in which literacy was used in the ancient Near East, and currently the academic director of the «Ancient Arabia: Languages and Cultures» project, based at the Khalili Research Centre in Oxford

33 David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2004). David McDowall studied Islamic History under Albert Hourani for his first degree and wrote his post-graduate dissertation on the Druze revolt in Syria, 1925-27. He has worked for the British Council and UNRWA, before becoming a full-time writer, writing on Britain, Palestine, Lebanon and the Kurds.

34 Benjamin Thomas White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2011). White is a Senior Lecturer of History at the University of Glasgow teaching and researching on the history of refugees and statelessness in the world at large.

Thus, for most of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kurdish and Arab tribes, mostly nomad and semi-nomad, populated the Jazira, along with Turkmen ones.<sup>35</sup>

The presence of Assyrians in the Jazira has also been discontinued for thousands of years, as a result of the migration of the population, but they keep an anchor in the Jazira, where they find refuge when threatened. The first Assyrian Empire, already partly located on the territory of today's Jazira, traces back to 2000 BC. More recently, Assyrian Christians fleeing the Iraqi massacre, were settled by the French mandate along the Khabur bank in 1932, and found refuge later again between 1936 and 1939 as a result of massacres targeting them in Iraq.<sup>36</sup>

Yezidis were also established in Jazira as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while Circassians settled in Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn in 1876 fleeing Russia.<sup>37</sup>

The last waves of refugees, under the authority of the Ottoman Empire first, and the French mandate later, in an attempt to control the nomad and semi-nomad populations include Circassians people arriving in the area in 1907 and 1911, as part of the Ottoman army, and Armenian people arriving in 1915, fleeing the genocide conducted by the Ottoman Empire.<sup>38</sup>

### C. Control of authorities over the area

For succeeding powers, nomads were a constant cause for concern, and a population that was to be controlled. A settled population also meant additional incomes for authorities, who were not able to collect taxes from Bedouins. Starting in the 1850's, as the Ottoman Empire sinks, it thus undertakes a policy of sedentarisation and pacification of the Jazira. It implements policies favouring tribal chiefs, endowing them with lands, inciting them to settle.<sup>39</sup>

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35 Azad Ahmad Ali, "Le Rôle Politique Des Tribus Kurdes Milli et de La Famille d'Ibrahim Pacha à l'ouest Du Kurdistan et Au Nord Du Bilad Al-Cham (1878-1908)," in *Alep et Ses Territoires : Fabrique et Politique d'une Ville (1868-2011)*, ed. Jean-Claude David and Thierry Boissière (Beyrouth - Damas: Presses de l'Ifpo, Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2014), pages 67–79. Ali is Doctor in History and formerly taught at Aleppo University; Alfred de Perthus, *Le Désert de Syrie, l'Euphrate et La Mésopotamie* (Paris, France: Hachette, 1896). De Perthus was an officer trained at the Royal Special Military School of Saint-Cyr (class of Isly, 1843-1845), captain of the 1st regiment of African hunters (in 1857). He spent eight years in Syria, and made another trip in 1866.

36 Étienne De Vaumas, "Le Peuplement de La Djézireh," *Annales de Géographie* 65, no. 347 (1956), <https://doi.org/10.3917/po-pav.689.0014>; De Vaumas (1914–1974) was a cleric, and a Doctor in Literature, who travelled to Syria; Myriam Ababsa, "Frontières de Développement En Syrie: L'adaptation Du Projet Ba'thiste Aux Logiques Tribales Dans Le Front Pionnier de La Jazīra," *À Contrario* 3, no. 2 (2005): 11–25, <https://doi.org/10.3917/aco.032.25>; Myriam Ababsa is an associate research fellow in Social Geography at the Ifpo in Amman and a consultant. Her work focuses on the impact of public policies on regional and urban development in Jordan and Syria.

37 Sebastian Maisel, "Syria's Yezidis in the Kürd Dâgh and the Jazīra," *Muslim World* 103, no. 1 (2013): 24–40, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2012.01417.x>; Sebastian Maisel is professor for Arabic language and translations at the Oriental Institute where he coordinates the section of languages and translations with classes in Arabic, Indonesian, Kurdish, Persian and Turkish; Vaumas, "Le Peuplement de La Djézireh."

38 Lewis, *Nomads and Settlers in Syria and Jordan, 1800-1980*.

39 Myriam Ababsa, "Mise En Valeur Agricole et Contrôle Politique de La Vallée de l'Euphrate (1865-1946): 2tude Des Relations Etat, Nomades et Citadins Dans Le Caza de Raqqa," *Bulletin d'études Orientales* 54 (n.d.): 459–87.

Later, the French mandate, perceiving the necessity to secure the area before considering its economic development, establishes, in turn, a series of policies aiming at pacifying and controlling the area. It implements, from 1920 to 1946, the Bedouin Control, tasked with the control and monitoring of nomad groups. The Bedouin control patrols were thus based in Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Hassaka and Qamishli, established for this purpose. Refugees will also reveal valuable for the mandate, who will receive and encourage the settlement of Armenian and Syriac refugees from Turkey, and of Kurds escaping Kemalist repression later.<sup>40</sup>

The French mandate further decides to rely on tribes, and endows tribes' leaders with lands, and on the other hand, settles semi-nomad tribes by taxing sheep livestock, banning the rezzou, and creating an agriculture bank.<sup>41</sup>

The policy of endowment of lands reveals however ambivalent. A number of factors, including a deficiency of land offices, result in a rise of land disputes. The mandate attempts to solve it by settling farmers, who happen to be mostly Kurds, in Northern Jazira, and semi-nomad people, mostly Arabs, in the south, a distribution that will reveal enduring. That is not, however, to say that Arabs and Kurds were not converging.<sup>42</sup> These attempts to pacify local insurrections even led at times to alliances between them, thus forming Arabo-Kurdish coalitions against authorities, as was the case when such a coalition led to French troops to back off in July 1923.<sup>43</sup>

## D. Economy

Starting in the 1920's, and as a direct result of the policies of sedentarisation, agriculture became a more common practice, boosted by the fertility of the region, that receives up to 400 mm of rain, a feature uncommon in the region. Nomad and semi-nomad chiefs themselves start experimenting and planting trees. The concept of land owning develops at the same time, encouraged by the French mandate and its concept of cadastre, that aims at registering the land and their owner.<sup>44</sup>

The 1950's mark the Jazira's most significant development. The striking increase of the

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40 Jordi Tejel, "Les Territoires de Marge de La Syrie Mandataire : Le Mouvement Autonomiste de La Haute Jazira, Paradoxes et Ambiguïtés d'une Intégration « nationale » Inachevée (1936-1939)," *Revue Des Mondes Musulmans et de La Méditerranée* 126 (2009). [Dr Jordi Tejel](#) is a Research Professor at the Department of History at the University of Neuchâtel where he leads a project on borders and state formation in the Middle East in the interwar period.

41 Ababsa, "Frontières de Développement En Syrie: L'adaptation Du Projet Ba'thiste Aux Logiques Tribales Dans Le Front Pionnier de La Jazira."

42 Jordi Tejel, "Un Territoire de Marge En Haute Djézireh Syrienne (1921-1940)," *Études Rurales*, no. 186 (2010): 61–76, <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesrurales.9232>

43 Christian Velud, "La Politique Mandataire Française à l'égard Des Tribus et Des Zones de Steppe En Syrie : L'exemple de La Djézireh," in *Steppes d'Arabies*, ed. Riccardo Bocco, Ronald Jaubert, and Françoise Métral (Geneva: Graduate Institute Publications, 1993), 61–86. Christian Velud is a researcher, and wrote his PhD thesis in 1991 on the French mandate on the Jazira region ([Une expérience d'administration régionale en Syrie durant le mandat français : conquête, colonisation et mise en valeur de la Gāzira : 1920 - 1936](#))

44 Ababsa, "Mise En Valeur Agricole et Contrôle Politique de La Vallée de l'Euphrate (1865-1946): 2tude Des Relations Etat, Nomades et Citadins Dans Le Caza de Raqqa."

price of cotton leads land owners to invest in machines and to develop the culture of cotton on the steppe, leading to an era sometimes referred to as the white gold rush. The poor regard to the health of the land leads to its excessive salinization, but builds the fortune of numerous Aleppian business owners, thus weakening the tribal structure and questioning the authority of Sheikhs.<sup>45</sup> The attribution of prosperous lands to the tribal leaders, and the deterioration of the land led to the frustration of peasants. The Ba'ath, aware of the opportunity, engages in policies benefitting peasants, who in turn start supporting the party significantly.<sup>46</sup>

### **E. The borders and the fate of the region**

The territory of today's Syria is the result of negotiations that started even before the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Aware of the rising tide of nationalisms within the Ottoman Empire, and anticipating its fall and the role of Great Britain in its aftermath, Lord Kitchener, then British representative to Egypt, visited 'Abdallah, son of Cherif Hussein of Mecca.

The borders of Syria were drawn as a result of three series of negotiations undertaken by Great Britain during the course of the war, simultaneously, and all in contradiction with each other. First, Henry McMahon, British representative in Egypt, entered negotiations with Hussein and his sons. His objective was then to build an alliance with Arab countries against Turkey, in exchange for the independence of Arab countries after the war. Correspondence between McMahon and the Cherif shows how ambiguous Great Britain was about the territories they intended to concede to Arab states after the war, especially with regards to Palestine, suggesting it would become independent. Second, and at the same time, the Allies were holding discussions on the repartition of a potential fallen Ottoman Empire. The infamous Sykes-Picot agreement, 16 May 1916, defined five zones. In two of these, France and Great Britain would each have direct control, over coastal Syria and Cilicia for France, and over Basrah and Baghdad for Great Britain. Palestine would constitute a third zone and would be international. An independent Arab state would constitute the fourth and fifth zones, over which France would have priority to establish industries in the north, consisting of today's Syria and Mosul (the fourth zone), while Great Britain would be first in the south, consisting in today's Iraq and Jordan (the fifth zone).

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<sup>45</sup> Ababsa, "Frontières de Développement En Syrie: L'adaptation Du Projet Ba'thiste Aux Logiques Tribales Dans Le Front Pionnier de La Jazīra."

<sup>46</sup> Ababsa.





Image no. (1) - A map of the Sykes-Picot agreement, with five zones in blue, red, yellow, A and B. Royal Geographical Society, 1910-15. Signed by Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot, 8 May 1916.

This agreement contradicted Great Britain's commitment towards Husein, unbeknownst to him, as did later, on 2 November 1917, the Balfour Declaration, that promised the establishment of a Jewish land in Palestine.

Allied to Great Britain against Turkey, Cherifians, followers of Cherif Husein, entered Damascus and attempted to establish a government. At the same time, nonetheless, France and Great Britain started implementing the agreement Sykes and Picot had come up with, including the Balfour Declaration. Despite Faisal's, Husein's son's concerns,



that led him to travel to Europe to inquire about the western powers' intentions and to defend the Arab state, the influence of France and Great Britain was increasing, with the former particularly aggressive about its presence in Syria.

Weary of waiting for France to leave, the National Congress promulgated on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 1920 the independence of Syria. The announcement was however void of effect, given the presence of the French army over Syria. At the same time, in San Remo, on 25 April 1920, the Allies' Supreme Council decided upon France's mandate over Syria and Lebanon, while Great Britain was attributed mandate over Iraq and Palestine, under the authority of the League of Nations. Syrians' categorical refusal of France's tutelage and the harsh conditions imposed upon the government by General Gouraud did not suffice to expel them, and French troops entered Damascus on 25 July 1920, effectively implementing French mandate over Syria.

Meanwhile, war was ongoing, and, by March 1920, French and British occupied Constantinople, and Sultan Mehmet VI was cooperating with the Allies, signing the Treaty of Sevres. The document was imposing a severe treatment to the Ottoman Empire, and distributed its territory among Allies. It also emphasized the protection of minorities. The new-born Republic of Armenia was thus endowed with parts of Armenian regions of Anatolia, and Kurds provided with an autonomous territory in Southwest Anatolia.<sup>47</sup> The treaty also placed the border between Syria and Turkey on the Adana-Jazira ibn Omar line. Turkey, however, notified it was not willing to let go of the area. This led to a first negotiation, resulting in the 20 October 1921 Treaty of Ankara. France would let go of Cilicia, and a new border as agreed upon, regardless of linguistic and ethnics data, to follow the railway of the BANP (Bozanti, Alep, Nissibin et prolongements), that had become Turkish and was exploited by France. France's little knowledge and understanding of the region allowed for Turkey's significant gains.<sup>48</sup>

However, Turkey and France disagreed on significant dispositions, and their incapability to find an agreement, with the former mostly willing to gain participation in the BANP, and the other attempting to extend its empire, led to talks on borders that only ended with the 1929 Treaty of Ankara.<sup>49</sup> Today's borders are a result of these events.<sup>50</sup>

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47 André Raymond, "La Syrie, Du Royaume Arabe à l'indépendance (1914-1946)," in *La Syrie d'aujourd'hui*, ed. André Raymond (Aix-en-Provence, France: Institut de recherches et d'études sur les mondes arabes et musulmans, Éditions du CNRS, 1980), 55–85. André Raymond (7 August 1925 – 18 February 2011) was [professor emeritus](#) at the [University of Provence](#). He was an expert on the history of the city in the Arab world.; Dorothee Schmid, "Turquie : Le Syndrome de Sèvres, Ou La Guerre Qui n'en Finit Pas," *Politique Étrangère Printemps*, no. 1 (2014): 199, <https://doi.org/10.3917/pe.141.0199>. Schmid is an expert on Mediterranean and Turkey issues, and holds a diploma in public management from Science-Po Paris and a PHD in Political Science from Panthéon-Sorbonne University.

48 Louis Dillemann, "Les Français En Haute-Djezireh (1919-1939)," *Revue Française d'histoire d'outre-Mer* 242–243, no. 66 (1979): 33–58. Dillemann (1899-1985) was a French officer and a researcher in Geography and History with a focus on Mesopotamia.

49 Dillemann.

50 Dillemann.

## 2. Tabqa

Syria long remained an agricultural country. In 1976, more than half of the active population was working in agriculture, that made up to 26% of its national revenue of Syria. Most of the country being arid, developing irrigation techniques has therefore always been essential, and the Euphrates river is one of, if not the, most valuable source of water.<sup>51</sup>

### A. A mixed success

A project recommending the creation of a dam in the Yusuf Pasha area was conceived under the French mandate in 1927, and never implemented. In 1957, an agreement was concluded with the USSR, organising a technical and financial assistance from the latter to Syria suffered the same fate.

In May 1961, Syria, then united to Egypt in the UAR, entered a protocol with Western Germany planning for a 500 million Marks loan attributed by Germany to Syria and refundable over 30 years with a 3,5% interest. The end of the UAR, and the interruption of diplomatic relations between Germany and Arab countries in May 1965 marked the end of the protocol.<sup>52</sup>

The agreement that would lead to the Tabqa dam/[Euphrates dam](#) was eventually signed with the USSR on 25 April 1966. It planned for a 500 million Syrian pounds loan attributed by the USSR to Syria, with a 2,5% interest refundable over 12 years.<sup>53</sup> The stated objective was to irrigate up to 640.000 hectares of land, doubling the surface of irrigated land.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, the project, facing an array of technical obstacles, from the overexploitation of the lands, to the crumbling of the canals, did not meet the expectations. As of 2009, only 260.000 hectares were irrigated, less than a fourth of the initial project.<sup>55</sup>

### B. A political tool at home and abroad

The Tabqa Dam/Euphrates Dam is one of the essential economic projects in the area of agriculture development and energy production in Syria. The Ba'ath regime was keen to invest this huge project in strengthening its hegemony over the state, using the countryside as an essential field for social engineering, consistent with its policy of ruralisation of the state. The historian Hanna Batatu found that the Ba'ath Party had tended to bring the party rustic by including members from the rural areas which it was active in between 1963 and 1970.<sup>56</sup> As of its 24 members, only 8% were from cities. General Salah

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51 André Bourgey, "Le Barrage de Tabqa et l'aménagement Du Bassin de l'Euphrate En Syrie," *Revue de Géographie de Lyon* 49, no. 4 (1974): 343–54, <https://doi.org/10.3406/geoca.1974.1658>. Bourgey is a French geographer specialist of the Arab world.

52 Bourgey.

53 Bourgey.

54 Bourgey.

55 Georges Mutin, "Le Monde Arabe Face Aux Défis de l'eau: Enjeux et Conflits," *Service Général Des Publications Lyon* 2, 2009, 164, <http://arxiv.org/abs/0911.4948>. Mutin is a French geographer specialist of the Arab world with a focus on the topic of water.

56 Hanna Batatu (1926-2000): an American historian of Palestinian origin. He specializes in the history of Iraq and the Arab East. He taught at Georgetown University, USA. His most important books: "The Sheikh and Peasant in Iraq" and "Syria's Peasantry".

Jadid (1926-1993),<sup>57</sup> admitted that in 1968 by saying: “the party has a very weak presence in large cities”.<sup>58</sup> However, the party’s intent from its rural orientation was not pure towards implementing an agricultural project, as its acts displayed willingness to subjugate the countryside to its hegemony and hence change the centers of power in society. That was why the party’s rural mobilization failed to improve agricultural industrialization and only directed the rural areas to integrate under the ruling regime.<sup>59</sup>

*The project of the Tabqa dam was first and foremost a political project. Sometimes compared to the Assouan dam built under Nasser in Egypt, it was the object of a myth promoted by its developers, as the name given to the reservoir born out of the dam reflects.<sup>60</sup> The construction of the dam started in March 1968, with a ceremony marking the 5<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the Ba’ath government.<sup>61</sup>*

Günter Meyer, a geographer and orientalist, said that the Ba’ath government promised al-Ghamr Arabs with 3.3 hectares of land each in compensation for those they lost for the construction of the dam. Although the land they granted was not far from their home area – north of the middle Euphrates valley – the al-Ghamr Arabs were not satisfied with the way the government handled their complaints, nor with the project it conducted for their resettlement.<sup>62</sup>

The project was also the vessel of political alliances. The construction of the dam was made possible as a result of heavy Soviet investment.<sup>63</sup> Beyond financial assistance, the USSR also provided technical assistance. 1 447 foreigners, mainly Soviets, arrived to work on the project.<sup>64</sup> The dam also arrived at a time when water had become a matter of conflict between Turkey, Syria and Iraq, who have the Euphrates in common. The dam happened to alleviate these tensions, and in 1987, Syria and Turkey signed a Protocol, followed by two others in 2002 and 2003, with at their hearts a commitment from Turkey to provide for a sufficient debit of the water of the Euphrates, and the renouncement by Syria of its claim over the province of Hatay (İskenderun/Liwaa Iskandaron, historically known as Alexandretta).

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57 Ba’athist leader. He and Nour al-Din al-Atassi overthrew the al-Nahlawi government in 1966. He was in control of power between 1966 and 1970. He demanded that Hafez al-Assad, who was defence minister in al-Atassi government, be tried. Al-Assad coupé against Jadid and placed him in prison where he died.

58 Hanna Batatu, “Syria’s Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics”, translated by Abdullah Fadel and Raed al-Naqshbandi. Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, Beirut 2014, pages 312 and 313.

59 Raymond Hinnebusch, “The Formation of Totalitarian state in Ba’ath Syria”, translated by Hazem Nahar, Riyad El-Rayyes publishing house, Beirut 2014, page 308.

60 Named Lake Assad, the reservoir is intrinsically associated to the President Hafez Al Assad.

61 Bourgey, “Le Barrage de Tabqa et l’aménagement Du Bassin de l’Euphrate En Syrie.”

62 “Anthropology and development in North Africa and the Middle East”, edited by: Muneera Salem Mrdock and Michael M Horowitz; “Rural Development and Migration in northeast Syria”, Monica Sella and Meyer Günter, Westview Press, San Francisco & Oxford, pages 251 and 252.

63 Bourgey.

64 Ababsa, “Mise En Valeur Agricole et Contrôle Politique de La Vallée de l’Euphrate (1865-1946): Etude Des Relations Etat, Nomades et Citadins Dans Le Caza de Raqqa.”

## 5. History of the Demographic Change in Northern Syria

It seems the memorandum submitted by Muhammad Kurd Ali, Minister of Education in Taj al-Din al-Hasani's first government,<sup>65</sup> to heads of ministries, dated 18 November 1931, was one of the first official statements that explicitly called for the displacement of the Syrian Kurds from their home areas for nationalistic reasons. Kurd Ali suggested resettling the Kurds in areas far from the borders of Kurdistan, stating that: "if the Kurds remain here, that would sooner or later entail political problems, which would lead to the separation of the Jazira from Syria's body. If they failed today to establish their independent state, they will absolutely do that one day if they keep arrogating that right and praising their nationalism". Thereby, Kurd Ali suggested to grant the Kurds lands in the provinces of Aleppo and Homs and to integrate them with the Arabs there, in the same fashion as Turks living with Arabs in İskenderun/Liwaa Iskandaron.<sup>66</sup>

### **A. Indications of demographic change from the reign of Gamal Abdel Nasser to Hafez al-Assad's**

The feudal system dominated Syria and the whole region from the beginning of the Ottoman rule until the declaration of the Agrarian Reform Law No. 161 of 11 June 1958. Large areas of land were in the hands of a few people, who were mostly notables, sheikhs of clans and princes. For example, feudal ownership in Jazira/al-Hasakah province was estimated in 1947 at 7.9 million hectares equivalent to 52% of the total agricultural area.<sup>67</sup> Besides, there were conflicts among landlords over rangeland then.<sup>68</sup>

Application of Law No. 161 in al-Hasakah and the Kurdish areas was subject to political considerations, as the areas of land taken from the Kurdish owners – especially those in the city of Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn – were larger than those taken from people of other groups although the law did not mention it would be the case. Lands taken from Kurds were granted to Arab tribes who were living in the vicinity and to others brought from different Syrian regions.

65 "The First Government of Taj al-Din al-Hasani", Syrian Modern History, <https://syrmh.com/2018/10/21/%d8%ad%d9%83%d9%88%d9%85%d8%a9-%d8%aa%d8%a7%d8%ac-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%af%d9%8a%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d8%b3%d9%86%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d9%88%d9%84%d9%89/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

66 Muhammad Kurd Ali: "Almozakart/The Diaries", the second part, Dar Adwaa al-Salaf for publication and distribution, book number 2775/2010, pages 440-442. To download the book please visit: <http://www.dimoqrati.info/?p=52101> (last visit: 4 September 2020). It is important to note that Muhammad Kurd Ali mentioned in one of his diaries that he was born to a Kurdish father and a Circassian mother.

67 Alexander Habib et al., "Syria's Economic Progress", Damascus 1947, page 36.

68 Azad Ahmed Ali: "The Role of Agriculture and Grazing in Mapping the Population of the Euphrates Island", Medarat Kurd, 22 March 2020, <https://www.medaratkurd.com/2020/03/%d8%af%d9%88%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b2%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%a9-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b1%d8%b9%d9%8a-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%b1%d8%b3%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ae%d8%a7%d8%b1%d8%b7%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%83/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).



*The idea of the Agrarian Reform Law was put forward during the UAR government (1958-1961), when Gamal Abdel Nasser wanted to apply Egypt's experience of limiting ownerships, to Syria. This led him to issuing, in 1958, Law No. 161,<sup>69</sup> that stipulates the distribution of land to poor farmers and the appropriation of areas exceed the maximum ownership decided by this law.*

Under the same law, land and property of Syriac/Christian families who resided in Qamishli and Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn, like Assfar and Najjar family, and those of Arab tribes like al-Jabour (al-Musallat family), that used to be settled south of al-Hasakah, were seized by the UAR government. Thus, not only the Kurds were the targeted by the law.<sup>70</sup>



Image no. (2) - A map printed in (1341 AH) - (1922 AD) by the Department of Maps at Istanbul Press - Agency of the Military College. Credit: Turkish Parliament website.

<sup>69</sup> The Agrarian Reform Law No. 161 of 1958, Syrian Parliament website, <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=10641&ref=tree&> (Last visited: 4 September 2020).

<sup>70</sup> Ammar Okla, "The Arab Explosive Belt in the Agrarian Reform Law-Invalidating the Right", Harmoon Centre for Contemporary Studies, 5 March 2017, <https://www.harmoon.org/reports/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d8%b2%d8%a7%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d8%b1%d8%a8%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d8%a7%d8%b3%d9%81-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%88%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d8%b5%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%ad/>



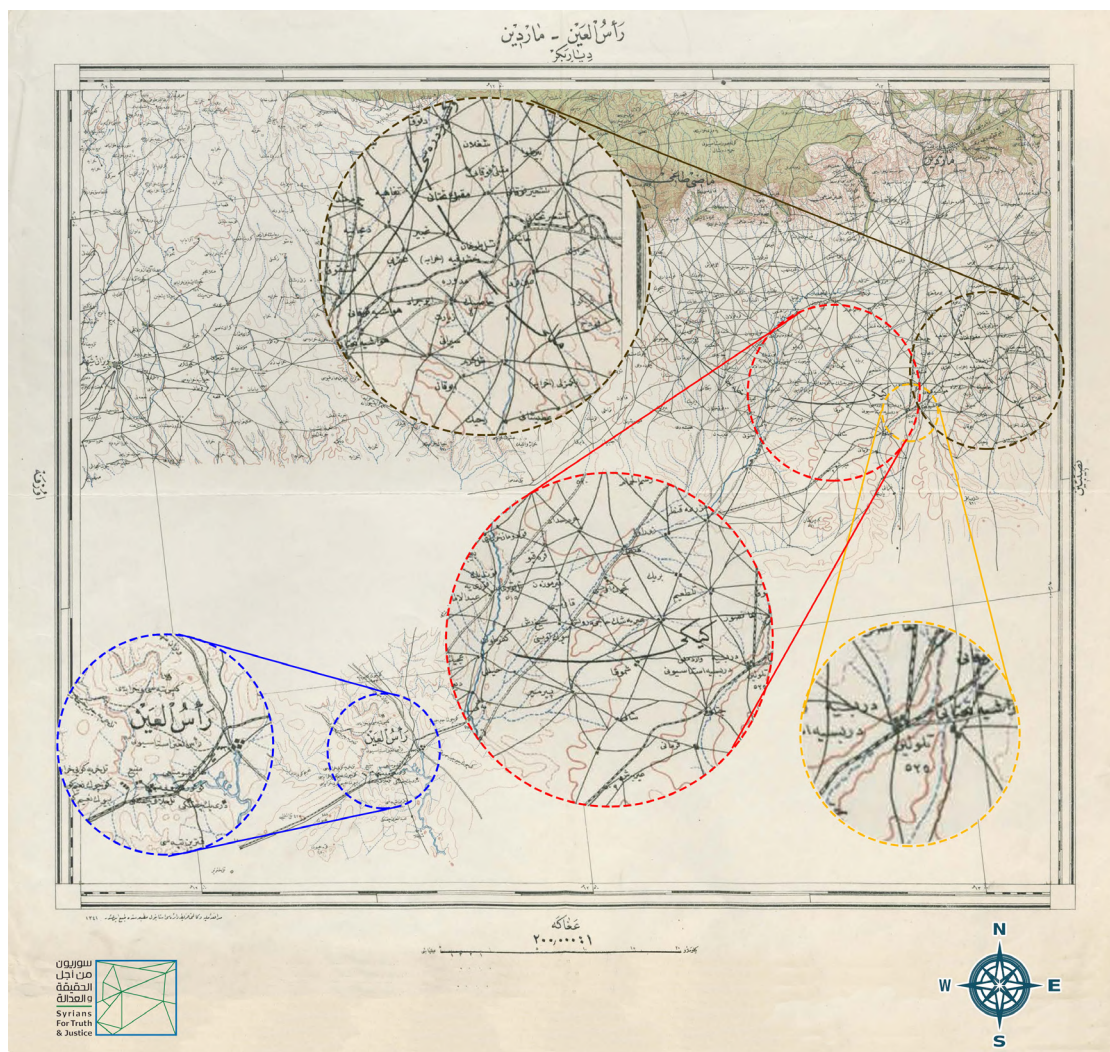


Image no. (3) – Tracing the locations of the Kikan and Mallan clans in the previous map (Modified by STJ).

## B. The first building blocks of demographic change in Syria's north east

One of the certain conclusions we drew in the context of this report was that the first building block for demographic change in northern al-Hasakah and parts of Tell Abyad and Afrin was laid during the UAR government. This was embodied in issuing Law No. 161,<sup>71</sup> under which property and land – extended from Dêrik/al-Malikiyah's extremity administrative boundary to that between the provinces of al-Hasakah and Raqqa – belonging to large landowners and villagers/Kurdish peasants were seized.

<sup>71</sup> Some landlords transferred land and property ownership to their family members to avoid the seizure stipulated by Law No. 161; the full text of the Agrarian Reform Law is available on <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=10641&ref=tree&> (Last visited: 4 September 2020).



The map displays the Idlib region in Syria, with a focus on the town of Idlib and its surrounding areas. The map is color-coded, with green representing civilian areas and red representing military zones. A compass rose is visible in the bottom right corner. The map includes labels for towns like Idlib, Latakia, and Hama, and features a legend in the top left corner.

72 Abdul Samad Dawood, "The Arab Belt in Jazira-Syria", Yekiti Party publications, Qamishli, Syria, second edition 2015, page 67.



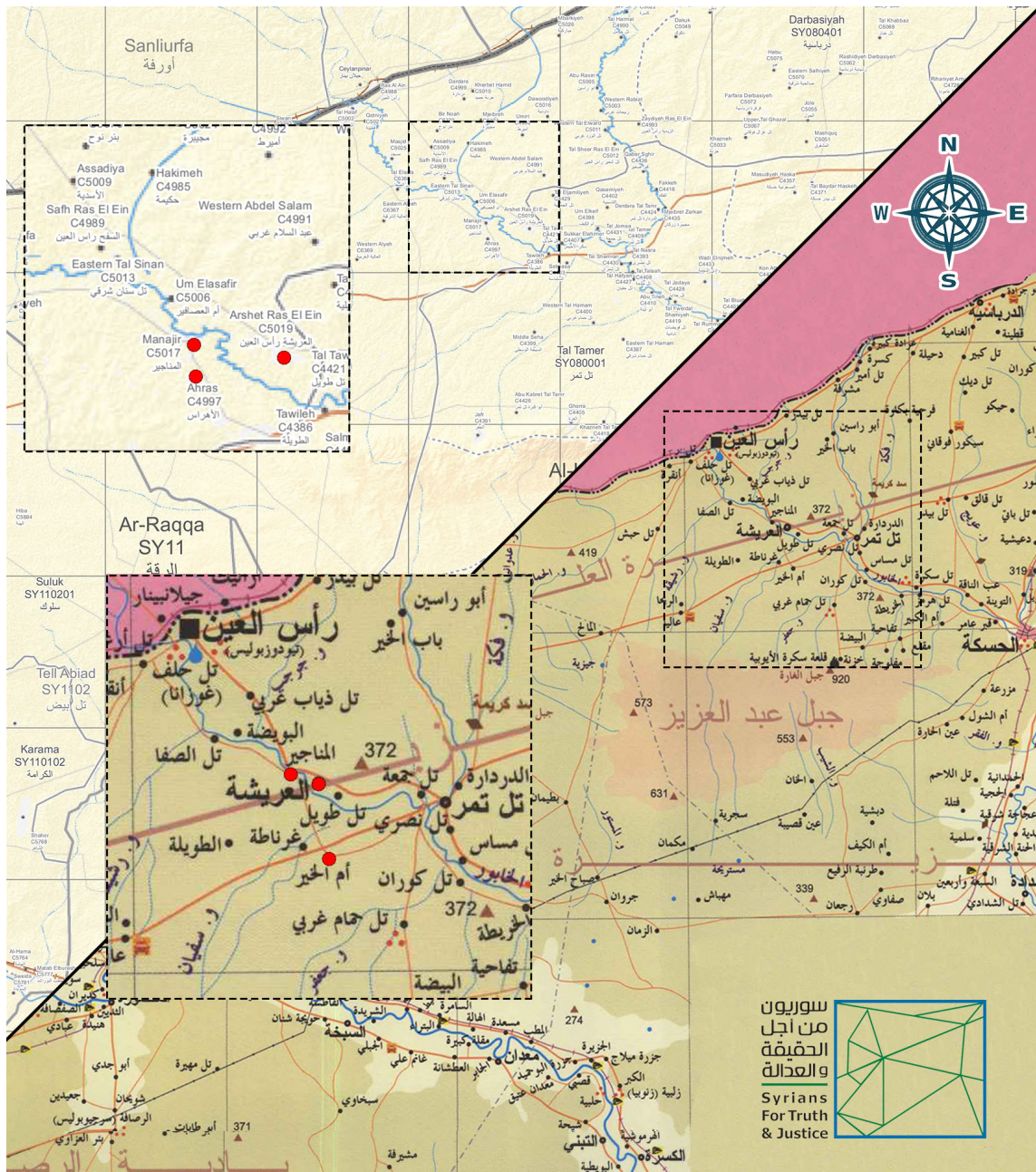


Image no. (5) – Some of the other above-mentioned villages

The agricultural lands seized in all Syria under Law No. 161 were estimated at the time to be 1.225.000 hectares,<sup>73</sup> which were distributed then to 300.000 families.

<sup>73</sup> Hectares and acres/dunum are units of area, the latter was used during the Ottoman period and is still used in some regions and countries (the area corresponding to a dunum varying by countries, as it is equal to 1000 square meters in Jordan, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon, and it is equal to 2500 square meters in Iraq). As for a hectare (the unit of measurement in the international system), it is equal to 10 thousand square meters.

Many scholars spoke about this discriminatory policy against the Kurds followed by the UAR government, among them was Dr. Nuredin Zaza, the first secretary of the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria, who submitted a memorandum to the Supreme Military State Security Court in Damascus while in prison in 1960, in which he referred in the third paragraph to what he termed ‘supremacist view’ which was manifest, as he described, in the government’s not giving the Kurds, as citizens, a share of the distributed state lands; and that was intended in part to resolve the disputed ownership issues between them and the powerful Arab tribes, in favor of the latter and at the expense of the Kurds’ rights. He said that the Syrian authorities gave lands only to Arabs, and not a single Kurd benefited from them. Zaza also referred to the state employees’ siding with Arabs in disputed ownership issues between them and the Kurds saying: “state employees race to help Arabs in their procedures to obtain ownership papers for the property they were granted, this was observed by members from the Arab tribes of al-Jabour and Shammar and also from the Kurdish clans of Mersina and Abassa.”<sup>74</sup>

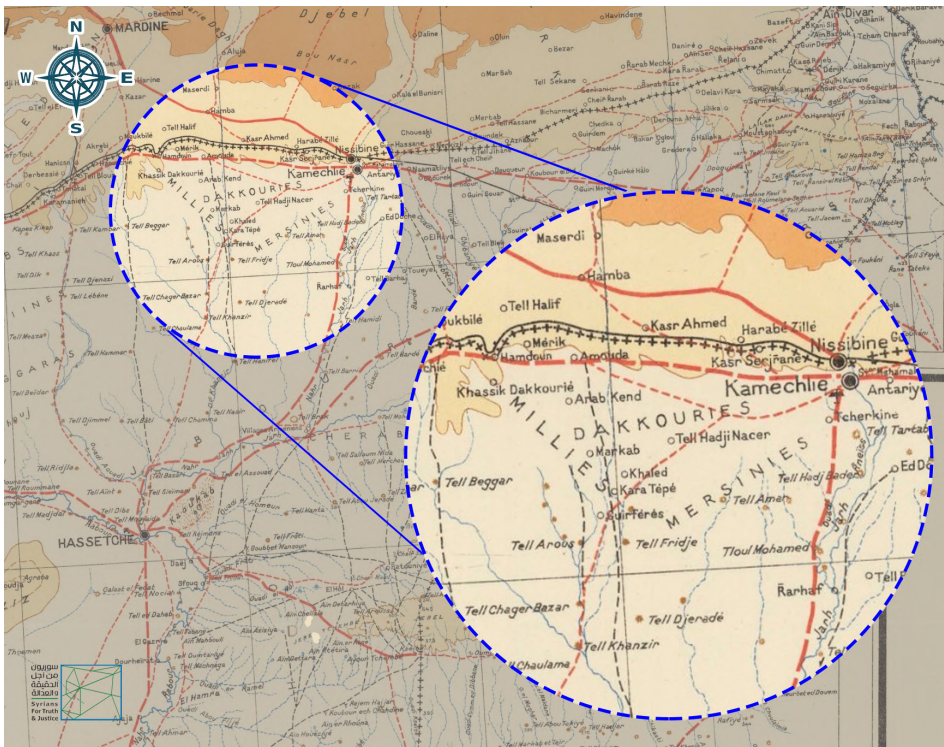


Image no. (6) - A part of a French map prepared by the topographical office of the French forces in the Levant and published in 1936. It locates some Kurdish clans that Dr. Nuredin Zaza mentioned in his defezse, including the Mersineh, Dakkoury and Malli. Credit: (BnF - Gallica).

<sup>74</sup> Ali Saleh Mirani, “The Kurdish National Movement in Kurdistan-Syria 1946-1970”, Dohuk, Iraqi Kurdistan, Dar Sabriz 2004, Appendix No.11, pages 294-295.



STJ managed to obtain exclusive documents showing disputes between the Kurdish and Arab clans in the 1940s over the ownership of some villages and regions...

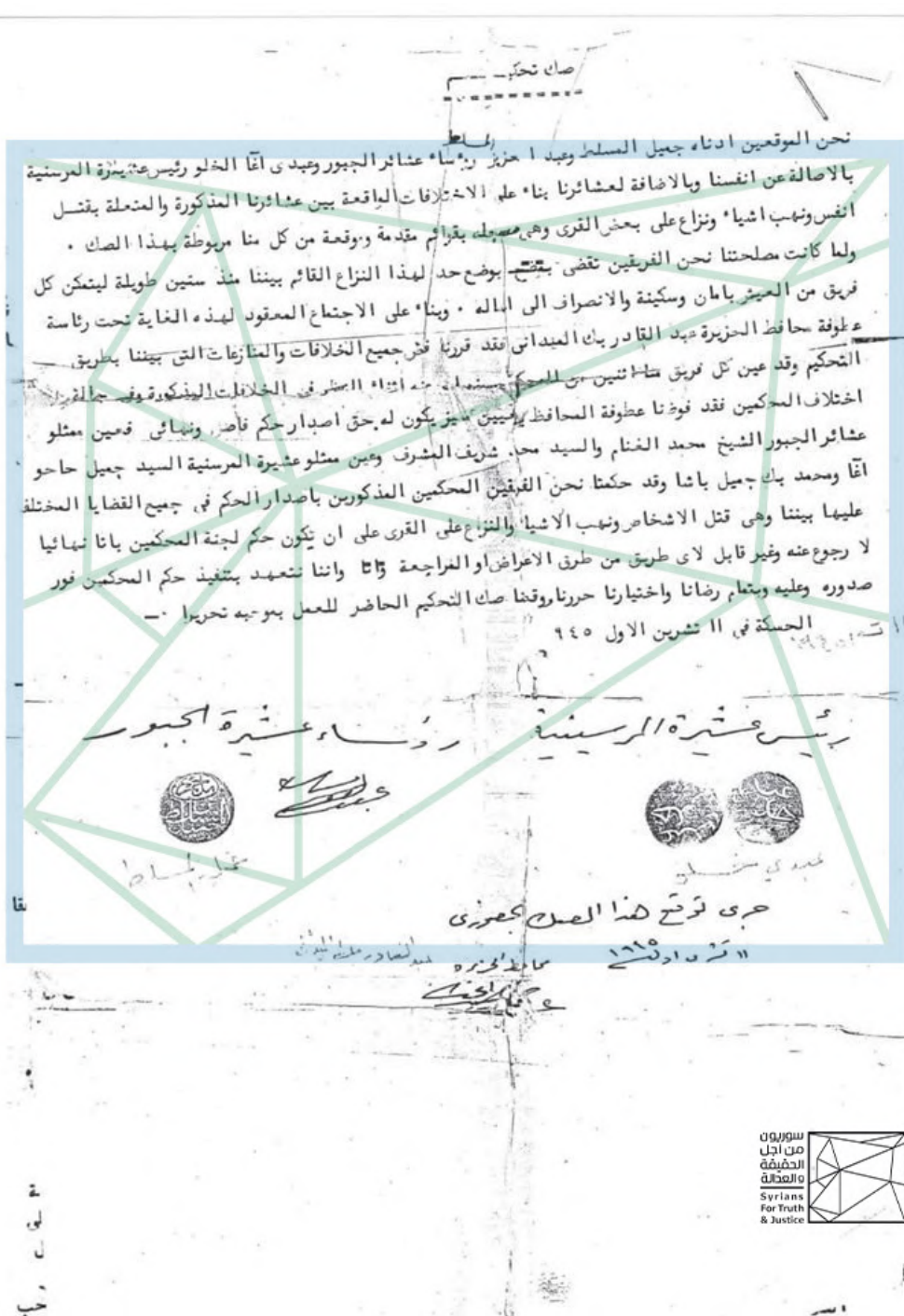


Image no. (7) - The arbitration agreement with its signing date appears: 11 October 1954. It was signed in the presence of the governor of the Jazira Abd al-Qadir Beik al-Midani and heads of the Mersineh the al-Jabour clans (the seals are that of the tribes), the signatories: Abdi Khalu and Jamil al-Musallat.





جمهورية سوريا العربية

وزارة الداخلية

محافظة الجزيرة

نحن الموقعين ادناه محمد جميل باننا وجميل حاجو المثلين لعشيرة المرستية ومحمد شريف العشر والشيوخ محمد الغنام المثلين لعشيرة الجبورينا على صك التحكيم المؤرخ ١١ تشرين الاول ١٩٥٠ في الموقع من قبل رؤساء العشيرتين المذكورتين والذي بموسمه جرى انتخابنا هيئة تحكيم مفوضة بالنظر في جميع الاختلافات القائمة بين العشيرتين المذكورتين وهي اختلافات متعلقة بالقرى المختلف عليها بين الفريقين والقتلى المختلف عليها بين العشيرتين والاموال العينية التي تدعى بها كل عشيرة علم الاخرى. ولدى البحث والتحقيق والتعمق في الاختلافات القائمة تبين لنا انه يمكن تلخيصها فيما يلي:-

اولا - الخلاف على القرى - تبين ان القرى المتنازع عليها بين الفريقين هي القرى الآتية:  
كرينيل - خويله - ام حجره - كرمه - بونجق - السبحة - مدينة - الكوجرة غولو وكل من الفريقين يدعي بملكية هذه القرى ويقول انها ملك له وان الفريق الآخر يسطح لا حق له بها  
ثانيا - القتلى - يدعي كل من الفريقين المتنازعين بوقوع عدد من القتلى من كل منها غير انه لم يحضر عدد قتلى كل من العشيرتين وسيجرى التحقيق بهذا الشأن لتثبيت عدد القتلى وفقا لاصول العشائر.  
ثالثا - يدعي كل من الفريقين بهاجمة بعض القرى التي تخصه وتهدد اناشها ومواسيها وحبيوبها والاشياء الاخرى التي كانت فيها.

ولدى البحث والعدالة وتقليب حوزة الرأي لاختيار افضل السبل لاقرار الصلح والوثام بصورة نهائية بين الطرفين يحفظ حقوقهما اصدرا حكما لاتفاق كما يلي:-  
اولا - القرى - ذكرنا ان القرى المختلف عليها هي سبع قرى وهذه اسمائها - كرينيل - خويله - ام حجره - كرمه - بونجق - السبحة - الكوجرة غولو.

وقد حكمنا بتخصيص قرية كرينيل بتمامها لعشيرة المرستية وتخصيص قرية ام حجره بتمامها بالشيوخ عبد العزيز القرى السبع الباقية فتكون حصة المرستية في كل منها ثلثين اثنين وحصة الشيخ عبد العزيز المسلط ثلث.

ثانيا - حق الاقامة في القرى السبع المذكورة وفلاحيتها واستثمارها محصور بافراد عشيرة المرستية ولا يحق لاحد من افراد عشائر الجبور الاقامة فيها او فلاحيتها او استثمارها بصورة بارة.

ثالثا - يتقاضى الشيخ عبد العزيز المسلط عند توضيح حاصلات القرى ثلث حصة المالك من عوم ما ينتج فيها وذلك وفقا للتعامل الجاري في بقية القرى المجاورة بين اصحاب الملك والمزارعين.

رابعا - بشأن القتلى حكمنا بان يجري احصاء دقيق من عدد قتلى كل من الفريقين وعند ظهور نتيجة التحقيق فكل قتيل من احد الفريقين يقابل قتيلا من الفريق الاخر ويدفن مقابله. واذا زاد قتلى احد الفريقين عن قتلى الفريق الاخر فالقتلى الزائدون تدفن بدفنهم وفقا لاصول العشائر ولعادات الدية التي جرى عليها المعرف بين عشائر الجبور وعشائر الاكراد.

خامسا - حكمنا بدفن جميع الضحايا من مواشي وحبوب واثاث دفنا نهائيا فلا يملك مطالب فريق الفريق الاخرية منها بتمامها.

سادسا - الودائع والامانات المادية التي لدى افراد احد الفريقين وتخص افراد الفريق الاخر ترد الى اصحابها بتمامها وتخضع لاحكام الشرع المالوفة العادية.

سابعا - اذا كان لاحد افراد عشيرة المرستية حقوق عقارية من اي نوع كانت او حقوق شراكة في احدى القرى الواقعة في منطقة الجبور وخارج القرى التسعة المذكورة في البند الاول من هذا الصك فيحق له حالا ان يعود الى التصرف بحقوقه هذه وفقا للتعامل الجاري قبل وقوع الخلاف بين الجبور والمرستية تصرفا حرا خاليا من كل معارضة.

ثامنا - اذا كان لاحد افراد المرستية فلاحية في قرية ام حجره التي خصصت بالشيخ عبد العزيز المسلط فيحق للمالك الفلاح ان يعود الى فلاحته لذرها ومتابعة استثمارها بالاتفاق مع صاحب القرية المذكور. واذا لم يتم الاتفاق فيجب على صاحب القرية الشيخ عبد العزيز المسلط دفع اجرة الفلاح الى اصحابه وفقا للتعامل -

المستمر

المطلوب في المشرق في مثل هذه الحالة

تاسعا - لما كان القنصل الجمهوري عباس السلطان هو من عائلة العلحم التي يعتبر من رؤساء الجبور فقد حكمنا ان يسر السلطان بشاره وفقا لاصول العائش المتبعة مثل هذه الحال فيذهب وقد الى بيت ذويه لاسترضاء خاطرهم ويقوم بتقديم الهدايا وفقا لارصون

عاشرا - اذا وقع تردد من احد الزعماء في تقديم الهدايا فليطلب من مدير المخابرات العامة ان يشرح له على اخصر لسان ان هذا هو المبدأ الذي عليه يتصرفون في مثل هذه الحالات ولا يكون مسؤولا عن ذلك ولا يجوز على تحريرهم الضرر بأربعة اضعافه اورد الاشياء المسروقة او الممنوعة من ثلثة اضعاف من نوعها

حادي عشر - لقد اتفقنا نحن ممثلي الفريقين واصدارنا حكمنا على التوجه المشروحة في البنود السابقة وعقد الصلح الدائم النهائي بين العشريتين تحريرا  
الحسكة في ١٠ تشرين الاول ١٩٤٥

مستشار  
الوزير  
الداخلية

علي هادي

المحمّد  
السن

١٩٤٥

Three documents showing the formation of an arbitration panel consisting of Muhammad Jamil Pasha and Jamil Hajo, as representatives of the Kurdish Mersineh clan, and Muhammad Sharif al-Mushrif as well as Sheikh Muhammad al-Ghannam as representative of the Arab al-Jabour clan, in order to decide on the ownership of the disputed villages of Krizil, Khwaitle, Oum Hajara, Karamah, Punjak, Siha, Medina, Kojriya and Gulu. The panel decided that the village of Krizil was all for the Mersineh clan, and the entire village of Oum Hajara was for the al-Jabour clan.

The document also provided in its second paragraph that only members of the Mersineh clan have the right to dwell, cultivate and conduct investments in the aforementioned villages, but with a third of the two-thirds of their crop to be given to the Arabs of the al-Jabour clan headed by Abdul Aziz al-Musallat, without being allowed to reside there<sup>75</sup>.

Credit: STJ.

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<sup>75</sup> The Kurdish writer Ibrahim Zorro, who provided us with these documents via e-mail on 24 June 2020, commented in this regard: “in 1944 the Arab tribes of Shammar and al-Jabour tried to take over Kurdish villages between al-Hasakah and Qamishli and it turns out that the Syrian government was the instigator for that. As a result, a war occurred between the al-Jabour Arab clan and the Mersineh Kurdish clan. This coincided with an attack from the al-Baggara or al-Bakara tribe against the Kikan Kurdish clan, occurred between Al-Darbasiyah and Seré Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn to the west of the province. Meanwhile the Arab Shammar tribe attacked the Kurdish Mirani clan, led then by Nayef Pasha, in the east. In the same year, the al-Jabour clan demanded from Mulla Sheikhmous Ahmad Muhammad Pahlavi, to hand over his village, Karazil, to them. The village of Karazil was inhabited then by the Kurdish Qurqati clan located between the old Qamishli-al-Hasakah road (between the villages of Saiha, Fajj, Buer, Karzin, Nus Tal, Jasa’, and Tell Zbib). Although Mullah Sheikhmous showed great flexibility in his attempt to contain the crisis, al-Jabour insisted to take these lands by force of arms. Since the issue was not related to the mullah alone, the latter contacted many Kurdish clans to support him but he received no response except from the Mersineh clan which promised him that it would not spare any effort in defending Kurdish lands against the Arab aggression which it saw would affect them deeply. Before taking action, Abdi Khalu Agha went to the French colonel, who was residing in the province of Deir ez-Zor, to inform him about the expected attack, but the latter couldn’t meet him since he was sick. Two days later, members of the clan gathered in the village of Tobus near Amuda and unanimously agreed to fight al-Jabour without mercy as long as they came as aggressors. The confrontation between the Mersineh, led by Hasko Agha – nephew of Abdi Khalu Agha – and al-Jabour, led by Abbas Al-Aghawat, took place in the village of Oum Hajara, 3 km away from the city of Tell Brak, and resulted in the killing of the latter, which made his men flee. As a result of that battle as well, some Kurdish families lost their lands that were close to Jabal Kawkab, close to the lands inhabited by the Arab tribes, and among those families, were the Keno family, which currently resides in the village of Neif, and the Ajjah family. “The aim of this war was to seize Kurdish clans’ lands by the Arab tribes in (Krizil, Khwaitle Oum Hajara, Punjak and Siha) and the rest of the villages mentioned in the attached reconciliation document, signed between the two mentioned clans in the presence of the governor at the time. It is worth mentioning that Abdi Khalu Agha asked France to keep naming the country the ‘Syrian Republic’ due to the presence of non-Arab peoples in it.



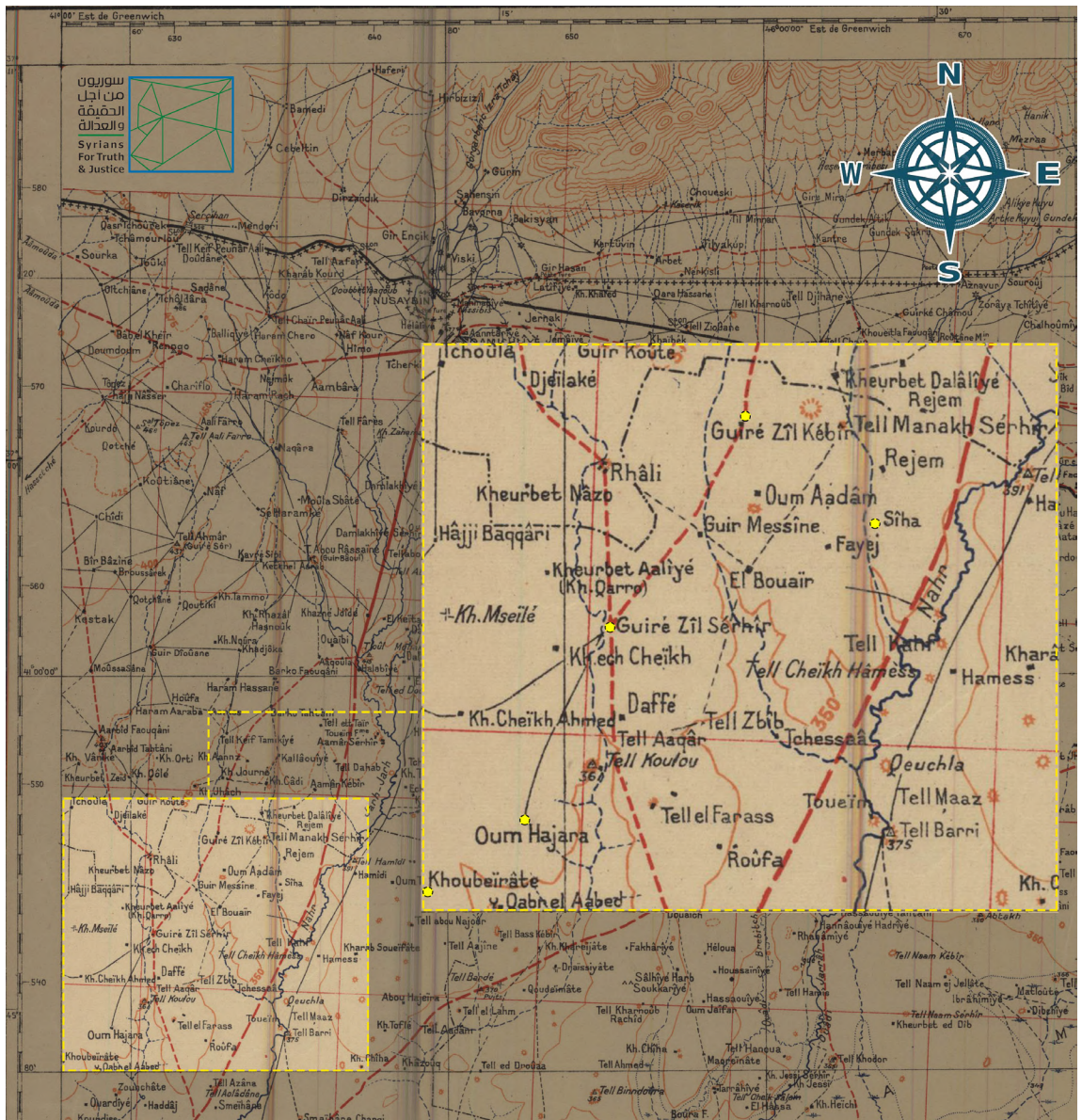


Image no. (10) - A French map shows locations of the abovementioned disputed villages, prepared by the topographical office of the French forces in the Levant and published in 1936. Credit: (BnF - Gallica).

### C. Breaches to the Agrarian Reform Law

Violations of the Agrarian Reform Law itself occurred in the context of implementing it, as in the case of Muhammed Beik, who was allowed to keep part of his land in the village of Da Da Afdal, while all property of his family was seized by the UAR government. Muhammed belongs to Jamil Pasha family (it has no links with the family of Ibrahim Pasha al- Melli, resided in Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn), whose members are of the largest Kurdish major landlords in the Kikan district of [Al-Darbasiyah](#) town, where they



own 12 villages, notably the village of Ta'alik whose name was Arabised to Daheela and changed later to Jabal al-Shaykh. The family also own 6 villages south of the Khabur Basin, jointly with al-Baggara or al-Bakara tribe. Depriving landowners from all their property violated Law No. 161, which itself allowed them to keep part of it according to the ownership ceiling it determined. Dr. Nidal Haj Darwish saw that the UAR government seized property of Jamil Pasha family to punish it for its significant activities in the Kurdish national movement and its role in Khoyboun (Kurdish: Xoybûn) organization.<sup>76</sup>

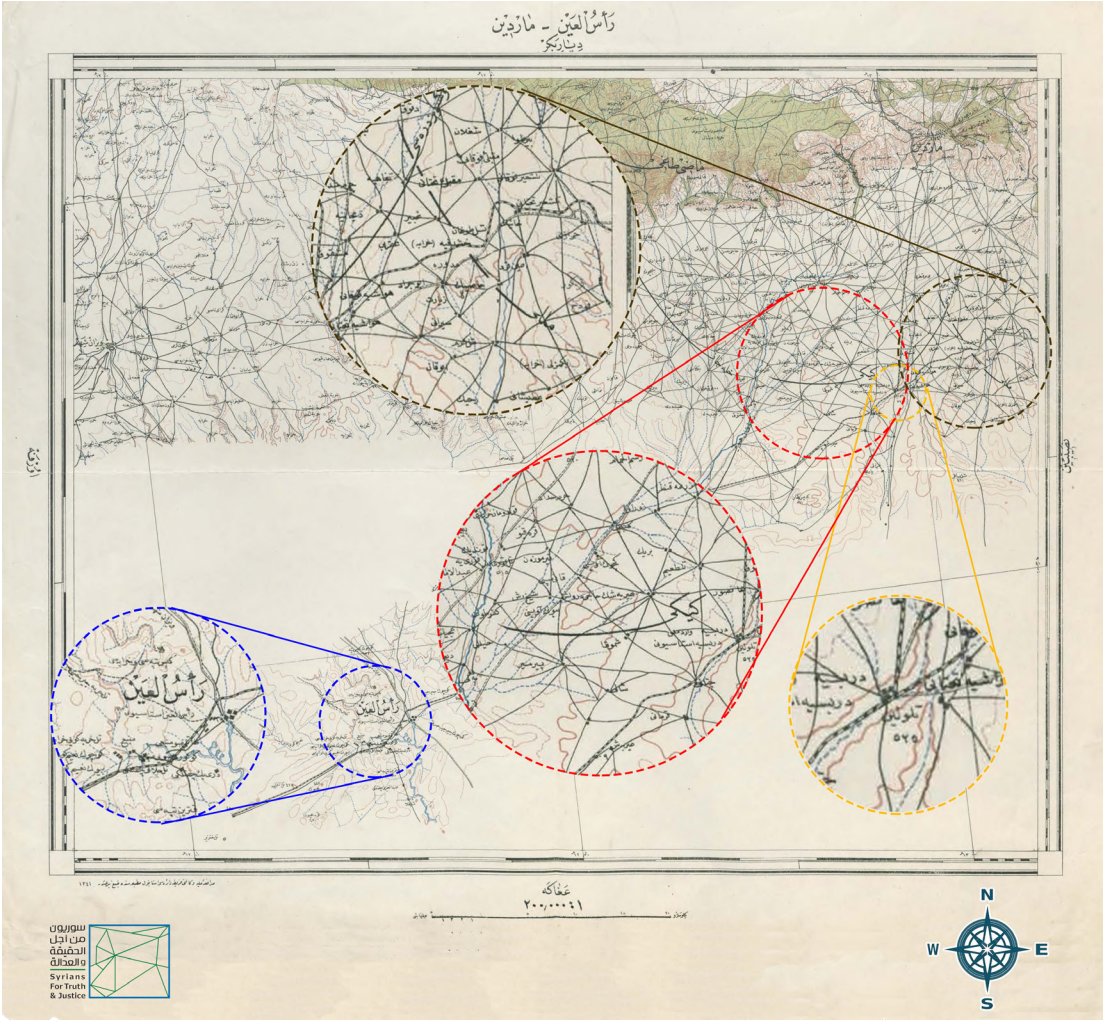


Image no. (11) - An Ottoman map shows the presence of Kikan/Kiki tribes mainly in the vicinity of Al-Darbasiyah.

The map printed in (1341 AH) - (1922 AD) by the Department of Maps at Istanbul Press - Agency of the Military College. Credit: Turkish Parliament website.

<sup>76</sup> Nidal Haji Darwish is a Syrian Kurdish academic with a PhD in Ancient Oriental Archaeology from Martin Luther University/Hala Zala, Wittenberg, Germany. Currently he is residing in Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan. STJ conducted an online interview with Nidal on the demographic change in the Kurdish region in Syria on 24 March 2020.



This context recalls the 1962 census, that resulted in stripping tens of thousands of Syrian Kurds of their nationality and led to:

- A. Impossibility of proving ownership of lands that belonged to persons rendered stateless.
- B. Kurdish peasants losing their nationality and failed to be entitled to lands distributed according to Law No. 161 and its subsequent amendments.<sup>77</sup>

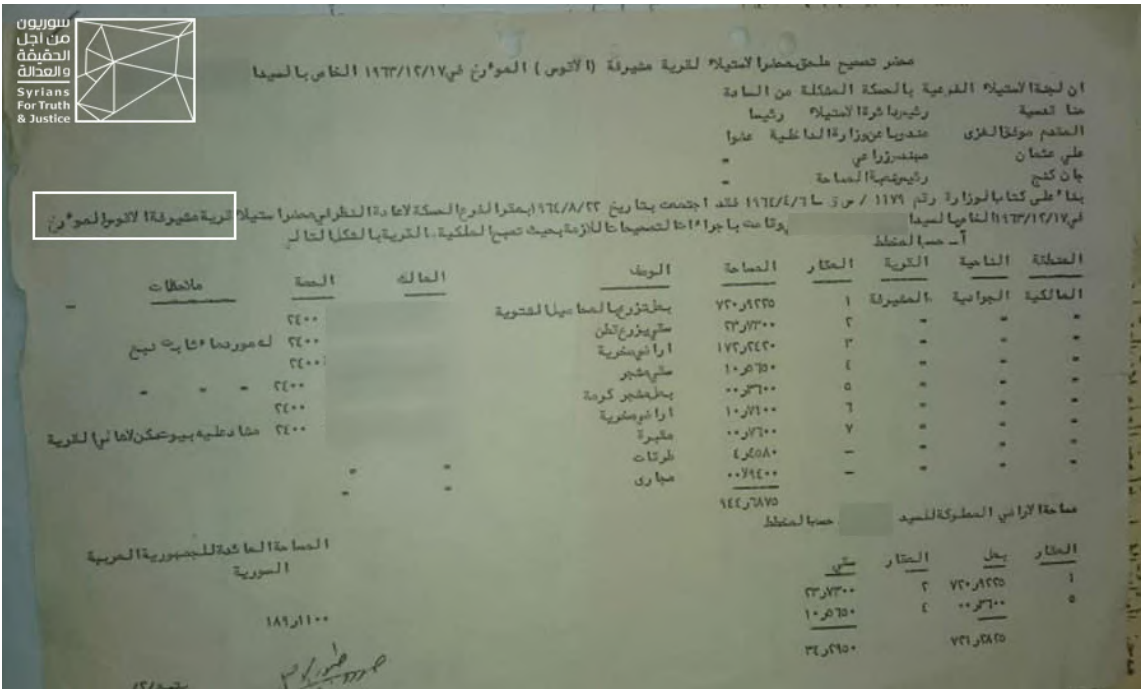


Image no. (12) - A correction report, dating back to 1963, annexed to a previous one on seizing more than 189 thousand hectares belonging to Murei Kurdish family, who resides in the village of Alaqous – whose name was Arabised to Mushayrifa – located in Çil Axa/al-Jawadiyah district. Some of the seizure committee members’ names appeared, including Hanna (his last name is unclear), head of the seizure department, Lieutenant Colonel al-Ghazi, representative of the Ministry of Interior - Ali Othman, Agricultural Engineer and Jan Kanj, Head of the Geodesy department.

Credit: a member of the Murei family.

<sup>77</sup> “Syrian Citizenship Disappeared: How the 1962 Census destroyed stateless Kurds’ lives and identities”, STJ, 15 September 2018, <https://stj-sy.org/en/745/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

## D. Literature contributing to draw the conceptual framework for discriminatory projects in Syria

Dozens of political literary works that contributed to developing a conceptual framework of the demographic change in Syria's Jazira during the Ba'ath rule, attributed the emergence of the 'Arab Belt' project idea to Muhammad Talib Hilal's security study, which included explicit racist recommendations aimed at deporting the Kurds from north Syria, stripping them from the Syrian nationality and conducting ignorance policy against them. The report was presented in congresses of the Ba'ath Party.

Hilal was done with his document entitled 'A Study of the Jazira Province from the National,<sup>78</sup> Social and Political Aspects' on 12 November 1963 (the date recorded on it). Some of the recommendations included:

1. "Resettling Arabs and Syrians of other nations in the Kurdish areas along the Syrian-Turkish border, to be a fortress in the future and to watch the Kurds pending their deportation. I suggest bringing people from the Shammar tribe, because, firstly, it is among the poorest tribes on the land and secondly, its members' devotion to defend their nation is 100% certain.
2. Militarizing the northern border strip of the Jazira to be as a frontline, by placing military units in it responsible for settling Arabs and deporting Kurds, according to the state's plan.
3. Establishing fully militarily equipped farms along the northern border for the resettled Arabs, just like the Jewish settlements on the borders."

It is worth mentioning that the Agrarian Reform Law No. 161 of 1958 was followed by several legislative decrees issued successively, among them Decree No. 88 of 1962 (during the separation era), that stipulated an ownership ceiling higher than that provided in Law No. 161. However, Decree No. 145 of 1966, passed by the Ba'ath Party after being in power (before Hafez al-Assad's arrival to power), re-changed that ceiling to how much it was in Law No. 161, but it was later decreased by Decree No. 31 of 1980.<sup>79</sup>

78 First Lieutenant: Muhammad Talib Hilal, head of the political division in al-Hasakah, "A study on the Jazira Province from the National, Social, and Political Aspects", Wekhevi website, <https://wekhevi.wordpress.com/2009/06/22/%D8%A8%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D9%86%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%83%D9%85-%D8%AF/> (Last visited: 4 September 2020).

See also: Amuda Forum for Kurdish Culture, November 2003, <http://www.amude.net/erebi/mihemed-taleb-hilal-lekolin.pdf> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

79 Ammar Okla, "The Arab Explosive Belt in the Agrarian Reform Law-Invalidating the Right", Harmoon Centre for Contemporary Studies. 5 March 2017, <https://www.harmoon.org/reports/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

Back to Hilal's study: it was discussed in the third Regional Congress of the Ba'ath Party in September 1966, and it said in its 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph:

*“considering the lands at the Syria-Turkey border, with a length of 350 km and 10 to 15 km depth, the property of the state and thus implement investment regulations there, which ensure Syria's security.”*<sup>80</sup>

According to a report issued by Human Rights Watch (HRW), the Ba'ath government changed the project's name from the 'Arab Belt' to the 'Plan for the establishment of state model farms in the Jazira region'. Accordingly, the government established farms on the lands it confiscated and inhabited them by Arabs.

A group of authors contributed to a book entitled 'The Syrian Kurds Issue: Reality-History and Myth',<sup>81</sup> in which they said that Hilal's study was an extension and completion, in many of its points, of the 'Jazira Reform' project, drafted by Saeed Al-Sayed – who served as the governor of al-Hasakah and later as the Minister of Agriculture and Reform in the government of Izzet el-Noss in 1961 – and adopted by the second government of Khalid al-Azm (1948-1949). Nevertheless, Muhammad Jamal Barout believed that the 'Arab Belt' project differs from that of the 'Jazira Reform' and said that Hilal's project wasn't adopted officially but the ideas it included affected policies taken in developing the Jazira. Barout also stated that the idea of the 'Arab Belt' project was originated from policies of establishing 'collective farms' or 'state farms', adopted by radical Ba'athists as a socialist solution to the peasant question.<sup>82</sup>

### **E. The 'Arab Belt' project recalls Erdogan's settlement plan of 2019**

In one of its aspects, the 'Arab Belt' project resembles Turkey's plan to resettle millions of Syrian refugees to northeast Syria, historically inhabited by the Kurds. This plan, which was submitted to the UN in November 2019, was put on the table following Operation Peace Spring, that resulted in Turkey's occupation of Syrian lands in the north.

President Erdogan himself has stated that, because of its geological features and the fact that it was desertic, the occupied area was designed for Arabs, and not Kurds.<sup>83</sup>

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80 "A Report on a Plan to Establish State farms in al-Hasakah Province", al-Munadil publication, issue 11, December 1966, pages 12 and 13.

81 "The Syrian Kurds Issue: Reality-History and Myth", edited by a group of authors, Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies, first edition, Beirut, January 2013 page 38.

82 Muhammad Jamal Barout: «The modern historical formation of Syria's Jazira - Questions and problems of the transition from Bedouin to urbanization», Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies, first edition, Beirut, November 2013, pages 416 and 417.

83 "The United Nations in Syria, or how the road to hell is paved with good intentions", STJ, 25 February 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/the-united-nations-in-syria-or-how-the-road-to-hell-is-paved-with-good-intentions/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).



Image no. (13) - Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan pointing to the area between Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn and Tell Abyad on map during an interview on Turkey's state-run TRT news network, aired on 24 October 2019.<sup>84</sup>

## F. Discriminatory projects paralleling demographic change

It must be noted that prior to the implementation of the land seizure policy, a process for Arabising names of places was conducted throughout the country,<sup>85</sup> specifically in areas inhabited by Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians, Syriacs and other minorities. For instance, Kurds' neighborhood/Kurds' locality in Damascus was changed to Rukn al-Din during the UAR government.<sup>86</sup>

The Arabisation trend became a constant policy followed by successive Syrian governments, and saw a rise during the Ba'ath's rule. On 15 February 1978, the names of 136 Kurdish villages and towns in al-Hasakah were Arabised under administrative decisions. However, years between 1996 and 1999 saw the highest number of such decisions; in April 1998 the Syrian Minister of Local Administration, Yahia Abu Asali signed Resolution No.2123,<sup>87</sup> which stipulated Arabising the names of 97 villages and 23 farms in al-Hasakah, and on the 18<sup>th</sup> of the same month the Minister passed Resolution No.580 to Arabise the names of 329 villages, towns and farms in Afrin, al-Bab and Kobanî/Ayn al-Arab.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>84</sup> An interview with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan conducted by TRT news network on 24 October 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEAgqGbDeNc&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR3rzHUUe\\_3re\\_SMqnVgW8N5tYvY3wZVywW31Cq\\_xmVS8\\_MdtvGYIQUUSD3k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEAgqGbDeNc&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR3rzHUUe_3re_SMqnVgW8N5tYvY3wZVywW31Cq_xmVS8_MdtvGYIQUUSD3k) (Last visit: 4 September 2020).

<sup>85</sup> STJ is preparing a special report on the Arabisation process conducted in Syria.

<sup>86</sup> "Syrian Memory... From the Rukn al-Din neighbourhood of Damascus with Sherine Al-Mulla", Enab Baladi, 28 April 2017 [https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/146515?fbclid=IwAR3Mh-j9\\_lXtnPIyAAT7pWu1XgW\\_TceWhvwK11dXyQFugU6Eke3AxPxo-UQ](https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/146515?fbclid=IwAR3Mh-j9_lXtnPIyAAT7pWu1XgW_TceWhvwK11dXyQFugU6Eke3AxPxo-UQ) (last visit: 4 September 2020).

<sup>87</sup> "History and future of the Kurds - sixth and final episode. Iyad Mahmoud Hussein, 8 June 2020, [https://www.tahawolat.com/cms/article.php3?id\\_article=678](https://www.tahawolat.com/cms/article.php3?id_article=678) (last visit: 26 June 2002).

<sup>88</sup> Meshaal al-Timmo, "The Kurdish Issue in Syria: the Untold and the Static Justification Systems", Middle East Transparent, 16 November





For this report, we accessed dozens of official documents issued by successive Syrian governments since the establishment of Syria, and noticed the use of the terms ‘Syrian State’ and ‘Syrian Republic’ in the formal proceedings during the years that followed the independence. The actual inclusion of the adjective ‘Arab’ to the state’s official name occurred in 1958, when it united with Egypt, and then named the ‘United Arab Republic’ (UAR). After seceding from the union in 1961, Syria re-established itself under the name the ‘Syrian Arab Republic’ which was stipulated by amendments of the 1905 Constitution. This name has been in use since then in official speeches and correspondence.<sup>89</sup>

In 1961, (the year of separation) Syria witnessed an unprecedented law, as described by Hashim Othman in his book *Modern History of Syria- Hafez al-Assad Era 1971-2000*. On 30 November 1961 the government of Izzet el-Noss issued a law requiring the use of the Arabic language exclusively in the country, i.e. in all documents, records, notebooks, reports, contracts, receipts, correspondence and signs of shops and companies – in what can be considered the largest Arabisation process for the Syrian state at all – and it provided for fines and prison sentences for violators.<sup>90</sup>

### **G. Eternal mismanagement of diversity in Syria**

In the first half of September 2016, the High Negotiations Committee of the opposition forwarded a plan to the Syrian government, in which it proposed a political transition to end the five-year civil war in the country.<sup>91</sup> The plan schemed the transition on three main stages;

1. Six months of negotiations accompanied by a ceasefire;
2. The formation of a transitional government with the stepping down of President Bashar al-Assad;
3. The holding of UN-supervised elections after 18 months of transitional government.

Though based on the Geneva Declaration of 2012,<sup>92</sup> which adhered to commitments to achieve equal opportunities and non-discrimination, the transitional plan contradicts

89 See for example: Hashim Othman, “Modern History of Syria”, Riyad El-Rayyes publishing house, Beirut, Lebanon, first edition 2012, pages 302,338,339;

See also: “Student ID at the Damascus High School-January 1958”, the Syrian History website, <http://www.syrianhistory.com/en/photos/4525> (last visit: 4 September 2020); “The ID for a member of the powerful Al-Naim Tribe-1950”, the Syrian History website, <http://www.syrianhistory.com/en/photos/5784> (last visit: 4 September 2020);

See the name of Syria in the Syrian Constitution proposed by the Constituent Assembly in 1928 and issued in 1930, <http://parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=5518&cat=4208> (Last visit: 4 September 2020).

90 : Hashim Othman, “Modern History of Syria”, Riyad El-Rayyes publishing house, Beirut, Lebanon, first edition 2012, pages 348,349.

91 “The Syrian Opposition Announces a Plan to End the Conflict”, BBC Arabic, 7 September 2016, [https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2016/09/160907\\_syria\\_opposition\\_proposals](https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2016/09/160907_syria_opposition_proposals) (Last visit: 4 September 2020).

92 “Highlights of the Geneva meeting plan on Syria”, Al Jazeera Net, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2012/7/1/%D8%A3%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B2-%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%AC%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7> (Last visit: 12 June 2020).

the establishment of such an inclusive society. More specifically, the first general principle of the High Negotiations Committee failed to adequately address social imbalances in Syria or to lay the groundwork for institutional reform:

*“Syria is an integral part of the Arab World, and Arabic is the official language of the state. Arab Islamic culture represents a fertile source for intellectual production and social relations amongst all Syrians of different ethnic backgrounds and religious beliefs as the majority of Syrians are Arabs and followers of Islam and its tolerant message which is distinctly moderate.”*

The High Negotiations Committee’s adoption of such a principle implies its seeking to impose the worst forms of tyranny on the Syrian people. Alexis de Tocqueville termed this concept of governance as ‘tyranny of the majority’, which extract obedience by force, not justice, and in response proposed:

*“A general law – which bears the name of Justice – has been made and sanctioned, not only by a majority of this or that people, but by a majority of mankind. The rights of every people are consequently confined within the limits of what is just.”<sup>93</sup>*

There is a clear tone of hegemony in the principles put by the High Negotiations Committee for the future Syria state, as they prioritizes specific religious and cultural groups over others, which will lead to the same discriminatory political environment created by President al-Assad, and such state would never have an inclusive society open to diversity.<sup>94</sup>

## **H. The Euphrates Dam project and the al-Ghamr Arabs issue**

The Syrian governments that succeeded in power before the Ba’ath Party coup in 1963 planned for a dam on the Euphrates and associated hydropower schemes. Thus, on 30 March 1947, Ministry of Public Works and Transportation signed an agreement with the British Alexander Jeb Company to study the possibility of building a dam across the Euphrates River for power generation. However, a year after the signing of the agreement, during which the company submitted the required study, the government postponed the project.<sup>95</sup>

On October 1957, Syria signed the ‘Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement’ with the former Soviet Union and in the same context the UAR government signed Contract No.928 in February 1958 and Contract No.929 in December 1959, to develop a study for the establishment of a hydroelectric station on the Euphrates River. The agreement and the two contracts stipulated the necessity to select a site for the dam that

<sup>93</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, “Democracy in America”, translated by Amin Morsi Qandil. part one and two, Books World Publications, first edition, Cairo, page 228.

<sup>94</sup> “Inclusiveness is Essential to Achieving Transitional Justice in Syria, Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, 5 October 2016, <https://ar.syriaaccountability.org/2016/10/05/%d8%a5%d8%b4%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%83-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ac%d9%85%d9%8a%d8%b9-%d8%a3%d9%85%d8%b1-%d8%ac%d9%88%d9%87%d8%b1%d9%8a-%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%ad%d9%82%d9%8a%d9%82-%d8%b9%d8%a%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%86/> (last visit: 4 September 2020).

<sup>95</sup> Ministry of Irrigation, General Directorate of the Euphrates Dam, [http://www.thawra.50webs.com/dams/dams\\_Euph.htm](http://www.thawra.50webs.com/dams/dams_Euph.htm) (Last visit: 4 September 2020).







Image no. (16) - Maps of different dates and sources show the areas flooded by the water of the Euphrates Dam.

1. On the top right: a map of the Raqqa province locating the Arab tribes, including al-Wilda, which traditionally the areas flooded by the Euphrates Dam (on both sides of the Euphrates River). Credit: The History of Raqqa by Taher Al-Naasani.
2. On the top left: a part of a French map prepared by the topographical office of the French forces in the Levant and published in 1936. (see the next image for the names of the villages).
3. On the lower right: a part of a French map prepared by officials in the French Special Forces at the topographical office shows the geographic distribution of ethnic and religious groups (it locates the Sunnah on both sides of the Euphrates River). The green area in the upper right corner shows the Turkmen presence in the region.
4. On the lower left: a map published by the Syrian government shows the Lake Assad water flooded the lands of the Arab tribes.



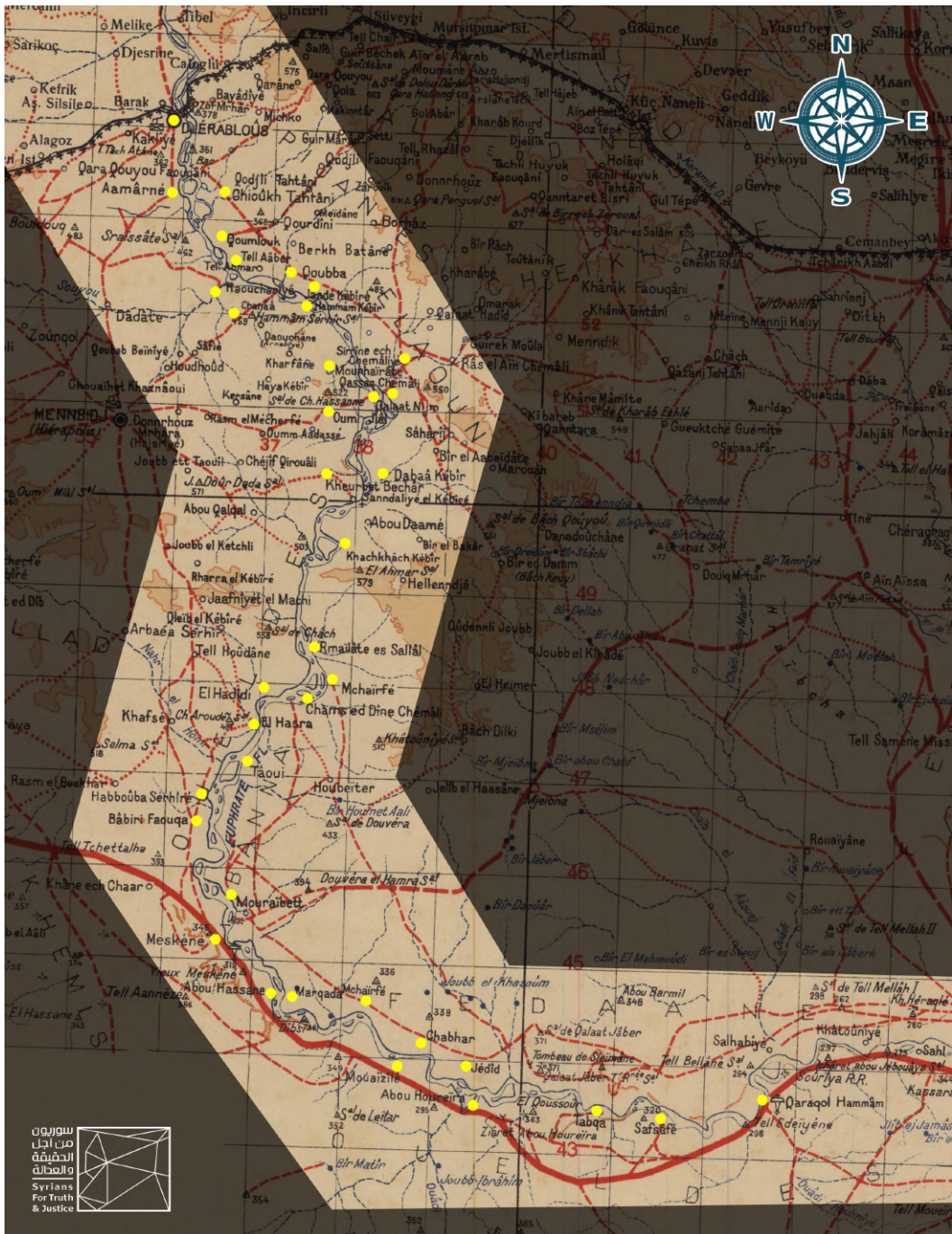


Image no. (17) - A part of a French map prepared by the topographical office of the French forces in the Levant and published in 1936, shows some of the villages that existed before the establishment of Lake Assad.

Hafez al-Assad showed particular interest in changing the demography of the Kurdish lands whose owners had title deeds issued by the Ottoman government or by previous Syrian courts.



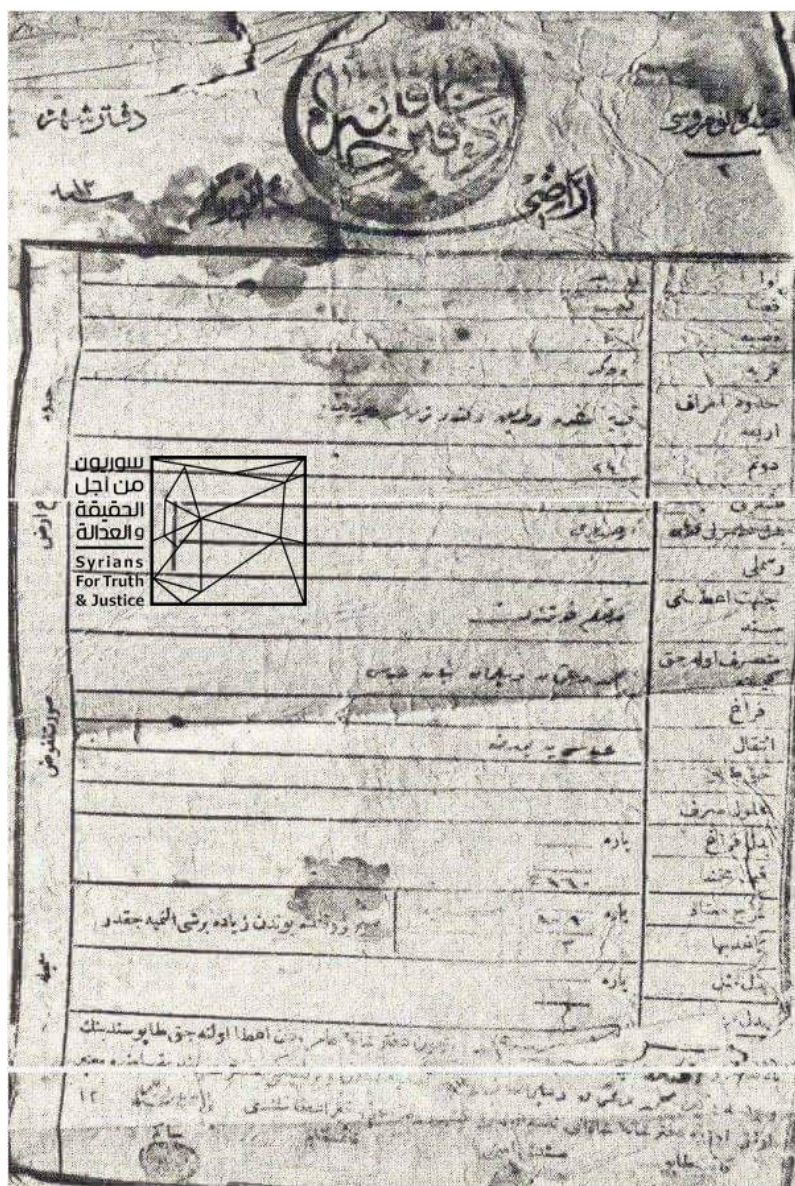


Image no. (18) - A title deed issued in the Ottoman era, in 1800, according to its holder, who is from the Abbas/ Abês family, which led the Kurdish Dorka clan and owned the village of Digirê, whose name was Arabised to al-Darak, located in Sanjaq Ashitiyeh district, which was administratively affiliated to Tirbê Spîyê/Qubur al-Bid – its name was Arabised later to Al-Qahtaniyah in 1960s by the district manager at the time Muhammad Nammour – in present-day Syria.

Credit: STJ.

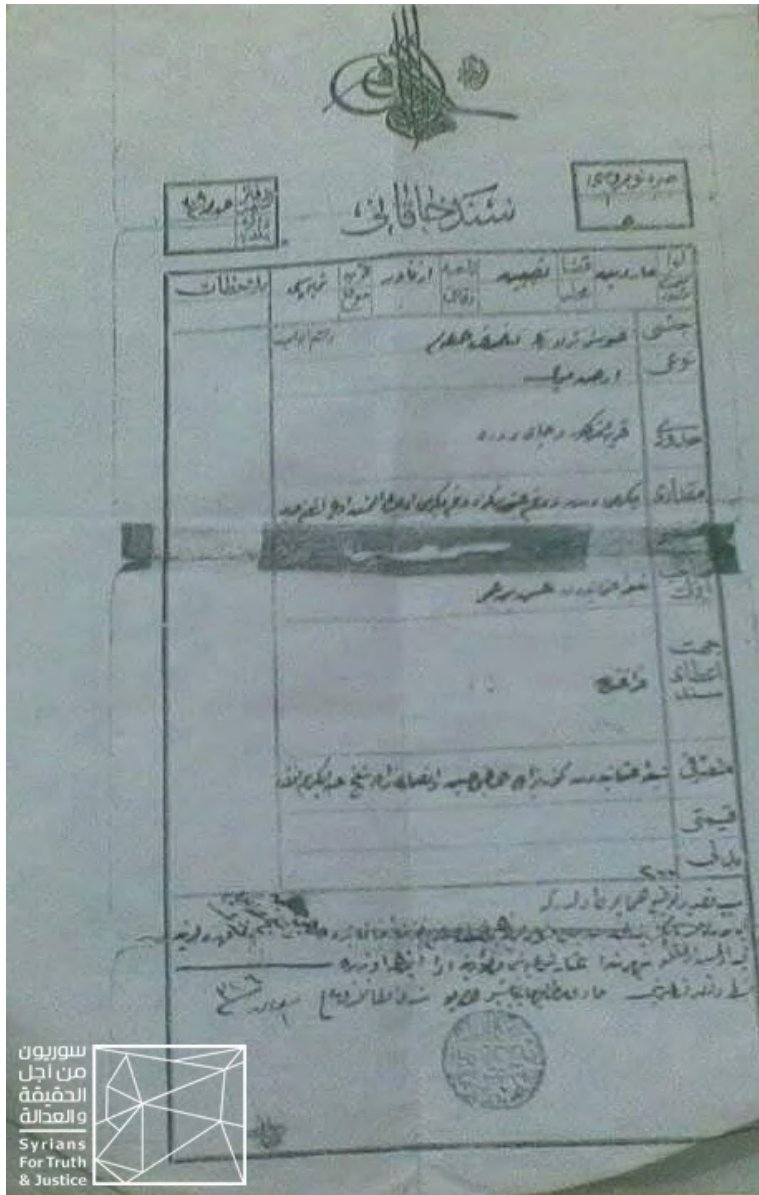


Image no. (19) - Another title deed from the Ottoman era proving Ajo family's – from the Jodka tribe – ownership of the Tirbê Spiyê/Qubur al-Bid village. The source said that there is a kinship between the clans of Dorka, Jodka, Dalmamka, Dumana, and Mumana, which are from the well-known Kurdish clans that lived in the far east of Syria - east of present-day city of Nusaybin/Nisêbîn. The mentioned clans also related to the Dodka and Nasira, which lived in Al-Darbasiyah and present-day Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn (west of today's Nusaybin/Nisêbîn). The source added that the villages that his clan owned, particularly Doukreh, received about 2000 Armenian and Syriacs who fled the Ottoman genocides in 1915. He said that one of their ancestors, called Muhammadiyah Abês/ Muhammad Al Abbas protected those fleeing the Ottoman extermination, and was thus nicknamed by the chief of the Shammar tribe in 1911 as 'al-Mustafij', which means the fair and generous one. Later, the French forces granted the villages of Maharkah and Kershiran also to the Armenians and Syriacs fleeing the extermination.



The document reads that the village of Digirê is administratively part of the Mardin District/Nusaybin/Nisêbîn, Aznawar nahiyah, which was taken over by a person called Khalaf Agha to protect the commercial convoys of the Ottoman Sultan who sent about twenty thousand fighters to support him at the time, according to Abbas family.

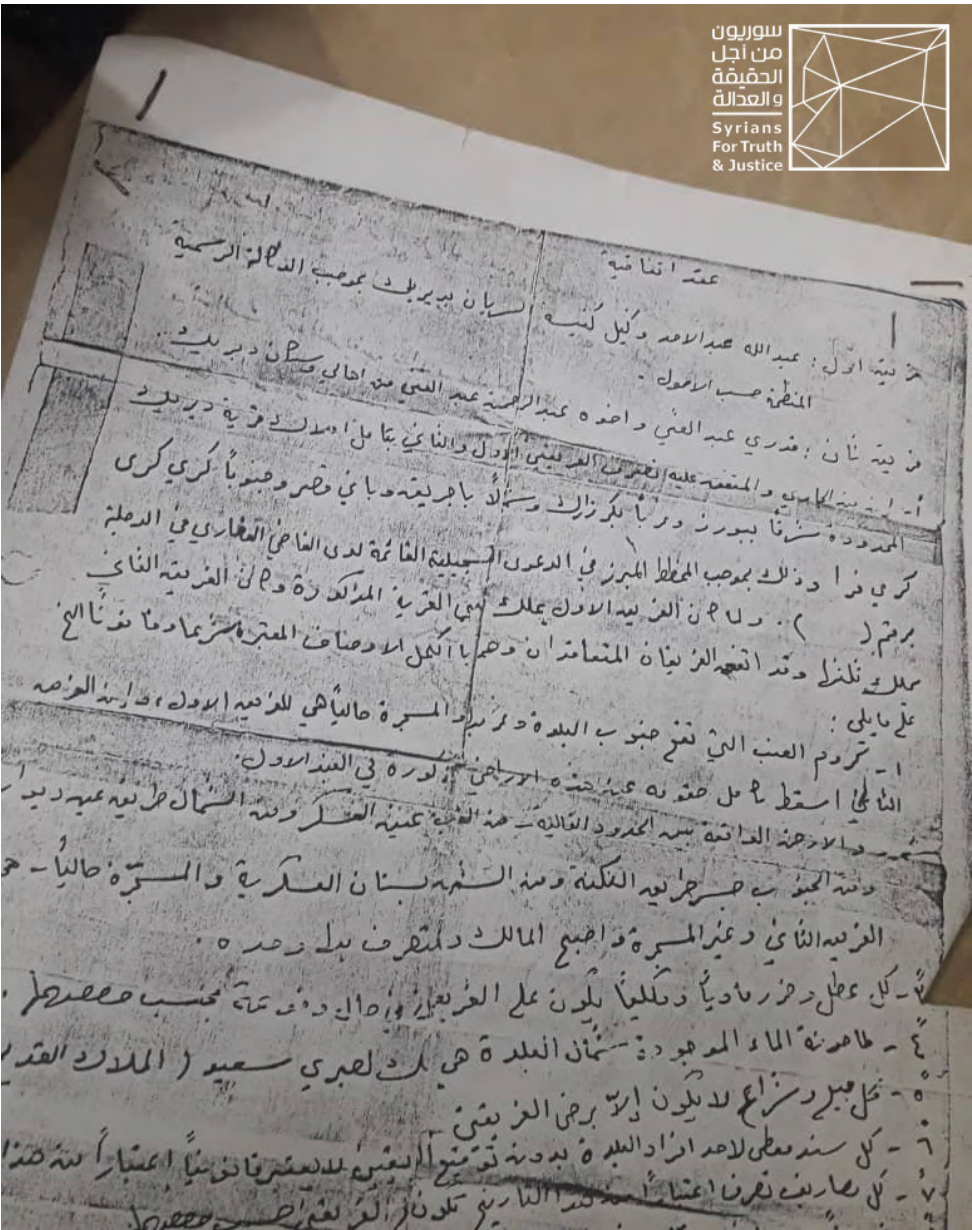


Image no. (20) - An original document from the 1950s, signed between Syriac Church's vice-chancellor and a member from the Abdul Ghani family, owner of the Dêrik village, known today as al-Malikiyah (after Arabisation).

Credit: a member of Abdul Ghani family.

On grounds that the Dam water might flood their land, Arab tribes from rural areas of Raqqa and Aleppo were brought to northern border areas, which was actually the start of the implementation to the ‘Arab Belt’ project, but Hafez al-Assad, however, called this process ‘building the new society’ in a speech he gave at the opening of the dam, addressing people of the al-Ghamr area,<sup>97</sup> and others who will start a new life in the Euphrates basin.<sup>98</sup> The HRW issued its first report on the situation of the Kurds in Syria in October 1996, in which it referred to observations by western diplomats about the Syrian government’s obvious concern over the fact that the Jazira has the largest non-Arab population in Syria and its intended deportation of the Kurds from their home areas, suggesting the main reason to be the oil reserves in those areas.<sup>99</sup>

In a further report issued in 2009, HRW confirmed that the Syrian government started implementing the ‘Arab Belt’ project in early 1970s, but under the new name, ‘Plan for the establishment of state model farms in the Jazira region’. Accordingly, the government established model farms on Kurdish lands and inhabited them with Arabs. Those lands were seized earlier by the government under the Agrarian Reform Law or as a result of the special census of 1962 which rendered their owners stateless. In 1975 the government resettled 4.000 Arab families who lost their homes for the establishment of the dam in 41 model farms in the heart of the Kurdish area. A year later; in 1976, the government froze the ‘Arab Belt’ project but it did not remove the model farms nor did it allow the return of the Kurds to their homes.<sup>100</sup> In February 1974, a delegation from the Arab al-Wilda tribe, which resides at the banks of the Euphrates, headed by Sheikh Shwakh al-Borsan, visited the former Syrian president, Hafez al-Assad, and discussed with him the Arabisation of the Kurdish region in the province of al-Hasakah, by resettling members of it there to serve as a ‘fence of Syria’, as described by al-Assad. This description and the aim of the project revealed the face of racism in this country. Many of the al-Wilda tribe members refused to leave their land but their sheikh forced them to do so, citing the promise he gave to Abu Sulayman (Hafez al-Assad), which must not be reneged, as he said.<sup>101</sup>

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97 The term ‘al-Ghamr area’ was used during the preparation and implementation phases of the project by its designers themselves, and this was subsequently led to the Arabs who were transferred being named as ‘Maghmurin’ or ‘Arab al-Ghamr’ which means the affected by flooding.

98 President Assad website, (The attached link was active until the research team’s last visit on 27 March 2020, but it became invalid on 9 July 2020), [http://www.presidentassad.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=352:5-7-1973&catid=255&Itemid=493](http://www.presidentassad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=352:5-7-1973&catid=255&Itemid=493)

99 “Syria: the Silenced Kurds”, HRW, October 1996, <https://www.hrw.org/report/1996/10/01/syria-silenced-kurds> (last visit: 9 June 2020)

100 “Group Denial: Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria”, HRW, 26 November 1996, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/11/26/group-denial/repression-kurdish-political-and-cultural-rights-syria> (last visit: 9 June 2020).

101 Qusay Abd al-Bari, “I gave a promise to Abu Sulayman.. Details from the forgotten story of al-Ghamr Arabs”, 4 December 2018, <https://www.eqtsad.net/news/article/22932/> (last visit on 27 March 2020).

## 6. The First Phase of the Demographic Change Operations in Syria - the Beginning of Land Confiscations

The end of the French mandate and the declaration of Syria's independence in 1946 presented a real opportunity for establishing a national state capable of accommodating all citizens on the basis of equal rights. However, what occurred back then actually pushed the country in other directions, especially since the official discourse was overcome by an exclusionary tone, taken by the successive governments and some political parties. At heart, the adopted discourse was hinged on a refusal to recognize non-Arab nationalities in Syria.

This discourse coincided with attempts at stifling political life in general. One of these attempts manifested in the decision passed by Sabri al-Asali, minister of interior of the first post-independence government, which Saadallah al-Jabiri headed. The decision functioned to dissolve all political parties, committees and organizations whose foundation was not officially licensed by the newly formed government. As might be expected, the government cracked down on Kurdish associations, clubs, and publications, issued during the French Mandate. Furthermore, the 5 September 1950 Constitution, drafted by Adib Shishakli, essentialized the Arab character of the state, as it stressed that: "The people are integral part of the Arab nation, along with their history, present and future." The constitution, thus, ignored the rights of Kurds and other ethnicities to representation, before the UAR government, the 1961 government, and the subsequent Ba'ath governments wrote off all references, documents and descriptions that proved the ethnic and racial diversity in Syria at the time.

The second year into enforcing the Agrarian Reform Law No. 161, passed in 1958, lands and property of landlords or Kurdish villagers/farmers — who leased the lands, but did not own them— were seized. The confiscations aimed at the region between the farthest parts of Dêrik/al-Malikiyah and the administrative borders separating the province of al-Hasakah from that of Raqqa. As mentioned above, in 1959 and 1960 properties belonging to "non-Kurdish landlords" were also seized, particularly in the Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn area and the region south of present-day al-Hasakah city.

One of the several accounts that confirm the spread of Kurdish clans in the region between today's Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn and Tell Abyad in 1911 is the map included in *The Journey of Mosul-Van; Mosul-Aleppo*, a book translated from German by Yusuf Rıza, the then deputy director of the Dar al-Sa'ada Center. The author said:



*“The next day, we arrived in ‘Tell Thourba’. Thirty four minutes later, we came across a tent of a sprawling Kurdish clan. The Kurds had also set up their tents south of ‘Khirbat Shan al-Barour’ at a 20 minutes distance. From there, as we headed towards the ‘Tek Tekdan’ mountain and having walked for a while, we started seeing a few other villages.”<sup>102</sup>*

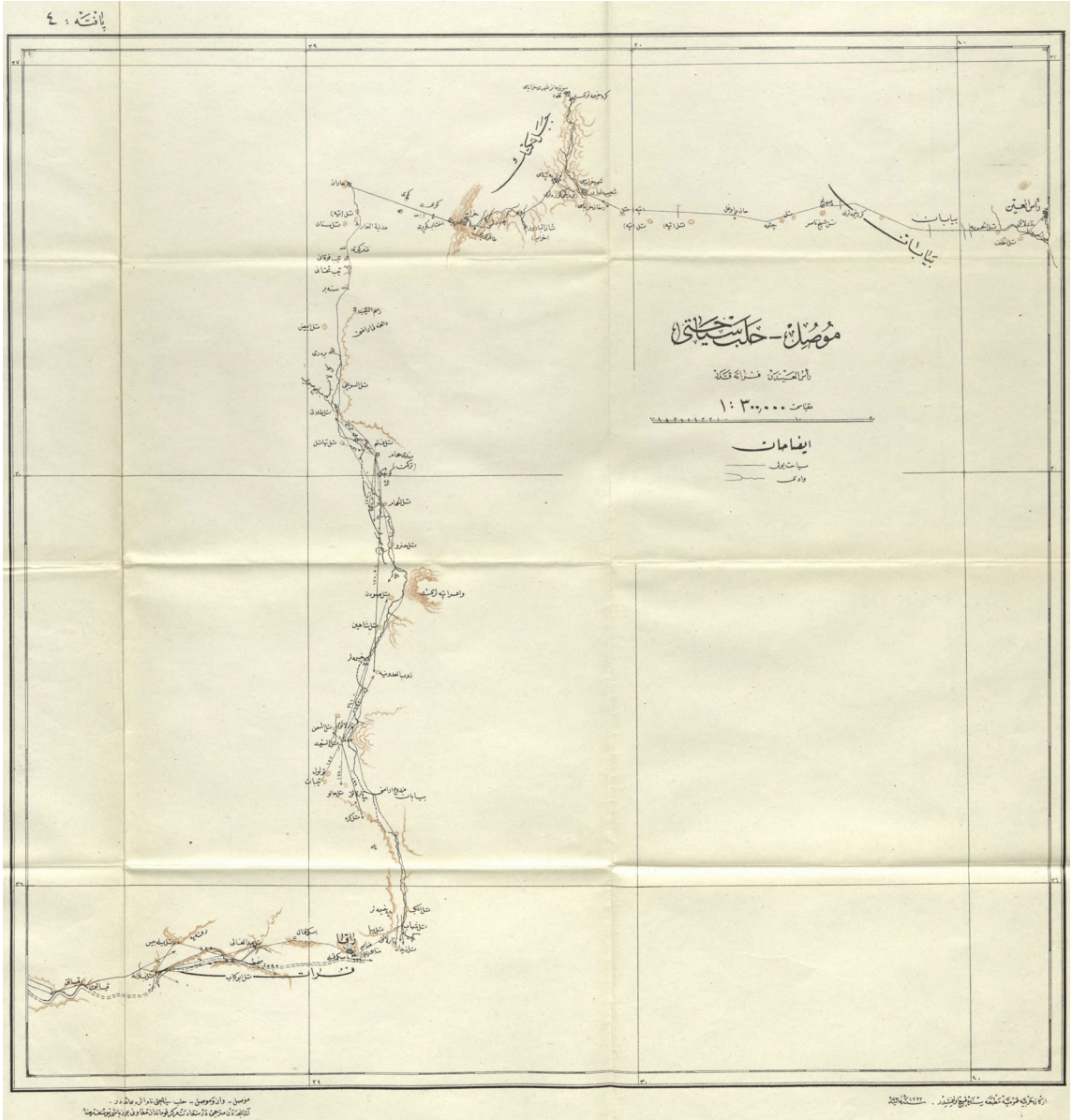


Image no. (21) – The map, included in the above-cited book, depicts the author’s journey from Mosul to Aleppo and tracks the locations of the Kurdish clans in the region extending between Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn and Tell Abyad.

102v Yusuf Rıza, Journey of Mousel-Van; Mousel-Aleppo. Originally titled Musul-Van, Musul-Halep Seyahatleri, the book was printed by the Military Publishing House of the Ottoman State in Süleymaniye in 1915 (1331 Hijri), page 10. According to sources: The journey was initiated in 1911.





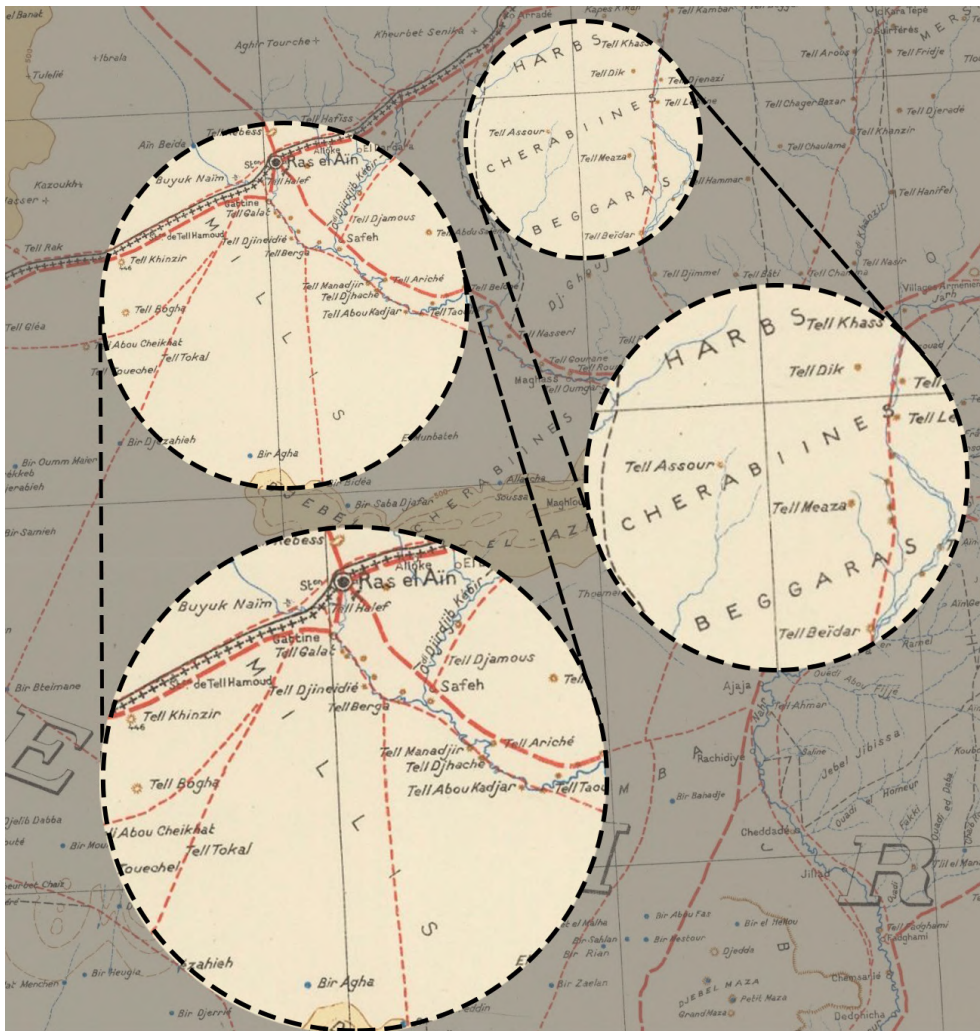


Image no. (23) – Map in French prepared by the Topographic Office of the French Forces in the Levant. The map was published in 1936, showing the spread of several Kurdish clans/Melli Clans in the Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn region and the spread of the al-Sharabiya and al-Baggara/al-Bakara clans east of the region. Credit: BnF – Gallica.

The documents listed below were provided for STJ's exclusive use by lawyer Ibrahim Pasha al-Melli, head of the Legal Committee of the National Democratic Meeting in Syria.<sup>104</sup>

104 For a recent version of these documents, signed and stamped by the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform in 2004, refer to page/ pages.



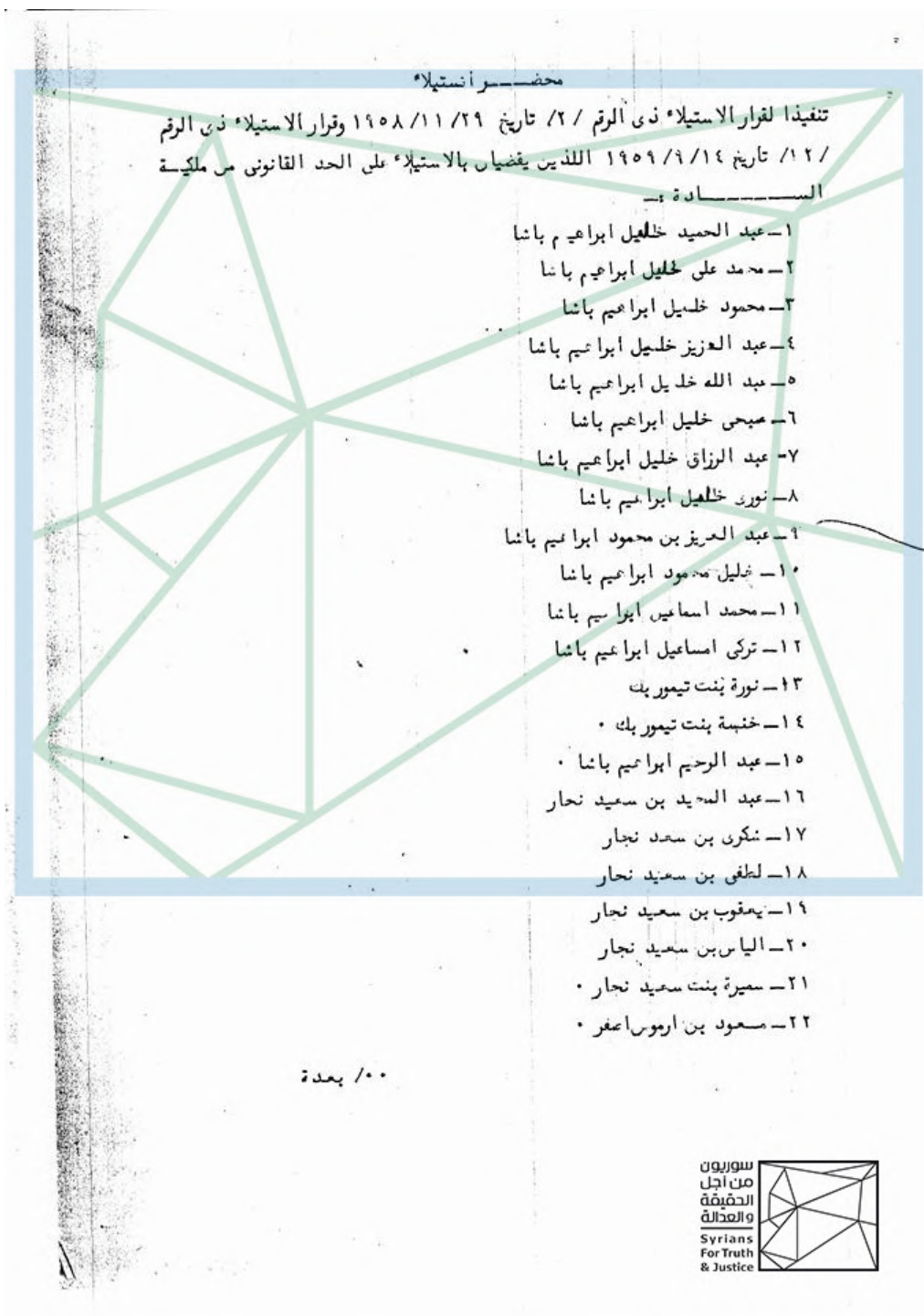


Image no. (24) – Document for STJ’s exclusive use reports large-scale confiscations of property owned by the Christian Assyrian family of Assfar and Najjar and the Kurdish family of Ibrahim Pasha al-Melli. The confiscations were carried out under the seizure decisions passed on 29 October 1958 and 14 September 1958. Credit: Muhammad Ali Ibrahim Pasha al-Melli.

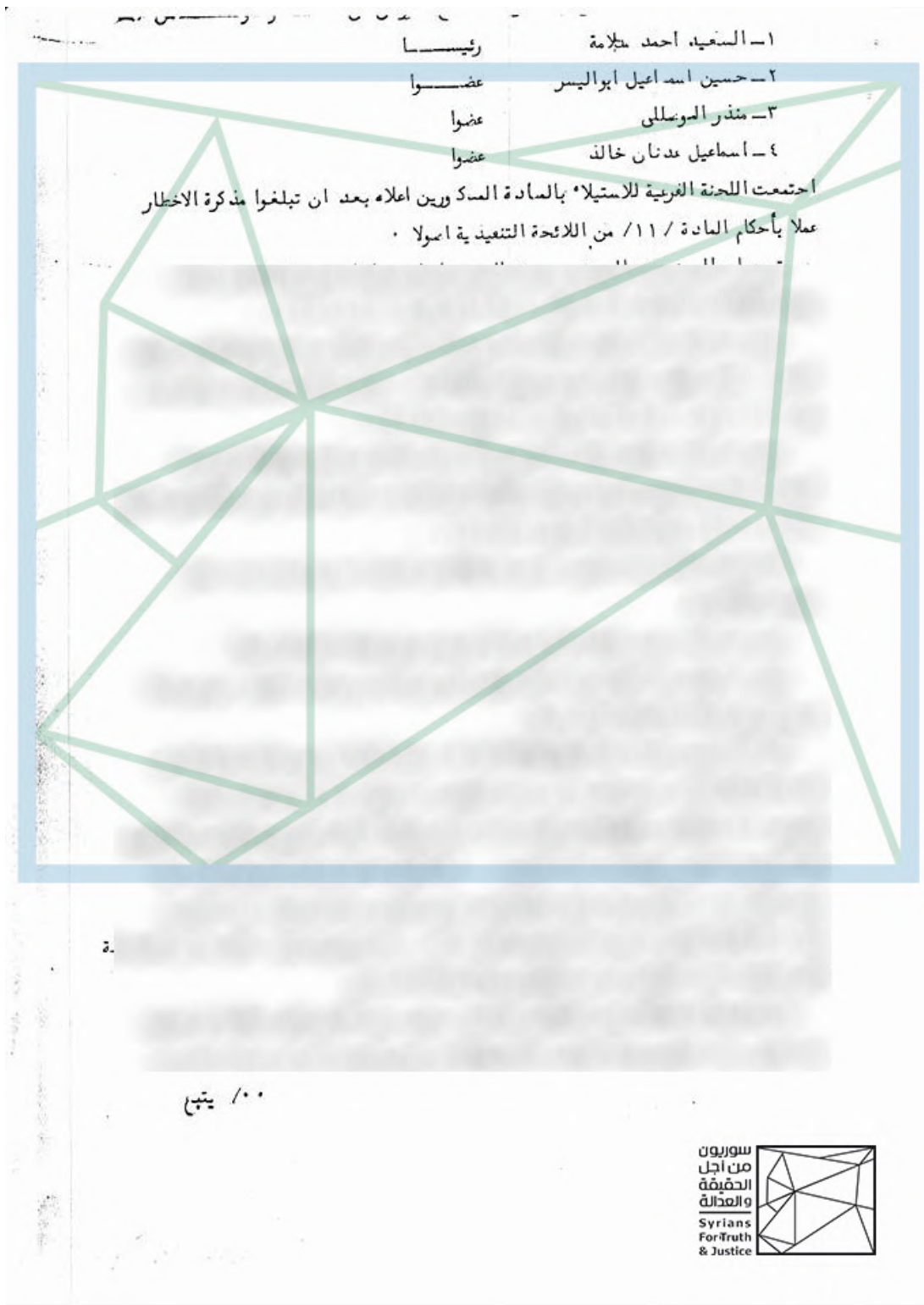


Image no. (25) – Another document listing the members of the Seizure Sub-Committee: Al-Said Ahemd Salameh, as the director, and Hussain Abu al-Yuser, Munzer al-Mouslli, and Ismail Adnan Khalid, as members. Credit: A member of the Ibrahim Pasha al-Melli family.



قال السيد .

#### الملكية

لقد تبين للجنة الاستيلاء القرية ان السادة اولاد خليل ابراهيم قد انتقلت اليهم الملكية في سند التملين ذي الرقم / ٧ / شراء من والد عم في عام ١٩٤١ وادعوا ان هناك وثائق رسمية ثابتة التاريخ تؤيد ان اسراء وقع قبل عام ١٩٥٠ وتبين ان المالكين لسند التملين يملكون السهام المسجلة بهذا اسم كل منهم في القيد الدفتر كما وجد مع المالكين قد اوردوا ما يملكونه في سند التملين المذكور ضمن اقرارهم .

#### الانشاءات

توجد في المبروكة ثلاثة مباني للسكن ومبنى مكون من عشرة مساكن كل مسكن مكون من غرفتين ومبنى مؤلف من خمس دكاكين مبنية من الاسمنت ومبنى مكون من خمس عشر غرفة كما يوجد في المبنى نفسه مستودع وثلاثة مساكن ومبنى خاص للمحروقات ملحق به سبع خزانات للمحروقات وخزانان للمياه واللمبة عدد ٦ واحدة للبتيز والثانية للماء ومبنى الادارة مكون من عشر غرف ومساكن كما يوجد مبنى يحتوي على رحبة لتسليم السيارات والجرارت ورحبة للفرامل ورحبة للحدادة كما يوجد مخزن من اللبن الترايبس يحتوي على غرفتين وزريبة للدجاج ومنكار عدد ٦ عديد .

كما يوجد كثير من الاالات وقد استولت اللجنة من اصلها على مايلي

١- جرار ثاثيريللر نمرة ٢ قوة ٢٥ حصان

٢- جلولار - نمرة ٤ قوة ٤٥ حصان

١٠٠ / يتبع



-	-	-	-	-	-	٤-
-	-	-	-	-	-	٥-
-	-	-	-	-	-	٦-
-	-	-	-	-	-	٧-
		٢	-	-	-	٨-
-	-	٢	-	-	-	٩-

١٠- حصادة اوليفر ٣٥

- - ١١-

- - ١٢-

١٣- جوندير

١٤- جرار لانز

١٥- بذارة جوندير عدد ٤ (اربعة)

ديسك مينيا بوليس ١٤ عاچه

بذارة مينيا بوليس

تربلا عدد ٤

بذارة ماسي ماريس

ديسك مينيا بوليس ١١ عاچه

بذارة جوندير ٢٨ عاچه

ديسك مينيا بوليس ١٤ عاچه

ديسك جوندير ١٣ عاچه

ديسك مينيا بوليس ١٠ عاچه

كالتفاتور ساكرا

كالتفاتور -

سكة شفرة عدد ٢

سكة شفرة عدد ٣

اللة غريلة ديبوي كهيرة ك على الكسريا

اللة غريلة ديبوي صفييرة على الذرياء

سيارة فارجر عدد ٦

سيارة ستود بيبكر عدد ١

موتور كسريائي الفا روميو عدد ٦

٠٠/ يتبع

Image no. (27) – The two documents report the Syrian government, represented by the Seizure Committee, confiscation of agricultural machinery, namely Caterpillar Tractors, in the village of Mabrouka in rural Serê Kaniyê/ Ras al-Ayn, meaning the government did not limit the seizure operations to lands. Credit: A member of the Ibrahim Pasha al-Melli family.

محضر تعديل مؤن في ١٦ / ١٠ / ١٩٧١ لمحضر الغزو والتجنيد النباتي المؤن  
في ١٦ / ٢ / ١٩٧١ للأراضي المستولى عليها بقرية ديشو رقم ١١٧١

ان اللجنة الفنية للاستيلاء والغزو والتجنيد المشكلة بقرار السيد محافظ الحسنة رقم ٤٣٢ / ق  
تاريخ ١٧٠ / ٢ / ١٩٧٠ والمؤلفة من السادة :

١- عبد اللطيف خايسر	مؤلف حقوق	رئيسا
٢- مظهر عبد الحميد	مهندس زراعي	عضوا
٣- صاموئيل دانيال	مندوب دائرة المساحة	
٤- صالي حسيين	= حزب البعث العربي الاشتراكي	
٥- حسين كاظم	= اتحاد الفلاحين	

#### أولا : النصوص القانونية والتعليقات النافذة :

يحد المأمور على احكام قانون الاصلاح الزراعي رقم ١٦١ / لعام ١٩٥٨ المعدل بالمرسوم النشر  
التشريعي رقم ٨٨ / تاريخ ١٦٣ / ٦ / ٢٣ والمرسوم التشريعي رقم ١٤٥ / تاريخ ١٦٦ / ١٢ / ٣  
واللائحة التنفيذية رقم ١٧ / تاريخ ١٦٧ / ١ / ١٧ والتعليقات النافذة بهذا الخصوص لا سيما  
القرار ٤١ / تاريخ ١٦٧ / ١ / ٢٩ والبالغ العام لوزارة الزراعة والاصلاح الزراعي رقم ٢ / سرتاريخ  
١٥ / ٢ / ١٦٧ المتعلقين باجراءات الاستيلاء والتعليقات رقم ١٨٥ / سرتاريخ ١٨ / ٢ / ١٦٧ -  
المتعلقة بالغزو والتجنيد والتجسي والمبادلة

ويحد المأمور على محضر الاجتماع المؤن في ١١ / ١٧٠ / ٥ المصدق بكتاب وزارة الزراعة والاصلاح  
الزراعي رقم ١١١٤ / ر. ح. ١٧٠ / ٦ / ٨ حول غزو وتجنيد الأراضي المستولى عليها بالعملية  
بمحافظه الحسنة تمهيدا لتوزيعها ، وعلى محضر الغزو والتجنيد النباتي المؤن في ١٦ / ٢ / ١٩٧١  
الذي اختتمته لجنة الاعتماد وعلى قرار لجنة الاعتماد بالقضية رقم ٤٣٥ / من محضر اجتماعها رقم  
٨ / تاريخ ١٧١ / ٦ / ٢٨ المتضمن قبول الاعتراض وغزو المساحة المستولى عليها في الجهة الجنوبية  
من القرية بالحقار رقم ١ / واعتبار المحضر مستندا يحد تعديله على هذا الأساس .

#### ثانيا : وفي الأراضي المستولى عليها قبل الغزو والتجنيد :

ويحد الرجوع الى اجابة التالين المسؤولين باحكام قانون الاصلاح الزراعي والذين صفت ملكيتهم  
حسب القانون المذكور واكتسبت المعاصر المضافة قبلهم الدرجة القطعية باعتمادها من اللجان  
المختصة حسب الاصول تبين بأنه قد تم الاستيلاء على المساحات التالية :

اسم المالك السابق	رقم العقار	سقي	يحل	غير مستمر	ملاحظات
اصفر ونجار	١	-	٥٣٦,٥٨٠٠ هـ		بموجب محضر الاستيلاء المؤن
آل الباشات	١	-	٥٣٦,٥٨٠٠ هـ		١٥٩ / ٦ / ٢٩ والنموذج بالجريدة
			١٠٧٣,١٦٠٠		الرسمية العدد ٤٣ / تاريخ ١٦٠ / ٢ / ٢٧

Image no. (28) – This exclusive document, obtained by STJ, reports the areas seized by the 1959 UAR government, of which 536.5800 hectares originally belong to Assfar and Najjar family and 536.5800 hectares belong to the Pasha al-Melli family. The confiscated lands are classified as unirrigated lands, but not as uncultivated, located in the Dishow village, rural Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn. Furthermore, the document cites Resolution No. (432/S), passed by the governor of the al-Hasakah province on 22 July 1970, providing for the formation of the so-called Seizure Sub-Committee. According to the document, the seizures were legally grounded on the Agricultural Reform Law No. 161, passed in 1958, and its subsequent amendments.

سند التعليل ذي الرقم ٢٢ / وقد تمت بجمع مواضع ومساكنهم الإدارية وموقع من سوير  
رقم ١١٩٣ هـ بئر عطية رقم ١١٨٤ هـ تل بلال رقم ١١٨٣ هـ واليهوا رقم ١١٨٠ هـ عصبه سح  
شكيا رقم ١١٦٤ هـ عارلى رقم ١١٧٩ هـ خربة دغيمه ١١٩٦ هـ السلاجى رقم ١١٩٥ هـ السويدية  
١١١٧ هـ خربة مجو ١١٦٨ هـ آنى زيارات ١١٩٩ هـ الانايه ١٢٠٠ هـ سمو ١٢٠١ هـ  
سمو الصغير ١٢٠٢ هـ الخليه رقم ١٢٠٣ هـ تل ثلاث ١٢٠٤ هـ حروبي وعذوانية ونصف  
الثل و اتوابسا رقم ١٢٠٥ هـ تل قليمه ورجسان وتوابسا ١٢٠٦ هـ ام منيع ١٢٠٧ هـ  
خربة ماجله ١٢٠٨ هـ القرن ١٢٠٩ هـ بشرن بيلان ١٢١٠ هـ خربة القايد رقم ١١٧٦  
وبشاربوجلود رقم ١١٧٧ هـ وتل عمر رقم ١١٧٥ هـ خربة الدنفى الجنوبية ١١٩٣ هـ خربة الغنى  
الغالية رقم ١١٧٤ هـ والمبروكه رقم ١١٧٨ هـ وخربة مئمان وخربة الحيران رقم ١١٧٢ هـ  
وليدشور رقم ١١٧١ هـ وضحة رقم ١١٧٠ هـ صالحه رقم ١١٦٩ هـ تونجيل رقم ١١٦٨ هـ سلماسه  
الغربية رقم ١١٦٧ هـ سلماسه الشرقية رقم ١١٦٦ هـ خربة فريسة ١١٧١ هـ تل الكر رقم ١١٥٦  
والقسم الداخلى ضمن السند من منطقة تل حشش رقم ١١٥٣ هـ ميزان رقم ١١٧٥ هـ مالحه ضيحي  
رقم ١١٥٨ هـ مالحه عزيز ١١٥٩ هـ مالحه محمد على ١١٦٩ هـ مالحه عبد البرزاق ١١٦١ هـ  
مالحه نوري ١١٦٢ هـ شموطه محمود رقم ١١٦٣ هـ شموطه عبد الحميد رقم ١١٦٤ هـ شموطه  
القبليه رقم ١١٦٥ هـ والمنطق المقاربه سجل نسيم رقم وعين نجده رقم  
وعين عفره رقم وابو حوره والمواقع خربة الشصير وما غنى داخل ضمن حدود  
السند من اراضى السجده وباب الخثر رقم ١١٤٢ هـ وموقع تل مبلن وموقع المعوديه ومووايه  
رقم ٨٢٤ هـ وما غنى داخل حدود السند من المنطقه السجده اريه عبد البراسيم رقم ٨٢٨ هـ  
والمواقع التاليه هـ البديع مكاره الجبل وثنيه الجبل والدحامة وجلبانغا ومالتم وموقع  
الشرقيان وزعيزه هـ ومرجان وسجده وموقع شمال خربة وخفيا  
حدود سند التعليل ذي الرقم ٢  
يحدد شمالا الخط الحدودي الفاصل بين الجمهوريه التركيه والجمهوريه العربيه  
المتمدة والذي يمتد من موقع تل خنزير شرقا حتى موقع نصف التل غربا  
ويحدد غربا موقع نصف التل وغراب سيار حتى موقع صبيخا وعين البيضة  
ويحدد جنوبا موقع عين البيضة وحتى سبيج جفار شرقا  
ويحدد شرقا سبيج جفار وتل المالحه حتى تل خنزير شمالا  
وتبلغ مساحته ٢٤٠٠٠٠ مليون واربعمائة الف دونم تقريبا هـ والمساحة تقريبا لان المقار  
لم يحدد بعد ولم يجرى هـ وان تقسما من اصل المساحة واقع ضمن محافظة دير الزور  
/٠٠ يتبين



Image no. (29) – Another document reporting the Syrian government's, represented by the Seizure Committee, confiscation of areas in villages owned by the Al al-Bashat/al-Bashat family, who provided the committee with an ownership deed that confirmed they possessed these lands. Furthermore, the document delineates the borders of the family's property, as reported by the ownership deed, which was called Ownership Deed no. (7). According to the deed, the railways separating Syria and Turkey—from Tal Khanzir village in the east to Nus Tal village—form the northern borders of the property; from Nus Tal and Kharab Siyar to Sumbikha and Ayn Batta form the western borders; from Ayn Batta in the south to Sabaa Jafar in the east form the southern borders; from Saba Jafar and Tal Maliha to Tal Khanzir in the north form the eastern borders. The Committee that issued the document confirms that the area of the confiscated family properties amounted to about 2.400.000 dunums, adding that a part of these properties is located within the administrative boundaries of Deir ez-Zor province.



٤ من لدن السيد بن عبد العزيز خليل ولدن محمد إبراهيم باشا كما استولت على حصة  
جوندير وبادارة جوندير وكالتفاتور وديسك ١١ حاج من قبل السيد بن عبد العزيز خليل  
المذكورين .  
الاستيلاء .

قررت لجنة الاستيلاء القمعية الاستيلاء على كامل مملكة السادة المذكورين اعلام من  
اعل سند التملك في الرقم / ٧ / باستثناء / ١٦٠٠ / دونها احتفاظ وتنازل عبد الرحمن  
ابراهيم باشا ضمن قرية البوغا في القسم الشمالي الشرقي من المنطقة العسكرية نفسها وعلى  
ان يكون البهروا ساكني ضمن احتفاظ المذكور وكلفت لجنة المساحة التابعة للقرية بتحديد  
هذا الاحتفاظ وتنازل على الطبيعة والمخطط حسب الأصول . وباستثناء .  
دونها بقية الاحتفاظ وتنازل مع عبد الحميد وترى اسم اعيل ونورة تيمور باشا في الارض الواقعة  
شمالي مضافة عقارية البوغة وبه واراض التمر . وقد كلفت لجنة المساحة بتوقيع هذه  
المساحة على المخطط والطبيعة حسب الأصول .

كما قررت اللجنة اعتبار السيد نوري بن خليل متنازلا عما يملكه في سند التملك في  
الرقم / ٧ / في - التي تبين ملكيته على ان يحدد احتفاظه في الارض التي يتصرف فيها فيما  
بعد وذلك . ومن اقراره بما قررت اعتبار السيد / خليل ابراهيم باشا الولي على ولده القاصر  
عبد الله متنازلا عما يملكه في حالة تبين التصرف من سند التملك لعدم اتمام  
في اقراره وان يحدد احتفاظه في المضافة التي اختارها حين الانتقار اليها .

وقررت اللجنة عدم الاعتداد بالتدخلات التي اتارها المالكون لجنة تصريف امتداد  
لاحكام المرسوم ١٣٥ والقانون ٨٤ لوقوعها بعد عام ١٩٥٠ لما قررت عدم الامتداد بالتصرفات  
الواقعة منس للخير سواء اكانت بيما او بجهة لعدم وجود وثيقة رسمية تامة المقارن . فزيد هذا  
التصرف .

كما قررت اللجنة قبول تنازل اولاد خليل ابراهيم لان تبين ملكيتهم او عدمه لا أثر على  
مجرى الاستيلاء . ولما انهم سيجعلون ضمن الارض التي يتصرفون بها او يملكونها خارج  
السند ان يكون اختلاف يكون عند ابيع بينهم وبين والدهم حول التصرف .  
كما قررت الاستيلاء على مبانى المبروكة جميعها بما فيها من دجيات وورشك وجميع الاوائل  
التابعة فيها . وقررت الاستيلاء ايضا على الآلات والمركبات المذكورة اعلام بالسمية لمجد اسماعيل  
وخليل محمود وترى اسم اعيل وعبد العزيز محمود بك وعلى ما تولى ور بالفاضة المدقة ايضا

٠٠ / يتبع

Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice

Image no. (30) – Another document reporting the Seizure Committee's decision that provided for the confiscation of the Al al-Bashat/al-Bashat family's properties, referenced in the Ownership Deed No. (7), except for 4.600 dunums of lands in the al-Bougha village in Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn region.



مندوب اتحاد الفلاحين

Image no. (31) – The document indicates the line separating the lands confiscated by the Syrian government and the ones the Ibrahim Pasha al-Melli family was allowed to keep.

## A. Dêrik/al-Malikiyah region and Syrian Jazira

It is unclear why the Government of the UAR chose the village of [Zuhairiya](#) — located on the western bank of the Tigris River, north of the Syria-Turkey-Iraq border tripoint, and approximately 17 km east of the city of Dêrik/al-Malikiyah — as the first place to resettle Syrian Arabs displaced from other regions.

The village, established to house unsettled people, was partially built on lands administratively affiliated to the village of Qara Kharâb / Qerexirab, which name had underwent a process of Arabisation becoming [Khirbat Omar](#). Towards the end of the UAR, the government moved about 30 families, mostly of the Alawite Sect / Syrian Arabs, from the provinces of Homs, Hama and Tartus, into the area to cultivate cotton across an irrigated plot of 700 dunums.<sup>105</sup>

Established by the Zihêrya- Zihêrî clan over a century ago,<sup>106</sup> the ownership of the [village](#) originally belonged to Mrs. Fatima Pasha, the sister of Nayef Mustafa Pasha, the region's renowned clan leader.<sup>107</sup> The village's lands were cultivated by 14 peasant families. Furthermore, the village's name was reported in one of the Syrian official maps as Zuhair al-Kurdiya / Kurdish Zuhair.<sup>108</sup>

In 1965, the government that ruled after the secession from the UAR, resumed what the Union government had started in the first place. From the Salamiyeh region, Hama province, about 50 families, of the Ismâ'îlîte Sect/Syrian Arabs, where moved to the region. Policy makers established a new model village north of the first al-Zuhairiya village, adjacent to Khirbat Omar village for the second batch of the “newly induced settlers”.<sup>109</sup> The village is today identified as Zuhairiyat al-Salmounyin.<sup>110</sup> The remaining lands of the village were distributed to the settlers, and the two new villages parts came to be called Salamiyeh locally.

It is important to mention that another “new village” was founded in the late seventies, known as al-Ahmadiyeh, 2 km northwest Salamiyeh. The people induced to settle there were nomad Arabs from the Çil Axa / al-Jawadiyah, to whom the state granted lands near the Gir Zêrîn, Arabised into [Tal al-Zahab](#). At the time, about 40 families were

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105 Medarat Kurd, “Al-Zuhairiya - The First Forgotten Settlement of the Arab Belt” (in Arabic), Medarat Kurd, 4 May 2020, (Last visited: 11 September 2020), <https://www.medaratkurd.com/2020/05/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b2%d9%87%d9%8a%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%b3%d8%aa%d9%88%d8%b7%d9%86%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d9%86%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d9%88%d9%84%d9%89/?fbclid=IwAR0PK4i-M8X93TKXJc5UV9CAjioSOfNTZBOCQBZ7D0hY6xgbiBV7qbkzwl>

106 Medarat Kurd, “Al-Zuhairiya - The First Forgotten Settlement of the Arab Belt.”

107 Nayef Musataf Pasha was the owner of 11 of the region's villages that covered an area of 89080 hectares, which were all confiscated. He was granted only 120 hectares. As for his heirs, 43 in total, they were granted only 96 hectares each.

108 The farmers were Sulaiman Ahmad, Youssef Haji Sulaiman, Youssef kourkis, Muhammad Kourkis, Khalil Hasso, Ibrahim Ismail Hassan, Mousa Jelo, Khalil Mousa, Abdulhakim Youssef, Saiyed Muhammad, Abdulrahman Rasoul, Maho Rasoul Haji Shalabni and Muhammad Hirashi, as Mr. Hussain Sharbati, a resident of the Zuhairiya (Zuhairiyat al-Naher), reported to STJ online in May 2020.

109 Mr. Hussain Sharbati.

110 Syrians for Truth and Justice does not adopt terms indicating hate speech or discrimination against any group. The term, thus, was used for the purpose of geographical reference only.



moved to the area, who came to possess no less than 500 hectares.<sup>111</sup>

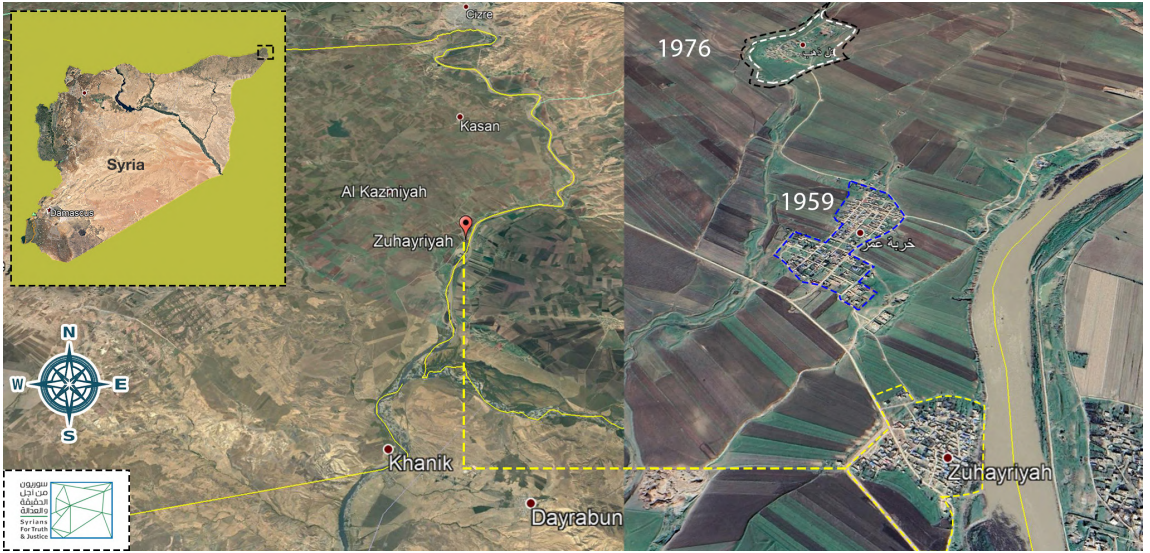


Image no. (32) – A map showing the locations of the Zuhairiya villages, reported in the paragraphs above.

The information obtained for the purpose of this report indicate that one share of the village’s lands that were redistributed was granted to a person called Muhammad Abu Musalam, dubbed Himki Zaryan, Kurdish from the Ali Joum village in rural Tell Ab-yad. The reasons for the transfer of this person to the area were, however, unidentified. In total, the area of the village’s confiscated lands amounted to 7500 hectares, according to Hussain Sharbati, a local of the original Zuhairiya village, whose father was a farmer there. In an interview with STJ,<sup>112</sup> Sharbati provided the following account:

*“This happened after the back-then Minister of Agriculture Abdulkarim Jundi visited the village’s police station, where he gathered the villagers and told them that they no longer had any lands in the village. Furthermore, the harvested crops were confiscated by the Nomadic Police. Later on, in response to altercations with farmers, 300 dunums were returned to six of the village’s families, only one of which was of the village’s original families. The rest, however, came to the village each in a specific manner. The displaced families were then granted agricultural documents, which functioned as ownership deeds exempting them from paying rent to the state, including the six families. In 1969, a person called Tala’at Koussa moved from his city in*

111 Medarat Kurd, “Al-Zuhairiya - The First Forgotten Settlement of the Arab Belt” (in Arabic), Medarat Kurd, 4 May 2020, (Last visited: 11 September 2020), <https://www.medaratkurd.com/2020/05/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b2%d9%87%d9%8a%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%b3%d8%aa%d9%88%d8%b7%d9%86%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d9%86%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d9%88%d9%84%d9%89/?fbclid=IwAR0PK4i-M8X93TKXJc5UV9CAjioSOFTZBOCQBZ7D0hY6xgbiBV7qbkzwl>

112 The interview was conducted online in May 2020 by one of the researchers conducting the report.

*Daraa province into the village, where he worked as an agriculture laborer, overseeing the village's plant nursery. He offered the villagers to teach them reading and writing in Arabic so as to gain their trust. The farmers were full of joy. Soon, Koussa was informed of the land seizure and demanded that the villagers provide him with all the documents they possessed that prove they worked in these lands. He claimed that the documents will be used to file a lawsuit against the state to return their rights. However, he burned the documents, saying that it was by mistake. Other copies of these documents and receipts, which were held by the state, were destroyed by a person called Aziz Rustum, the director of the Agriculture Directorate in Al Hasakah province at the time. In the end, farmers were left no documents to prove their ownership and rights except for their memories."*

Even though the political landscape was modified by successive coups and changing governments over four critical stages of Syria's history (the union with Egypt, the secession, the 8 March 1963 coup, and the 1966 coup,<sup>113</sup> prior to Hafiz al-Assad's rule), the policies aimed at demographic change maintained an upward trajectory. In July 1966, the Director of Amuda district, Lieutenant Ramadan Obeid, informed locals in several villages of the city's countryside to prepare to leave their homes and villages, and to choose one of the areas south of the province instead. Early that year, over the course of two months, such calls were regularly made by a number of border police stations in Dêrik/al-Malikiyah and Serê Kaniyê / Ras al-Ayn.<sup>114</sup>

## **B. Villages of Tell Abyad and the countryside of Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn**

Before the current borders of the Syrian state were demarcated, the plains extending to the countryside of Kobanî/Ayn al-Arab on the west and Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn on the east, were not completely empty of population. They were, in fact, unsteadily inhabited, enduring the semi-permanent migration of Arab, Kurdish and Turkmen nomadic tribes. Moreover, the region was a vital sphere for two prominent and competing groups. The first was the al-Barazi coalition, encompassing various sub-groups, including Arabs and Kurds—who maintained a Bedouin lifestyle between the Suruj plains and Jarablus. The second coalition was the Milli tribal union, whose influence covered the area between the regions of Diyarbakır/Amed, Mardin, Amuda, Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn, Urfa,

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113 The 1966 Syrian coup d'état which overthrow Amin al-Hafiz. It refers to events between 21 and 23 February during which the government of the Syrian Arab Republic was overthrown and replaced. This coup was the eighth in Syria's post-independence history and the first within the circles of the Ba'ath Party itself, in the aftermath of the 8th of March coup. Furthermore, the coup sent several historic Ba'athist leaders out of the country and the power domain, including the party's founder, Michel Aflaq, and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, which ultimately toppled the government.

114 Ali Mirani, "Policies of National Discrimination and Government Arabisation Campaigns in Kurdistan-Syria: 7 August 1928 – 5 October 2008" (in Arabic), Kurdish Studies and Document Conservation Center (Dohuk University Press, 2009), page 48.

parts of present-day Raqqa, and parts of present-day Aleppo.<sup>115</sup>

Administratively, France established the city of Tell Abyad in 1920. Its first inhabitants were Armenians fleeing the Ottoman extermination, along with members of the Arab al-Bakara/al-Baggara tribe, who arrived in the area as recruits of the French Army of the Levant, and then decided to settle down in the region.<sup>116</sup>

Even though the Agrarian Reform Law did not include in its first stage the lands located in the western countryside of Tell Abyad, the Syrian government in 1967 formed a “seizure committee” led by a person called Lieutenant Ibrahim. The committee confiscated an area of approximately 3,800 hectares, that included 53 artesian wells with equipment, pumps and engines, in addition to three agricultural tractors. Then 1,400 additional hectares of land were seized in the villages of:

- Slip Qaran, whose name was Arabised into 8 azar;<sup>117</sup>
- Jarkh Abdi;
- al-Ahmadiyah;
- al-Hurriya village, that was built on the lands of the Hualiki; village, Koberlik, whose name was Arabised into Tal Al-Kabir;
- Fyountta - located between Abadi and Tal al-Kabir;
- Bir Arab; and
- Bir Kno villages.<sup>118</sup>

The committee also sized Jalba, whose name was Arabised into al-Thawra, located 10 km southwest of Tell Abyad. The ownership of the village originally belongs to Mr. Shaheen Salukah, whose son Ismail was interviewed by STJ online in April 2020 and recounted the details of the confiscation:

*“In 1965, Lieutenant Ibrahim took over the recruitment division in the city. He was influential, and did not hide his hostility towards Kurds, on the pretext that they were feudal landlords and supporting the revolution in Iraqi Kurdistan and Barza-*

115 Badrakhn Ali, “About Tell Abyad and the Problematics of Arabic-Kurdish Names” (in Arabic), Medarat Kurd, 22 February 2020, (Last visit: 11 September 2020), <https://www.medaratkurd.com/2016/02/%d8%b9%d9%86-%d8%aa%d9%84-%d8%a3%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%b6-%d9%88%d8%a5%d8%b4%d9%83%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%b3%d9%85%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d8%b1%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%a9/>

116 Fabrice Balanche, “Tal Abyad: Achilles Heel of the Syrian Kurdish Belt,” The Washington Institute, 21 December 2018, (Last visit: 11 September 2020), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/tal-abyad-achilles-heel-of-the-syrian-kurdish-belt>

117 8 azar, meaning 8<sup>th</sup> March, refers to the date of the Coup leading the Ba’ath party to govern Syria.

118 Ibrahim Muslem, “Gire Spi or Tell Abyad, when Arabised: Historically, Geographically and Politically Speaking” (in Arabic), Girê Spî (blog), 3 June 2015, (Last Visit: 11 September 2020), <https://girespi.wordpress.com/2015/06/03/%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B6-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%A7/?fbclid=IwAR0RKk31H01pVfDuCgNPbXYoB7nFoNjV6z6T7tXDGC99TRyuAEz42aDWX1c>



*ni. He even seized the guesthouse of our uncle Ahmed Shabeen and turned it into a prison for many people of neighboring villages. Then, a decision was passed providing for our deporting from the two villages of Jalba and Kifkhaneh, located south of Kendal village and somewhere before the Sahrija village. We owned the two villages, and all the farms were seized. When we protested the decision, a number of family members and villagers were imprisoned, including my father. A year later, as he was held captive without trial, my father went on a hunger strike for 22 days, demanding that he be brought before the court. The government proceeded with its decisions. The two villages were indeed seized. Some 50 families of the al-Bashmashmeh were transferred into the village, with the support of the police and security forces, who also supervised the induced settlers' housing process. Worse yet, they taxed each household 200 Syrian pounds and confiscated the year's harvest."*

The Kurdo family also owned four villages in the western countryside of Tell Abyad, before the government brought in Arab settlers from Manbij countryside, according to Rashad Kurdo, who witnessed the seizure incidents and reported the following to STJ:

*"The government planned to evacuate Kurds from the border strip that Tell Abyad shared with Turkey. To do so, it adopted abhorrent policies, that aimed at robbing us of our lands, even though we offered documents proving our ownership over the land and that we were the lawful heirs. We had four villages, Koberlik, Jarkh Abdi, Slip Qaran, and Hualiki. Back then, modern harvesting machines did not exist and the cultivated areas were vast, my ancestors thus brought farmers from the Saramda clan from the countryside of Manbij to work in the fields of the villages of Koberlik and Slip Qaran. The farmers, however, left the two villages due to disputes with the family. In 1967, all of a sudden, the state mobilized dozens of the Saramda clan members, who were brought in into our Slip Qaran village, with their belongings and their children onboard military trucks, accompanied by security forces and the army. They meant to resettle them there. They gathered all our family members near the house and threatened us with arms, preventing us from attempting any resistance. Furthermore, they arrested two of my paternal uncles, Baqer and Majju, and sent them to the Tadmur Prison, along with a number of the village's youth and men. Then, they imposed a military cordon on the village, preventing traffic to and from it for months, during which the army was building housing units for the people moved to the village."*

Rashad Kurdo added:

*“We filed legal complaints. A committee from the Land Reclamation Department, then, passed a decision planning for a land survey of the village and an assessment of its properties, totaling 2,700 hectares. The survey was carried out over two months, and concluded that there was no exceeding ownership. Accordingly, the lands were not covered by the scope of the Agricultural Land Reform Law. The state, nevertheless, raised an objection to the findings and formed a new committee with the same purpose, that came out with similar results. This prompted the state to form a “five-member accreditation committee”, including the governor, the secretary of the Ba’ath Party branch, and the head of the Peasants Union in Raqqa to decide that all the lands of the village belong to the elder brother Rifa’at Kurdo only, denying the other family members ownership over the land. They registered the lands under his name to seize them later on the pretext that they exceed the ownership limits specified in the Agrarian Reform Law. We have resorted to all legal objection methods, after which a decision was issued by the Prime Minister, also the head of the Supreme Agricultural Council, to return the lands to the owners of the family members along with appropriate compensation. However, the Ba’ath Party branch and the State Property Directorate refused to put the decision into effect, arguing that the accreditation committee’s decision is final and not subject to appeal even by the judiciary. Over the past years, the government did not grant the settlers to our village with a usufruct certificate, but only with seasonal lease contracts. It also issued a decision to pay material compensation in return for the seized lands, but we refused the compensation for fear that this would be a prelude to the ultimate confiscation of our lands, even the ones we are left with.”*

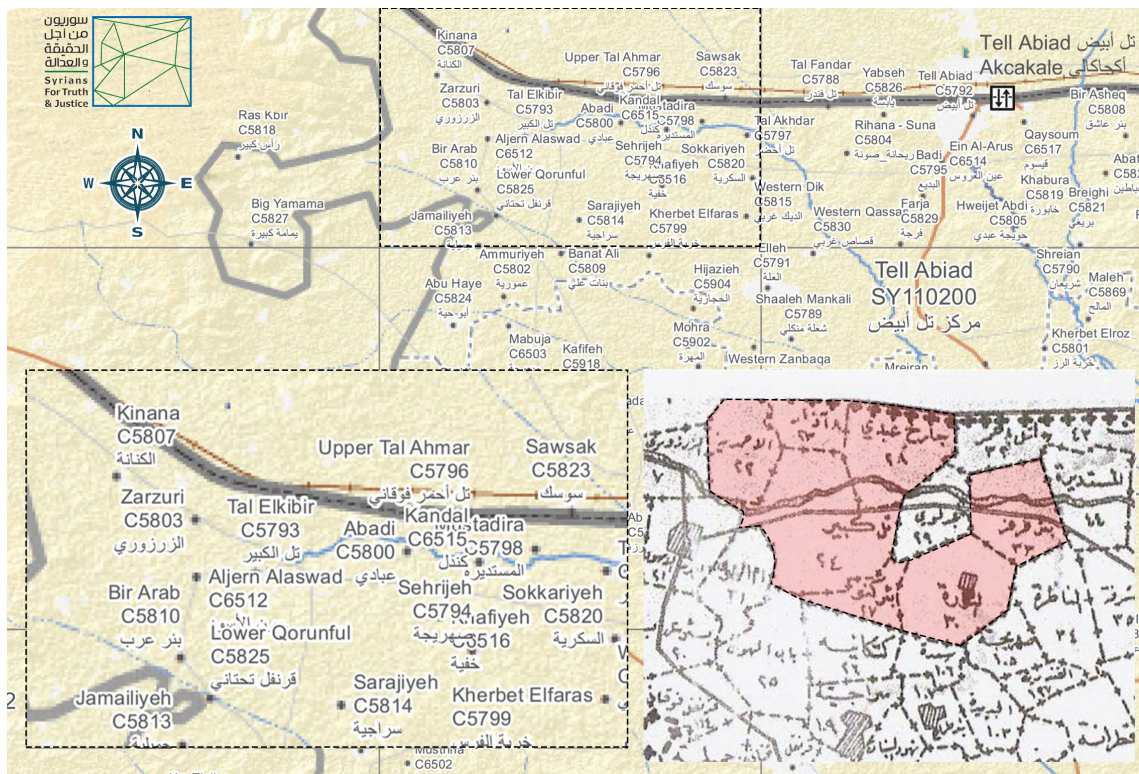


Image no. (33) – A map showing the locations of a number of the villages reported in the section above.

### C. “Karadağ/Kurds Mountain,” present-day Afrin region

Until a later stage of Syria’s independence from the French Mandate, Karadağ or the Kurds Mountain still held its generally recognized name.<sup>119</sup>

The name was, for instance, reported in My Memories of the One Thousand and One Nights’ Lands, written by the French Commercial Attachés in Aleppo between 1548 and 1555, and printed in the French city of Lyon in 1655: “By virtue of my profession, importing silk, I travelled to Kilis, Iantep, A’zaz, and the Kurds Mountain, among others”.<sup>120</sup>

Furthermore, the Russian Consul in Beirut, Konstantin Bazili (1809-1884), in his book Syria and Palestine under the Ottoman Rule, written in 1840 and covering the end of Ibrahim Ibn Muhammad Ali Pasha’s occupation of the Kurds Mountain regions, reported: “Urged by the Ottoman Sultan, many groups descended from Jabal al-Akrad/ Kurds Mountain and Kafr dağ towards the property of the Egyptian forces”.<sup>121</sup>

119 Karadağ, or as reported in some sources as Kurdtağ, is an Ottoman name that means the Kurds Mountain in Turkish.

120 Khayr al-Dīn Asadī, Aleppo Comparative Encyclopedia (in Arabic), 1st ed. (Aleppo, Syria: Aleppo University Press, 1981), 240.

121 Konstantin Bazili, Syria and Palestine under the Ottoman Rule, trans. Tariq Ma’sarani, (Moscow, Russia: Al-Taquadum Publishing House, 1989), 182.



In Afrin region, the Agrarian Reform Law chiefly targeted the lands of the Juma Plain (Deşta Cûmê), considered the region's most fertile plot and its preliminary economic reservoir. Spreading across these plains, the larger parts of the confiscated and then redistributed lands belonged to Aghas.<sup>122</sup>

The beneficiaries, however, were members of Arab tribes, who arrived in Afrin either as settlers, laborers or farmers, while only 20% of the Kurds benefited from the process of redistribution.

The lands of the Juma plain were owned by the following people, referred to as Aghas:

1. Ahmed Agha Kinj: He owned Hammam and Jendires areas, which encompassed lands that extended from Jendires to the Marwaniya, through the village of Hammam, as far as the borders of Anqla village. Most of these lands, especially those located in Jendires and Marwaniya, were granted to Arabs. Later on, the larger proportion of the Kinj family moved to Turkey.
2. Omar, Rifa'at, and Mustafa al-'Ammu: As aghas, they owned the Frairiye, Ramadiya, Hmailka, Rifa'ata, Iska, and Jalma villages. Their properties extended from Kafr Zeit to the borders of Jendires.
3. Muhammad Agha Seydou Memo: He owned the Ayn Dara, Sheikh Abdulrahman, Miska Fawqani, Miska Tahtani, Kojima, Sindyan, and Jolaqa villages. Memo was an affiliate of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement, represented by the Kurdistan Democratic Party – Syria (KDP), the reason why the state took over nearly 90% of his properties.
4. Ismail Agha Zada: He was robbed of his lands in the village of Ester.
5. The rest of the area's Aghas, such as the Aghas of the Sinnara family, owned lands in the mountain. Their lands were rigid, while confiscations aimed at the lands of the Juma plain, particularly Jendires that is known for its fertile soil.
6. Hamid Sheikh Feleik and Sheikh Muhammad Feleik: Both these Aghas were from the village of Brimje. The state seized their lands near Jalma and Shadiri villages, where, though gradually, the number of Arabs grew remarkably larger, especially in the villages of Jalma, Ramadiya, Iskan, Muhammadiya, Mulla Khalil, Hajj Iskandar, Bablit, Betita, Kawkaba, Rifa'tiya, Kafr Zeit, Mansoura and Abu Ka'ba.

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<sup>122</sup> The plural variation of the singular noun Agha or Aga, which is an honorific title used during the Ottoman Empire to refer to civilian dignitaries or high-ranking military officers. Aghas used to own vast areas of land, covering villages at times.

Among the compounds established under the Agrarian Reform Law in present-day Afrin region was the Qarisq/Qarsaq. It was founded in the 1960s, on the northern slope of Mount Liloun and about 1,5 km west of the village of Iskan. These lands were granted to an Arab family of seasonal shepherds, encompassing about ten houses. Likewise, the Kaniyê Dinky compound — located between the villages of Sheikh al-Dair and Iskan — was established and also granted to individual Arab seasonal shepherds.<sup>123</sup>

Later, during the 1970s, the Syrian government established another set of residential compounds, in conjunction with the launching of the ‘Arab Belt’ in al-Hasakah. These compounds were also handed over to Arab settlers, in a step similar to that carried out in the Jazira region, including the Bakhashi compound — located between the two villages of Nazan and Hasan Dairli, at the crossroads leading to Nabi Hori, Bulbul and Midanki. It consisted of seven houses. Also established around the same time was the Mansoura compound, which is a novel village formed south of the village of Fraira and next to the village of Abu Ka’b, which was abandoned by the Yazidis in the 1920s. It is inhabited mostly by Arab families who have benefited from the Agrarian Reform Law.<sup>124</sup>

## 7. Local Repudiation and Resistance of the Authorities’ Repeated Attempts at Demographic Change

Although the UAR government managed to forge the legal ground aiming at allowing land seizure under the Agrarian Reform Law no. 161, the 1961 government and those after failed to practically realize all their attempts to establish areas meant for resettling people from other areas, including Arabs, given the Kurdish peasants’ resistance.

In his account, Abdulhakim Mulla Ramadan,<sup>125</sup> born in 1943 in the village of Robariya, rural Dêrik/al-Malikiyah, reminisces about forms of local resistance. They engaged in skirmishes with the security forces repeatedly under the rule of the 1961 government, that attempted to put into practice the land seizure started by the UAR government:

*“For years, we first resisted the decisions providing for the confiscation of our lands, and second the attempts at handing them over to other people. We did not stop ploughing the lands or cultivation, even though the government would show up every time and confiscate the yield. We were arrested and imprisoned due to our resistance till the 1970s, when the government brought the al-Ghamr, the Arabs affected by flooding, into the area, forcibly ploughed our lands and ultimately seized large plots of them.”*

123 Muhammad Abdo Ali, *Kurds Mountain (Afrin): A Geographical Study* (in Arabic), 1st ed. (Afrin, Syria: 2014), 264.

124 Ali, *Kurds Mountain*, 246.

125 The witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 7 December 2018.

In 1967, the Syrian authorities embarked on the confiscation of new lands that belonged to Kurdish clans scattered across the Jazira region. As a result, Kurdish villages became a site of confrontations with the police and security forces supported by the Hajana, Border Guard. The people protested the displacement plans. An uprising, thus, starting from the village of [Ali Farow](#), west of Qamishli/Qamishlo, up to al-Jarah River in the east, broke out, leading to hundreds of Kurdish peasants being arrested, insulted and subjected to torture for their stand on the matter.<sup>126</sup>

The resistance to the land-seizure project in the village of Ali Farow in the city of Amuda is perhaps the most prominent incident in this context. This prompted the French newspaper *Le Monde* to publish a news report covering it in May 1967, after the government seized measures of the village's lands and labeled them as 'State Farms'. Collectively, a group of peasants, affiliated with the Kurdish Leftist Party and several communists, decided to plough the already cultivated lands themselves in April 1967. Enraged by their act, the then Director of the district of Amuda, First Lieutenant Yousef Tahttough, dispatched a police force to stop them that ended up challenged by the people. In retaliation, Tahttough reported to higher ranks that "an armed Barazani-urged revolution was taking place in Ali Farow". Consequently, on the night of 1 May 1967, the governor mobilized a force of 35 different military vehicles loaded with soldiers and police, about 500 personnel, who surrounded the village. Sticks and stones, the villager's only weapon, could not survive that military force, and they finally surrendered. The force then looted the village, and arrested more than 133 people from the village and its surrounding, who were next transferred to the Qamishli prison. As it failed to accommodate all of them, they were transferred to al-Hasakah prison.<sup>127</sup>

In fact, the resistance against displacement and land confiscation the Kurdish people embarked on did not amount to an organized movement throughout their regions. They were rather instances of resistance in separate Kurdish areas.

Going back in time, Rashad Jamu Al Hamak,<sup>128</sup> born in the village of Agh Bash, rural Tell Abyad, gave an account of his father's resistance to the decision that provided for their family's land seizure in 1960. He said:

*"Our father was a courageous man, full of inherent power. He was always concerned over the national Kurdish cause. He was persistently on the side of the truth, which he bluntly put to words, without embellishment or fear of individuals or authorities. When the Agrarian Reform Law was passed, land confiscation in the villages of east*

126 Ismail Hassaf, *Modern Historiography of Syria's Kurdistan* (in Arabic), Vol. 3, 1st ed. (Erbil: 2017), 89.

127 Hassaf, *Modern Historiography*, pages 45-46.

128 The witness was interviewed by STJ's field researcher in May 2020.



*Tell Abyad began, with the housing of Arab clans, over a strip of about 10 km. In 1962, the confiscations then aimed at our village (Agbash/Akbash – Arabised into al-Baida). The ownership of the lands was registered as belonging to the people of the Sarmada clan, originally brought from Manbij. Nevertheless, my father prevented them from investing or cultivating the land for about three years. He even embarked on many illegal actions, but they were all meant to resist the confiscation. Once, he removed mines from the border with Turkey and planted them in the land, blowing up a number of their agricultural vehicles. Form the border line with Turkey, he also shot the vehicles that were trying to plough the land. Therefore, my father was determined to embark on something massive and leave the region completely and permanently if he did not get his lands back.”*

Rashad Jamu Al Hamak added:

*“Later on, the authorities managed to arrest and transfer my father to Deir ez-Zor prison, where he was subjected to severe torture over a period of three months. Several charges were pointed against him, including affiliation to Kurdish parties and propagation of Kurdish nationalism, but all efforts at stopping him from resisting the project failed. This was the case, until the government changed its decision and gave us back the lands we owned in this village. Thus, my father stopped the Ba’ath Belt project and prevented it from expanding towards Kobanî and its countryside.”*

Rashad noted that the seizure committees that were in charge of implementing the Agrarian Reform Law did not apply it to any Arab villages, aiming at the lands of the Kurdish ones only, such as the lands of the Slouka family in the village of Jalba that were confiscated, along with the lands belonging to the Kurdo family in the villages of al-Hurriya and Tal Fender, the lands belonging to the Koussa family in the village of Abdi Koy, and those belonging to the Suni family in the village of Bir Attwan.

## **8. Second Phase of the Demographic Change Operations – the ‘Arab Belt’ Project**

Wasting no time, Hafez al-Assad’s plans, centralized over ideas and projects that resulted in dreadful demographic outcomes, were put into effect. In early 1973, a committee was formed for this particular purpose, headed by Muhammad Jaber Bajbouj, the regional deputy secretary of the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party, and another member of the Regional Command, reported in several sources as being Abdullah al-Ahmad. Al-Assad assigned them the task of implementing the plan within a year. Called the al-Gamr/Immersion Committee, it carried out the plan on two levels:

- Level one: It focused on persuading the members of the Arab clans to abandon their lands and move to the areas of the Euphrates Basin. In sync, the concerned authorities in the province of al-Hasakah were to prepare the ground for finalizing the plan. The authorities also organized visits into the area over the course of a year for these clans' representatives to inform them of the areas where they will be resettled and the lands they will invest in ultimately.<sup>129</sup> This clearly indicates that a large segment of Arabs did not comply with the plan.
- Level two: Action focused on catalyzing a minimum level of acceptance among the Kurds and the overall population of al-Hasakah province. To this aim, in the spring of 1973, the authorities, aided by the governor of al-Hasakah, invited a number of clan leaders, religious and social figures to a meeting in Damascus with a member of the Regional Command of the Ba'ath Party. Furthermore, in early May 1974, the governor of al-Hasakah visited Sheikh Daham al-Hadi, the head of the Shammar Clan, Farhan al-Nayef, the head of the Tayy Clan, and Nayef Pasha, the head of the Kurdish Kujaran Clan, and others to calm them down and ensure that any problems will not arise during execution.<sup>130</sup>

The peasant community was widely surprised at the 'model villages' built on the lands previously confiscated from their owners. The state did not officially disclose its plans until after the inauguration of the Euphrates Dam through Hafez al-Assad's speech and reports by official newspapers in the following days.

After the Syrian state seized the lands under the 'State Farms' label and at the orders of the al-Ghamr Committee, the governor of al-Hasakah passed decisions determining the areas allocated to each 'model village', the number of beneficiary families and the area of agricultural land designated to each of these families.

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129 Abdul Samad Dawood: "Arab Belt in Jazira, Syria (Qamishli- Syria, issued by the Kurdish Party of Yekiti in Syria, 2nd edition 2015, page 53.

130 Dawood, The 'Arab Belt' in Jazira, page 54.

## ان محافظ الحسكة

تنفيذا لتكليف الرفيق الامين القطري المساعد رئيس لجنة الشعر  
واستنادا لقرار القيادة القطرية رقم ٥٢١ تاريخ ١٩٧٤/٦/٢٤ حول التوزيع بالتوزيع الحاصل  
والاراضي للمستحقين من ابناء منطقة الشعر بعد تدقيق استماراتهم  
واستنادا لقرار القيادة القطرية رقم ٥٤١ تاريخ ١٩٧٤/٨/١٩ والذي اهل لكل وحدة ارض  
مساحة حسب مواردها في مزارع الدولة \*

## مقرر مايلي :

توزع الاراضي العائدة لمزارع الدولة الواقعة في منطقة المالكية على مستحقيها من اهالي  
منطقة الشعر المقيمين من محافظة الرقة ، وتخصص لكل وحدة مساحة ١٥٠ مترمربعين دون  
عمل ويحدد في توزيعها الاصل التالية :

أ- تعتمد في التوزيع المساحات المستعمرة من قبل منشأة مزرعة الدولة بالمالكية حسب واقع  
الاستثمار الفعلي \*

ب- تستبعد الاراضي المحجرة والمشجرة والثروة والمعادن والاراضي المؤجرة والمخزون  
عليها اجبر مثل من التوزيع \*

ج- تقوم لجنة الاستقبال في منطقة المالكية ، مع المصاحفين المتكلمين من الاصل الخمسة  
بتسليم الاوزن للفلاحين الشعر حسب المساحات المخصصة لكل قرية من قرى الشعر الخماسية  
على ان تبدأ اللجنة بالتوزيع من الجهة الغربية بدءا من قرية مشوق وحتى نهاية  
قرى الشعر وذلك حسب التفصيل التالي :

اولا - قرية مشوق : عدد وحدات المساحة ٥٧ وحدة وتخصص لها المساحات المدرجة في  
الهياكل العقارية التالية :

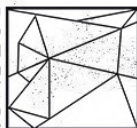
متسلسل اسم المنطقة العقارية رقمها العقاري المساحة الخاصة ملاحظات  
للتوزيع بالدوليميل

١	مشوق	٢٢٢	١٠٠٨٥ دوقم	وهي المساحة الباقية بعد استبعاد المساحة المؤجرة لابراهيم الحمري ورفقاءه ٨ والبالغة ١٤١٦ دوقم
٢	القطية	٢٣٤	٢١٤١ دوقم	وهي المساحة الباقية بعد استبعاد المساحة المستعملة للغمر قرية المبادرة البالغة ١٢٠٠ دوقم
٣	تل المسهد	٢٣١	١٢٢٥ دوقم	تركزت مساحة ٦٤٦ دوقم بإدارة من استحقاق المتكلمين كاحتياط

٢٢٤٥ دوقم لا استدراك اخطاء التوزيع المحددة  
وجمعيته تعاونية

١٦٦٩١ دوقم

سوريون  
من اجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice





ثانياً : قرية توكل : عدد وحدات المساحة ١٤١ وحدة وتخصم لها المساحات المدرجة في المناطق العقارية التالية :

متدلسل اسم المنطقة العقارية رقمها العقاري المساحة الخاصة ملاحظ	للتوزيع بالدوم		
١ توكل	٢٢٦	٧١٦٠ دوم	
٢ خشيفة	٢٢٢	= ٨٨٠	هناك مساحة ٣٩٠ دوم بها
٣ دير أيوب	١٢٦	= ١٠٠٠٠	قسم عليها استدارا لا يتجاوز ١٠٠٠٠
٤ تل الحسانات	٢٢٠	= ٣٥٠٠	المحتلة وجمعية تعاونية
		٢١٥٤٠ دوم بعل	

ثالثاً : قرية الحمراء : عدد وحدات المساحة ١٠١ وحدة وتخصم لها المساحات المدرجة في المناطق العقارية التالية :

متدلسل اسم المنطقة العقارية رقمها العقاري المساحة الخاصة ملاحظ	للتوزيع بالدوم		
١ دير أيوب	٢٢٩	٢٥٢٠ دوم	الباقى بعد ادلاء قرية توكل ١٠٠٠٠
٢ اليمامة	٢٢٢	= ١٠٣٠	
٣ دير حافر	٢٢٢	= ٢١٦٥	
٤ عتبة	٢٢١	= ٣٤٩٠	
٥ مشرفة	٢٢٥	= ٢٢٥٠	تركت مساحة ٥٥٥٠ دوم بعل كاحتياج
٦ ابر بكر	٢١٢	= ١٨٥٠	لاستداراته الخطاء التوزيع وجمعية
٧ سالحية	٢١١	= ٦٥٠	
٨ النبي سادى	١٤٠	= ١٣٠٠	
		١٥٧٣٥ دوم بعل	

رابعاً : قرية كل امر : ( كوريتان ) عدد وحدات المساحة ١٨٥ وحدة وتخصم لها المساحات المدرجة في المناطق العقارية التالية :

متدلسل اسم المنطقة العقارية رقمها العقاري المساحة الخاصة ملاحظ	للتوزيع بالدوم بعل		
١ ابو عهدة	١٤١	١٠٧٦ دوم	
٢ ام الرمان	١٣٩	= ٥٥٠	
٣ الحمراء	١٣٦	= ١٥٩٧	
٤ الحميدة	١٣١	= ٢٢٨١	تركت مساحة ٣١٨ دوم بعل كاحتياج
٥ الحسانية	١٢٢	= ١٨٦٠	لاستداراته الخطاء التوزيع المحتلة
٦ حلاق	١٣٥	= ٣٢٥٠	وجمعية تعاونية
٧ تل مذرى	١٤٢	= ٣٨٤٠	
٨ سدابار	١٢١	= ١٣١٠	
٩ الحسانية	١٢٢	= ٧٤٦	
١٠ تل امر	١١١	= ٣٥٠٠	قسم عليها
١١ تل امية	١٥٠	= ١٦٠٠	



خامساً :- تسمية المصطفاوية : عدد وحدات المساحة ١٦٨ وحدة وتخصص لها المساحات المدرجة في المناطق الحضرية التالية :

متسلسل اسم المنطقة العمرية رقمها الإداري المساحات الخاصة ملاحظات

للتوزيع بالادولم		المساقاوية
٥١٨٠ دولم	٦٥	١
= ٢٠٠٠	٦٤	٢
تركزت مساحة ٤٧٦ دولم بمساحة	٦٣	٣
= ٤٨٢٠ قسمتها كاحتياط استدارا لاجل	١٢٦	٤
= ٢٦٢٦	٦١	٥
= ٦٠٠	١٢٥	٦
= ٣٩٥٠	١٢٧	٧
= ٩٠٠	١٢٢	٨
= ١٠٠٠	١١٩	٩
= ٤٦٠٠		

الباقى بعد استبعاد المساحة المخصصة  
للفلاحي قرية تل اعرج البالغة ٣٠٠٠٠  
دولم بمساحة

مساحات : - قرية المحمية : عدد وحدات المساحة 14 وحدة وتخصص لها المساحات المدرجة في المناطق الحضرية التالية :  
٢٥٦٢٦ دولم محل  
دولم محل

متسلسل	اسم المنطقة البحرية	رقبها العقاري للتوزيع بالدولم	ملاحظ
١	قوتلية	٦٢	الباقى بعد اخطاء مساحة ٤٨٢٠ دولم
٢	البحرية	٥٥	بعل لقرية المصفاوية
٣	وحيدة	٥٦	تركزت مساحة ١٨٥ دولم بعل كاحتياط
٤	السفح	٥٧	لاستدراك اخطاء التوزيع المحتملة
٥	حكاكة	٦٢	وجمعية تعالو

سابعاً : - قرية تل الصديق : عدد وحدات المساحة ١٠٢ وحدة وتخصص فيها المساحات المدرجة في المناطق العقارية التالية :

[illegible]



أما : من الغنم : عدد وحدات المساحة ١٥٦ وحدة وتضمحلها المساحات المدرجة في  
البنادق العقارية التالية :

مستأهل اسم المنطقة العقارية	رقعها العقارى المساحة الخاصة ملاحظ	للقرنيز بالدولم
١	عن الغنم ١٥	٤٧٧٠ دولم
٢	عن بازوق ٣٥	= ٢٥٢٠
٣	شربة عهد ٣٦	= ٢٥٧٠
٤	دير البلح ٣٧	= ٢٥١٧
٥	المنصورة ٣٨	= ١٧٢٠
٦	الكاظمية ٥١	= ٦٠٠
٧	عن ديوار ١٨	= ٣٠٠٠
٨	حب الهوى ١٧	= ١٦٠٠
٩	شربة ٣٢	= ٣٥٠٠

تركبت مساحة ٤٤٧ دولم بحل كل  
لا ستدراك اخطاء التوزيع المحال  
وجمعية تصاريح

٢- يبلغ هذا القرار من يلزم لتنفيذه فور صدوره %  
الحسكتي ١٦٧٧ / ٥ / ١

محافظ الحسكة  
حسين حسن

المرسل اليه :  
١- رئاسة الجمهورية  
٢- قيادة فرع الحزب بالحسكة ١٠ نسخ مكتب الفلاحين الفرعي بالحسكة ٠ نسخ لتوزيعه على  
الرفاق اعضاء لجنة الاستقبال  
٣- مديرية مزارع الدولة بدمشق ٥ / ١٠ نسخ مديرية مزرعة الدولة بالمالكية ١٠ نسخ  
٤- قيادة شعبة المحافظة ٥ نسخ لتوزيعه ٥ / ١٠ ط لمناقشة المالكية لتقديم العوارضة  
٥- اتحاد الفلاحين بالحسكة ١٠ / ١٠ نسخ شعبة الحزب بالمالكية ١٠ نسخ ٥ / ١٠ ط فرع الحزب  
٦- رئاسة الفلاحين بالمالكية ٥ / ١٠ ط اتحاد الفلاحين بالحسكة ١٠ نسخ  
٧- رئاسة الاعمال الفنية بالحسكة ١٥ نسخة للمباشرة فوراً بتسلم الارز للمنتفعين في القرى المذكور  
٨- بعد الا ستحانة بمخدرات منشأة مزرعة الدولة بالمالكية وتسلم المساحات المذكورة في كل قرية  
٩- مديرية الزراعة والاصلاح الزراعي بالحسكة ١٥ نسخة  
١٠- مديرية الزراعة

١٦٧٧ / ٥ / ١

سوريون  
من اجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice

Image no. (37) – the four images are of a document issued regarding the distribution of agricultural lands to al-Ghumr families in Dêrik/al-Malikiyah. It reports resolution no. (493/s) passed on 3 May 1977 by the governor of al-Hasakah, Hussain Hassoun, that provides for the redistribution of lands labeled as ‘State Farms’ to al-Ghamr families, displaced from Raqqa province. The resolution states the number of ‘model villages’, and the area of agricultural lands to be attached to these villages, as well as the number of families transferred to these villages and the area of plots seized from each village for the benefit of the settlers.



One of the documents issued regarding the distribution of agricultural lands to al-Ghamr families in Dêrik/al-Malikiyah. It reports resolution no. (493/s) passed on 3 May 1977 by the governor of al-Hasakah, Hussain Hassoun. The resolution provides for the granting of lands labeled as ‘State Farms’ to al-Ghamr families, displaced from Raqqa province. Each of the families will be allocated 150 dunums of unirrigated lands, cut off from the villages of Ma’ashouq, Tokil, Tal A’war /Kourtaban, al-Hamraa, al-Sihiye, Mustafawya, Tal al-Sidiq, and Ayn al-Khadraa, while also defining the areas to be taken from each of the region’s villages to be transferred to the mobilized people.

In his account, Youssef Hussain,<sup>131</sup> born in 1926 in the village of Keshek, Dêrik/al-Malikiyah, goes back in time to the early stages of the project’s implementation process. He said:

*“When the government first brought the al-Ghamr/Arabs affected by the floods into the area, we were told to grant them lands. We refused to do so explicitly, stressing that we would not give and hand over the land that we reclaimed and cleaned up, even if it costs us our lives. As a result, a fight broke out between us and them, [al-Ghamr], but the government stood by them. When we saw a tractor cultivating land in the village, we threatened the driver and demanded that he stops. Following a verbal altercation with the driver, a Christian farmer immediately intervened, and we immediately understood that he had a deal with the al-Ghamr, that he cultivates the land for them in return for shares in the yield. He, then, took the seeds and drove the vehicle away. The next day, a lieutenant of the Police Station in the Çil Axa/al-Jawadiyah district showed up at the al-mukhtar’s guesthouse to inform the farmers of the necessity not to hinder the tractor that will come the next day to complete its work.<sup>132</sup> We still protested and defied their orders. The next day, they actually brought the tractor. We, the villagers, went out and attacked them. We started hitting the al-Ghamr people, who accompanied the tractor. However, the government arrested us and then subjected us to beating. No matter what, we held tight to our rejection. It was then, when the director of Çil Axa/al-Jawadiyah district appeared and threatened the villagers again. He said: Even if the government decides to give them, [the people of the village] the land back, I will not do it.*

We, in return, said: If that is what you wish for, you have first to drive your tractor over our bodies. We will never allow this, as long as we continue to live.

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<sup>131</sup> The witness was interviewed in person on 26 November 2018 by STJ’s field researcher.

<sup>132</sup> Mukhtar is the Arabic word for a head, a leader or a governor of a district or neighborhood.

A while later, the Secretary of the Ba'ath Party branch in Dêrik/al-Malikiyah passed a decision granting rocky terrains to older farmers, and the cultivable plots to al-Ghamr. They, then, arrested us all, 56 men and 6 women villagers, as we engaged in a fight with them. The women also attacked them. The detention facility could not accommodate us, for we were many, so they drove us to the horse stables. Men were placed in one side,

*and the women in the other. A number of the village's shepherds informed the rest of the villagers, who came to our rescue and released the women from the stables by force. They transferred us to the Dêrik/al-Malikiyah, and finally released us."*

## 9. Petitions, Complaints and Initiatives to Stop the 'Arab Belt' Project

For their part, the Kurdish peasant communities filed petitions and complaints to officials calling on them to stop this project, which they considered "a blow to the heart of national unity". The Kurdish political parties adopted a similar stance and used their statements to plead with "national and progressive forces", demanding that they cooperate to cease the project, which they also thought was a risk to the "country's security." One such statement was that of the Syria-based Leftist Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), released in early June 1973. Another statement was also made by the Syria-based Kurdish Democratic Party (AlParty) in mid-July 1973, in which the party approached Arab rulers to address Hafez al-Assad to stop what the statement called the "smelting process." The statement commented on the description, saying that should the process be complete, it will "turn into a rain of calamities, coercing also a crowd of citizens into the enemy lines against their wishes." On 20 August 1973, the same party distributed leaflets urging resistance to this project, throughout al-Hasakah province, in addition to Damascus, Aleppo and Beirut. Consequently, members of the party, who participated in publishing or distributing the leaflets, were arrested and tried. Sentenced to various penalties, some of them were to serve up to eight years in prison.<sup>133</sup>

The authorities' response to these calls took an escalating rhythm, expressing their fear of a potential growth in the rejectionist movement and the role the party could play within the Kurdish circles. On 29 July 1973, they arrested five leaders of the Kurdish Democratic Party (AlParty), including the party secretary in addition to three members of its advisory committee, who spent over eight years in prison as well.<sup>134</sup>

The detainees were Hajji Daham Miro, Muhammad Nazir Mustafa, Muhammad Amin Sheikh Kuleen, Khaled Mashayekh, Abdullah Mulla Ali, Muhammad Fakhri and Hamid Hajj Sino.

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<sup>133</sup> Dawood, The 'Arab Belt' in Jazira, page 67.

<sup>134</sup> Azad Ali, The (Arab) Belt in Syrian Jazira (in Arabic), (Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan: Rudaw research center, 2015), page 7.

The Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party in Syria was one of the Syrian Kurdish parties that led a campaign against the ‘Arab Belt’ project. In the early summer of 1973, the party’s Central Committee held a meeting to take action to affront this “racist project”, as described by the party’s literature. The party then called on the Kurdish masses to stand against the project and sent a high-ranking delegation to the Lebanese capital Beirut, consisting of the party’s secretary Abdulhamid Darwish, and the reputed commander Jakar Khwain, to mobilize the Arab forces and other actors against it.<sup>135</sup>

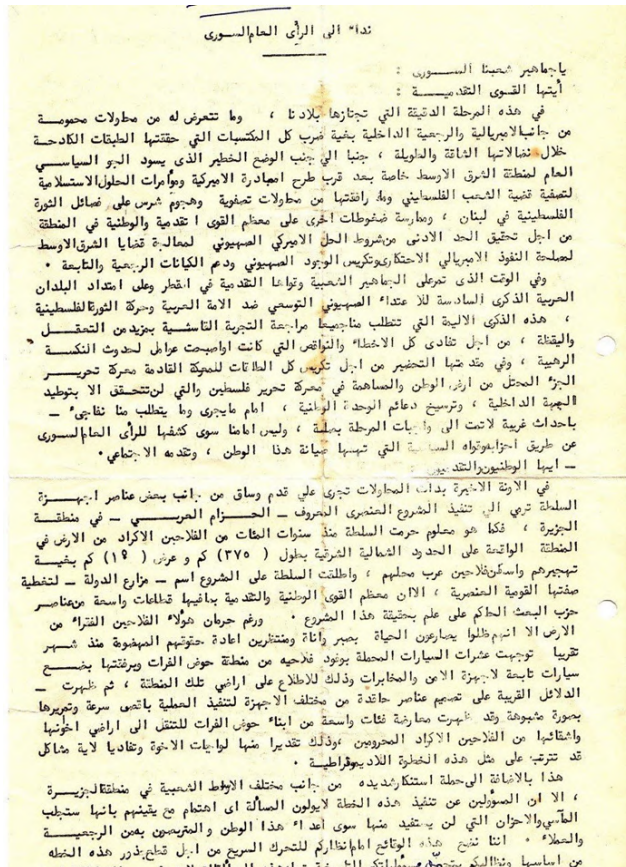


Image no. (38) – A statement by the leftist Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (ALParty) addressing the Syrian public opinion regarding the Syrian government’s attempts at the time to implement the ‘Arab Belt’ project, referring to changing the project’s name to ‘State Farms’ to give it a less racial stance. It is noted in the statement that information has been obtained saying that the project was supposed to be along 375 kilometers, although many other sources said that the project was to cover 270 to 280 kilometers, in parallel to the Syrian-Turkish border.

135 Abdulhamid Darwish, Lights on the Kurdish Movement in Syria – Events between 1956 and 1983, (Margaret Foundation and Jamal Erfan Cultural Foundation), page 48. It was, then, deposited at General Directorates under entry no. 1495, 2013, pages 194-195.



الوحدة / YEKITI / العدد / ٦٧ / الصفحة الثامنة

**من الأكراد لطيفي والإسلامي في المعيش بأمان وإخاء**  
ومساواة مع شقيقه الشعب العربي في سوريا ، ولقد  
نادى حزبنا دوماً بتعزيز الوحدة الوطنية في القطر  
، ومنذ بدء إخلاصنا في كل مناسبة للتعاون في سبيل  
وحدة وإزدهار وتقدم البلاد ، ومن المأسف أن  
يألكي هذه المعاملة من كل موقف كموقف حزبنا .  
إننا نعتقد بيقين شلت ، أن صلاحيات الاعتقال  
والإنضباط الجارية بحق مناضلي حزبنا ، لا  
تخدم مطلقاً المصالح الحقيقية للشعب العربي في  
القطر السوري ، ولا الأسس التقدمية الطامع فيها  
نظام الحكم الحالي ، بل لنا الثقة ، أن فتح باب  
الإرهاب على مصراعيه من جديد بحق الأكراد  
ليس حتى مرعياً من قيادات العليا للبلاد ، وعلى  
رأسها قائد الحركة التصحيحية . لأن ما يجري  
الآن في الجزيرة بالنسبة للأكراد مختلف لكل  
العلاوة التي أعلنها ( قائد المسيرة نفسه وقامت  
على أساسها الجبهة الوطنية التقدمية ) . إننا نعتقد  
أن الهجوم المسلح الذي قام به جهاز مخبرات أمن  
الدولة على قرية موزلان وإشاعة الإرهاب فيها  
حتى الآن ، وفي بقية القرى التي يقطنها الأكراد ،  
غير معني فيه المواطنون الأكراد فقط ، بل إن ذلك  
موجه إلى السياسة العليا للبلاد ونهجها التقدمي .  
وإن إطلاق النار على المقاتلين الأكراد من قبل  
هذا الجهاز ، لا يقصد به الأكراد فقط ، إنما هذا  
الرمز صامع موجه إلى دعمسور البلاد ، ومؤسساتها  
التقدمية والديمقراطية ، إننا نؤمن أن السياسة التي  
تتحل بالأكراد نتيجة تطبيق مشروع الحزم ، وكافة  
أوجه التمييز العنصري القائمة ، هي بمجملها قضية  
وطنية قبل كل شيء ، ومن المفروض أن تلقى  
اهتماماً عاماً وحزبياً من كل الفئات الوطنية  
والتقدمية ، إننا نضع قوى الجبهة الوطنية للتقدمية ،  
وكافة الفئات والخصائر الشرقية في القطر أمام  
مسؤولياتها المدنية ، ونطلبها بالعمل على إطلاق  
سراح المعتقلين من قبائلي حزبنا والأكراد الآخرين  
، ووضع حد لممارسة الإرهاب والتمييز العنصري  
الجاريين بحق الجماهير الكردية في سوريا ، وكشاً  
أمل أن بياننا سيأخذ أذاناً صاخبة من جميع القوى  
والفئات الوطنية والتقدمية لتتجهز حتى الأبد الأخوة  
العربية الكردية على أسس مبنين من الوحدة  
الوطنية ، ولتتضافر كافة القوى الوطنية والتقدمية  
في طريق معاداة الاستعمار والصهيونية .  
أولاً  
الحزب الديمقراطي الكردي في سوريا

**من وراء عمليات الإرهاب ؟**  
أصدر الحزب الديمقراطي الكردي في  
سوريا ( اليساري ) بتاريخ آب ١٩٧٣ م ،  
بياناً تحت هذا العنوان ، بعد اعتقال عدد  
من الوطنيين والقديسين ، هذا نصه :

فوجيء المواطنون في الجزيرة في مطلع شهر  
آب الجاري بمحنة اعتقالات جرى بحق بعض  
قبايلي حزبنا المناضلين ، وبعض المواطنين الأكراد  
، ولأول مرة في تاريخ القطر ، يرافق اعتقال أحد  
رفاقنا ، قيام جلاوزة مخبرات أمن الدولة بإطلاق  
النار على المواطنين في قرية موزلان ، وإرهاب  
النساء والأطفال والشيوخ ، مما أدى إلى سقوط أحد  
المواطنين جرحاً ، ولا جميع سكان القرية بالقرار  
هائمين على وجوههم في البراري . لقد سبق أن  
تعرض مناضلو حزبنا في مثل الحكومات الرجعية  
السابقة للإعتقال والإرهاب والتعذيب ، ولكن لم يفت  
ذلك في عضد جماهير حزبنا ، ولم يؤثر على  
لضالها الذخوب في سبيل رفع نسر الإضمحلال  
العنصري عن كواهل شعبنا الكردي وإنل حقوقه  
الديمقراطية المشروعة . ويبدو أن بعض التيارات  
الرجعية والثوفانية في القطر كانت تعدّ العدة لهذه  
الاعتقالات ، منذ الإعلان عن التية بوضع مشروع  
الحزام العنصري موضع التنفيذ ، هذا المشروع  
الذي أجمعت كل القوى والفئات الوطنية والتنظيمية  
العربية في القطر السوري والخارج على إدانة  
وشجبه ، ومن البدهي أن يقف حزبنا المناهض  
بوضوح وشدات في وجه هذا المشروع ، بإذنا كان  
جهده في فضحه وإظهار حقيقته العنصرية المغفلة  
. لقد قام حزبنا أصلاً من أجل الدفاع عن حق

(المرافعة)

Image no. (39) – A page of a newspaper issue, published by the “Yekiti” party, showing an archive photo of a statement made in early August 1973, documenting an arrest campaign against leaders of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (AlParty) and an armed attack on the village of Mozlan by the security services. There is a clear reference to the ‘Arab Belt’ project, described by the newspaper as “racist”.

The ‘Arab Belt’ was one of the issues raised by the delegation that met with members of the “Republican Palace” in Damascus on 21 March 1986, the day on which the well-known incident, the martyrdom of Suleiman Adi, who was among the masses of demonstrators who gathered in front of the palace protesting the ban on the Newroz celebration, took place. In addition to the chief demand of declaring Newroz an official holiday, the protestors addressed the al-Hasakah 1962 exceptional census, the ‘Arab Belt’ and Arabisation, according to the members of the reported delegation itself, in-

cluding Ismail Hama, who later held the position of Secretary of the Central Committee of the Yekiti Party of Kurdistan-Syria.<sup>136</sup>

The petitions and all political calls to stop this project were to no avail, for none of the Syrian authorities, from top to bottom, did actually respond. Indeed, the Ba'ath Party proceeded with its plans, moving to the implementation stage, creating new villages by annexing real estate from several villages or building 'model villages' on confiscated properties.

In a 1979 report, Amnesty International documented how the Ba'ath regime resorted to arresting leaders of the Kurdish political movement who objected to the implementation of the 'Arab Belt' project and how it embarked on the "displacement of Kurds from the three main Kurdish areas that were to be repopulated by Arabs." Nine of the detained leaders were members of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), such as Daham Miro and Kanaan Agid.<sup>137</sup>

## 10. Facts and Figures on the so-called 'Arab Belt' Project

The 'Arab Belt' extended over a 280 to 300 km long and 10 to 15 km deep area. The number of the families moved to the area amounted to nearly 4,000, from rural Raqqa. 335 Kurdish villages were affected, with a population that at the time exceeded 150,000 people. Under the 'Arab Belt' project, 40 new 'model villages' were built through the merging of properties confiscated as parts of or entire villages. In a systemic process of Arabisation, the names reported in the table below were used to refer to the invented villages, whereas old names were abolished from the official records.<sup>138</sup>

The 'Arab Belt' expanded from Dêrik/al-Malikiyah, in the far north east, to Serê Kaniyê / Ras al-Ayn, in the far north west of the province, in the manner displayed by the table below:

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136 Ivan Bikhtyar, "Peaceful Democratic Struggle of the Kurdish People in Syria's Kurdistan" (in Arabic), Ashti Center for Studies and Research, (Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan: Hamdi Publishing House, 1st ed. 2011), deposited at the Public Sulaymaniyah Library under entry no. (1415), page 32.

137 "Briefing on the Situation in Syria," Amnesty International, 1979, 9, (Last visit: 13 September 2020), <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/204000/mde240041979en.pdf>

138 Azad Ali, The (Arab) Belt in Syrian Jazira, (Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan: Rudaw research center, 2015), page 8.

Model Villages where al-Ghamr Arabs were restteled			
#	Dêrik/al-Malikiyah	Qamishli/Qamishlo	Serê Kaniyê / Ras al-Ayn
1	Ayn al-Khadraa	Al-Manazra	Tal Tishreen
2	Tal al-Sidiq	Al-Haramoun	Al-Quncitra
3	Al-Sihiye	Al-Qahtaniya	Al-Qairawan
4	Mustafawya	Helwa	Zahr al-Arab
5	Tal A'war	Al-Tanouriya	Al-Assadiya
6	Al-Hamraa	Um al-Fursan	Barqa
7	Al-Jawadiya	Himo	Tal al-Haddara 1
8	Shabak	Al-Thawra	Tal al-Haddara 2
9	Tal Alo 1	Al-Hatemiya	Tal al-Arqam
10	Tal Alo 2	Um al-Rabi'	Muthana
11	Tokil	Al-Bahira	Al-Mutanabi
12	Ma'ashouq	Al-Jabriya	Um Izzam
13			Al-Inadiya
14			Al-Rawiya
15			Al-Dahmaa
16			Hanadi
Total	12	12	16
	40		



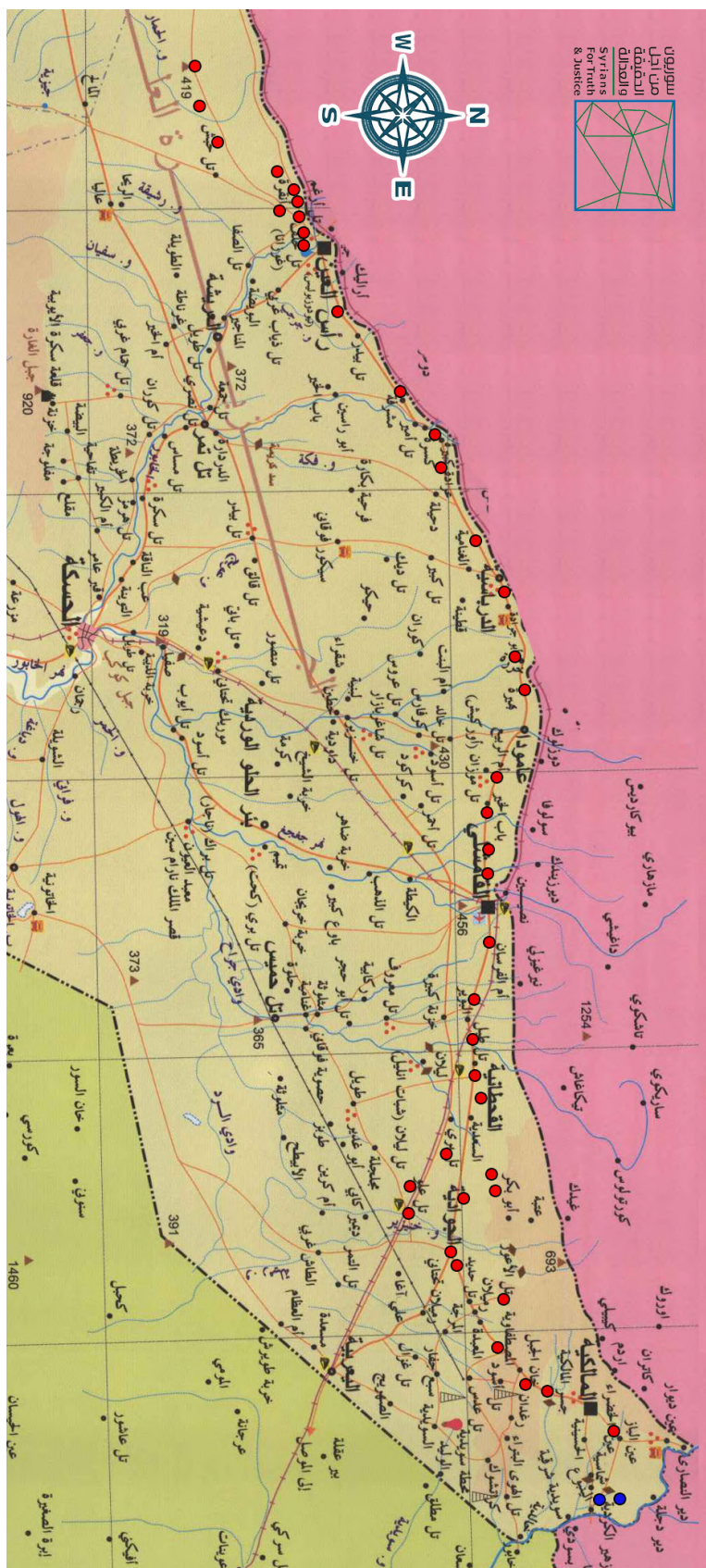


Image no. (40) – A map shows in its red area 40 model villages established as part of the so called ‘Arab Belt’ project to resettle the al-Ghamr Arabs. The blue dots mark the location of two villages found in far northeastern Syria, near the Kurdish village of al-Zaharieh, in 1960s. For more info, please see image no. (32)

## A. Accounts and figures on the Arab Belt Project in Dêrik/ al-Malikiyah region and Syrian Jazira

Ahmed Hasan Selow Hamza is a resident of the village of [Qaztepan/Qastepan](#) in Dêrik/al-Malikiyah region,<sup>139</sup> whose name was Arabised into al-Hamidiyya. Commenting on the land seizure and the demographic changes induced in his village, he said:

*“I was born in the village of Qazetpan. This village actually belongs to my forefathers. In 1965, the government changed the village’s name into al-Hamidiyya, while they made the Keshek village’s name Hamra. They were intent on confiscating our lands, instead of forcibly displacing us from our areas, since displacement would have turned us into a burden, compared to land seizure, which was rather easier to carry out.”*

Hamza added:

“Of the village’s total area of 433 hectares, 308 were seized and annexed to properties labelled ‘State Farms’. The seized plots were then granted to the al-Ghamr Arabs. Although the village’s farmers used primitive means, such as animals, to cultivate small areas, barely amounting to 10 dunums, the government did not slack off and showed up at harvest time to confiscate the yield.”

Hamza also referred to the government’s discriminatory practices against Kurds:

*“By the time the land distribution committees roamed the area, the 1962 census was already conducted. Our Kurdish people were divided into ajaneb<sup>140</sup> and Syrian citizens. The group categorized as ajaneb was then transferred to other villages, such as al-Safa, Dhakhira, and Kar Sour.”*

Youssef Sheikh Khaled,<sup>141</sup> another witness from the village of Qazetpan/Qasetpan and born in 1940, reported to STJ that large-scale land seizures were carried out at intervals. The Syrian government, he added, brought tractors in the area, ploughed and cultivated the seized lands for several years. Later on, rumors spread that the government was intent to resettle the al-Ghamr Arabs there. He said:

“At first, we did not believe these rumors. Later, however, we came to know they were true, as they brought the al-Ghamr Arabs. Homes were built, wells dug, and warehouses set up in the villages they had been brought to. They were also provided with all the

<sup>139</sup> The witness was interviewed in person on 8 December 2018 by STJ’s field researcher.

<sup>140</sup> Ajaneb is the plural variation of the singular noun ajnabi, which is the Arabic word for foreigner.

<sup>141</sup> The witness was ajnabi himself, namely a Kurdish person deprived of the Syrian nationality. However, he was granted citizenship in 2011.

necessary agricultural materials, loans and assistance —that is everything they needed to achieve stability in the region and embark on further land seizures. This prompted Kurdish peasants to rehabilitate the inarable stony terrains, determined to invest in them. To this aim, they ploughed these plots and cultivated them.

Nevertheless, the newly arrived al-Ghamr Arabs once again coveted the reclaimed areas and tried to seize them, claiming they were theirs. We confronted them and quarreled, which triggered the government to arrest five or six villagers, whom they deposited in the al-Hasakah prison for two months. The detainees were next transferred to the military court in the city of Qamishli for trials. There, the judge told us we were lucky. Our crime was grave, but a presidential pardon was passed, and it applied to us.”

Located in al-Hasakah province, the town of [Mustafawya](#) was one of the Kurdish areas subjected to massive land seizures by the Syrian government under the ‘Arab Belt’ project,<sup>142</sup> which covered nearly a 1,000 hectares of the town’s area, according to the witness Lazkin Amin,<sup>143</sup> born in this town in 1962. He said:

*“The people of the village were left with two choices: either immigrate from the country altogether, or invest in rugged stony lands, where sheep usually grazed, for most of the villagers owned cattle. They were thus forced to cultivate these rocky terrains to feed their cattle. They removed the rocks and stones with hundreds of agricultural tractors, until they were able to reclaim an area of 3 to 4 hectares each. Having prepared the rugged stretches of land for cultivation, al-Ghamr told them that the lands they already seized were small, so they confiscated these reclaimed lands, illegally however. They bribed officers and police stations. In fact, if the people of this village were not as forbearing as they were, hunger would have brought them to their demise. Furthermore, many of the villagers’ children moved to Damascus and other cities, picking up odd laborious jobs there.”*

The table below delineates the areas, in dunums, that the state seized from each village in Dêrik/al-Malikiyah region to build new ‘model villages’, to which they attached confiscated agricultural lands. It also reports the villages’ original names and their Arabised versions.

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142 The town is administratively affiliated to Dêrik/al-Malikiyah, particularly the Girkê legê district. Mustafawya is an ancient town, which today encompasses about 120 houses belonging to farmers.

143 The witness was stateless, deprived of the Syrian nationality due to the 1962 exceptional census. He was labeled ajnabi. Nevertheless, he was granted citizenship in 2011 under Decree No. 49. Furthermore, the witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 1 December 2018.



	Name of Established Villages	Gross Area	Area Granted Per Family	Families Displaced to New Villages	Villages, from which Model Villages were Established		
					Original Name	Arabised Name	Confiscated Area / D
1	Ayn al-Khadra	23847	150	159	Bane qesrê	Ayn al-Khadra	4770
					Ên bozaq	Ayn Bazouq	2520
					Xirbê Abid	Khirbat Obeid	2570
					Girê başot	Dair al-Balah	3517
					Kaniya Mitirb	Al-Kazimiya	600
					Ên dîwar	Ain Diwar	3000
					Mozerê	Al-Mansoura	1720
					Hebilhewa	Hab al-Hawa	1600
					Baxûs	Gaza	3550
2	Tal al-Sidiq	15823	150	105	Girê vira	Tal al-Sidiq	5020
					Carûdiyê	Al-Ismailiya	1600
					Xerab reşk	Swaidiya Gharbi	325
					Girê kera	Khirbat Adnan	3100
					Ezîziyê	Al-A'aziziya	507
					Hec Metrê	Aka	1500
					Gir dêmiyê	Al-Shamsiya	250
					Qeze Receb	Qaddaa Rajab	371
					Kanî kerkê	Al-Hassaniya al-Sharqiya	950
					Girkê Mîro	Tal al-Umaraa	2200

3	Al-Sihiye	14855	150	99	Ser Misaxa Jêr	Qalqilya	1100
					Wanîk	Al-Sihiye	1955
					Rûbarya	Ruheibe	8830
					Girkê Selma	Al-Safeh	1700
					Hiyake	Hiyake	1300
4	Mustafawya	25676	150	171	Mistefawiyê	Mustafawya	5180
					Gêrê	Al-Murtafi'a	2000
					Ser Misaxa Jêr	Qalqilya	4820
					Ser Misaxa Jor	Bustan	2626
					Banoka	Al-Firdaous	600
					Jêlika	Al-Jabriya	3950
					Delavê kera	Mraijat	900
					Kanya nebya	Nabi' al-Na-bi	1000
5	Tal A'war	27750	150	185	Kortepan	Tal A'war	4600
					Sêgirka Derho	Abu Obeida	1076
					Mûsa gewra	Um al-Ruman	552
					Kêşkê	Al-Hamraa	6507
					Gir denîk	Al-Hamidi-yya	2680
					Qerxo	Al-Ghasani-ya	1860
					Helêq	Halaq	325
					Girê dêra	Tal Muthri	3840
					Gulîca	Sinjar	16310
					Kanî kerkê	Al-Hassani-ya	7460
					Kortepan	Tal A'war	3000
					Elwanka ezam	Tal Umayya	1600
					Elwankê	Al-Tali'a	4254

6	Al-Hamraa	15735	150	105	Dêrûna qulinga	Dair Ayoub	2520
					Şîtika	Al-Yamame	1030
					Xerabê reş	Dair Hafer	2195
					Utbê	Utbe	3490
					Ale qewsê	Mushairfe	2750
					Bekîr oxlî	Abu Bakr	1850
					Salihîyê	Al-Salihiya	600
					Nebî sadî	Al-Nabi Sadi	1300
7	al-Jawadiyah	3327	56	60	Çil axa	al-Jawadiyah	3327
8	Shabak	8120	56	145	Şebek	Shabak	8120
9	Tal Alo 1	6788	54	125	Til Elo 1	Tal Alo 1	6788
10	Tal Alo 2	9288	54	172	Tilo Elo 2	Tal Alo 2	9288
11	Tokil	21540	150	143	Tokil	Tokil	7160
					Xuşêniyê	Khshaine	880
					Dêrûna qulinga	Dair Ayoub	10000
					Kêl hesenakê	Tal al-Hasanat	3500
12	Ma'shouq	16696	150	111	Maşûq	Ma'shouq	10085
					Qetraniyê	Al-Niftiya	2141
					Gir dêm	Tal al-Sayed	1725+2745

Scenes of the al-Ghamr Arabs being brought into the area are yet stuck on the minds of owners, farmers and their children, who can still recall which of these vast areas was his or in which he worked as a farmer. This knowledge turned into a legacy, passed down to children with long detailed narratives of what the displaced had to suffer back then. One of these was Ibrahim Hajji Nawaf,<sup>144</sup> from the village of Mustafawya, where he still lives. He narrated the following to STJ:

*“In late 1976, they moved the al-Ghamr to the village. It was winter, and they were brought aboard tractors, along with their possessions. They stayed in the village for about a year, until they were distributed lands. During their one-year stay, they planted lentils. Later on, the government took al-Ghamr and resettled them in a*

<sup>144</sup> The witness was interviewed in person by STJ's field researcher on 27 November 2018.



*village by the road, which they called al-Mustafawya al-Jadeeda (New Mustafawya). The village extended over an area of about 2000 dunums, even more. It is beyond calculation, for there were the rigid terrains, lands that the state confiscated under the 'State Farms' label, the lands of ancient peasants and the lands of the landlords. The area granted to al-Ghamr exceeded 1000 hectares. Nevertheless, we can still identify our lands."*

The Ba'ath government, that planned and implemented the 'Arab Belt' project, deliberately, but gradually, impoverished Kurdish peasants. Six to seven years prior to the project's implementation, the government first stripped them of the lands they cultivated, annexing these plots to the so-called 'State Farms'. These lands were then leased to the same farmers for rents that only grew bigger in time. With the advent of the al-Ghamr, the leased areas shrunk, as they were instead given to the people moved into the area. On their turn, Kurdish peasants were not allowed to protest any of these practices. Commenting on this, Sayed Taher Muhammad Amin al-Sheikh,<sup>145</sup> from the village of [Tokil](#) said:

*"The village of Tokil al-Ghamr was built in the western part of our area, separated from it by an asphalt road. There were no problems between us and the al-Ghamr or the government, because we did not object. We were actually afraid to protest or talk about the matter. Before the flooding, the lands were run by the state under the 'State Farms' label, for six or seven years. Then, they were handed over to the al-Ghamr, and we even started working for them. We were poor and had no lands to cultivate for six to seven years. We did not have a crust of bread to feed our children. Since the job was familiar to us and because we were impoverished, we opted for working for them."*

The village of Kaire,<sup>146</sup> al-Hasakah province, whose name was later Arabised into the town of al-Murtafi'a, suffered large scale land acquisitions, for Kurdish people's lands were being forcibly seized. The witness, Youssef Sayed Hassan,<sup>147</sup> born in the village in 1955, recounted that the Syrian government left the Kurdish farmers only 150 out of 1100 hectares of the Kaire village's total area. Recalling the incidents at the time, he said:

"In the past, our agricultural lands were in the hands of peasants and landlords. However, as the 'State Farms' [policy] was applied, part of the peasants' lands were confiscated. In 1974, the government brought in the al-Ghamr Arabs and handed them these lands, after they had remained part of the 'State Farms' for three or four years. When al-Ghamr took the lands, they invested in them till 1988. Once again, they said that their shares in the Kaire village were not sufficient, so they appealed to the government to have their complete dues. They robbed whatever lands the farmers were left with.

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<sup>145</sup> The witness was interviewed in person by STJ's field researcher on 26 November 2018.

<sup>146</sup> The village is administratively affiliated to Dêrik/al-Malikiyah, particularly to the Girkê legê district.

<sup>147</sup> The witness was interviewed in person on 27 November 2018 by STJ's field researcher.

Today, these lands are the ones owned by the Mustafawya al-Ghamr, encompassing the lands of 13 Kurdish villages. Even though only 30 or 40 al-Ghamr households live in the area, the Kurdish families in the village of Kaire, which grew in number, as some branched into 10 or 20 families, were all given one or two hectares of land only.”

Hassan believes that the Kurdish farmers in the town of Kaire/al-Murtafi’a were subjected to another grave injustice in 1988, when the al-Ghamr Arabs sought to confiscate more of the town’s lands. The town’s people, for their part, had repeatedly attempted to prevent these land seizures, but, with the constant support of the Syrian government, the al-Ghamr ended up victorious. He said:

*“Regarding 1988, I remember that it was marked with unrest, as a result of the al-Ghamr Arab’s desire to confiscate additional lands. I, myself, was one of the people arrested due to these lands. I was taken to the Criminal Department in the city of al-Hasakah, accompanied by a number of villagers. They released me later on. We spared no effort to stop the confiscations, but they were all to no use. We have even addressed the Regional Command of the Ba’ath Party, the People’s Council, and the Peasants’ Union, who all refused to hear us because we were the weak side.”*

The land seizures carried out in the al-Hasakah province went beyond the town of [Robariya](#), which back then was inhabited by about 2000 people, within an estimated area of 3,000 to 4,000 hectares. Furthermore, Robariya’s name was Arabised into the town of al-Rhaibe, according to witness Omar Haji Abdi,<sup>148</sup> who is a resident of this town. When the lands of Kurdish farmers were seized and 80% of the town’s area were forcibly confiscated, he reported, the farmers had nothing else but the stony terrains or wastelands, that they had to cultivate with the rather traditional plough. He added:

*“Under to the 1962 census, 60 to 70% of the people of Robariya village were stripped of their Syrian nationality. Later in the 1970s, particularly in 1976 or 1977, the al-Ghamr Arabs were displaced to our town. The government distributed lands to them. Our people, the owners of the land, were doomed to be miserable and impoverished in this village. Stricken with poverty, they were coerced to seek the rigid terrains, from which they removed stones or ploughed resorting to oxen and mules. Others chose to move to Damascus, Daraa, and Latakia, where they started working for other people, still serving them today.”*

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148 The witness was stateless, deprived of the Syrian nationality due to the 1962 exceptional census. He was labeled ajnabi. Nevertheless, he was granted citizenship in 2011 under Decree No. 49. Furthermore, the witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 7 December 2018.

The village of [Sermisax](#) was also severely affected by the ‘Arab Belt’ project, implemented in the al-Hasakah province. Furthermore, its name was later Arabised into al-Bustan, according to witness Sabri Ibrahim Youssef,<sup>149</sup> born in the town in 1975.

He gave an account of the initial confiscations of the lands owned by Kurdish farmers:

*“I was a middle school student. I still remember how the government summoned the al-Ghamr Arabs and brought tractors in 1988, and how they ploughed whatever areas they desired. In return, we told them either to kill us or to leave our lands alone. We then fought with government personnel, who started shooting, while we threw stones at them. In the aftermath, a number of the villagers were arrested, and they remained in detention for about four months. Five or six men from the town of Sermisax were then released and returned home. Worse yet, other villagers were displaced, hid somewhere for several days, unable to show up in the village, fearing arrest, as soldiers and police personnel were searching the village. They damaged everything on their way as they inspected the area. This is what I saw and lived. Regarding our lands, they are yet held by the al-Ghamr Arabs. They have confiscated our lands though several of them are not even in the village, but live in Raqqa and other places.”*

Six years after the first batches of the al-Ghamr Arabs arrived to the area, the Syrian government tried to seize the stony terrains as well, the only pieces of land it had left to the Kurdish farmers in the town of Sermisax/al-Bustan, which roughly amounted to 300 to 400 hectares. However, the government’s attempts failed, according to witness Abdulhamid Farman,<sup>150</sup> born in the town in 1963:

*“Every year, the Syrian government attempted to acquire new lands and give them to the al-Ghamr Arabs. Then, in 1988, a group of people came to the village, accompanied by a minister from Raqqa, and seized 150 additional hectares of the village’s lands. This prompted the villagers to confront them, believing that they were a group of al-Ghamr. Back then, we did not know that they were affiliated to the government. We clashed with them for an hour and a half, managed to defeat them, and smashed their cars down. They finally left the village. The next day, they returned, backed by a force from Deir ez-Zor, intending to fight us. We thus fled our village to neighbouring ones, where we stayed for 20 days. Nevertheless, we managed to preserve our remaining lands. As a child, I grew up knowing that the village is called Sermisax. My forefathers lived there, and we were the ones who established this village, about 75 years ago.”*

149 The witness was stateless, deprived of the Syrian nationality due to the 1962 exceptional census. He was labeled ajnabi. Nevertheless, he was granted citizenship in 2011. Furthermore, the witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 1 December 2018.

150 The witness was stateless, deprived of the Syrian nationality due to the 1962 exceptional census. He was labeled ajnabi. Nevertheless, he was granted citizenship in 2011. Furthermore, the witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 1 December 2018.



Sabri Ibrahim Youssef,<sup>151</sup> a resident of Sermisax, gave an account of the events that took place in 1988:

*“I was an eight-grader back then. One day, I got sick and was taken to a doctor. When we returned home, we were told there had been fighting between the people of the village and government officials. The people were throwing stones at them, as the officials fired in the air over the villagers’ heads. The people hit back. The officials wanted to arrest some of them to cut off their lands and give them to al-Ghamr. We stayed at home. In the evening, someone told us that government officials were planning to raid the village due to what happened. Therefore, my family, concerned for my safety, hid me in the wheat fields. It was harvest time. They took me there, accompanied by my uncle, who was old. Many elderly men and women went there. We stayed there, among the wheat stacks for about an hour or two before we could finally go back home.”*

He added:

*“In the morning, a person who worked in Rmelan area came to the village and said that the government had called in a force, planning to attack the village soon. He added that the people of the village must hide because they would come to arrest them. As a result, many of them fled, and those who could not run concealed themselves in wheat groves. As I was sick, I stayed at home, accompanied by many old people. We stayed there until they ripped open the door and made their way in. Among them was an officer who opened the door with a pistol in hand. Two soldiers came into the house and removed my blanket. One of them saw the medicines and the doctor’s prescription, so they left me alone, and they searched our house and wreaked havoc on our stuff. They finally left, after having arrested about six villagers.”*

The town of [Keshek](#), al-Hasakah province, whose name was later Arabised into the town of al-Hamraa/Hamra, also was not spared the land seizures that were carried out in accordance with the Agricultural Reform Laws, in addition to the al-Ghamr Arabs who were displaced to it later. Arafat Ramadan Hamo,<sup>152</sup> born in the town in 1958, narrated for STJ:

*“The land seizures in the town of Keshek, whose area is estimated to be about 1,000 hectares, started in late 1965. The Syrian government took over farmers’ lands and labelled them ‘State Farms’. We knew, especially the elderly, that this was political. They wanted to empty the ‘Ten Line’ — a 10 km strip from the Turkish border — of Kurds, so that Arabs would turn into a barrier between the Kurds of Turkey and the*

<sup>151</sup> The witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 27 November 2018.

<sup>152</sup> The witness was stateless, deprived of the Syrian nationality due to the 1962 exceptional census. He was labeled ajnabi. Nevertheless, he was granted citizenship in 2011. Furthermore, the witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 30 November 2018.

*Kurds in Syria. They wanted to rob them off their lands, and bring them to their demise, economically and geographically, as well as displace Arabs and resettle them in the area instead of us, seeking a demographic change. Therefore, they left us no land and our youth were dispersed to other regions. They abandoned the area, hundreds of thousands of them, to other provinces, such as Damascus and Aleppo. Some even went to Europe, all because of their misery.”*

In 1974, the Syrian government brought the al-Ghamr Arabs to the town of Keshek, reported Hamo, where they initially stayed in tents. There, Arabs and Kurds could not coexist, which prompted the al-Ghamr to choose a new destination, heading to either Çil Axa/al-Jawadiyah or Dhakhira. They built a new town called al-Hamra al-Jadeeda or Hamra - [Hamrat al-Ghamr](#). He added:

*“According to information we had, all the villages of al-Ghamr were built between Kurdish villages. To this day, these lands are at their disposal, while we were deprived of them even though we are the owners. Until now, a large portion of our people are still considered maktoumeen.<sup>153</sup> I know many maktoumeen families, who are not even foreigners. A foreigner can obtain an individual status record, but a maktoum cannot. Speaking of our status, we were stripped of nationality when the seizures took place, and I remember how we owned land in three different directions around the village. Each family had a piece of land according to how large or small it was. We owned three plots of land, and each plot was no less than eight hectares. They were all seized.”*

Hussain Ramadan,<sup>154</sup> another witness from the town of Keshek/Hamra, reported to STJ the land seizure and confiscation the Syrian government carried out in the town in 1960s, as it seized 800 hectares of lands, leaving Kurdish farmers with only 100 hectares:

*“When the government brought al-Ghamr Arabs into our town, the government officials told us that the dam’s water had immersed their lands, but this was not true. In time, we got to know that some of them were from the [al-Sefirah](#) area in the suburbs of Aleppo, and they were summoned under the pretext of the dam’s floods. The government applied the ‘Arab Belt’ to our area. We were thus either displaced, or turned into ajaneb, stripped of identity documents and citizenship. We were left with nothing and deprived of everything. In our ancient town, we all knew each other. All families were subjected to 30 to 40 hectare land seizures. Furthermore, in 1986 or 1987, al-Ghamr approached us and demanded additional plots of land,*

<sup>153</sup> Maktoumeen is the plural variation of the singular Maktoum/maktouma, meaning unregistered stateless people.

<sup>154</sup> The witness was stateless, deprived of the Syrian nationality and labeled ajnabi. Nevertheless, he was granted citizenship in 2011. Furthermore, the witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 30 November 2018.

*aiming at the stony areas adjacent to the river. As a result, there were turmoil and clashes, because these stony stretches were the only pieces of land we were left with back then. This is what the town bore witness to. To this day, they feed on the yield of our town's lands, while we are treated as mere guests."*

Due to the 1962 exceptional census, Ramadan added that he was deprived of the Syrian nationality for about 39 years, pointing out that he was not only denied all his economic and social rights, but also his land was forcibly confiscated. In 2011, his situation was normalized. However, the identity document he always dreamed of was only recognized in al-Hasakah province, while deemed unofficial in the capital Damascus.<sup>155</sup>

When al-Ghamr Arabs wanted to have additional lands in the town of Keshek several years into their resettlement, a fight broke out between them and the townspeople, according to witness Youssef Hussain,<sup>156</sup> born in the town in 1926. The Kurdish farmers' refusal was blatant, he said, adding that:

*"We told al-Ghamr Arabs that we would not give them our lands, even if it cost us our lives, for we toiled to remove the stones and make them arable. However, al-Ghamr's answer was that it is the government that granted them these lands. We clashed, but they had government officials on their side. I and a group of the town's men, saw a tractor coming to help al-Ghamr plough the land. The tractor had already ploughed one furrow when we rose to prevent it. Accompanied by two men, I stood before the tractor. In addition to the tractor, al-Ghamr had brought seeds from the Nabi Sadi village. Two Christian farmers were planting the seeds. We approached one of them and said: 'We have mistaken you for al-Ghamr and were about to hit you with stones'. We asked him to stop the tractor, and indeed he stopped it after a long debate."*

The next day, a lieutenant visited the Mukhtar of the Keshek town, saying that the matter was resolved and the lands will be granted to al-Ghamr Arabs, Hussain added, stressing that the Kurdish farmers were also determined to stick to their rejection:

*"The lieutenant told us that they would bring the tractor the next day to continue ploughing the land, and that we should not leave the town. So our response was: 'If you want the tractor to move around the land that much, it is better to let it pass over our bodies first. Then, the tractor can also use our bodies to plough it.' He said: 'Are you that powerful?' and we told him: 'You will see it yourself'. Indeed, al-Ghamr came with a tractor the next day. We went out, attacked and started beating al-Ghamr. We hit them with stones, as they attempted to cross the river. The government officials chased us. Some managed to escape, but six men were arrested and re-*

<sup>155</sup> The witness reported that his ID is unrecognized in Damascus because those who obtained the Syrian citizenship after 2011 under the Legislative Decree No. 49 were not registered at the Syrian Government Electronic Gate — an online database.

<sup>156</sup> The witness was stateless, deprived of the Syrian nationality and labeled ajnabi. Nevertheless, he was granted citizenship in 2011. Furthermore, the witness was interviewed in person by STJ's field researcher on 30 November 2018.

*leased the next day. What matters the most is that they were unable to take this land. Later on, the government passed an order, granting arable lands to the al-Ghamr and the stony terrains to the Kurdish farmers. The matter ended thus.”*

Hussain also commented on the way the Syrian government dealt with the Kurdish farmers:

*“The government always questioned farmers about the area they cultivated in the past and during the confiscations’ period. We explained every time that earlier on cultivation depended on the ploughs and the bulls and mules that stirred them, as each farmer planted lands according to his ability to plough, and each of us had five to six hectares. One, day, the government sent an official to inquire into the matter, and asked the farmers to gather at the town’s school. We refused to go there at first, fearing arrest, but we eventually had to go. I remember that when the official saw us, he said: ‘Come in, curse your fathers.’ Seeing that we could never give them the land, the government officials arrested 56 men and 6 women. We had clashed with them, even the women took part in that fight.”*

Recalling the details of that incident, Hussain added that the ‘detention center’ in the Çil Axa/al-Jawadiyah district could not accommodate the large number of detainees, who had been arrested at the town of Keshek. Thus, the officers transferred them to the horse barn, depositing the women in one side and the men in the other.

The town of [Shabak](#), in al-Hasakah province, also had its fair share of land seizures, with about 30 hectares. The confiscated lands were later granted to al-Ghamr Arabs, according to Hassan Khalaf,<sup>157</sup> born in Shabak in 1940:

*“When they first came here, al-Ghamr lived in tin and adobe houses, like the makeshift homes the displaced usually build, set up for them by the government. These houses were made out of stone, sand, or something of that sort. Earlier on, they were not allowed to build anything as they pleased. Then, they started to build whatever they wished, saying we were all brothers. Some of them even managed to establish huge buildings and blocks, but those who could not afford it continued just the way they had started.”*

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157 The witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 27 November 2018.



Raizan Khalil Maho,<sup>158</sup> another witness born in the town of Shabak in 1961, told STJ that when the Syrian government first brought al-Ghamr Arabs into his town, they initially seized about 13 hectares, that they reserved for construction works. In 1974, according to him, al-Ghamr sought to seize more lands, so the total area they confiscated at the time amounted to around 50 hectares, indicating that a number of the townspeople continued to pay the Syrian government rent for the lands taken from them and granted to al-Ghamr Arabs, in spite of all their appeals to the Agricultural Cooperative to exempt them from the rent at least. He recounted the following:

*“When the government brought al-Ghamr Arabs to the town, the construction contractors were all Kurdish from the area. They built the place, dug a well and set up a large water tank for al-Ghamr. They were building for them, while we, the owners of the land, were deprived of everything.”*

According to witness Suleiman Hajji Karro,<sup>159</sup> born in Shabak in 1946, the land seizures the Syrian government carried out in the town lacked all justifications. When the government first brought al-Ghamr Arabs to their town in 1973, he reported, it claimed they could not be settled in the border villages, and had to be transferred to the villages on the main road. He added:

*“They brought al-Ghamr to the town of Shabak, allegedly to irrigate the lands around the Çil Axa/al-Jawadiyah dam. The government also granted them lands seized from the villages of Kinjo, Tal Alo, and Khirbat Bajar. From the town of Shabak, they confiscated an area of 13 hectares, dedicated to housing al-Ghamr Arabs. The situation being thus, the townspeople decided to redistribute the lands among them, dividing thus the confiscated areas as well. However, the villagers continued to pay the rent for the lands they were left with, each according to their pre-confiscation area.”*

The fate of the Mousa Koureh /Mousa Kourh village, in al-Hasakah province, was not very different from that the Shabak town suffered. According to witness Abdi Hajji Fateh,<sup>160</sup> born in the village in 1959, Mousa Koureh’s name was Arabised into Um al-Ruman, from which 300 hectares were confiscated by the Syrian government in 1963, leaving the remaining plots primarily to landlords, and very little stretches to the farmers. He said:

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158 The witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 8 December 2018.

159 The witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher in mid-December 2018.

160 The witness was stateless, deprived of the Syrian nationality and labeled ajnabi under the 1962 exceptional census. Nevertheless, he was granted citizenship in 2011. Furthermore, the witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 30 November 2018.

*“In 1976, al-Ghamr Arabs were brought to the region, and were handed over our seized lands. A group of them settled in the towns of Çil Axa/al-Jawadiyah, others in the al-Hamra Junction or in the town of Tal A’war. Al-Ghamr who settled in the town of Tal A’war were the group granted our lands in the village of Mousa Koureh/Mousa Kourh. In 1997, once again, al-Ghamr came to seize our stony lands. [I resisted the confiscation] and was thus detained at the Çil Axa/al-Jawadiyah prison for about 20 days. They demanded that we leave them our stony plots, which we refused to do. We managed to keep both the stony and the rocky lands.”*

Ismail Fattah Ismail,<sup>161</sup> another witness born in the village of [Mousa Koureh](#)/Mousa Kourh in 1962, was one of the farmers who saw their land being confiscated and granted to al-Ghamr Arabs summoned by the Syrian government from other provinces:

*“After restrictions were imposed on landlords, regarding the amount of property they could own, the state first seized lands under the label ‘State Farms’. For instance, Arab landlords in the Twaimen area possessed thousands of hectares, similarly the Arab landlords in the Amo Kar region owned lands extending over an area of 500 to 1000 hectares, but no seizures aimed at their areas. Arabisation was exclusively applied to Kurdish regions, seeking to obliterate the Kurdish identity and harm the Kurds. To this day, we are people who have a cause, who still cling to their land. We are determined to tell our children the truth of what happened, and they in turn will tell our grandchildren, for what happened to us is unacceptable. Even the names of our villages were changed. The name of our village is Mousa Koureh/Mousa Kourh, which Gamal Abdel Nasser, then the Ba’ath regime, changed to Um al-Ruman. They always targeted the Kurdish regions.”*

The Kurdish farmers in the town of Kharab Rush, whose name was later Arabised into Dair Hafer, were also severely affected by the ‘Arab Belt’ project in the al-Hasakah province, where the Syrian government confiscated about 900 hectares of the town’s area. Only 360 hectares were left to the farmers, according to witness Muhammad Shareef Barhak,<sup>162</sup> born in the town in 1962. He recounted the following:

*“In 1976 and 1977, I saw with my own eyes how the government brought al-Ghamr Arabs to our town, and how they were flocking by trucks to the villages around us. Al-Ghamr took our land and left us no rights, knowing that some of the lands they were given were not even cultivated, and they actually did not need them. The people of the town, on their turn, all immigrated due to their dire economic conditions. This*

<sup>161</sup> The witness was stateless, deprived of the Syrian nationality and labeled ajnabi under the 1962 exceptional census. Nevertheless, he was granted citizenship in 2011. Furthermore, the witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 30 November 2018.

<sup>162</sup> The witness was stateless, deprived of the Syrian nationality and labeled ajnabi under the 1962 exceptional census. Nevertheless, he was granted citizenship in 2011. Furthermore, the witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 30 November 2018.

*is an intolerable injustice. And here we are, raising our voices to all humanity and those who can give us our rights back. I still remember how al-Ghamr once dared to sprinkle poison across the lands. We filed a complaint to the district's director, but al-Ghamr's response was that: 'We will sprinkle the poison whenever it pleases us'. Back then, our chickens also died. To tell the truth, regarding this particular incident, the district's director was also on our side and said: 'We told you to poison field mice, not to sprinkle it around the villages'. We, thus, collected the poisoned chickens, put them in bags, and took them to the police station. In reality, even animals did not survive al-Ghamr's doings."*

## B. Qamishlo/al-Qamishli Region

The table below delineates the areas, in dunums, that the state seized from each village in Qamishlo/al-Qamishli region to build new 'model villages', to which they attached confiscated agricultural lands. It also reports the villages' original names and their Arabised versions.

	12	Gross Area	Area Grant- ed Per Family	Families Displaced to New Villages	Villages, from which Model Villages were Established		
					Original Name	Arabised Name	Confiscated Area/D
1	Al-Manaz- ra	24750	150	165	Girdêm	Tal al-Sayed	4000
					Alcreşê	Al Raushi	9660
					Otilce	Al-Thalja	3090
					Qtraniya jêrî	Qantara Foukani	6500
					Qtraniya jorî	Qantara Thahtani	1700
2	Al-Hara- moun	21600	150	144	Tîl xatûnkê	Al-Khatounki	6192
					Mizgeft	Wahrân	6460
					Melle Ebbas	Mulla Abbas	1800
					Xizêmok	-	2800
					Qubik û Mî Diham		4348

3	Al-Qa-htaniya	16950	150	113	Tirbesipiyê	Al-Qahtaniya	11350
					Dirêjîkê	Al-Marj	1500
					Tîl berhem	Tal Barham	1800
					Nesran	Tal Nassran	1300
					Miherkan	Mahrakan	1000
4	Hlewa	25200	200	126	Hilwa	Helwa	4980
					Dugir	Al-Darak	1180
					Miherkan	Mahrakan	1700
					Hasûd	Qutba Foukani	3140
					Rûtan	Routa	2610
					Zorava	Zorava	3800
					Girkê Şamo	Kerki Shamo	5000
					Tîl Cîhan	Tal Jihan	400
					Tîl Bişk	Tal Bishk	335
					Tîl Şihîr	Tal Sha'ir	1500
5	Al-Ta-nouriya	30600	200	153	Xuwêtla jorî	Khwaitle Foukani	555
					Tenûriyê	Tanouriya	6390
					Xezna biçûk	Khazne Zaghira	825
					Xezna Mezin	Khazne Kabira	11200
					Buwêra	Buwaira	2050
					Xirêçka	Khraijka	1250
					Qere Hesen	Qara Hassan	2730
					Şorîk	Showrik	1815
					Tîl Xernûb	Tal Kharnoub	1700
					Tîl Birêş	Tal Braish	1380
					Xirbê Xelîl	Kherbat Khalil	1280



6	Um al-Fursan	31000	200	124	This will be explained separately		
7	Himo	30600	200	170	Hîmo	Himo	100 <sup>163</sup>
					Girê fêris	Al-Faris	12850
					Nicim	Al-Qoura	4540
					Demxiya mezin	Damkhiya Kabira	4100
					Inbara	Enbara	3050
					Niqare	Naqara	2700
					Herem Şero	Haram Sherow	1685
					Elîfero	Al-Halabe	1675
8	Al-Thawra	6800	200	34	Tîşîira Şêxan	Shaikhan Tal Sha'ir	3000
					Xerab kortê	Kharab Kourt	3800
912	Al-Ha-temiya	22400	200	112	Heremê Şêxo	Al-Hatemiya	1680
					Herem reş	Al-Haram	2825
					Bilêqiyê	Al-Baqaa	2040
					Çoldara	Al-Shajara	700
					Elîfero	Al-Halabe	7155
					Topiz	Al-Haniye	3200
					Birîva	Al-Adnaniya	2000
					Şerîflo		2800
10	Um al-Rabi'	12400	200	62	Moza	Tal al-Mal	7100
					Sêmitikê jorî	Abu al-Howl	1500
					Birîva	Al-Adnaniya	400
					Gulica	Waridah	1200
					Hasda jorî	Hassdah	2200

163 This area was reserved for construction work, namely the village's property.

11	Al-Bahira	21800	200	109	Hemdûn	Hamdouni	5520
					Mihêrîk	Mi'airik	2900
					Tîl Hebeş	Tal Habash	4900
					Marît	Dair Mari	2530
					Qezembûk	Qertasiye	2800
					Uwênîkê	Al-Ewaine	1883
					Dîkê	Dikiye	427
					Qijlê	Al-Qa'la	750
					Soxana jorî	Um al-Bassal	90
12	Al-Jabriya	20800	200	104	Xasîkê	Al-Khassah	4791
					Kodîh		1820
					Qerengoz	Ayn al-Ass-wad	2424
					Eynqirdê	Ayn Qerd	2250
					Xanîkê	Dar	270
					Qijlê	Qa'la	750
					Eynemşa	Ayn A'mmsha	725
					Uwênîkê	Al-E'wainch	1880
					Tor Ilyas	Tour Ilyas	1250
					Îtêşan	A'taishan	4730

The area allocated to the new village of Um al-Fursan was located between the two regions of Qamishlo/al-Qamishli and Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn. Each of the families resettled in the village was granted 100 dunums,<sup>164</sup> seized from villages in al-Qamishli, and 150 dunums, seized from the villages in Ras al-Ayn. The new village's area thus amounted to 13.000 dunums, about 10 hectares, in the first region and 18.000 dunums in the second. The total area was 31.000 dunums confiscated from the following Kurdish villages:

<sup>164</sup> Smaller than a hectare, a dunum is a unit of area measure. It was first used under the reign of the Ottoman Empire, and is still in use in areas once affiliated to it. The area covered by dunum differs from one region to another, but the most common area equivalent is the one used in the Levant, where a dunum amounts to 1000 m<sup>2</sup>, while a dunum in Iraq, for example, amounts to 2500 m<sup>2</sup>. It is reported that a dunum amounted to 919.3 m<sup>2</sup> prior to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after WWI, and after its collapse, the dunum measured 1000 m<sup>2</sup> during the British Mandate.

Qmishlo/al-Qmishli Region			Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn Region		
Village Name		Confiscated Area/D	Village Name		Confiscated Area/D
Nî'matli	Nametiye	3000	Tal A'rman Janoubi	Til Ernan başûr	18000
Diyo	Deyyo	2000	Tlaile	Tilile	
Da'doushiya	Dadûşiyê	1500	Ozinja	Ozince	
Jerkou	çirko	650	Khirbat Fraisa	Xirbe ferîse	
Jokha and al-Shaikh Ujail	Cûxa û Şêx Icêl	1875	Tal A'rman Shamali	Til Ernan bakur	
Dubane	Dibanê	3025			
Junaidiya Saghira	Cinêdiya biçûk	225			
Junaidiya Kabira	Cinêdiya Mezin	150			
Tal Braish	Til birêş	500			
Rashwaniya	Reşwaniyê	75			

### C. Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn Region

Upon addressing the land seizures suffered by landlords in the region of Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn, it is essential to refer to the two largest families that were deprived of their lands, namely Assfar and Najjar and Ibrahim Pasha al-Melli. The official seizure report indicates that the Syrian authorities confiscated 2.400.000 dunums of the area owned by the two families. It is noteworthy that it is an approximate area that the report records, because the exact area of the two families' property was not yet defined and parts of their properties were located in the provinces of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. In addition to land seizures, several agricultural machines were confiscated. A document, obtained by STJ, also shows that 436.800 hectares of each of the two families' properties were confiscated under the seizure order dated 29 May 1959, which was published in the official newspaper, issue No. 43 on 27 February 1960.

محضر تعديل مؤمن في ١٦ / ١٠ / ٧١ لمحضري الفز والتجنيد النهائي المؤمن  
في ١٦ / ٧١ للأراضي المستولى عليها بقرية ديشو رقم ١١٧١

ان اللجنة الفرعية للاستيلاء والفز والتجنيد المشكلة بقرار السيد محافظ الحسنة رقم ٤٢٢ / ق  
تاريخ ٢٢ / ٧ / ٧٠ والمؤلفة من السادة :

١- عبد اللطيف خايس  
٢- مازن عبد الحميد  
٣- صاموئيل دانيال  
٤- صالي حسين  
٥- حسين كاطع

رئيساً  
عضواً  
مندوب دائرة المساحة  
= حزب البعث العربي الاشتراكي  
= اتحاد الفلاحين

#### أولاً : النصوص القانونية والتعليمات النافذة :

يحد الانعقاد على احكام قانون الاصلاح الزراعي رقم ١٦١ / لعام ١٥٨ المعدل بالمرسوم التشريعي رقم ٨٨ / تاريخ ٢٣ / ٦ / ٦٦٣ والمرسوم التشريعي رقم ١٤٥ / تاريخ ٣ / ١٢ / ٦٦٦ -  
واللائحة التنفيذية رقم ١٧ / تاريخ ١٧ / ١ / ٦٦٧ والتعليمات النافذة بهذا الخصوص لا سيما  
القرار ٤١ / تاريخ ٢٩ / ١ / ٦٦٧ والبالغ المام لوزارة الزراعة والاصلاح الزراعي رقم ٢ / ستراريح  
١٥ / ٢ / ٦٦٧ المتعلقين باستيلاء والتعليمات رقم ١٨٥ / ستراريح ١٨ / ٢ / ٦٦٧ -

المتعلقة بالفز والتجنيد والتجديد والعبادة  
ويحد الانعقاد على محضر الاجتماع المؤمن في ١١ / ٥ / ٧٠ المصدق بكتاب وزارة الزراعة والاصلاح  
الزراعي رقم ١٢١٤ / ستراريح ٨ / ٦ / ٧٠ مؤمن فز وتجنيد الأراضي المستولى عليها البعلية  
بمحافظه الحسنة تمهيدا لتوزيعها ، وعلى محضري الفز والتجنيد النهائي المؤمن في ١٦ / ٢ / ٧١  
الذي انشئت لجنة الاعتماد وعلى قرار لجنة الاعتماد بالقضية رقم ٤٣٥ / من محضر اجتماعها رقم  
٨ / تاريخ ٢٨ / ٦ / ٧١ المتضمن قبول الاعتراض وفز المساحة المستولى عليها في البعثة الجنوبية  
من القرية بالمعار رقم ١ / وامتنار المحضر مستندا بحد تمديله على هذا الاساس .

#### ثانياً : وفي الأراضي المستولى عليها قبل الفز والتجنيد :

ويحد الرجوع الى اشارة الدالكن المشمولين باحكام قانون الاصلاح الزراعي والذين صفيت ملكيتهم  
حسب القانون المذكور واكتسبت المحاضر الممناعة قبلهم الدرجة القلعية باعتمادها من اللجان  
المختصة حسب الاصول تبين بأنه قد تم الاستيلاء على المساحات التالية :

#### المساحة المستولى عليها

اسم المالك السابق	رقم العقار	سقي	يحل	غير مستثمر	ملاحظات
اصفر وجيار	١	-	٥٣٦٨٠٠ هـ	بموجب محضر الاستيلاء المؤمن	
آل الياشات	١	-	٥٣٦٨٠٠ هـ	٢٩ / ١ / ٥٩١ والمنشور بالجريدة الرسمية العدد ٤٣ / تاريخ ٢٧ / ٢ / ٦٦٠	

Image no. (41) – This exclusive document, obtained by STJ, records the areas seized by the 1959 UAR government, of which 536.5800 hectares originally belong to Assfar and Najjar family and 536.5800 hectares belong to the Pasha al-Melli family. The confiscated lands are classified as unirrigated lands, but not as uncultivated, located in the Dishow village, rural Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn. Furthermore, the document cites Resolution no. (432/S), passed by the governor of the al-Hasakah province on 22 July 1970, providing for the formation of the so-called Seizure Sub-Committee. According to the document, the seizures were legally grounded on the Agricultural Reform Law No. 161, passed in 1958, and its subsequent amendments.

The documents listed below, also obtained for STJ's exclusive use, report the number and the area of villages confiscated under the Agricultural Reform Law and the orders of the Accreditation Committees founded by the subsequent Syrian governments. The cited villages are all owned by Ibrahim Pasha al-Melli, Al al-Bashat/al-Bashat family, in the suburbs of al-Hasakah province, particularly in the areas where the family lived in Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn.



## ٢١ - إحصاء في دور لاجئين

من الرجوع إلى سجلاتنا سنجد أنه إحصاءات لاجئين يملكون حق اللجوء في سوريا

المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
عزبة ٢٩٥	٤١٤,١٠٠٠	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
عزبة ٢٩٦	٤٧٤,٠٠٠	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
عزبة ٢٩٨	٤٤٧,٠٤٦٤	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
الناصرة ٢٩٩	٥٢٥,٠٠٠	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
شمار ٤٠٠	٥٤٢,٠٠٠	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
الساعة ٤٠٤	٤٤٥٨,٠٠٠	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
التيه (عزبة) ٤٠٧	٥٤٠,٠٠٠	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
شمار صغير ٥٢٩	٤٩٢,٠٠٠	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
برج ٥٤٠	٤٥٠,٠٠٠	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
تق ٩١٧	٤٠٦,٠١١	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
تق ٩١٨	٤٧٦,٥٤٥	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
تق ٩٤١	٦٢١,٤٧١٤	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
ساحة حربي ١١٥٨	٩٩٠,٧٥٠	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
ساحة عبد العزيز ١١٥٩	٤٥٤,٤٦٥٠	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
ساحة عمر ١١٦٠	٩٩٨,٩٤٥٥	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
ساحة عبد الرزاق ١١٦١	١٤٦٥,١٤٠٠	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار
ساحة توري ١١٦٤	٧٦٤,٥٠٠٠	المنطقة الجغرافية	رقم القرار

١٥,٦٦٦٨	١	١١٨	أبو جازة صبر
١٠٨٦,٩٢٢٩	١	١١٩	مكتبة
٢٩٨,٤٤٥٠	الطالب	١١٩١	بالوجه
٢٤١,٥٩٠٠	٥	١١٩٢	نيل منير
١٩٠٨,٢٨٠٠	٥	١١٩٤	صبري شفا
١١٤٩,٠٠٠	٥	١١٩٥	السلامة
٢٨٩٦,٤٦٠٠	٥	١١٩٦	دعينة
٤٦٠,٧٩٥٠	٥	١١٩٧	مؤدية
٥٩٢,٥٨٢٥	٥	١١٩٨	خربة هجو
٦٩٤,٧١٥٠	=	١١٩٩	أمنيات
١١٠٥,١٦٠٠	=	١٢٠٠	السلامة
٤٨٤,١٠٥٠	٥	١٢٠١	نبرج
١٤٨,٢٧٠٠	٥	١٢٠٢	مؤدية
٩٢,٥٦٧٥	=	١٢٠٣	فيلد
١٤٤,٤٦٠٠	٥	١٢٠٧	م. الفع
٥٧٦,٦٤٠٠	٥	١٢٠٨	خربة عاملة
١١٠٢,٦٠٠٠	٥	١١٦٥	خربة قلبية
١٩٨٤,٠٠٠	١,	١١٦٦	سلامة رقة
٧٨٤,٦٩٥٠	الطالب	١١٦٨	نوميل
٥٥٥,٥٤٠٠	١,	١١٦٩	صالة
٥٤١,٢٠٢٢	١	١١٧٠	وصف

مقدار	١٥٨٤,١١٠٠	بالطاهر	طريقه الحنفية لجنوبه ١١٧٢
س	١٦٧٤,٤٠٠٠	س	طريقه الحنفية لجنوبه ١١٧٤
س	١٦٧٤,٤٠٠٠	س	تقويم عمر ١١٧٥
س	٧٦٤,٠٤٠٠	س	طريقه الحنفية ١١٧٦
س	١٢٥١,٦٠٠٠	س	بزر ابو جليل ١١٧٧
س	٥٧٤,٨٤٨٠	١	البوفا ١١٨٠
س	٨٠٥,٨٤٥٠	١	تقويم ١١٨٢
س	٢٤٠,٢١٧٥	س	بزر عطيه ١١٨٤
س	٤٠,٤٤٤٩	٤٤	ابو لصوص ١١٨٦
س	١٩٦٦,٢١٠٠	بالطاهر	الحرفه ١٢٠٩
س	٤٤٢٤,٧٤٥٠٠	س	بزر ديبانه ١٢١٠
س	٥٩٤,٤٠٠٠	س	سكان نعيم ١٢٢٤
س	٦٧٥,١٥٩٤	س	عنه نعيم ١٢٢٥
س	٢٦٥,٢٨٦٧	س	عنه صفيه ١٢٢٦
س	٥٩٩,٩٧١٠	س	ابو حوده ١٢٢٧
س	٤٥٨,٤١٠٠	س	طريقه شيعه ١٢٢٨
س	٤٢١٧,٧٤٠٠	س	بزر ديبانه ١٢٤٤
س	٨٤٨,٠٤٠٠	س	طهسم ١٢٤٢
س	٤٤١٤,٤٩٢٤	س	الطاهره ١٢٤٤
س	٤٥٦١,٤١٢٤	س	موضع ابراهيم و اسحاق ١٢٤٦
س	١٤٩٠,١٠٦٧	س	جليل الاغا ١٢٤٨
س	٤٢١٠٠٠٠		



Image no. (45)

In an interview with STJ, lawyer Muhammad Ibrahim Pasha al-Melli stressed that the family's lands extended from the city of Serê Kaniyê/Ras al-Ayn and the Tigris River in the east to the southern and western parts of the Ayn Safra village, deep in Raqqqa province, as far as the al-Zaidi village, from where they continue reaching the Turkish borders in the north. Other family properties covered parts in Deir ez-Zor province, "at the tripoint of the three provinces of Jazira, Deir ez-Zor and Raqqqa. The first land confiscation incident was carried out in 1958, followed by another in 1963, and finally in 1967. The whole range of the seized lands, amounting to 400.000 dunums, were then handed over to The Libyan Company and Arab investors or otherwise labeled 'State Farms', which were granted to the al-Ghamr Arabs. The lands we willfully distributed to our Kurdish people were all confiscated and granted to Arabs only."<sup>165</sup>

165 Abdul Samad Dawood: "Arab Belt in Jazira, Syria (Qamishli- Syria, issued by the Kurdish Party of Yekiti in Syria, 2nd edition 2015, page 207.



	New Village	Gross Area	Families Displaced to New Villages	Original Villages, on the Lands of which New Villages were Established (encompassing lands from different villages)	
1	Tal Tishreen	27500	120	Tilêlûnê	Tal Tishreen
				Hewaşiyê	Hwashkiye
				Xenamiyê	Ghanamiya
				Rihiyê	Rihya
				Ebo Cîradê	Abu Jrade
2	Al-Qu-neitra	21500	102	Şêx Mensûr	Shaikh Mansour
				Qermaniyê	Al-Qurmaniya
				Gir Beşk	Tal al-Attas
				Ber Gevirê	Bir al-Hajar
3	Al-Qa-irawan	23500	135	Talikê	Dhaile
				Şîfçet	Shafqa
				Hac Oxli	Hajj Oghli
				Tewratê	Al-Twara
				Tali'a	Ta'a
				Gir Kund	Tal al-Bulbul
4	Dahr al-Arab	20500	103	Aliya	Aliya
				Tewratê	Al-Twara
				Rehmanî	Rahmaniya
				Coxa	Jokha
				Xezna	Khazna
5	Al-Assadiya	23750	95	Mişêrfê	Mushairfe
				Tewratê	Al-Twara
				ifçetŞ	Shafqa
6	Barqa	13570	57	Mubarek	Mubark
7	Tal al-Haddara	16800	55	Til Helef	Tal Halaf
8	Tal al-Haddara 2				
9	Tal al-Arqam	7160	22	Enqere	Ankara
				Ebo Sof	Abu Souf
10	Muthana	11700	93	Ezîziyê	Al-Aziziya

11	Al-Mu-tanabi	5980	19	Mextelê	Mukhtale
12	Um Izzam	7000	23	Um Enqer	Um Aunqur
13	Al-Inadiya	18206	66	Tel Xinzîr	Tal Khanzir
14	Al-Rawiya	27000	87	Sehrîc	Sahrîj Shikya
				Selacî	Al-Salaji
15	Al-Dahmaa	24900	83	Xirbe Dixêm	Khîrbat Dghaime
				Aq ziyaret	Aq Ziyarat
16	Hanadi	26100	85	Mebrûka	Mabrouka

## 11. Losses of Al-Ghamr Arabs and the Empty Promises of Hafez al-Assad

With the implementation of the Euphrates Dam project, the Arab al-Wilda clan, that inhabited most of the lands flooded by the artificial lake, in addition to the population in other villages that the project did not cover, were doomed to suffer critical losses. Although Hafez al-Assad made generous promises to the clan's sheikhs, they had to pay a significant price to move out of the area. Sheikh Shwakh al-Borsan lost about 37.000 hectares of unirrigated lands and 7.000 other hectares of irrigated lands. To a large extent, similar land losses were inflicted upon both Sheikhs Suleiman al-Mabrouk and Omar Muhammad al-Jum'a. Additionally, with the blessings of the government, the area's farmers took over the sheikhs' remaining lands, and divided them among themselves. Loss was not limited to land, for the clan's people left behind them water pumping generators, agricultural tractors and other machines, as well as power generators, that were all taken over too.<sup>166</sup>

The dam project also had a significant societal cost, for the clan's people lost their social incubator as they moved to new surroundings, where they were not welcome. The settlers could not feel at home in the Jazira province, nor consider themselves the true owners of the lands they were granted. To the day, the uprooted clan's people continue to grapple with a sense of isolation from other Arabs, who historically inhabited the region.

<sup>166</sup> Qusai Abdulbari, "He Made 'Abu Suleiman' a Promise: Details of the Forgotten Story of al-Ghamr Arabs" (in Arabic), Eqtsad, 4 December 2018, <https://www.eqtsad.net/news/article/22932/>, (last visit: 20 September 2020).

The resettlement had another vicious dimension to it, for the displaced clan's people were either coerced into or at times voluntarily embraced and engaged in the mechanisms of the state's discriminative policies against the Kurds. As the resettled Arabs were mobilized against the Kurds and several of them were turned into security and partisan tools, skepticism and mutual lack of trust overrode the relationship they had with their new neighbors. The chasm grew bigger when some settlers sought help from government to confiscate additional plots of the Kurdish farmers' lands.

It was not until the early 1980s that al-Ghamr Arabs started to bury their dead people in their new area of residence, up to which they kept burying them in Raqqa. Furthermore, al-Ghamr were not allowed to vote or run for the elections of the People's Council or the Local Administration till the 1990/1991 electoral term. Many of them returned to their original areas, built homes there, and showed up only in autumn to plant the seeds and in early summer to harvest the yield and claim its revenues, according to Ibrahim Hamoud al-Hazem,<sup>167</sup> one of the people resettled in the village of Wanki, Arabised into al-Sihiye:

*"Not all the resettled people were affected by the dam project. In the village, there are about 102 houses, but they are not all inhabited by the resettled families. Some travelled to Lebanon due to poverty, others returned to Raqqa, others still have never lived here, visiting the village at the harvest time, only to claim the crops' money and then going back to Raqqa, where they have farms, worth billions." Justifying the settlement process, al-Hazem added: "The lands we own here are in fact 'State Farms', which the state took over and passed to us."*

Having conducted an investigation about the status of the state-owned lands in the eastern provinces, published in the state-affiliated Tishreen Newspaper on 29 March 1973, the Syrian journalist Ahmed Mardini explained:

*"We all know that al-Ghamr, that is the people whose lands were immersed by the floods of the Euphrates Dam, had benefited from the lands of the al-Hasakah province as a compensation for the lands they lost. They are entitled to do so, since the matter is related to such a great project as the Euphrates Dam. However, the strange thing is that a large proportion of these people [al-Ghamr] did not inhabit the new areas in al-Hasakah province they were granted the right to use. These people have rather returned to Raqqa province to benefit from the projects initiated there, including al-Hasheem well, while also attempting to benefit for the third time, under the names of their sons, of the Maskanah Sharaq project."*

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<sup>167</sup> The witness was interviewed in person by STJ's field researcher on 7 December 2018.

Before it brought them into the area, the government made the al-Ghamr Arabs generous promises that their new life would thrive with comfort and privileges. However, Ibrahim Hamoud al-Hazem reported the shock that seized al-Ghamr upon their arrival:

*“When we first came here, the living conditions were extremely poor. We lived in tents, moving between the villages of Kasan and Zuhairiya, among other areas. We made ends meet taking up jobs as laborers or depending on the harvest season. When the crops were abundant, we would feed on them, and then we would borrow money to survive until the next harvest season. That was our life. Regarding the lands the state granted us when we were displaced, the order passed by the Ba’ath Party’s command provided that we were to be given 150 dunums each, but they gave us only 90 dunums, for there were not enough lands to seize the other 60 dunums. We are still waiting for their promises to materialize.”*

Commenting on displacement and the dire housing conditions, particularly in the beginning, as well as the promises the Ba’ath Party made, Ali Hussain Abdullah,<sup>168</sup> born in Raqqa in 1943 and one of the al-Ghamr people resettled in the Wanki village, on the lands of which the al-Sihiye Model Village/Settlement was built, shared:

*“When we arrived in the village, I was married and had children. We had a rough life in the tents, especially as black sneaks proliferated. We endured miserable conditions that no one can imagine but those who lived them. We built houses of brick and adobe, but they collapsed when it rained. We were broke, and our life was bitter, until finally tin roofs arrived, and we felt a little relieved. The government was supposed to compensate each of us with 15 hectares, but it gave us only 7.”*

Ibrahim Hamoud al-Hazem, born in Raqqa province in 1967, came to the Wanki/al-Sihiye village in al-Hasakah province along with his family. The Syrian government, he said, promised to grant his family 150 dunums, but eventually only gave them 90:

*“I was a first-grader when I came to the village. We sought the area after our lands were flooded by the Euphrates Dam’s water. Our civil records are still kept in the Civil Registry Department in Raqqa. We applied to the authorities to transfer our records and prepared all the needed documents, but they did not approve the procedure. When we arrived here, the conditions were poor. We lived in tents, moving between Kasan and Zuhairiya villages, among other areas. To make a living, we worked as laborers, or waited for the harvest. When there was yield, we would have food. Then, we would again be waiting for the next harvest season. Every time, the government would promise to give us more dunums. But to the day, the government*

168 The witness was interviewed in person by STJ’s field researcher on 7 December 2018.



*did not grant us the remaining 60 dunums. Today, we only own 90 dunums, part of which is gone, dedicated to the Airbase the U.S. built. Families were thus left only 45 dunums. There are about 102 houses in the village, not all of them inhabited, for many families have travelled to Lebanon stricken by poverty or returned to Raqqa.”*

Al-Hazem pointed out that some families did not even move from Raqqa province to al-Hasakah, even though they have lands in the latter province. They only show up at the harvest season, bringing food as well, to avoid having to buy it here. After they claim the crops' money, they return to Raqqa once again. Some of these absent families, he reported, have lands that are worth billions in Raqqa province:

*“The government granted my father 4.5 hectares. We are three families— mine, my father's and my brother's. How are we supposed to divide these lands? Each of us would barely have 7 dunums. The lands we own here are originally ‘State Farms’ the state took over and then passed to us.”*

Hajji Jum'a, another witness born in Raqqa province in 1968, had also settled in the town of Wanki/al-Sihiye in 1976. He confirmed the account provided by the previous witness and narrated that some of Raqqa's people, who were granted agricultural lands, do not come to the area unless it is the harvest time:

*“When we came here [al-Hasakah province], I was a first-grader. The state built us five villages: Hamra, al-Jawadiyah, Tal A'war, Shabak, and Tal Alo. Each family was given 150 dunums of agricultural land, and we still depend on these as a source of living. We also make a living through other means, like working as laborers or getting employed. Some of al-Ghamr still live in Raqqa and visit the area only at the harvest time. When we were first displaced, there were around a 100 families, while today we amount to 400 families. Some of these families are here [al-Hasakah province], some in Qamishli and others are in Raqqa. As for the civil records, we are basically registered in Raqqa, and we can either transfer the records to al-Hasakah or keep them in Raqqa.”*

Echoing Jum'a's account, Muhammad al-Safi, another witness born in Raqqa in 1945, who was later resettled in the Tokil al-Ghamr town, explained that the Syrian government was not fair in its treatment of al-Ghamr Arabs and did not fulfil the promises it made them. While they were supposed to get 15 hectares each, his seven-member family was granted only 75, and promised to be given the rest of the lands later.

Going by a pseudonym, Hazim al-Jism, born in Tokil al-Ghamr town in 1990, recollected the hard living conditions suffered by several of al-Ghamr Arabs, who were brought into the al-Hasakah province. His family was uprooted from the city of Raqqa in the 1970s, he reported, and was granted 100 hectares in the Tokil town as a compensation for their lands, that had been affected by the Euphrates Dam's floods:

*"We could not make a living by cultivation only, for our family was large. My father was married to two women and had 13 children. This pushed us to pick up some odd jobs. My brother and I headed to Lebanon seeking to work. My other brothers, however, started working in the city of Çil Axa/al-Jawadiyah."*

Also choosing to go by a pseudonym, Abdulrahaman Mustafa, born in the Tokil al-Ghamr town in 1981, said that numerous Arab farmers had a miserable life after they were brought into al-Hasakah province for compensation:

*"We had to find other sources of living besides agriculture, due to our dire conditions. Even though the government granted us 130 hectares, lands do not always yield crops. The cultivation might be fruitful one year, but it may not be for years. The lands we were given were way less than the government promised. Each family member was supposed to be compensated with 150 dunums, but all we got was 1.300 out of the promised 1.950 dunums."*

Using a pseudonym, Ahmad al-Ra'i, born in Raqqa in 1970 and one of al-Ghamr Arabs who resettled in the Ma'shouq al-Ghamr/Ma'shouq al-Jadeededa since 1976, said that they managed to coexist with the area's people for the whole past years, and that they never had any disputes with the Kurdish farmers.

## 12. Unfair Compensations

According to several eyewitnesses and Kurdish farmers interviewed by STJ for the purpose of this report, the Syrian government compensated a number of Kurdish farmers, who held Syrian citizenship, granting them lands located in the regions of the second and third rainfall lines in the al-Hasakah province. However, these did not compare to the confiscated lands in term of productivity. For example, the yield of each of the hectares confiscated in Keshek town equals the yield of five hectares in the areas given to Kurdish farmers as a compensation for their seized lands. In other villages, the yield of each confiscated hectare equals that of 10 hectares granted to farmers in the second or third rainfall lines.

As for the stateless Kurdish farmers, who were deprived of the Syrian citizenship under the 1962 exceptional census, they were not repatriated and were left with no lands. In some exceptional cases, where farmers resorted to mediation, Kurdish farmers from the Keshek/al-Hamraa village were granted lands located on the third rainfall line in the town of Tash, al-Hasakah province. Obtaining these lands depending on intermediaries, they were demanded to pay a rent of about 700 Syrian pounds per hectare, while Kurdish holders of the Syrian citizenship had to pay only 200 Syrian pounds per hectare.

It is important to mention that out of the 27 eyewitnesses that STJ's field researcher interviewed, 16 Kurdish farmers were stateless and labeled ajaneb under the 1962 exceptional census when the 'Arab Belt' project was being implemented. However, they were all granted the Syrian citizenship in 2011 under the legislative Decree No. 49.

### **13. Persistent Deprivation Policies and Partiality of the State under Hafez al-Assad's Rule**

at the onset of the 1980s, a group of al-Ghamr Arabs started complaining about 'shortage of land', intending to convince the Syrian government to grant them additional areas of land. They focused mainly on the plots already reclaimed by the Kurdish farmers, who in turn were deprived of ownership over lands as Law No. 161 was put into effect, especially in the region of Dêrik/al-Malikiyah.

Consequently, in the 1980s, a second round of land confiscation was applied to the village of Qaztepan/Qastepan, Arabised into al-Hamidiyya, in rural Dêrik/al-Malikiyah, the village of Tokil, affiliated to Çil Axa/al-Jawadiyah district, and the village of Sermisax, affiliated to Girkê Legê /Ma'bade district.

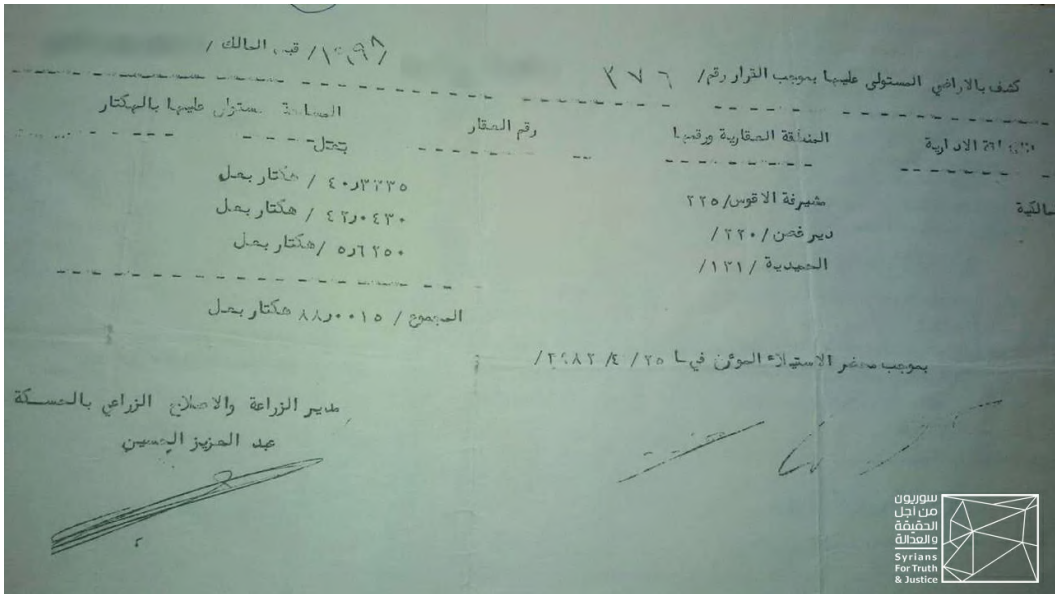


Image no. (46) - The document, obtained for STJ's exclusive use, reports the Syrian government's confiscation of lands owned by Syrian Kurds under a seizure ordered, passed on 25 April 1982. The confiscations were carried out in the villages of Alaqous/Mushairfe, Dairna Agha/Dair Ghuson, and Qaztepan/Qastepan/al-Hamidiyya in Dêrik/al-Malikiyah. The confiscated areas, according to the document, totaled over 88.000 hectares, which were all unirrigated plots of land. Credit: A member of the Al Mir'i/ Mir'i family.

#### 14. Al-Ahmadiya, the Last Built 'Model Village'

Around the end of the 1970s, the al-Ahmadiya village was built on the land of four villages confiscated on an area of about 21.000 hectares: Qara Kharâb, Shamsiye, Ma'amra and Qasrouk. The village of Qara Kharâb belonged to the Ismail Ahmed family, while the other three villages belonged to Munier Diyab al-Hourani, the minister of economy of the Fawzi Selu-led government, the lands of which al-Hourani had bought from Nayef pasha and Fatah Abdulkarim, who were the Jazira region representatives at the People's Council.<sup>169</sup>

In the village of al-Ahmadiya, the government resettled al-Zubaid Arabs, an offshoot of the al-Jabour clan, who were mostly from the Jar Bajar village, located about 3km south of Çil Axa/al-Jawadiyah, and a number of Christians from the village of Khaniyek, the last village on the Syria-Iraq borders. The settlers were granted lands confiscated from the villages of Kar Zaireen, Qasrouk, Qdairik and Kasan. The resettlement was ordered by the secretary of the al-Hasakah branch of the Ba'ath Party. About 40 families were displaced to the new village, of which less than 20 continue to live in the area to the day.

<sup>169</sup> Mr. Hussain Sharbati, a resident of the original Zuhairiya village, where his father was a farmer, reported to STJ online in May 2020. Other sources told STJ that Nayef Pasha had run for the elections, but did not win. Fatah Abdulkarim, for his part, had lands in Ain Diwar village and was its mukhtar.



## 15. Bashar al-Assad following in his Father's Footsteps

Two decades into the 'Arab Belt' project, the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform issued the Letter No. 1682/MD on 3 February 2007, which provided for resuming the redistribution of the lands labeled as 'State Farms'. Indeed, on 8 June 2007, the Agriculture Provincial Directorate sealed contracts under which 5.600 hectares of the lands in Kharab Rushik, Karirush, Kerkimiro, Qadirbaik, and Qazar Jub, rural Dêrik/al-Malikiyah, were granted to 150 Arab Families in the al-Shadadi region, south of al-Hasakah.

The provisions of the letter were met, even though the Regional Command had passed Resolution No. (83) in February 2000, ordering the liquidation of the 'State Farms' and the redistribution of the lands they encompassed to a prioritized list of the employees who worked at the departments of the 'State Farms'.

Back then, the [Defend International Organization](#) launched a campaign: "Against any Ethnic Belts in the Middle East: The Ethnic Belt in al-Hasakah and Dêrik". The campaign addressed the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) to press the Syrian authorities to cancel the resolution, to refrain from passing such similar resolutions and to stop the implementation of the 'Ethnic Belt' plan in the al-Hasakah province. It also demanded that the state distribute lands impartially to the region's people, treat all citizens equally and without any forms of discrimination, as well as to allow all minorities within the Syrian borders to register their ownership over properties under their own names.<sup>170</sup>

## 16. Societal Repercussions of the Demographic Change Projects

The repercussions of the discriminative projects, including the ones that aimed at demographic change, were not only political, but also psychological and societal. These projects laid the ground for mutual skepticism, mistrust, rancor and hatred between key components of the areas in northeast Syria, including Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians and Circassians. Gradually, the sons of the resettled people were assigned as local officials in the branches of the Ba'ath Party or security services.

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<sup>170</sup> Widad Akrwai, "Against any Ethnic Belt in the Middle East: Part I" (in Arabic), Modern Discussion 1994, 1 August 2007, <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=104577> (last visit: 21 September 2020).

In the following account, the writer Walid Abdulqader,<sup>171</sup> from the city of Dêrik/al-Malikiyah, reports two incidents that took place during the initial phase of resettling “Arabs from Central Syria” in the region:

*“My father’s preoccupation with politics was the reason why we all had interest in the issues of the region where we were born. His release from detention corresponded to the rise of the UAR and the enforcement of the Agrarian Reform Law, as well as the leaks that largely circulated on the regime’s intention to change the demographic structure of the region back then. The issue was presented to us in the most horrible and terrifying terms, and we always imagined that they [the Arabs] were coming to our region to evict us from our homes and seize our properties, including my father’s shop.”*

Walid also pointed out to the women brought from Salamiyeh and how they dressed very differently from the region’s women, especially Kurds, Christians and some of the families that were originally from Aleppo. Estranged, the Kurdish children would often call them out as: “Arabs, Arabs! From Salamiyeh!”

However, the turning point in Walid’s life was in 1963, when the Fahed al-Sha’ir-led Yarmouk Forces, affiliated to the Syrian regular army, were mobilized into the region to help the Iraqi government combat the Kurdish revolution in the Iraqi Kurdistan:

*“It was around 9:00 am. We were on our way out of Mulla Khalifeh’s place, who used to teach us Quran. His house was on the opposite side of the sole mill in the town. We saw a group of the Salamiyeh women, wearing their traditional attire, which had already become familiar, each accompanied by a child or more. They stood on the pavement, as several trucks loaded with women, children and elderly passed, coming from Iraqi Kurdistan.”*

They grabbed pebbles and stones from the ground and started throwing them at the passengers, who back then were seeking refuge in Syria. I can still remember the refugees’ looks as the trucks approached us, many bleeding. On our side, a man stood, he was one of the town’s original inhabitants. I remember his features very well and the way he wore a white scarf over his head. He came closer to us, we were children. Looking at the women from Salamiyeh and their children, he said:

*“These people are Kurdish from Iraq. Here, you have got enough stones to make these women behave. We actually started throwing stones at the women and the children, until they retreated into the mill.”*

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171 The witness was interviewed by STJ’s filed researcher in May 2020.

## 17. Conclusion

Since the 1930s, successive governments in Syria contributed to an integrated system of racist ideas that worked against the formation of a state in which the society's various ethnic components are well integrated and enjoy equality.

This provoked social divisions cooked systematically by the Ba'ath party since seizing power in 1963 through demographic change projects, including the 'Arab Belt', which was initially met with little resistance from the al-Ghamr Arabs and later gained growing acceptance from a cross-section of the Syrian people, among them elites and opponents who did nothing to prevent its implementation, and even ignored it completely in their literature and political programs, citing that it was a matter for the Kurds alone. The Syrian opposition, represented by the Coalition and its political and military arms (the Syrian Interim Government and the National Army), legalized the seizure of the Kurds' property in areas occupied recently by Turkey in Afrin, Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tell Abyad, as verified by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and other international organizations.<sup>172</sup>

That led to the disintegration of the Syrian people into sub-statist structures and impeded the draft of an inclusive political project, which can ensure genuine equality of rights for all to reach the hoped-for state of citizenship.

We desperately need to 'forget historical errors', since 'forgetting' can be one of the most crucial factors to create a nation, if it was based on fair compensation, as described by Renan. We should review the Syrian history and dive in the racist policies imposed by the Ba'ath government, which made components of the Syrian society unable to coexist or integrate under a law which equally represents the interests and protect the rights of all persons without any discrimination.<sup>173</sup>

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172 "Syria: Civilians Abused in 'Safe Zones'", HRW, 27 November 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/27/syria-civilians-abused-safe-zones> (last visit: 4 September 2020)

173 Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?", translated by Hasan al-Shami, Nazwa Magazine, issue 34, April 2003.

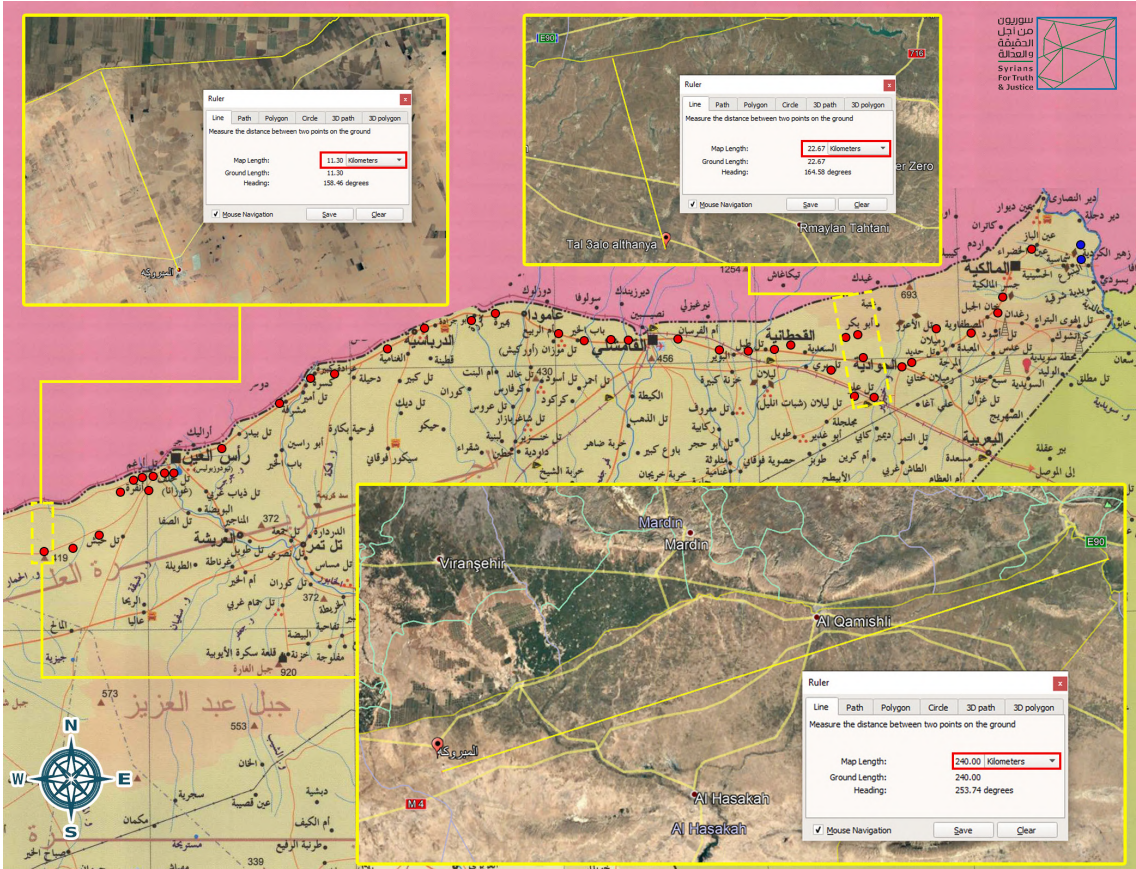


Image no(47) The square in the upper right shows the distance between the village of Tal Alo Tehtani - found in the context of the so called ‘Arab Belt’ project - and the Syria-Turkey border (to the north), and it appears to be 22km.

The square in the upper left shows the distance between the village of Mabrouka, located in rural Ras al-Ayn/ Serê Kaniyê, and the Syria-Turkey border, and it appears to be more than 11km. The distance from the village of Mabrouka to the Syria-Turkey border in the far northeast calculates 240km if measured in a straight line.