

The Syrian Identity (3): The Rise of Syrianism through Islamism, Globalisation and Colonisation in the Middle East Diaspora

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Abstract

The current identity crisis refers to the currently unstable competing components of Arabism, Syrianism and Islamism. In this article we explore Syrianism and its increased prominence since the beginning of the Syrian civil war by formulating two arguments (1) we argue that Syrianism is used within the rhetoric of both Assad and the opposition and (2) that the foundations of contemporary Syrianism were formed through the French Mandate's creation of the Syrian state. We consider Assad's altered rhetoric, followed by the Syrian opposition's turn towards Syrianism. We then proceed to evaluate the role of colonialism in the creation of present-day Syrianism.

Key words: Syrianism, Colonialism, Islamism, Globalisation, Othering

Introduction

Research⁵¹ suggests the term 'Syrianism' is used to refer to the geopolitical, cultural identity that seeks to unite the inhabitants of Syria to its territory, an element of the identity predates the French Mandate (Zisser, 2004; Tauber, 1993; Kaufman, 2004). Although, it must be noted, for clarity, that Syrianism existed before the Mandate yet, this is the unity of the entire Greater Syrian region, whilst the current Syrianism refers to the unity to the territory within the European-drawn borders and contemporary *pan-Syrian* refers to the unity of the pre-Mandate borders (Pipes, 1992; Zisser, 2004). Using Syrianism as a form of nationalism since nationalism, highlights the shared culture of its adherents and draws borders vis-à-vis others, in addition to its territorial element that binds the adherents to the geographically-defined nation (Eriksen, 2002; Smith, 2013). Therefore, in this article, 'Syrianism' refers to the sentiment of geo-political and cultural unity within the current European-drawn borders of the Syrian nation.

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President Bashar al-Assad

When Arab states supported the anti-Assad movement, the regime seemingly turned away from its Arabism rhetoric and pursued a Syrianism rhetoric (Morrell, 2018). The Arab League⁵² suspended Syria, giving the seat previously occupied by Assad to Syrian National Council, the Syrian opposition, which later, the League decided to revoke (Black, 2011; Spencer & Osborn, 2012; Morris, 2013; Al Jazeera, 2014; Kholaf & Mater, 2014). For Assad's regime, the League's move was described as "serving a Western and American agenda" and subsequently, contributed to a turn from the previously dominating Arabism rhetoric (Reuters, 2011; Rifai, 2014).

The waning prominence of the Arabism component has been replaced by an increased emphasis on Syrianism. This is evident by the promotion of articles, films and songs by state-influenced and state-controlled media, highlighting Syria's "cultural glory", depicting (pro-Assad) Syrians as heroes and emphasising Syrians' shared history (Rifai, 2014; SANA, 2015; 2017a). Furthermore, in the film *Our Roots on the Ground*, Assad's wife is shown to reject Arabism, instead highlighting the distinctive Syrian identity whilst speaking in the Syrian dialect, rather than Standard Arabic (Syria News, 2013; Rifai, 2014). The use of the Syrian dialect specifically, is indicative of the regime's departure from its previous heavily Arabism rhetoric, for the main unifying factor of

the Arab World is its single Standard Arabic language⁵³. Through promoting a history of shared experiences, culture and language, the Syrian regime appears to have replaced Arabism with an increasingly Syrianism rhetoric. This seems surprising when considering that until recently, Assad referred to Syria as the "beating heart of the Arab world" and "the fortress of Arabism" in addition to the Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party (BASP) slogan, "one Arab nation, bearing an eternal message" (Al Arabiya, 2013; Spencer & Sherlock, 2013; McAvoy, 2013). This seems to be a reaction to the Arab disunity reflected in the Arab League's decision that seemingly condemns Assad's actions. Thus, it is conceivable that Assad has sought to follow a more Syrian-leaning rhetoric since Arab unity seems unlikely given the Arab League's approach to Syria. Additionally, this could be conceived as a strategy to enhance Syrian unity and rally support based on the waning possibility of a single Syrian-Arabism identity.

The Syrian Opposition

Declining support for the Syrian opposition has provoked the adoption of an increasingly inward-looking, Syrianism rhetoric. The disunity of the Arab League, namely, the Saudi-Iran rift dubbed the 'Cold War' of the Middle East, has prohibited any meaningful success concerning Syria and hence, support of the Syrian opposition (Allam, 2012; Naumann, 2014; Dickinson, 2013; Metzger, 2014; Azzam, 2016;

⁵² The Arab League is made up of the following 22 members: "Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Syria (suspended), Oman, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen" (Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.)

⁵³ Modern Standard Arabic has been promoted in formal streams including, education and the news by the Syrian regime (Abdelmoula, 2015; Versteegh, 2014; Abuhamdia, 2016; Hudson, 2014).

Luck, 2017; Al Jazeera, 2017). Further, there has been a definite waning of international support for the Syrian opposition. More than 60 members attended the initial 'Friends of Syria' conferences in 2012⁵⁴, this dropped to much smaller groups in early 2013 and declined further to the 'London 11' (Carnegie Middle East Center, 2012a, 2012b; Governo Italiano, 2013; Gov.uk, 2013). A former war crimes prosecutor for the UN Panel for the Syrian conflict resigned stating that "the states in the Security Council don't want justice" and "the commission) simply doesn't do anything" (McKernan, 2017). Moreover, the Arab League's decision to revoke the Syrian National Coalition's seat suggests its relaxation in opposition to Assad, as the head of the Syrian National Coalition, Ahmad al-Jarbra condemns:

"...keeping Syria's seat empty in your midst sends a clear message to Assad that he can kill, and that the seat will wait for him to resolve his war. This is how the regime understands the message..." (National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, 2014)

This ostensible waning of support in combination with severe rifts and contradictions within the League, has contributed to a departure by the Syrian rebels from a previously prominent Arabism element. The Syrian opposition has turned to a more inward-looking, Syrianist-orientated identity, which is evident in banners from anti-Assad rallies. An example is one banner proclaiming the longevity of the Syrian territory, a unifying factor far longer than Christianity or Islam⁵⁵

(Barshouni, 2012). This is reiterated by Rifai (2014) who noted:

"...the discourse of anti-Assad Syrians on the ground slammed Arab states for their failure to help Syrian rebels in ousting the Assad regime...these anti-Assad Syrians seemed to associate themselves less with the Arab identity; for them, the Arab states did not provide an adequate level of support."

Therefore, it can be deduced that the Syrian opposition has seemingly departed from a rhetoric exhibiting Arab unity, to one that proclaims Syrian unity that is inwardly-dependent based on the lack of tangible support by the international community, particularly Arab states.

The Role of Colonialism

It is important not to place too much onus on the French mandate, because realistically, whilst the French mandate created the Syrian state, recent rises in Syrianism are the result of Syrian agency (Morrell and Papé, 2018). The creation of the Syrian state under the Mandate, engendered a structure within which domestic actors have operated, further binding the inhabitants of the artificially created Syrian state. Although the shift in identity rhetoric is seemingly unrelated to the legacy of colonialism, the French Mandate constructed the meaning of contemporary 'Syrianism' through the creation of the Syrian nation. This, in turn, provided a structure within which Syrians exist. The Mandate manufactured 'Syrianism' through the formation of Syrian borders.

⁵⁴ Four of these conferences took place in 2012 (Lund, 2017; US Department of State, 2012; Carnegie Middle East Center, 2012b; Gov.uk, 2012; ReliefWeb, 2012).

⁵⁵ The banner translated read: "if we are Christians, we have been Christians for more than 2000 years; if we are Muslims, we have been Muslims for more than 1400

years, but we have been Syrians for more than 10,000 years" (Barshouni, 2012; Rifai, 2014).

Notably, the endurance of the Syrian conflict can be attributed partly, to the selfish interests of the international community. For instance, Russia and China have prevented numerous attempts at conflict-resolution based on self-interested motivations (Grammaticas, 2012; BBC News, 2017; Fleming, 2017; McKirdy, 2017). No tangible progress has been made to ameliorate the conflict, which Kaldor (2013) interprets as due to an amalgamation of previously destructive international action in Afghanistan and Iraq. Whilst this is convincing, the Syrian civil war has been described as a proxy war for the Russia-America and Saudi-Iran rifts (Mabon, 2013; Antonopoulos & Cottle, 2017; Sakwa, 2017; Williams, 2017). The international involvement in the conflict seems to be primarily self-interested and based on the extent to which action is appropriate for the state's internal politics and strategies.

To contextualise this in the current chapter, self-interested motivations form the foundation of action within Syria and characterises the presently normalised behaviour of dominant states *vis-à-vis* others. Explicitly, dominant state relations with Syria are ones that are inherently unequal and exploitative, they attempt conflict amelioration only when suitable for themselves. Although this is not colonial, it is behaviour that has developed from colonialism, larger powers exploit relations that are characterised by a dominant-subordinate binary. Rather than formally invading and conquering territory, dominant powers utilise the subordinate state to its own benefit. These are *neo-colonial* relations, which are defined by the All-African Peoples' Conference as:

"the survival of the colonial system in spite of formal recognition of political independence in

emerging countries which become the victims of an indirect and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, military or technical" (Pambazuka News, 2011; CENCSA, n.d.)

As Phillips (2016) argues, the initial uprising in Syria and the conflict's longevity has been sustained by external powers involvement. Consequently, it seems that external involvement in Syria has been sustained through self-interested motivations. Thus, a colonial legacy here seems to be one that has developed to prescribe a certain behaviour from larger power states, one that is exploitative and dominating, present in the international involvement in the Syrian conflict. Further, these external actors' actions seem to shape the internal dynamics, namely, the rise in Syrianism based on the waning international support that has forced an increasingly more internally-motivating element within the unstable Syrian identity.

This article addresses recent rises of Syrianism within the national identity, which seems to have been engendered somewhat by the international community; moreover, the neo-colonial nature of external states *vis-à-vis* Syria has ultimately elongated the Syrian conflict based on self-interested motives. I have discussed the developed structure of Syrianism through the artificial creation of the Syrian state. In addition to a rising Syrianist element, the Syrian national identity has been concurrently subjected to a growing Islamist presence within the Syrian identity, this will be discussed in the successive chapter.

The Rise of Islamism

Islam rose between the fourth and seventh centuries, yet, political Islam formed through

the Ottoman rule and the French Mandate (Gelvin, 2005; Alhaj, 2012). 'Islamism' refers to the ideology that advocates Islam as something that transcends religion, a phenomenon that guides politics, society and culture (Marcotte, 2005; Zemni, 2013; Osman, 2016). Syrian Islamism is an overwhelmingly Sunni-dominated identity, however, it is hardly unified, as there is an array of sub-identities, or indeed, interpretations of Sunni-Islamism⁵⁶ (Rifai, 2014). During Hafez's dominion, Islamism was suppressed, as previously discussed concerning the Muslim Brotherhood, yet, with the emergence of the Syrian conflict, Islamism has resurfaced as a prominent identity element. The authors argue that the Global North has contributed to the rise of Islamism in Syria highlighted by the increased prominence of Islamism in war-torn Syria and the impact of the Global North's construction of the Arab/Muslim 'Other' and Western dominance respectively, in triggering a resentment that engendered the Islamist movement.

First, some caveats, Islamism *vis-à-vis* the Global North constitutes a large and complex topic that deserves considerable attention, however, owing to the nature of this work and its limited word count, this chapter merely touches upon a vast topic to explore its relevance concerning colonialism's legacy within the Syrian identity. Notably, Islamism did not solely stem from a reaction to the Global North, which would be rather condescending and orientalist to suggest, rather, Islamism rose for additional reasons, including the Ba'athist secularism (Khosrokhavar, 2016). There is a

danger in perpetuating and deepening the North-South binaries, however, we seek to challenge their existence entirely, focussing on Islamism and not not the Global South as a hegemonic bloc nor the religion of Islam.

Islamism in Syria

Islamism has surged since the Syrian uprising; for instance, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, after political exile by Hafez al-Assad, according to Lefèvre (2015), "has become an important component of the Western-backed Syrian opposition". The Islamism element of the Syrian identity is evident in a banner from anti-Assad protests, showing a pencil changing the meaning from "Oh Arab" to "God" (Raqqau, 2013; Rifai, 2014). This seems to encapsulate the shift from Arabism to religion that perhaps reflects the larger trend of the rise in Islamism at the expense of Arabism. More famously due to its widespread destruction⁵⁷, the Syrian Civil War has been accompanied by the rise of Islamic State of Syria (ISIS) in addition to other extremist Islamist groups, including Ahrar al-Sham and the Nusra Front (O'Bagy, 2012; Hamid, *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, moderate Islamism is present within the Syrian opposition within Suqur al-Sham and the Umma Brigade, conversely, democracy is compatible with their commitment to political Islam, unlike Salafi-jihadists (O'Bagy, 2012). These examples demonstrate the prominence of Islamism during the current identity conflict. It can be argued that whilst the fractured Syrian identity became unveiled in the wake of the Syrian uprising, the balance in the national identity became uneven

⁵⁶ From moderate to radical respectively, Sunni groups include: Sufi, Salafi, Salafi-Jihadi (Rifai, 2014).

⁵⁷ Here is reference to the 143 inspired and conducted attacks across 29 countries that have killed 2,043 between 2014 and 2017 (Liser, *et al.*, 2017).

leading to increasing levels of Islamism that resonated within the Syrian society.

Islamism, in the form of Islamic orthodoxy, can be traced to nineteenth century Ottoman Syria and developed during the French Mandate due to the perceived Westernisation that accompanied the Mandate, interpreted as an imperialist conspiracy against Islam (Gelvin, 2005; Charlcrafft, 2016). Consistently, the Muslim Brotherhood saw the Ba'athists as "morally corrupt agents of the materialist West" (Charlcrafft, 2016: 398). These movements were continually suppressed which Abd-Allah (1983) attributes to the strength of the threat that they posed to the regime based on the ability to target the hearts of a majority Muslim population.

There are many conceivable long-term motivations for the historical prominence of Islamism and its recent surge within the Syrian identity imbalance. Greater Syria's history comprises two separate French colonial ventures in Syria, both of which were met with resistance, included strategies of religious and cultural indoctrination⁵⁸ and were extended longer than required (Calderhead, 2016). Correspondingly, Adams (2015) highlights a connection between recent Islamist terrorism in Paris to the Western selective memory concerning violence and denial about "the long history of conflict, empire, religious war, colonial intrusion, disrespect, racism, and invasion" that

characterises Frances relationship with the Muslim world. Whilst Calderhead (2016) and Adams (2015) observe the link between Islamic extremist hatred towards the Western identity, they do not prove the link with sufficient detail and the authors propose that this disdain roots much deeper, incorporating the construction of the Arab/Muslim 'Other' in addition to the Western hegemony.

'Othering' in the Global North

The rise in Syrian Islamism and its resentment towards the West is not solely the product of French-Syrian relations. Rather, it is produced partly by the endured orientalist behaviour⁵⁹ of the North in culture, policy and society. Notably, 'Othering' within the North is not a unified, homogenous process, but aspects of culture, society and policy within the Northern bloc inform and influence perceptions. Orientalist behaviour is evident firstly, within the North's culture exhibited through the film industry, through which Arabs have been depicted as barbaric villains (Quinn, 2008; Shaheen, 2009; Teo, 2012). Secondly, in policy, including the US-led campaign against the irrationality and violence of the Arab/Muslim 'Other' during the War on Terror (Jamal, 2008; Khalid, 2017). Cesari (2009), in a report produced before the uprising in Syria, found that Islam has been securitised in Europe through speech acts and policy processes, which has implications for immigration, multicultural and security policies

⁵⁸ The first colonial venture was the French desire to spread Christianity in the 1860s and secondly, during the French mandate, the French established Catholic activity in Greater Syria, including missionary schools, "to indoctrinate pupils with French language and culture" as part of the French "civilising mission" (Calderhead, 2016; Fieldhouse, 2006)

⁵⁹ I refer to Said's (2003) understanding of Orientalist behaviour, a behaviour that exhibits a constructed

distortion of those in the Orient by those in the West. The Orient itself is a European construct, an undefined geographical location in the East, based on the Western experience of colonisation and of cultural and linguistic difference; it is the "deepest and most recurring" Other (Said, 2003: 1).

in addition to anti-discriminatory measures. Thirdly, within Northern societies, many do not know the difference between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden (Lashmar & Whitaker, 2003; Holsti, 2009).

These examples suggest that an incredibly anti-Arab/Muslim sentiment has festered within the North, one that has demonised the inhabitants of the entire MENA region, constructing them as adversaries through film culture and policy, which disseminate into societies, guiding popular opinion and politics. It seems this dissemination has brewed an ignorance within society, one which adheres to the othering of an entire region and fits Hussein and bin Laden into one single Arab/Muslim 'Other' category, despite their radical differences. This is reiterated by Allen (2004), who argues that anti-Western Islamism and Islamophobia is a "self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing cycle", since the deepened securitisation of Islam is disseminated into a deepened fear of Islam within society and in turn, intensifies issues and further demarcates Islam. The continued construction of the Arab/Muslim 'Other' has reproduced, deepened and normalised reductive categorisations that have been criticised heavily by Said (2004). It is possible then, that these orientalist constructions by a large and powerful region have provoked a feeling of deep insecurity for some Arabs, particularly, Islamists, who seek to protect their culture and society from those who threaten it.

Islamism, Globalisation and the Plague from the West

The North's dominating behaviour has engendered resentment within a foundation of Islamism. There seems to be an anti-Western sentiment that is exhibited by Islamic extremist groups, indeed, Salafi-jihadi movements are understood widely as 'anti-Western' or 'anti-globalisation'⁶⁰, in opposition to what the North associates with 'modernity' (Rudy, 2004; Lia, 2005; Tabarani, 2011; Islam, 2015; Tomass, 2017). For instance, during Ramadan in 2017, ISIS called supporters to wage war on the Western politicians and "scholars of evil and sedition" (Dearden, 2017). Further, ISIS has called for the assassination of "the son of the mule of America", President Trump's 11-year-old son (CBN News, 2017). In a speech, the leader of the Nusra Front calls for Muslims' duty to expose the deceptive and harmful nature of the US and Russian-led international community (Orient Net, 2016). A similar anti-'Western' sentiment was proclaimed from al-Qaeda, a group that is renowned initially to have inspired current Islamist groups including the Nusra Front (BBC News, 2002; Chulov, 2016; Solomon, 2016). This suggests that contemporary Islamism is a reactionary movement based on a perceived insecurity of identity from Western infiltration. It seems that Islamism has aims that are linked to an anti-West or anti-globalisation rhetoric and therefore suggests that Islamism is, at least in part, a reactionary movement to Western hegemony.

Discourses of globalisation have brought about a global trend of neo-liberalism accompanied

⁶⁰ Globalisation is understood as the greater integration of world markets (Gilpin, 2001)

by 'Westernisation', the spread of Western economics, ideology and values (Hay & Marsh, 2000; Marsh, *et al.*, 2006; Scholte, 2009; Findlay, 2011). Westernisation, or *gharbzadegi*⁶¹, is often conceived as modernity and progress by mainstream Northern actors and operates through enforcing and exporting the 'Western' model, including, through the universalisation of human rights and the persistence of secularism (Ahmad, 1984; Mehmet, 1999; Fung, 2010; Findlay, 2011; DeChaine, 2005; Selby, 2012; Muda, 2015; Milton-Edwards, 2016; Strafella, 2017). This process is an example of the North's dominance within the international realm and 'modernisation' is understood as shaping of the 'non-West' along Western lines. It is a hegemony of Western culture, values and ideas, sometimes expressed through a 'logic of no alternative'⁶² based on the normative influence that the North possesses and a subsequent self-righteousness. There has been a prolonged history of cultural domination from states in the North in addition to what Gelvin (2005) understands as ignorant Western attempts to enforce the Western interpretation of modernity onto the non-West combined with a history of rejection by Islamic orthodoxy.

It seems apparent that Islamism, especially the extremist ideologue, has risen in reaction to the hegemony of the West. Additionally, Westernisation seems to be a security threat to the Islamist identity, one that provokes such passion that it operates using a strategy of global terror. Western dominance has

developed through the normalised binaries of dominant-subordinate states. A legacy of colonisation here appears to be in the development of the contemporary nature of the self-righteous Western hegemony that has contributed to the rise of Syrian Islamist movements Syria. Although, consistent with the rise in Syrianism, rises in Syrian Islamism cannot solely be attributed to colonialism, since Syrians maintain agency within enduring structures, for instance, weak or war-torn states seem to be widely recognised as a "breeding ground" for extremist Islamism (Hear, 2006; Newman, 2007; Gilsinan, 2014; Fukuyama, 2015).

Conclusion

The authors demonstrate the impact that the North has had on Islamism in Syria (Morrell & Papé, 2018a). The North appears to have posed a threat to the Islamic identity leading to the formation of social movements that sought to protect themselves from *gharbzadegi* (Ahmad, 1984). Moreover, colonialism has translated into the contemporary world through dominant-subordinate binaries that characterise Global North-South relations, owing to the North's self-identification of its importance and righteousness that further fuels Islamist resentment.

The focus of this work was to uncover traces of colonialism that exist within the Syrian identity. It has been shown that the Syrian experience of colonisation has informed current identity politics within Syria. Taken together, the results

⁶¹*Gharbzadegi* is a term coined by Ahmad (1984) which was used to refer to the discontent created through the spread of Western values, translated as 'Westoxification' or the 'plague from the West'.

⁶² The term 'logic of no alternative' is used to refer to the phrase popularised by Hay and Watson (2003) meaning a rhetoric of a necessity and imperative

suggest that the current identity crisis can be traced to colonialism. Explicitly, the French Mandate promoted societal divisions which provoked political instability in Syria's following the French decampment; these divisions appear unaddressed, that were blanketed in Hafez's enforcement the compelling, yet superficial, unity that ultimately, proved to be unsustainable. Although colonialism has informed identity politics and structures in Syria, this does not discredit the existence of agency.

Indeed, colonialism has constructed structures that domestic actors acknowledge and operate within. The divided nature of Greater Syria during the Ottoman rule was exacerbated by French self-interested policies that sought to prevent the progression of Arabism and the creation of a national identity. Additionally, an anti-French sentiment that seemed present within Syria's identity based on the annual celebration of Martyrs' Day and the seemingly associated Sykes-Picot agreement. Highlighted is the long-term implication that stemmed from the French Mandate, the BASP's acquisition of power and ultimately, the Assad dynasty through the proportional growth of the Alawites within the military.

The rise of Ba'athism within the Syrian identity is in addition to the ostensible unity fostered within Syrian society. Ba'athism formed through colonial resentment following the Mandate has deepened an anti-Western, anti-imperialist sentiment within the Syrian identity. The idea that Hafez's tenure is characterised by stability is challenged in this article and suggested that instead, this is a façade based on superficial unity manufactured through his leadership style. Indeed, the supposed unified Syrian

society blanketed the intercommunal cracks to mirror Assad's utopian vision of a single Syrian identity. Principally, we believe the façade suppressed divisions within the national identity and were forced to lie dormant.

Following Hafez's death, the suppression of the identity cracks was not sustained due to Bashar's weaker grip on the Syrian nation. This weakening of power enabled the cracks in Hafez's façade to resurface and ultimately, engendered identity crisis. The most prominent conclusion that is drawn is that the current Syrian conflict is partly the product of the suppression of societal divisions that were intensified by the policies of the Mandate.

We have uncovered explanations behind recent rises of Syrianism within the Syrian identity. The suspension of Syria from the Arab League and waning support from the international community provoked both the regime and the opposition to adopt a more Syrianist-centred rhetoric. The French Mandate constructed the structure in which current Syrian domestic actors are forced to operate within, in addition to the development of neo-colonial behaviours by external actors who exploit power inequality between states.

The authors have discussed the rise of Islamism and demonstrated the impact that the North has had on Syrian Islamism. We show that the West has posed and continues to pose a threat to the Islamic identity leading to the formation of social movements that sought to secure their identity. Moreover, the long history of Western colonial maltreatment, namely exploitation, has contributed to the birth of Islamism. Additionally, we uncovered the damaging constructions of the Arab/Muslim

'Other' within the Western world that informs societal perceptions. We argue that colonialism has informed contemporary relations between the Global North and the MENA, based on dominant-subordinate binaries and perceptions of self-importance that further fuel Islamist resentment of the North.

The findings from this work suggest that former colonisers, namely France, bear a degree of responsibility for the crisis of identity that has since unfolded in Syria. This work contributes to understandings of identity politics; the significance of identity within the Syrian experience that we have identified, suggests that identity is a noteworthy factor that can shape both domestic and international politics and thus, requires more attention.

There are limitations due to the nature of this work, such findings cannot be accurately applied to other states due to the focus on distinctly Syrian elements of identity. However, the findings have gone somewhat in enhancing understandings of the role that colonialism has played in engendering conflicts and animosities specific to Syria. This raises questions concerning other former colonies and their respective experience of colonialism. Accordingly, whilst the findings might not be transferable to former colonies, these findings could serve as a base for future studies, for instance, investigating Lebanon's colonial experience. This would help to establish a better understanding of the extent to which the Syrian experience is transferable through a comparison between Lebanon and Syria.

The present work touches upon the presence of neo-colonialism that informs external powers' behaviours vis-à-vis weaker states, perhaps in

addition, what is needed is first, an investigation into the reasons for which neo-colonial behaviour developed and secondly, a study that investigates the impact of neo-colonialism on weaker states.

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