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The Arab American Way: The Success Story of an American Family from a Syrian Village in Global Diaspora

by Anton Escher

Nowadays, it is possible to encounter people who are able to trace their roots back to Arab countries in almost every nation of the "New World." That also includes approximately four million citizens of the United States, who live primarily in large metropolitan areas and in the eastern part of the country. Taking a large family and the associated clan of this group as an example, it is possible to show how Arab migrants, dispersed all over the globe, associate the different underlying conditions in countries of democratic America.

Fig. 1: Arab population in the Americas

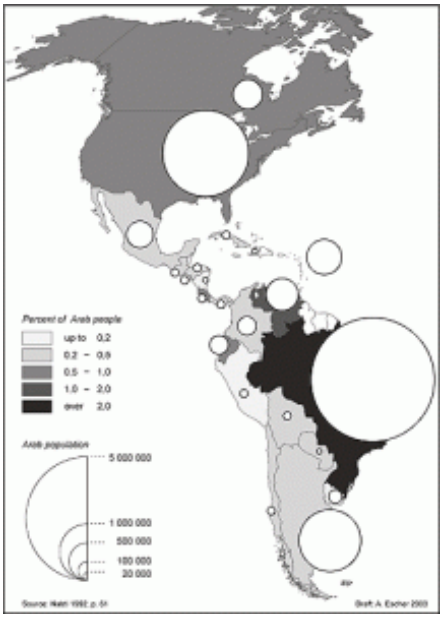

Fig. 2: Arab American population in the U.S.

The group of Arab Americans [1]—a collective term for Arabic-speaking people and persons of Arab descent in the U.S. majority society—is very diverse and fragmented in terms of ethnicity. This can be seen in the self-description of Helen Samhan, who is the Executive Director of the Arab American Institute:

Arab Americans are as diverse as the national origins and immigration experiences that have shaped their ethnic identity in the United States, with religious affiliation being one of the most defining factors. The majority of Arab Americans descend from the first wave of mostly Christian immigrants. Sharing the faith tradition of most Americans has facilitated their acculturation into American society, as did high intermarriage rates with other Christian ethnic groups. Even though many Arab Christians have kept their Orthodox and Eastern Rite church (Greek Catholic, Maronite, Coptic) affiliations, which have helped to strengthen ethnic identification and certain ritual, their religious practices have not greatly distinguished them from the Euro-centric American culture. Roughly two-third of the Arab population identifies with one or more Christian sect. (Samhan 1)

The Arab immigrants, who arrived in the United States at the end of the 19 th century, and especially the immigrants after World War II, cling fast to the day-to-day traditions that they brought with themselves in spite of their ethnic diversity. "The shape and intensity of ethnic identity varies widely between the first and second waves of Arab Americans. For all generations, ethnic affinity is resilient in food, extended-family ritual, and religious fellowship" (Samhan 1). Moreover, there is a tendency among some ethnic groups of Arab Americans to isolate themselves socially:

Those immigrating since the 1950s and most Muslim families are likely to relate less with the white majority culture and more with subcultures in which religious, national-origin, and language traditions are preserved. For those who live in ethnic enclaves, intra-group marriage, and family businesses often limit outside social interaction. (Samhan 2)

Today, two-thirds of the Arab Americans in the U.S. have embraced Christianity, while barely one quarter is still Islamic. The lion's share of 70% of Arab Americans comes originally from the Levantine countries Syria and Lebanon. Taking a large family and the associated clan of this group as an example, it is possible to show how Arab migrants, dispersed all over the globe, associate the different underlying conditions in countries of democratic America with their traditions of family through a diaspora organization and leverage the opportunities of different societies for their prosperity and their success. [2]

The Syrian Family of Fares Hadeed on the Caribbean Island of Antigua

Antigua is an island in the West Indies, which was once known for its sugar and tobacco production. Nowadays, it relies almost exclusively on sailing tourism and tourists from cruise liners. The official Internet page of Antigua's and Barbuda's tourism authority describes the culture of its society as a "mixture of African, European, American and Middle Eastern culture" (Government of Antigua and Barbuda). Only 0.6% of the island's approximately 69,000 inhabitants are Syrian and Lebanese. Despite the marginal share of the population, the Syrian inhabitants have a major significance for the island. The immigration of Syrians to Antigua is very recent, dating back to just the 1950s. By the 1970s, several dozen Syrians had moved to Antigua. Since then, the number has increased steadily. Today there are between 475 and 500 people of Syrian descent on the island as permanent residents. The Syrians are primarily involved in the import business and have managed to establish themselves in academic professions. They distinguish themselves from the island's other inhabitants through their native tongue, Arabic, which they use in addition to the official language, English, and through their clothing and many other cultural practices. This is evident especially when looking at their marriage and travel behavior, as the Syrian consul explains:

99% of the young generation, they marry Syrians. … I have three nephews, who get married and they go to Syria abroad two, three, maybe four times from their childhood, and every time they go there, they make friends. … Well, two of them, they find girls that they can get married to and they get married to Syrian girls and they have the wedding in Syria [sic]." (unpublished interview)

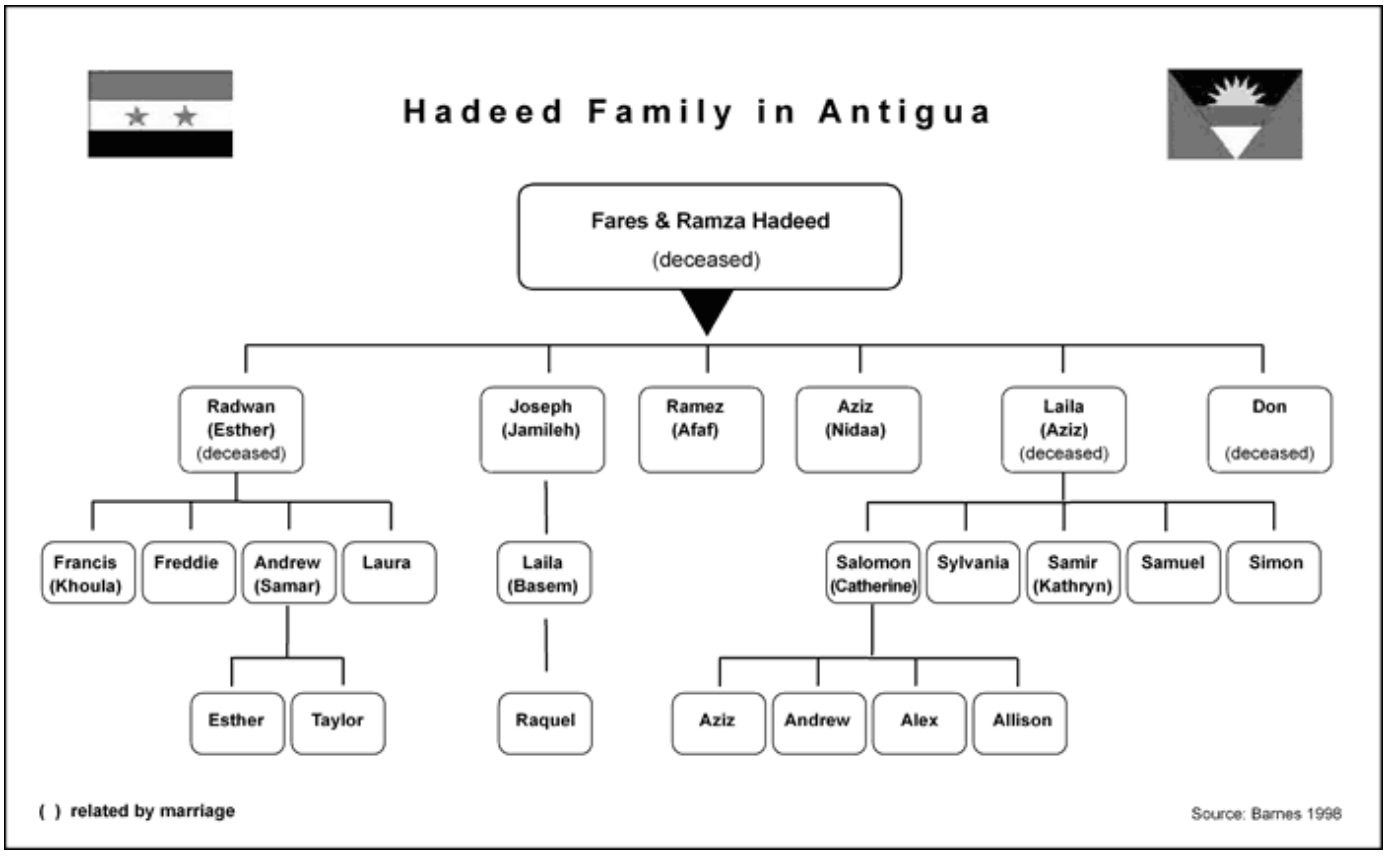

Fig. 3: The Hadeed Family in Antigua

Nowadays, the phone and especially the internet are even more important for the networking between different locations than traveling. The most successful Syrian family, Fares Hadeed, includes—after the death of the founding father—twenty persons of three generations and enjoys an exceptional position on the island (see Fig. 3). “The Hadeed story is a success story!” says everyone who deals with the family. The founder of the family, Fares Elias Hadeed, was born in Amar al-Hosn in Syria in 1911. He got married at the age of 28 and moved abroad in February of 1952, leaving behind his wife and six children ranging between six months and eleven years in age. Like many Syrian Christians from villages of the al-Hosn region, he first immigrated to Venezuela. From 1952 to 1954 he dealt with groceries. Then he moved to Jamaica for one year, followed by six months in Guyana, two years in Barbados and six months on Trinidad and Grenada. Everywhere he went, he encountered relatives and acquaintances from his home village, the al-Hosn region or Large Syria. They lent him aid and assistance and helped him to get his foot in the door to the New World. Nevertheless, he was dissatisfied with all the opportunities to earn money and continued to look for a place that would offer him better prospects for success. In 1958, he arrived with his son in Antigua for the first time and took up a door-to-door salesman job, which is relatively common for Syrian immigrants (cf. Nicholls and Plummer). “Mr. Hadeed, with his valise of goods traveling through the countryside, became a familiar figure and he became well-known in all the villages. He took the merchandise which the people needed to their door.” (Barnes, 25)

The traveling salesman is described as a kind-hearted businessman, who not only catered to the wishes and needs of his customers but also knew their problems and was always willing to grant them credit, which at that time was not extended to the colored population who made up 90% of the inhabitants. In 1960, he established a “Furniture Factory.” This was the first step to the subsequent family-run corporation. Over the years, he also invested in other sectors:he organized his own bank “Finance & Development Co. Ltd.” to finance the loans for potential customers of his own automotive dealership “Hadeed Motors Ltd.,” he invested in real estate (“Marble Villas Development Co. Ltd.”), and became involved in tourism by investing in hotel complexes and in the regional aviation industry. While the economic success of the family can be attributed to many factors, all those involved primarily cite the importance of the family. The family stands up for all of its members over all other values and needs of individual family members: “One of the hallmarks of our family’s success has been our togetherness over the years. That family bond is precious to us all and it is something we do not take lightly,” explains a daughter of Hadeed. “United we stand, divided we fall,” explains a family member while describing the most important imperative of American society.

Rituals and traditions have been established to ensure that family relations are upheld and preserved. In addition to that, there are publications about family get-togethers and anniversaries. The publications contain family photos, biographies and family trees (Barnes and Hadeed). Several members of the extended family have extended their self-portrayal to the internet for economic purposes. Celebrations are always joint affairs and not individual occasions. All activities, such as education of the children, choice of professions, and formation of companies, are decided by the family with attention to its overall interest.

One of the most important strategic and economic principles of the Hadeed family was practiced early on by the founding father: “As a businessperson, if you can’t live with the people, you can’t make it. From the very beginning, we socialized with the people. We lived their lives; we lived with them. We had no flair” (Barnes, 4). This strategy guaranteed the acceptance of the Hadeeds by the local residents, since they did not appear as “colonial” masters but rather as equals. This is also evident in the choice of their business taking care not to get involved in sectors or activities where they would have competed with the local population. In a publication commemorating the company’s 25th anniversary, the managers of the family stated: “It is a family policy that we do not touch whatever the locals can do. We never went into supermarkets or food trade because we consider that is for locals. We focus mainly on what is not available on the island in terms of businesses” (Barnes, 7).

One of the oldest and most influential of the supporters of the regime is the Hadeeds, a family of Syrian origin who have lived in Antigua for more than 40 years. The family have even reportedly loaned the regime substantial sums of money to pay bills including wages to government employees. The Hadeed Group now owns car dealerships, petroleum products, electronics assembly, financial institutions, construction, an airline and tourist development as well as control of Antigua’s electricity supply. The Hadeeds were recently granted a lucrative contract to build a

government office complex. Bird (*Prime Minister of Antigua)* appointed Aziz Hadeed as an ALP senator in 1994 and Hadeed was also appointed chairman of LIAT, the regional Caribbean airline which is majority controlled by the Hadeeds and the government. Aziz Hadeed's brother, Ramaz is Antigua and Barbuda's ambassador to the Middle East.

What a useful thing it must be, to own your own country!

Text box 1: Excerpt of a critical Internet text regarding the political influence of the Hadeed family in Antigua. Source: http://pub17.ezboard.com/fdiligizerfrm6.showMessage?topicID=487.topic

Guided by the perspective of their own judgment, the managers of the family-run corporation have understood the need to let the locals feel as if they were supporting the people through their involvement. "We do not interfere and we do not compete (in areas) we consider to be for the local or small man attempting to raise himself up in business. We assist them, but we do not compete with them" (Barnes, 14). This sophisticated approach proved to be a winning strategy. Even the division of tasks between generations within the Hadeed family seems to function like clockwork. The Hadeed family has also been very successful at holding political posts,such as the Antigua and Barbuda ambassador to Arab states, member of Antigua and Barbuda's parliament, honorary consul for Arab states to Antigua and Barbuda, and honorary consul of Arab states to Trinidad and Tobago. These political offices give the family control over the migration between Arab states and the Caribbean islands (see text box 1). The basis of this success, as the consul does not fail to mention, is the family: "And all, in Antigua they live like one family!" The Syrian Fares Hadeed family on Antigua is very closely integrated into the large Hadeed clan with all their social, economic and political contacts. The clan traces its origin back to Hanna Hadeed from Ramallah, which is now part of today's Palestine. According to the family's collective memory recorded in a documentation of the family's history, which was published to mark the last family get-together on July 14, 2001, their ancestors wandered through several stations before settling in the Syrian village Amar al-Hosn. "The Hadeeds," as the clan likes to refer to itself, nowadays live primarily on Caribbean islands and in the United States (see Fig. 4). Most members of the clan live in Trinidad, where many Syrians and Lebanese begin their lives in the New World before traveling to other locations. There are numerous Hadeed families living on the small island of Antigua and several families on the islands of Grenada and Jamaica. Allentown, Pennsylvania, is also the home of Hadeed families and thus an important location for the global village community of emigrants from Syria's Amar al-Hosn. The remaining family members live in Oregon, Pennsylvania, California, Arizona, Illinois, and Texas (see Fig. 2). The Hadeed relatives in Trinidad and Jamaica as well as in the U.S. are also able to boast noteworthy economic successes (see, e. g., text box 2). For the family in Antigua, the clan represents a higher-level unit of communication in the New World. In this case, they rely on the common language and especially on the common ancestry from the village, from the al-Hosn region and/or from the former Greater Syria (Bilad es-Scham), which comprises the current nations Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel.

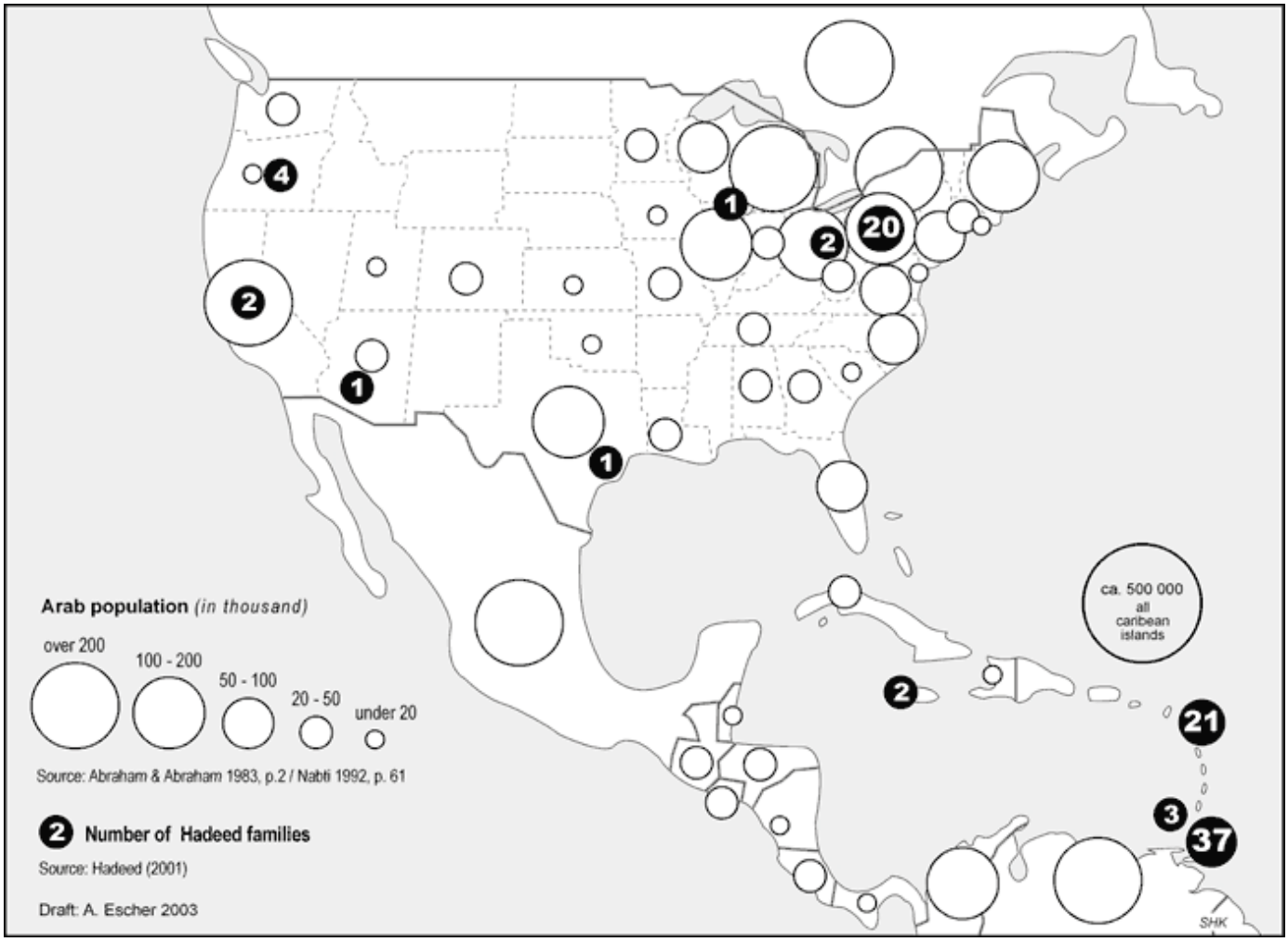

Fig. 4: Arab population and the Hadeed families

HADEED, Ray, Business Executive, President Serv-Wel since 1960. Executive Chairman General Consultants and Insurance Brokers Ltd., R. E. H. Investment Ltd., Rosa Investment Ltd., Hadeed Holdings Ltd., Financial Investment Management Services Ltd. Director Century National Bank, Serv-Wel Electric, Serv-Wel Marketing Co. Alumina and Steel Products. Serv-Wel Precision Tools, West Indies Shipping Co., Jamaica Industrial Development Corporation, A & S Services Co. Organizations: Life Director Jamaica Manufacturers Association; U.S. Business Club. Born: Syria, February 21, 1921, son of Elias Hadeed, Farmer, and Sophia. Educated: Omar High School. Denomination: Presbyterian. Married: Rose Hannon, April 29, 1945; 1 son, 2 daughters. Interests: Hunting, Reading. Address: (business) 8 Ashenheim Road, Kingston 11; Tel. 923-6036; (residence) Manor Court, Kingston 8.

Text box 2: Online self-portrayal of a member of the Hadeed family living in Kingston, Jamaica
Source: http://www.discoverjamaica.com/gleaner/discover/whoswho/hnames.htm

Amar al-Hosn, the Center of The Network, a Village in the Syrian Arab Republic

The entire network of the Fares Hadeed family includes, in its opinion, members of the Hadeed clan, other families from the village of Amar al-Hosn, all Syrians from Wadi Nasara, and other Arabic-speaking persons who have been "integrated" into the network of relatives for different reasons, mostly economic ones. In the course of the 20th century, the home village of these Syrian families has evolved into a factual and imaginary center of the worldwide network, which is in part controlled via the center of the emigrants in Allentown, Pennsylvania. The village plays an exceptional role for the diaspora community as the real point of origin and as virtual nodes.

The village Amar al-Hosn is located in the typical Mediterranean landscape with its stunted tree and bush formations. Besides the small village core with its winding streets and small houses, the village is now dominated by two large hotel complexes and the shell of a hotel. The large and spacious buildings with restaurants and swimming pools have apartments only with multiple bedrooms for families. Several old houses in the village core

have been developed extensively and spacious villas are now popping up along the cliffs of the mountain.

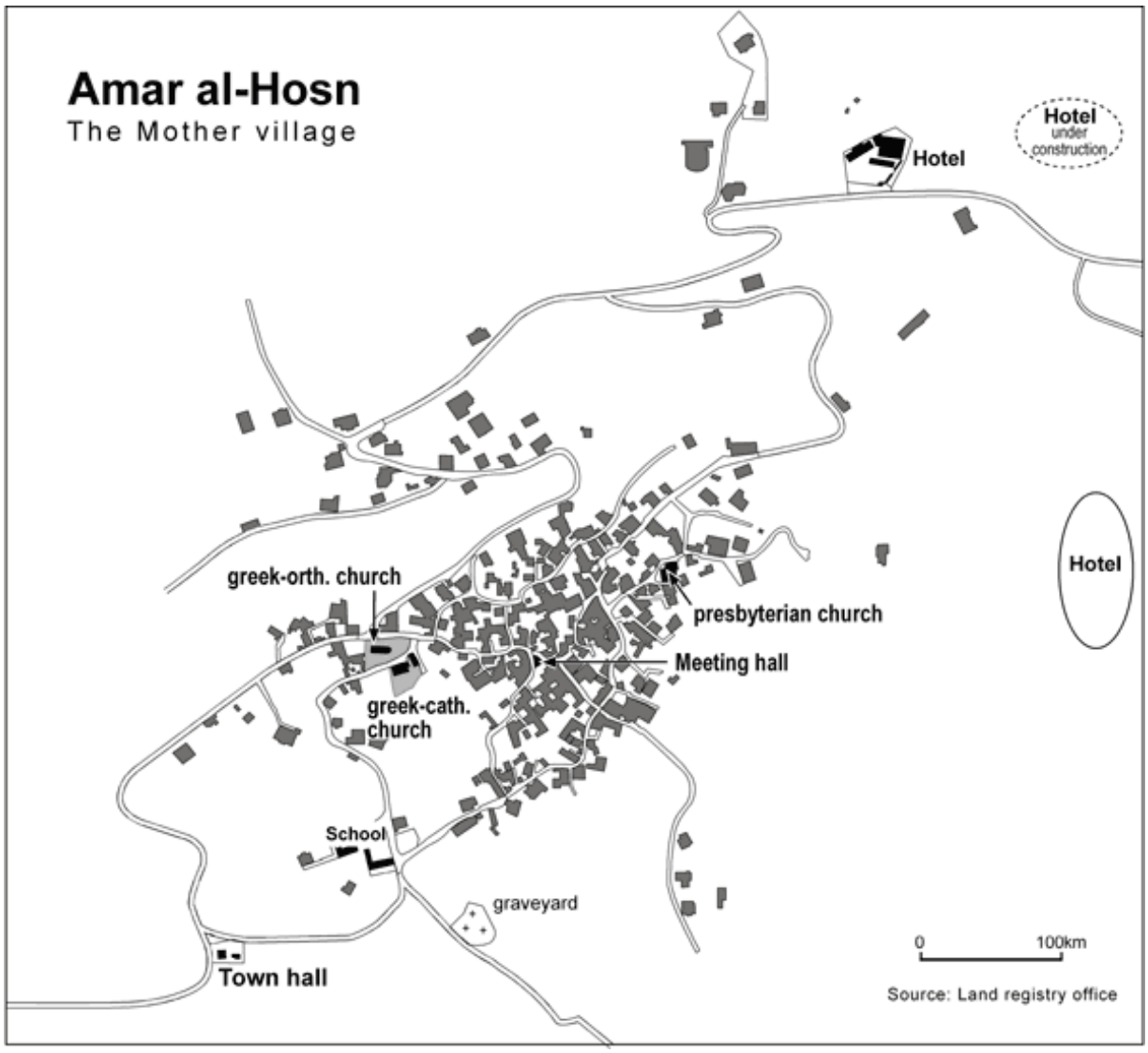

Fig. 5.: Map of Hamar al-Hosn

The village core includes a Greek Orthodox church and a Greek Catholic church as well as a Presbyterian church (see Fig. 5). In 1950, the village still had a population exceeding 2,000 inhabitants. Today, in the first decade of the 21st century, there are scarcely 400 persons living there during the long winter months. By comparison, from June to August, the number of people staying in the village is frequently larger than 2,500.The seasonal residents from the region and overseas visitors come to stay in the village. At this time, it is possible to encounter people wearing Western European or familiar American clothing in public, in residential homes, and in hotels. The inhabitants who describe themselves as “Amarians” can be divided into three categories. The first group is that of the “permanent residents,” returning emigrants, and retirees who regularly visit their overseas relatives, including 73 holder of a U.S. Green Card; only three of the permanent residents have never left the village in their lifetime to seek work elsewhere. The second group are “visitors to the village,” who usually spend their summer vacation in the village every year; the third one are “travelers,” who do not regularly live in the village or who regularly live in another part of the world.

The general conditions for agriculture have always been poor in the village. Since the marginal soil requires a lot of work with only minimum output,people rely on extra income, which must be obtained outside of the village through migratory work and services or retail trade. The inhabitants of Amar al-Hosn started to migrate to larger cities in the surrounding area like Trablus and Beirut, and close provincial towns like Homs and Banias while fleeing the state authorities and searching for income during the 19th century. Subsequent destinations include the industrial cities Damascus and Aleppo. A new epoch was ushered in, when many inhabitants of Amar al-Hosn decided to embrace the Presbyterian faith, after missionaries from the U.S. had built a school in the village in 1879. The first overseas

migrants emigrated to the New World in the 1880s. The majority of these emigrants assimilated to the new society and became alienated from their village community (cf. Younis and Kayal/Kayal).

The first villager who contributed to the formation of the current community was Aziz Atiyeh who taught at the American University of Beirut. He emigrated to the United States in 1888 and returned to Amar al-Hosn in 1903 to get his brother. By doing so, he established the connection between the place of departure and the overseas destination. The majority of the villagers followed suit and explored the world in the sense of kinsman-like chain migration. A larger group from Amar al-Hosn settled in Allentown, Pennsylvania, at the beginning of the 20th century, where newcomers received support from the Presbyterian church that was present in the village. Soon, every family in the village had a representative in Allentown. Today, the largest community of emigrants and descendants from the al-Hosn region can be found in the vicinity of New York and Pennsylvania (cf. Benson/Kayal).

Only a few villagers ended up in the South American countries Venezuela, Brazil and Mexico. The second international wave of emigration occurred after World War II when villagers from Amar al-Hosn moved to Latin America and the Caribbean. During this time, inhabitants of Amar al-Hosn tried their luck on Caribbean islands such as Grenada, Trinidad, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Antigua, and Bahamas (cf. Lafleur). Members of the village had in the meantime wandered to other countries around the globe. Young Amarians set off at the end of the 1950s to study in the Federal Republic of Germany, in Greece, and in Canada and then stayed in these countries. In the mid 1970s, migration to Australia was encouraged by the constant violent conflicts taking place in the region. Amarians migrated to Melbourne and Sydney. Other villagers found work in Gulf countries, in Saudi Arabia, and in the United Arab Emirates. The emigration and further migration brought the al-Hosn villagers and their descendants to many other countries and created a basis for the organization of a global network spanning four continents (see Fig. 6).

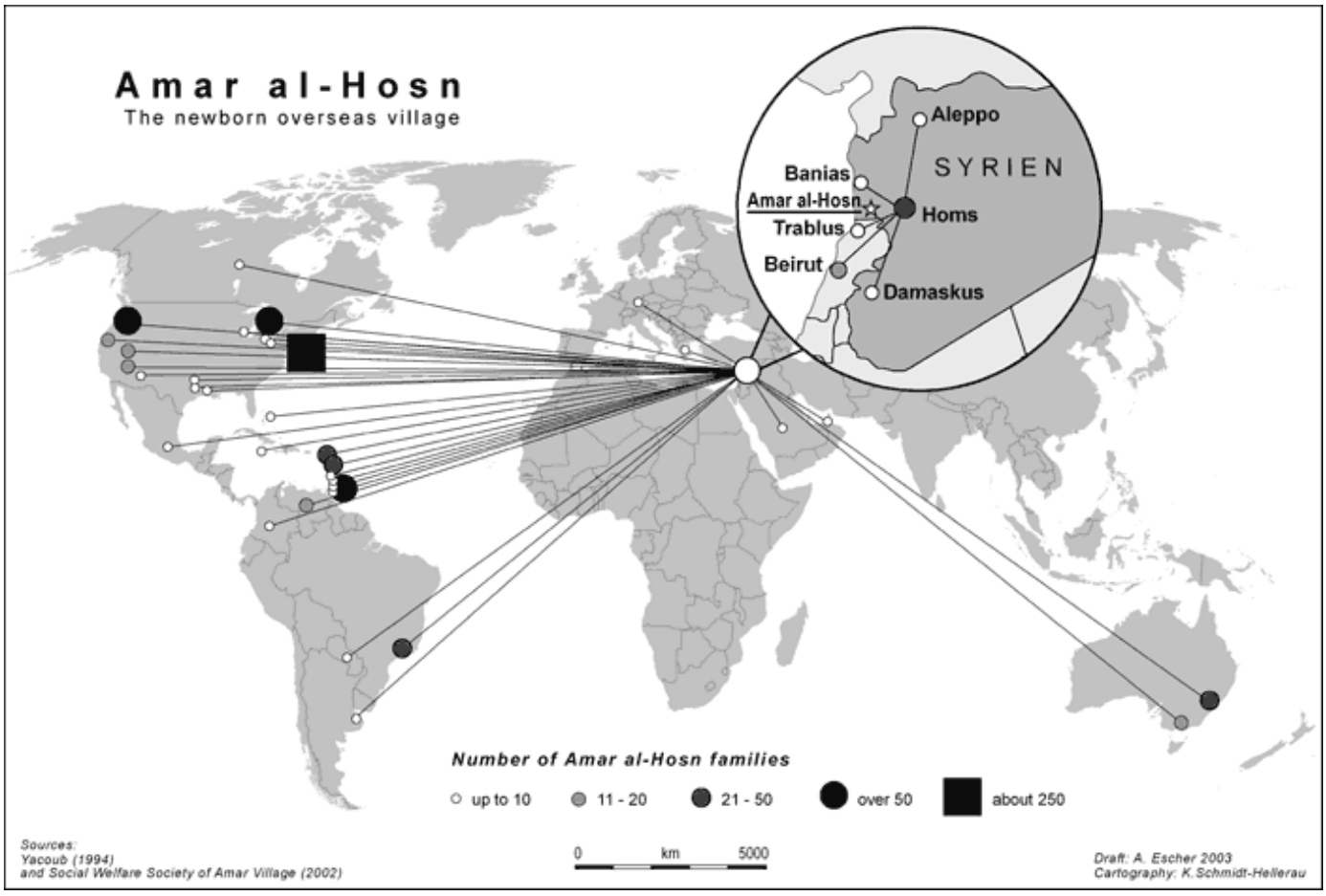

Fig. 6: Number of Amar al-Hosn families in the world

Amar al-Hosn — The Global Village of the Clan

The villagers and those who come from families from al-Hosn see their community, which is distributed all over the

globe, as a “newly born” and expanded village. “We believe that our village, Amar al-Hosn, comprises two villages:the mother village and the newborn overseas village,” says the director of the “Social Welfare Society of Amar Village” in the preface to the telephone book, where the local telephone numbers are listed with the numbers of citizens of Amar all over the world. The preface of the directory is almost a creed for the village community, stating:“We believe in the fact of communication and its efficiency. We believe that human relations may not ripen and become fruitful without interconnection. We believe that the higher values:love, fidelity, honesty, truthfulness, devotion, and sacrifice will not flourish without communication.” This forms the basis—the indispensable requirement for the existence of Amar al-Hosn as a global community. The standards of the inhabitants of Amar al-Hosn seem to apply especially to the members of its own global community. The village Amar al-Hosn in Syria as place of origin, as mother village, is assigned a preternatural status and becomes “sacred”. The symbols of the village include nature and the esthetics of Wadi Nasara. The olive tree is an icon and the hallmark of the village and the community. The village is glorified as a bride. Moreover, the location and the village are praised in songs and poems in all its sub-communities throughout the world: “O, Amar, cradle of my love / I cannot bear being away from you / Awake or asleep, I dream of you, / Your memories buoy me up on / Wings of ecstasy and love.” (Yacoub, 22)

All members should embrace this spirit, and the majority does in fact strive to visit Amar al-Hosn again either in thought or in reality. Part of the annual vacation is spent in Amar al-Hosn, especially children are brought back to Amar al-Hosn so that they may become familiar with the area. For children, the time spent in Amar al-Hosn is a period (almost) without constraint since attention is placed on forming a bond between the third and fourth generation descendants and the Amar community. The older generations migrate back to spend their retirement in the village, while the younger generations want to remain in the host countries, which in terms of economic conditions have become the new places of residence. The problems of the dispersed village are overcome through communication and travel, as Joseph Hadeed reports:

As you can see, I live in both. Almost every year I go to Syria. And every year I go, not just for one month or so, sometimes I go three or four months. I have house in Syria, I have house in Antigua. Oh we have lot of people like me. . . But there are two things that keep me comfortable about retirement. My grandchildren, they are here in Antigua, and when I go for instance, I can not really spend the rest of my life in Syria, because I have my family here, my wife, my daughter, my grandchildren. And I can not really live here all the time, so I share between both [sic].

The selection of location and the frequency of visits depend on the economic situation of the family and the individual’s position in the generation cycle.

The club in Amar al-Hosn courts the expatriate villagers and attempts to establish a bond between them and the village—creating a shared locality. “My dear emigrant:Your mother village calls you:its beautiful nature, flowering green versants of its mountains, lofty summits, immortal forests, enchanting dream spring that always grants and contributes” (Social Welfare Society of Amar Village, 6). The society arranges the community telephone book with a directory of all families which originally came from Amar al-Hosn. This type of publication has a long tradition, which begins among other things with the first Arab “business directory” published in 1908 in New York, and which has many imitators like the Arab social guide from Chile (Mattar). The society organizes the popular “Festival of Emigrants” every year in August in the largest hotel of the village, which also attracts many Amarians from all over the globe.

Affiliations to Organizations and Institutions

To cope with their individual and social existence, all people need an identity in space and time. The identity of the Amarians is created by family affiliation and Amar al-Hosn as their place of origin. While the community can be furthered through marriage and adoption, “family” and “location” are not negotiable. It is a different story when it comes to belonging to organizations and adaptable institutions like nation or state, church or religion, and club or society. For instance, the inhabitants of Amar al-Hosn have a completely pragmatic view of “nationality” and “affiliation to a nation.” A businessman from Amar al-Hosn in Kingston, Jamaica, explains:

Yes, I am Jamaican. I have Syrian passport, too. Also I have British passport, too.” It is only a question of how to

get a passport that offers advantages when traveling. People with a passport from the European Community usually do not need a visa for most countries in the world or have no difficulties in obtaining a visa. That's why preference is given to a British passport. The Syrian consul from Antigua has exactly the same argument: "At the time when I came to Antigua, of course I have a Syrian passport. Now, I'm naturalized Antiguan and I still maintain my original Syrian nationality. I'm holding both nationalities. At the same time I'm the Syrian counselor in Antigua. (unpublished interview)

In the global village of Amar, the idea is to have children in the United States, not because the health care system is better, but because the new additions to the human race are U.S. citizens. If we were to meet inhabitants of the village in Amar al-Hosn mother village, they are automatically Syrians and praise their country and president, who ensures the safety, protection, and freedom of travel in the village. With all the political posts that the members of the global village Amar have accumulated worldwide, the village community virtually has its own political representatives. As a result, it is possible for the community of Amar al-Hosn to describe itself as an own, even if imaginary, political unit, which has evolved among nations and countries as part of globalization.

In response to the question regarding the religious affiliation that the people in the village have, an elderly man answers with a whimsical smile: "We always have the religion which people who live in villages have and whom we meet during our travels!" This does not mean that the villagers renounce their religion but they rather focus on their acceptance among other groups that they meet as individuals. This illustrates the flexibility which the inhabitants enjoy at least temporarily in self-evaluation. The members of many families have various denominations: The son of the eldest of the Presbyterians is Maronit, while the other son belongs to the Greek Orthodox community. The wife of a Presbyterian in the village is a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, which are forbidden in Syria. This mixture clearly illustrates that the villagers view their affiliation to a religious community as a strategic element for opening up avenues to potential resources outside of the village. Within the village it is possible to see Protestants attending Presbyterian services and members of other Christian religious groups at the Greek Orthodox church services. The Presbyterian church played a key role for the early emigrants from the Syrian village. This American church facilitated a better integration of immigrants into everyday life in the United States than was the case in the past for other Arab immigrants. In the New World, the First Presbyterian Church of Allentown still offers services like "Sacraments of Baptism" and the Lord's Supper in the Arabic language. The Christians do not stand out in their efforts to shape their plans or in their lifestyle. They maintain a methodic lifestyle and base their everyday life on economic success. Moreover, the Presbyterian church provides a clear mission that can be found on the back of the documentation relating to the get-together of the Hadeed Family Clan and can be read as the family motto by further emphasizing the individual and the imperative for acting on this side of reality besides missioning: "Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!" (I Chronicles 4:10). The other Christian churches also play a constructive role in the migration of their members and contribute to the cohesion of the Amarians in the world (cf. Kayal/Kayal).

Social organization soon evolved in the immigrant communities regardless of the number of families at the adopted destination. The purpose of the club or society has always been to preserve and strengthen family associations as well as develop new family contacts among the Arabic-speaking community. The club organizes the Syrian social life and maintains contact with their home country. It also creates, in a culturally different land, a Syrian location that in many aspects eliminates the spatial difference and isolation from the place of origin. The most important club of the Amar al-Hosn village is the "American Amarian Syrian Society," which was originally founded in 1926 in Allentown under the name of "Amarian Club." It made a significant contribution to the construction of a hospital in the Syrian al-Hosn region. During the period from 1966 to 1974, there was a sports club in Amar al-Hosn, which was also responsible for cultural activities. Today, the "Social Welfare Society of Amar Village" attempts to preserve the community based on the perspective of returning emigrants. "The Syrian Lebanese Women's Association of Trinidad and Tobago" is the club of Syrian and Lebanese women in Trinidad (cf. Besson and Besson/Besson). It was founded in 1950 and organizes the entire social life of the Syrian-Lebanese community on Trinidad and Tobago, which it documents in recurring publications. The foundation of the club was promoted primarily by a Presbyterian woman from Allentown, even though the majority of the immigrants on Trinidad were members of the Roman Catholic church for pragmatic reasons, because the schools on the island are organized by the church (cf. Sandhoff). Today, the club is still an important focus for the Syrian and Lebanese women on the island, since they do not have a social life outside of the house and the club. The people from Amar al-Hosn are, as the example

shows, also included in clubs and societies of other Syrian-Lebanese emigrants.

Intensification of Identity in Networks of Diaspora

Networks of emigrated Arabic-speaking groups have existed since the establishment of colonies and the appearance of returning emigrants. A diaspora may evolve on the basis of communicative integration between different groups of emigrants in different countries. All empirical research regarding Syrian-Lebanese migrants focuses on the role of the family in this process. “The concept of family life as something sacred has not yet been divorced from the Syrian mind,” states Hitti (80) in one of the first comprehensive qualitative analyses of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants in the United States. In a comparative manner, these statements still apply half a century later (Kayal/Kayal, 116): “All cooperation between individuals, therefore, is limited to their traditional groups—family, village . . .” As a result, the concept of the segmentary community may in part be transferred to the current situation of the world community. A village community, which is structured in families, assumes a global organization dispersed to many corners of the earth. The above qualitative analysis permits the assumption that the identity of the global community is based on the place of origin—the village of Amar al-Hosn! A network in the form of a diaspora has evolved. Nation-state positions, religious institutions and social clubs are leveraged for the prosperity and constitution of a global village community with the potential of a strategic negotiation. The shared locality, the place of origin or the “mother village” is the fixed point, the sacred location, which facilitates symbolic actions and defines the members of the community. The place of origin of the global community becomes a holiday destination, a place to relax, a place of communication, a place of future business, a place of new alliances, and a place for retirees and pensioners. The village becomes the mental center of the community which has “branch locations” all over the globe. A diaspora community is established, which is perpendicular to national organizations and religious institutions, reminiscent of segmentary communities.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the underlying technical and political conditions advance the development and strategies of the global village community and promote the social, economic and political cohesion of migrants and inhabitants as well as future generations of the village. As part of this structure, the members implement strategies that contribute to the preservation and functionality of the community. In this case, the diaspora identity of the Amarians has a higher-level significance. It allows the members of the community to act in relation to a given context and offers pragmatic strategies for economic benefit in a dynamic world marked by competition. The people of Amar al-Hosn are not subject to uprooting and marginalization as well as deterritorialization and removal of boundaries. Instead, they expand their territory and increase their strategies for economic success. The small colonies, the parts of their families at various locations around the globe and the diaspora form a flexible communicative and active unit. The conditions of globalization provide the people of Amar al-Hosn with the opportunity to recreate their village community and to increase their options, since they are able to fall back on a wide variety of locations with diverse political and economic conditions. Central anchor point, common thread, and shared longing remains Amar al-Hosn for all time.

Summary

The global network of Syrian families in the U.S., the Caribbean and in other parts of the world is based on the identity of family, village and region. Family connections and group-internal solidarity, individual education, collective experience and socialized business sense contribute to the functionality of the global network. Church, as an organization with a translocal structure, and its newly founded clubs in almost every corner of the world,are instrumentalized for shaping the global village. They serve to formally reinforce family ties. Religious denomination and nationality, on the other hand, do not depend on context and are thus negotiable. The identity of Syrian families, who are locally and/or regionally founded and intensified in the diaspora, does not only contribute to the preservation but also to the social effectiveness and economic success of the globalized village community.

Notes

1 Samia El-Badry (2008) describes the problems that people of Arab descent experience and difficulties

encountered in the process of their scientific research in the U.S.: “Though Arab-Americans are the least-studied ethnic group in the United States, they receive considerable publicity associated with political and economic events, a good example of which has been the intense focus on the community in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. While this attention may be of grave political and diplomatic importance, it overshadows Arab-Americans’ financial and social impact in the United States. More importantly, such attention—including the current focus on the community—points out a longstanding problem: Very little is actually publicized and discussed about the make-up of the community.

2 An earlier German version of this article appeared as “Amar-al Hosn, the Mothervillage and the Newborn Overseas Village. Eine globale Gemeinschaft mit geteilter Lokalität und segmentärer Diaspora-Identität.” *Transkontinentale Migration im Mittelmeerraum,* Bayreuther Geowissenschaftliche Arbeiten 24, ed. Rolf Monheim (Bayreuth: Naturwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft e. V., 2004), 183–208.

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