

The Impossible Revolution

Pursuing Liberation, Peace, and Spatial Equity in
Syria



To all the detainees
To all the forcibly disappeared
To all the martyrs

Colophon

The Impossible Revolution: Pursuing Liberation,
Peace, and Spatial Equity in Syria
Masters Graduation Thesis 2023-24
P5 report

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Figure 1: Musa, a 25-year-old Kurdish marksman, stands atop a building as he looks at the destroyed Syrian town of Kobane, also known as Ain al-Arab, on January 30, 2015.

Source: CBC News

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Figure 2: Displaced Syrian residents wait to receive food aid distributed by the UN Relief and Works Agency at the besieged al-Yarmouk camp, south of Damascus, Syria, on January 31, 2014.

Source: UNRWA/Reuters/Landov

Abstract

The Syrian conflict, beginning in 2011, has escalated into a complex crisis marked by the aggressive response of the Assad regime and geopolitical power struggles. Humanitarian consequences, including mass displacement, neoliberal reconstruction policies, and environmental degradation, pose substantial risks. The 2023 earthquake has made the humanitarian situation severely worse. Oversimplification, selective compassion, and a business-oriented research approach hinder comprehensive academic engagement. This multifaceted problem manifests as the appropriation, oversight, and commodification of the Syrian narrative, evoking a sense of a stolen story among Syrians. The thesis will reclaim the Syrian narrative by researching the procedural urban practices that have contributed to the conflict and have led to the worsening of the violations. It will investigate how spatial planning can be a narrative tool to provoke change, provide alternative realities, and bring war-torn societies back together. That is, by first analyzing and mapping the unjust spatial consequences of the authoritarian practices before and after the uprising and, second, embracing the current grassroots movements. As a result, the thesis will provide a framework for change that deals with the political complexity of the context and provides a conciliation tool toward social-political reconciliation. Those different outcomes contribute to bringing justice, freedom, and co-existence back to Syrians.



Figure 3: An aerial picture taken with a drone shows Qah refugee camp in Idlib, Syria, 07 May 2022.

Source: EPA

Keywords: Syrian Conflict, Spatial Justice, Post-conflict Urban Recovery, Grassroots Movements, Conciliation, Syria, Damascus, As-Sweida.

INTRODUCTION

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Motivation

During the first year of my architectural studies, the uprising in Syria started to unfold, inviting me to join a journey highlighted by my commitment to justice and freedom. Alongside my fellow Syrians, we commenced our collective demand for a democratic country where we can live peacefully. However, the response to this call was violence, turning our peaceful demonstration into bloodshed. Consequently, the peaceful movement was turned into an armed struggle that is still ongoing today.

As a response to this disturbing turn of events and in alignment with my motivation to help the displaced people, I joined several humanitarian responses. My main goal was to make tangible contributions to those affected by the conflict, especially the children. See Figures 4 and 5 to illustrate one of these responses in my hometown, As-Sweida. During this commitment, I collaborated with local and international NGOs, and I was very persistent in my efforts until I was forced to flee the country in 2019.

The Syrian revolution has deeply shaped who I am and heavily influenced my personality. From the first stages of peaceful demonstrations to the active engagement in humanitarian responses and eventually taking up the role of a displaced person, this journey has instilled a profound sense of responsibility deep within me. This responsibility is what drove me to start this spatial analysis of the conflict, hoping that this research might contribute to the salvation of my people. Now, after sharpening my spatial

skills through the course of my master's program, I find myself pushed into navigating the contours of the Syrian conflict through the eyes of both the activist and the urbanist. My fascination lies in understanding why and how protests happened in certain places and uncovering how the regime used spatial tactics to control and suppress Syrians.

Moreover, I am driven by a genuine desire to tackle the complex web of challenges faced by Syrians, created by the intertwined forces of climate change, neoliberalism, and populism, which worsen existing inequalities. Guided by the principles of justice, I aim to urgently break down the systemic barriers that oppress and discriminate within Syria's socio-political landscape. Ultimately, my passion lies in understanding and adapting spatial planning and development to the local context in Syria, acknowledging its vital role in responding to the unique demands, dynamics, and realities, especially when injustices are perpetuated by the state. I firmly believe that addressing the multifaceted challenges in Syria requires a holistic, multi-dimensional approach, and I champion alternative perspectives on spatial planning, justice, and governance. This stance seeks to challenge prevailing power structures and pave the way for a more inclusive and just approach. In essence, my motivation is to use my context-related knowledge combined with my theoretical understanding of spatial planning to contribute to a more just reality in my country, Syria.



Figure 4: A photo of a camp in As-Sweida city for internally displaced people, 27 Nov 2017.

Source: The author



Figure 5: A photo of a camp in As-Sweida city for internally displaced people, 27 Nov 2017.

Source: The author

GLOSSARY

- Authoritarianism:

Any form of non-democratic governance. Unlike democracies, an authoritarian regime lacks the essential institutions and processes related to citizen participation, political competition, safeguarding fundamental rights, and overseeing the exercise of power (such as separation of powers, parliamentary systems, elections, and a diversity of political parties). Consequently, it lacks the democratic legitimacy inherent in a democracy. (Lauth, Hans-Joachim, 2012)

- Tyranny:

Unlimited authority or use of power, or a government that exercises such power without any control or limits. (Cambridge Dictionary)

- Ba'athist government (Syrian Regime):

The Arab Socialist Party is one of the regime's most effective institutions and mechanisms through which it maintains its authoritarian grip. (Carnegie, 2021) <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/83906>

- Proxy wars:

'Conflicts in which a third party intervenes indirectly to influence the strategic outcome in favor of its preferred faction' (Mumford, 2013)

- Useful Syria:

In early 2016, Bashar Al-Assad the president of Syria, coined the term "Useful Syria" for key governorates—Latakia, Tartus, parts of Homs and Hama, and Damascus with its surroundings. He asserted a strong defense commitment

to these areas, considering them strategically significant. In contrast, other regions affected by him and his allies were viewed as less critical, with battles seen as constantly changing. (Qutrib, 2016)

The Syrian Revolution:

The peaceful uprising against the Syrian regime that started in 2011.

- The Syrian opposition:

It is the political structure represented by the Syrian National Coalition and associated Syrian anti-Assad groups with certain territorial control as an alternative Syrian government.

- Kurdish controlled areas (SDF):

Kurds refer to the Kurdish-aligned armed group, including the Syrian Democratic Forces, that operates mainly in northeast Syria.

Kurds/Government denotes the locations where Kurdish de facto authorities and the Syrian government have agreed upon joint control. This includes Qamishli in the Hasakah Governorate, which has been under joint control since the start of the conflict.

- The Global Coalition Against Daesh:

It was formed in September 2014 to dismantle the ISIS/Daesh (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) network in Syria and Iraq.

- Internally displaced people (IDPs):

Syrians who were displaced by the conflict from their home cities and live in other cities in Syria.

- Externally displaced people (refugees):

Syrians who were displaced by the conflict from their home cities and live outside Syria.

- The Greater Idleb area includes Idleb governorate and parts of Aleppo governorate (Atareb and Daret Azza sub-districts), and parts of Hama governorate controlled by armed opposition groups (Ziyara sub-district).

The Northern Aleppo area includes 16 sub-districts located across Afrin, A'zaz, Al-Bab, and Jarablus districts.

In the realm of spatial planning, a striking void exists in documented studies concerning cities in the global south, particularly those immersed in conflict, such as Syria. The deficiency in scholarly attention to the unique challenges and opportunities presented by urban landscapes in these regions calls for a reevaluation of research priorities. Recognizing the multifaceted impact of conflicts on spatial dynamics is crucial for effective urban planning and development strategies. A diversified perspective that embraces the complexities of cities in the global south during times of war is essential for comprehensive and equitable spatial studies. Mona Harb (2016) underscores that prevailing urban studies tend to disproportionately focus on cities in the global North, neglecting those at war elsewhere. This oversight persists even though cities outside the global North are becoming more frequent targets of defense strategies by the US and Europe. This is also questioned by Azzouz: 'Does this align with the 'First' and 'Third' World prejudice where some lives and cities are less valued than others?' (Azzouz, 2023, p. 10)

Moreover, Western narratives surrounding conflicts in the global south, notably the Syrian war, often tend to oversimplify, driven by the tendency to align coverage with predetermined agendas. This reductionist approach misrepresents complex geopolitical events and presents a one-sided story that

overlooks the complexities of regional dynamics. An alarming example is the tendency to label the Syrian conflict as primarily a consequence of climate change, neglecting the intricate web of political, social, and economic factors at play.

'The Syria case appears to confirm this, showing that the conflict effects of climate change are already with us and lending extra credibility to warnings of future climate-driven instability. The Syria example, in turn, has potentially important policy implications, especially for how political, military, and development institutions might prepare for and adapt to the changing global climate' (Kelley et al., 2015)

Such reductionist perspectives fail to grasp the full complexity of conflicts and stand in the way of the formulation of nuanced and effective responses.

Furthermore, Western compassion toward conflicts in the global south is frequently selective, with expressions of empathy often aligning strategically with geopolitical interests and propaganda. Human suffering is unfortunately manipulated to fit predefined narratives, amplifying the suffering of certain groups while downplaying or ignoring the plight of others. This selective compassion not only distorts the true nature of conflicts but also perpetuates a biased global perspective. This is evident in the case of Ayan, a 3-year-old Syrian

child whose photo, found dead on the Turkish coast, garnered significant online circulation. However, his 5-year-old deceased brother Galip lying next to him received minimal media attention. The reason for that, according to Maria Mattus, is '... that there is a fine line between generating a deeper understanding of the plight of migrant children in Europe and causing even more distance to the objects. Obviously, Galip was not worthy of the same degree of compassion as his younger brother, for instance, because his images were more gloomy, lacking any glimmer of hope; Galip seemed 'too' dead.' (Mattus, 2020, p.1)

Another selectivity is Lynn Meskell's critique in "Ruins: UNESCO, World Heritage, and the Dream of Peace" (2018), which raises significant ethical concerns about the focus on rescuing material heritage, particularly classical antiquities, in conflict zones. She emphasizes the danger of intervening selectively in the preservation of cultural heritage, prioritizing Western-defined antiquities over addressing the urgent needs of communities living through conflicts and refugee crises. Meskell points out the disproportionate attention given to the classical ruins of Palmyra compared to the widespread destruction of Islamic mosques and shrines in Iraq and Syria.

Moreover, Azzouz (2023) highlights critical issues in the academic approach to studying the Syrian conflict. He criticizes academics,

often from privileged backgrounds in global cities, who rely solely on online reports rather than engaging directly with the people affected by the war. Azzouz emphasizes the emergence of a business-oriented approach in the overseas Syrian refugee research industry, where even individuals with no prior experience in Syria or Lebanon are seeking funding for projects. Furthermore, he points out that projects are frequently designed without the input of impacted Syrian communities, causing potential offense as their struggles become academic projects imposed on them. This lack of engagement and the commodification of research contribute to a disconnect between academic endeavors and the real challenges faced by Syrians on the ground.

In conclusion, The dearth of research on urban landscapes in conflict-ridden regions of the global south, exemplified by Syria, underscores a critical oversight in scholarly priorities. Western-centric narratives often oversimplify complex geopolitical events, such as the Syrian conflict, misrepresenting its multifaceted nature and neglecting the lived experiences of those directly affected. Selective compassion and biased media coverage further exacerbate this issue, distorting the true nature of conflicts and perpetuating global inequalities. Critiques highlight the need for a more diversified perspective, engaging directly with impacted communities and prioritizing their voices and needs over Western-defined agendas. In essence, the narrative surrounding conflicts like Syria has been appropriated, overlooked, and commodified, emphasizing the imperative for a more inclusive and nuanced approach in academic research and media representation.

This research aims to challenge reductionist narratives and uncover the nuanced realities of the Syrian conflict by engaging directly with impacted communities and adopting a comprehensive approach that embraces the complexities of urban landscapes in conflict contexts.

In the following pages, a thorough exposition of the current critical situation in Syria will be presented.

Problematization

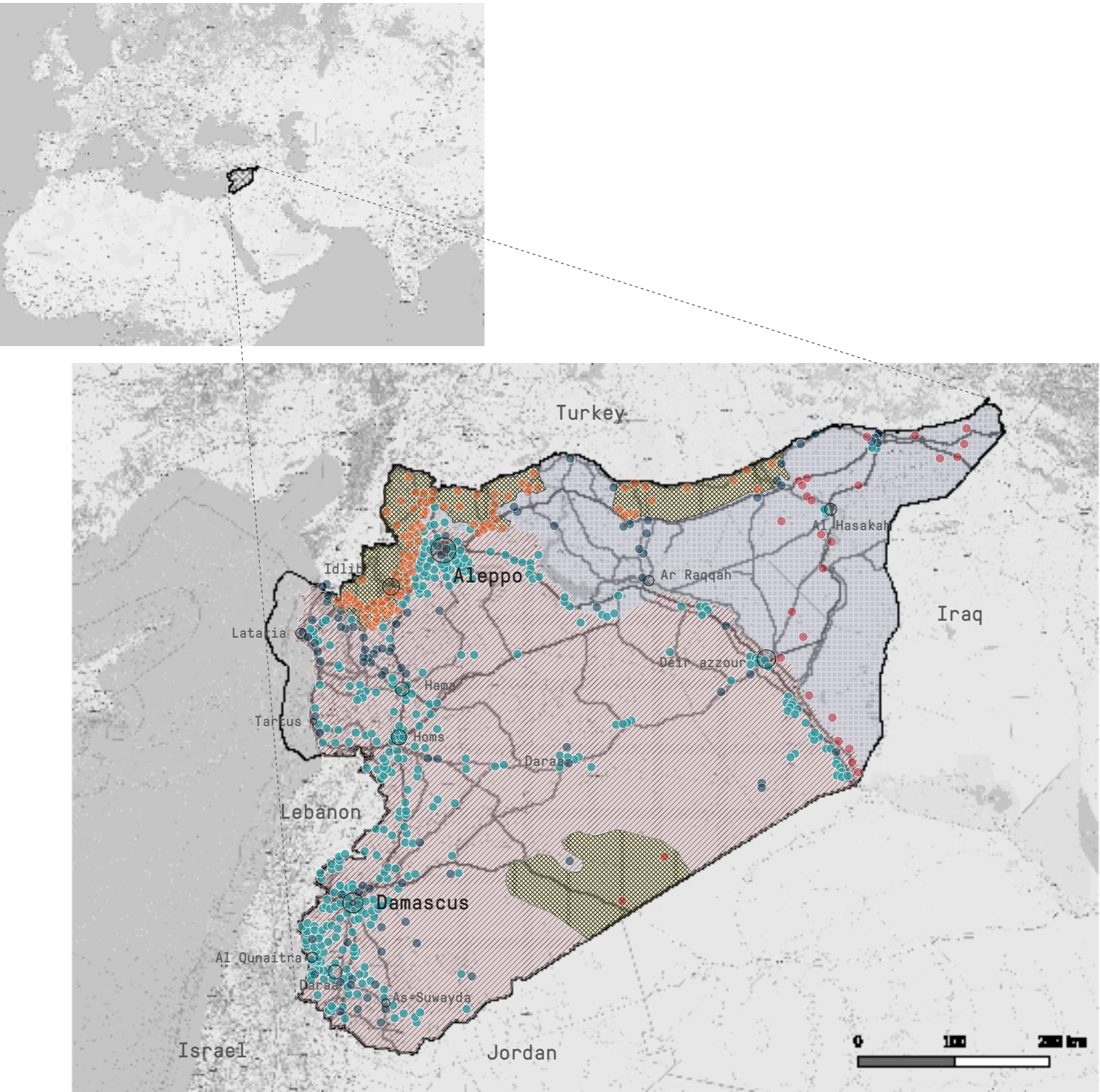


Figure 6: A map of military influence in Syria and the current geopolitical situation.
Source: The author. Adopted from: Olwan et al. ,2023)



The Proxy war

The war in Syria has been going on since 2011, and it is considered the most disastrous conflict since the Second World War (Wimmen, 2016). Inspired by the Arab Spring that started in Tunisia, millions of people in multiple Arab countries went to the streets pursuing freedom and democracy (Blanga, 2017; Daher, 2018; Gause, 2014; Gelvin, 2018). In Syria, the response of the Syrian regime headed by Bashar Al-Assad was extremely aggressive and violent, which accelerated people’s frustration and anger (Gelvin, 2018). Protestors had to defend themselves and their freedom of speech; thus, different factions started to emerge. Dramatically, the struggle was transformed into an armed struggle against the authoritarian regime, which led to a civil war. The civil war, which initially started between the Syrian opposition and the Syrian regime, rapidly evolved into a proxy war. The involvement of external countries has played a vital role in the Syrian civil war (Gelvin, 2018; Hughes, 2014). Russia and Iran have taken the side of the Syrian regime, while Turkey, Gulf countries, and Western countries have supported the opposition (Kadioglu, 2018). The support of the allies extended beyond political support within the international community to encompass military assistance on the ground (Hughes, 2014). As a result, those external parties have contributed to the acceleration of the Syrian civil war, leading to the victimization of millions of Syrians over the more than decade-long duration of the ongoing strife.

Consequently, a new geopolitical landscape has arisen in the region. Syria has been partitioned into several geopolitical territories tailored to the interests of the conflicting parties, ensuring their political influence amid international power struggles. In the past 13 years, zones of military dominance and influence have undergone substantial shifts. In the last three months alone, I found it necessary to revise the map of geopolitical territories twice, which highlights the volatility and constant evolution of the power-related situation.

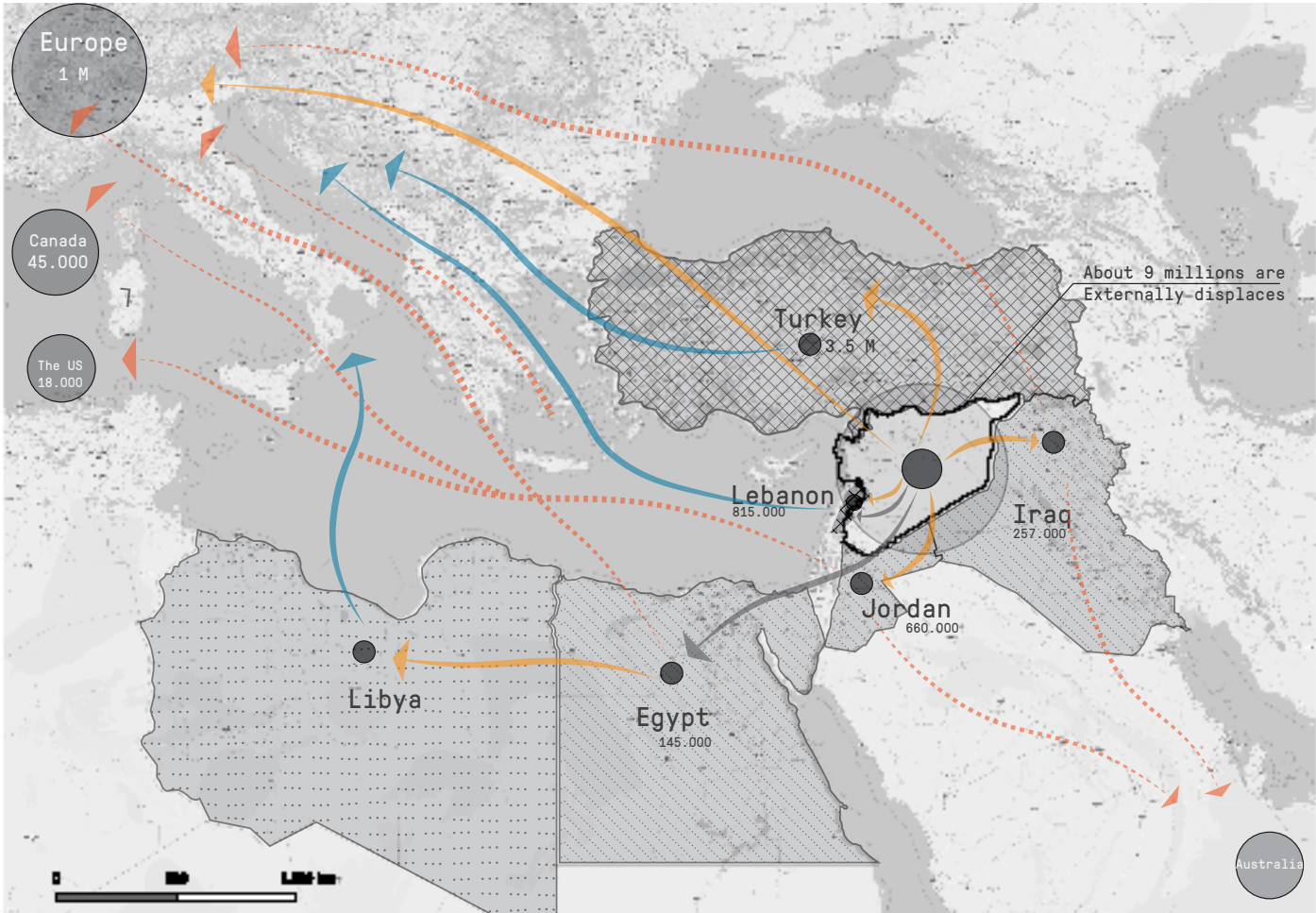
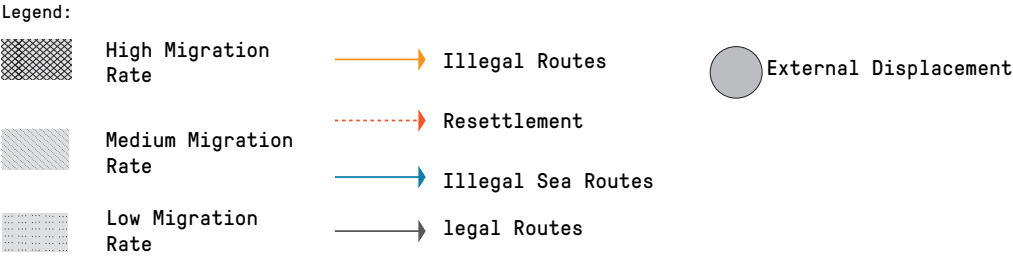


Figure 7: A map of the external displacement and the migration routes
Source: The author. Adopter from: (Al-Terkawi, 2023)



In the face of conflicts, involuntary migration intensifies. Over half of Syria’s population has experienced displacement from their residences. Globally, two-thirds of refugees originate from just five nations, with Syria leading the list (UNHCR, 2021). Those escaping Syria have sought refuge globally, primarily in neighboring nations like Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq, as well as in countries further afield such as Egypt, Sudan, and Europe.

In numerical terms, Turkey is accommodating approximately 2.5 million Syrians, followed by Lebanon with 815,000, establishing them as countries experiencing high migration levels. Meanwhile, Jordan hosts 660,000, Iraq 257,000, and Egypt 145,000, categorizing them as countries with moderate migration levels. (Jusoor for Studies, 2023)

As the “refugee crisis” escalated and became a global political issue, secure migration routes nearly vanished. While a small number successfully resettled through UN programs and others migrated legally, a significant portion of Syrians had to navigate highly dangerous routes to escape the war and seek safety. Their ultimate destinations varied, with approximately 1 million Syrians heading to Europe, 45,000 to Canada, and 18,000 to the United States.

However, reaching ‘safety’ does not necessarily mean feeling safe. This is what Azzouz (2023) delves into extensively in his book “Domicide: Architecture, War, and the Destruction

of Home in Syria.” Azzouz explains the challenges faced by Syrian diasporic communities post-settlement in their host countries, citing Halilovich in the process:

‘Even when arriving at the comfort of new home countries, diasporic communities, according to Halilovich, experience the complexity of the interplay between place, memory, and identity. Halilovich notes that this complexity is more intense when the places which communities have left are scarred, vandalized, destroyed, divided up. These ruined places that turn into sites of suffering, trauma and humiliation are also the places of desire for the displaced survivors who wish to return even if only to visit these ruins.’ (Azzouz, P.83)

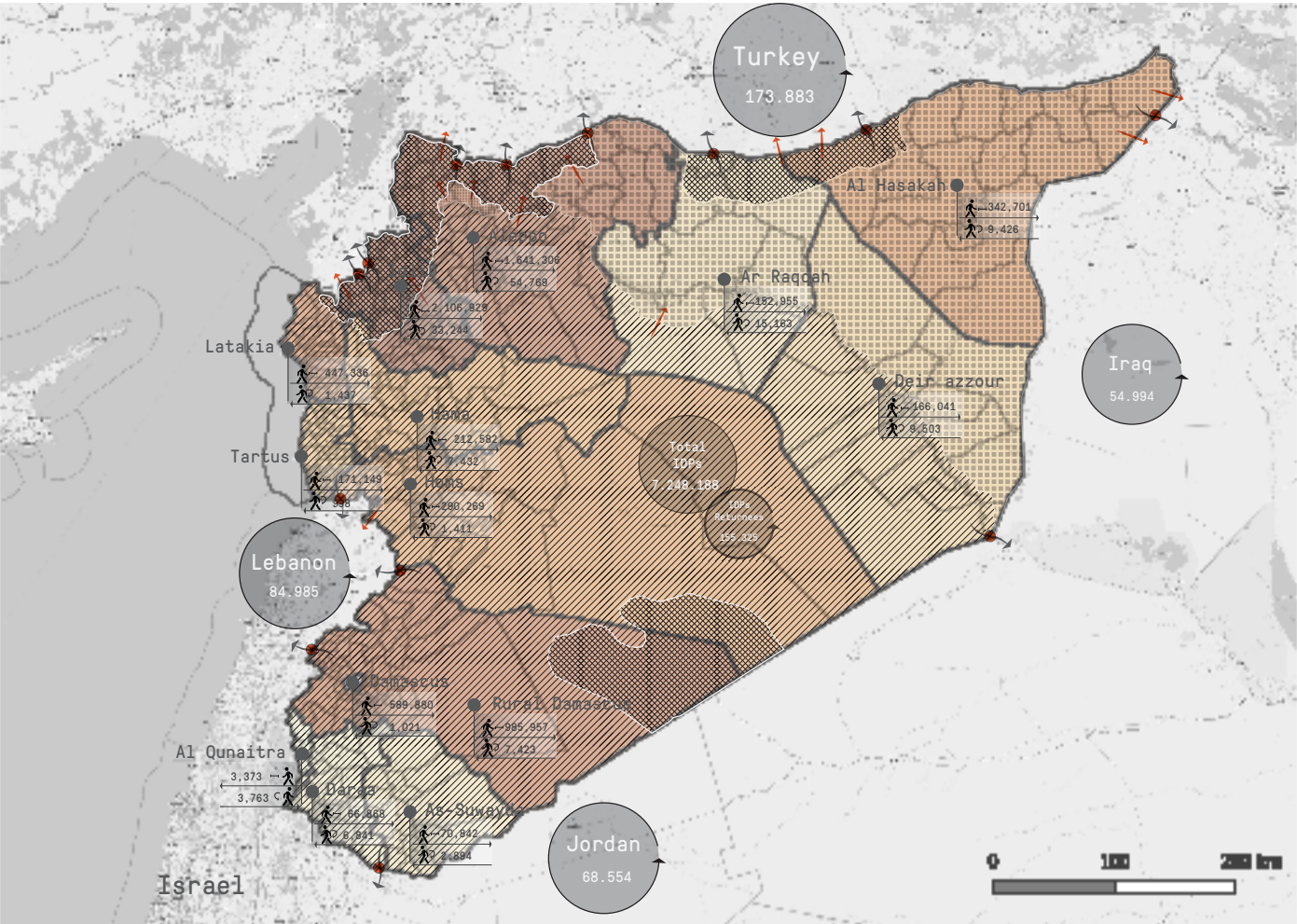
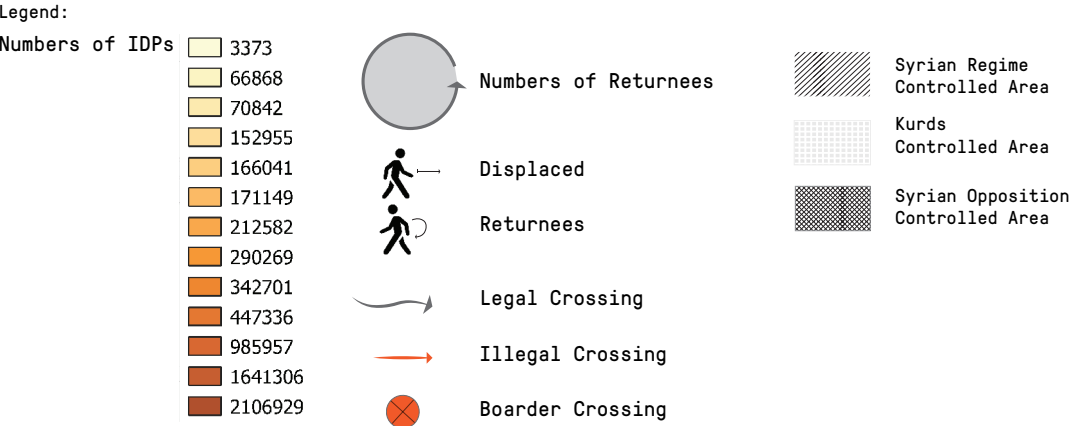


Figure 8: A map of the internal displacement and the returnees movement
Source: The author. Adopted from: (UNHCR, 2023)



On the other hand, citizens who were not able to flee the country had to seek refuge internally. It is documented that some Syrians have been displaced more than 25 times over the last decade. (Beaujolais 2016). The extent of displacement is intricately connected with the severity of the conflict. Hence, various regions in Syria have encountered varying degrees of displacement. Idlib, a governorate situated in northwest Syria, has faced the highest incidence of displacement, followed by Aleppo and Rural Damascus. On the other hand, the southern part of the country, encompassing Daraa, As-Suwayda, and Al Qunaitra, experienced the least amount of displacement. The total number of IDPs (internally displaced people) is 7248188 all over the country.

Due to the dynamic changes in the political landscape and the fluidity of military influence areas, many internally displaced persons (IDPs) often return to their original cities after experiencing displacement. Nevertheless, both returnees and those still displaced face a significant challenge concerning their HLP (house, land, and property rights) rights. As part of the Syrian regime's collective punishment plan, systematic methods are employed to expropriate property ownership, aiming to replace areas inhabited by regime opposition with demographics loyal to the authoritarian regime (Hussain, 2016).

These violations were extensively explained in the recently published report by the Syrian Network for Human

Rights (SNHR), as I quote: 'The Syrian regime's hegemony over the legislative process through its control of the three branches of power (legislative, judicial, and executive) has created a reality in which the laws issued in relation to real estate properties, both before and since March 2011, have been created simply and completely to serve the regime's vision and enable it to take over Syrian citizens' real estate properties, including in Homs governorate, particularly those belonging to individuals in any of the three aforementioned groups, i.e. forcibly displaced persons, forcibly disappeared persons, and the families of those victims whose deaths have not been registered in the civil registry.' (The Syrian Network for Human Rights 2023).

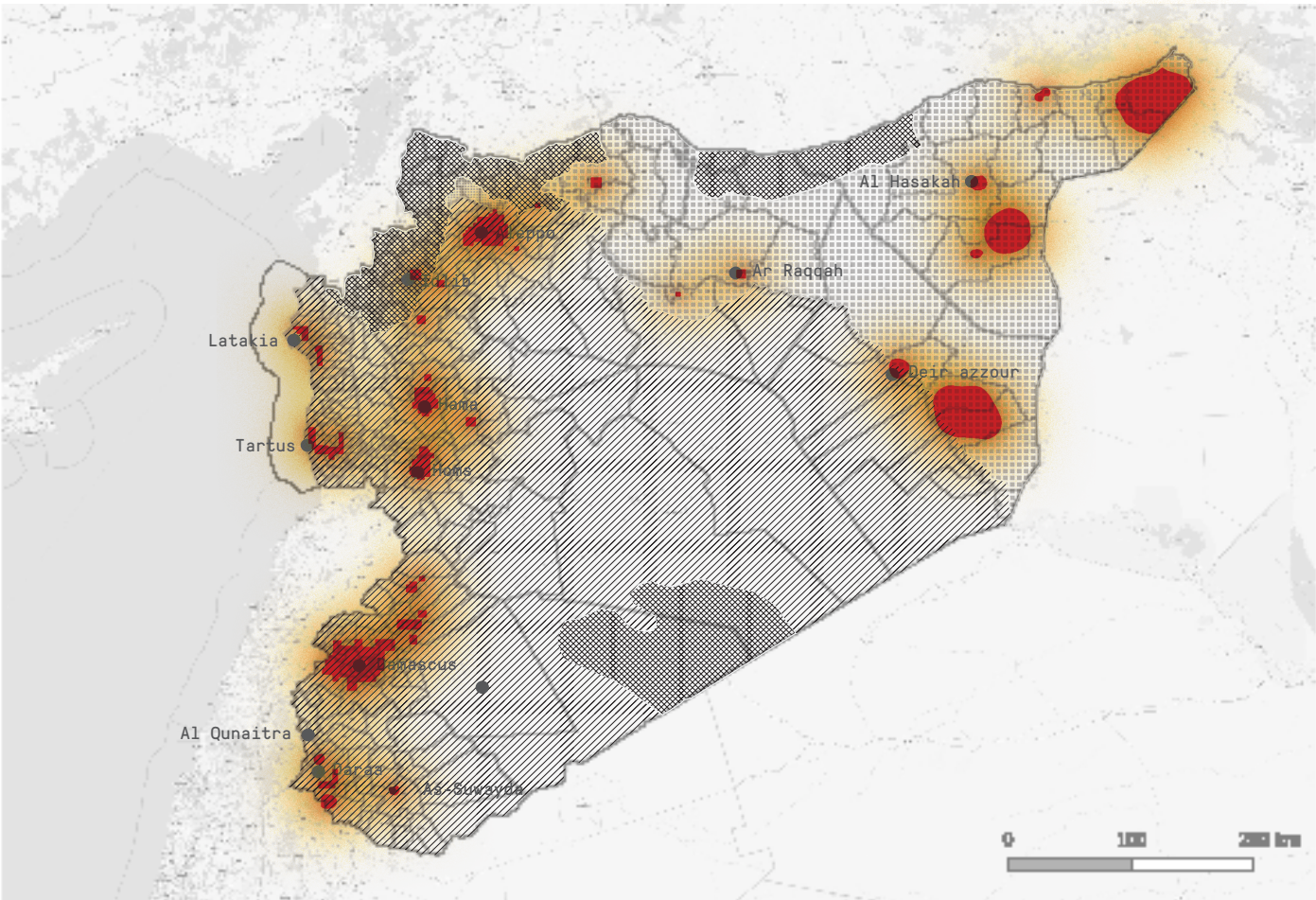
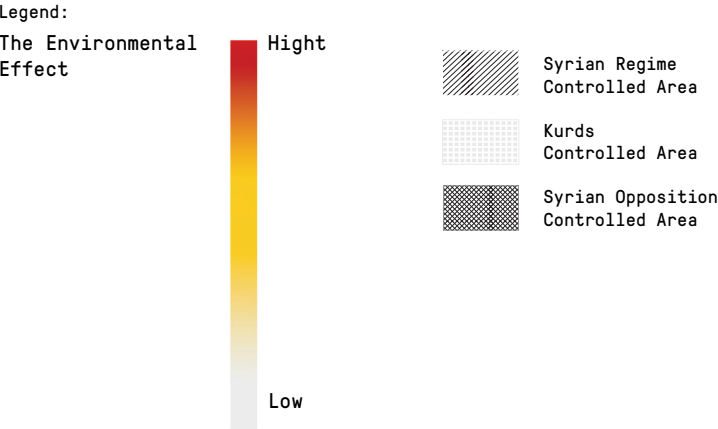


Figure 9: A map of the Environmental effect.
Source: The author. Adopted from: (Regional Planning Authority, 2022)



In this report, I have utilized the environmental degradation dataset provided by the National Spatial Planning Framework. This decision was necessitated by the absence of comprehensive and reliable data from other sources, given the severe fragmentation of the country. It is important to note that while I have used this dataset for its wide coverage, my detailed critique on the biases and political motivations underlying this framework can be found on page 134. Readers are encouraged to review this critique to fully understand the context and limitations of the data presented.

The environmental degradation was a major factor in starting the conflict in 2006 and continues today. The drought crisis, especially affecting the Northeast region, is now showing its serious effects. Fluctuations between droughts and floods pose an annual threat to the region, rendering the area, often referred to as the breadbasket of Syria, highly vulnerable (Schwartzstein & Zwijnenburg, 2022 Impact Initiative, 2021).

The environmental impact extends beyond the repercussions of oil refineries and various weapon usage. It includes heightened levels of air pollution, soil contamination, and the consequent dependence on makeshift oil refineries that contribute significantly to pollution. Additionally, issues such as water mismanagement and pollution are integral facets of this broader environmental crisis (Gaafar, 2021). Furthermore, thirteen years of conflict have caused a substantial environmental toll on Syria, transforming the nation

into an experimental battleground for various weapons. The continuous use of chemical weapons by the regime and its allies has significantly contributed to the deteriorating situation (Qandeel & Sommer, 2022).

Combining the environmental impact map with the military influence areas reveals a noteworthy pattern, with the most severely affected regions primarily situated in the northeast of the country. This correlation can be attributed to the existence and the miss-usage of oil refineries in this war-torn region.

Problematization

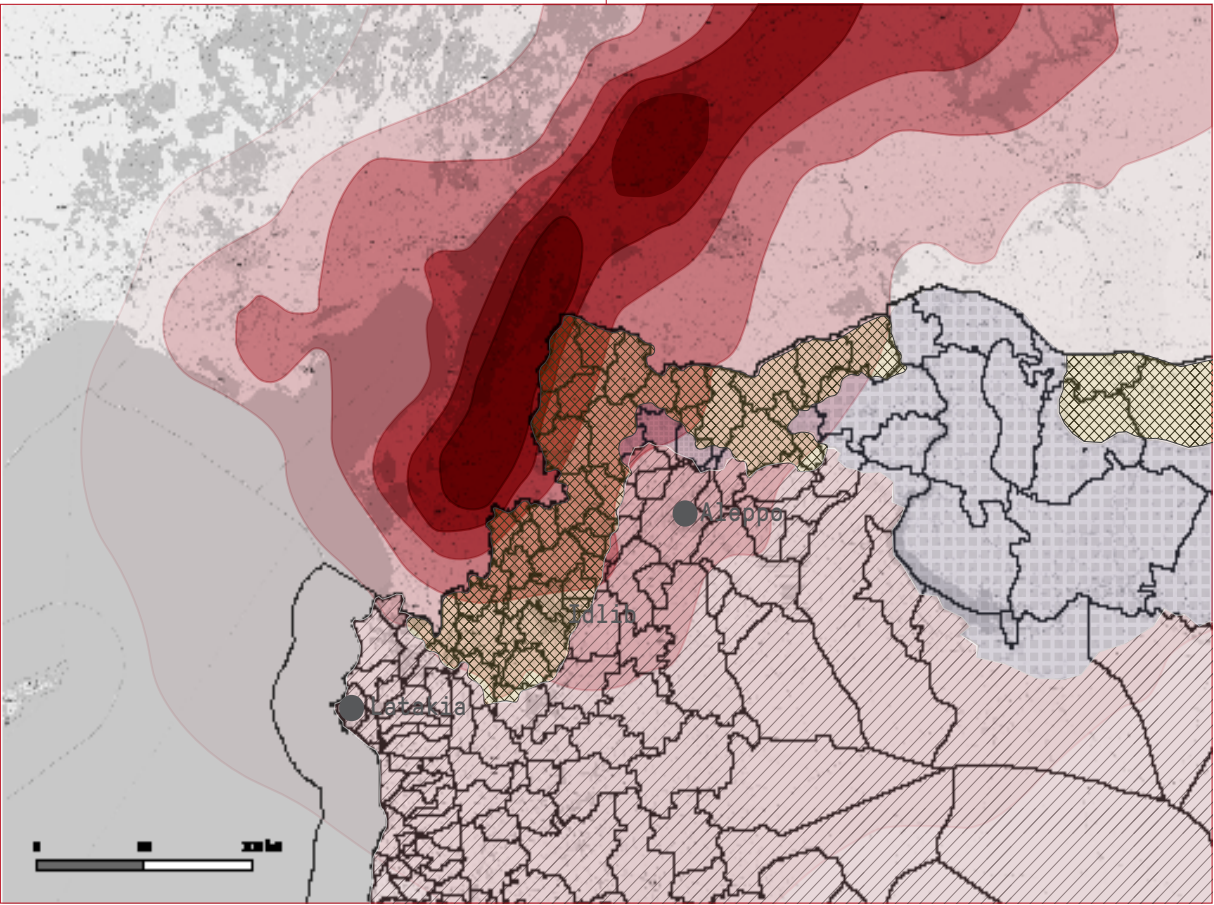
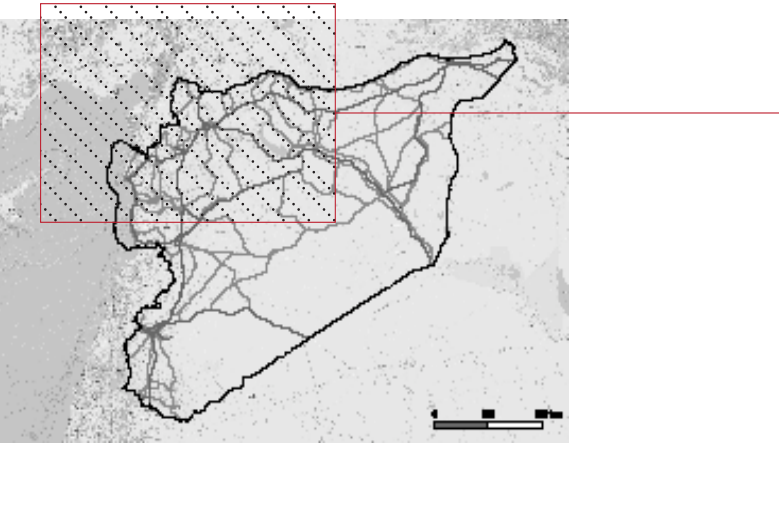
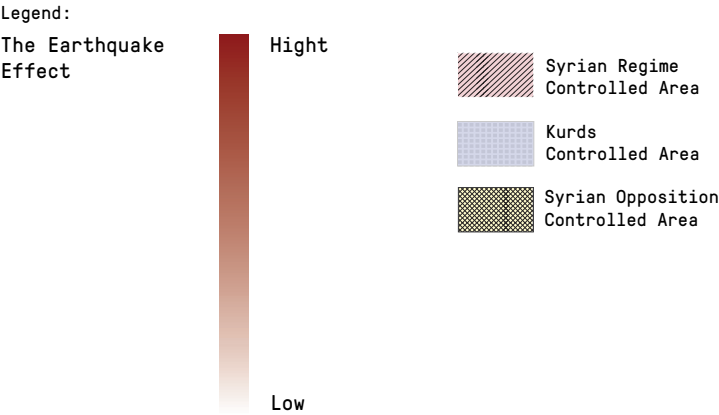


Figure 10: A map of the Environmental effect.
Source: The author. Adopted from: (RDNA, 2023)



The Earthquake

On the morning of February 6, 2023, the southern regions of Turkey and Northwestern Syria experienced a destructive earthquake unlike any witnessed in the region for decades, killing over 50,000 people and destroying and damaging over 230,000 buildings (Abdisamad, 2023).

The earthquake had a catastrophic impact on Syria, a country already ravaged by war. It particularly devastated Syria’s marginalized and previously besieged northwest areas. The losses from the earthquake were compounded by the inadequate response from international powers, the detrimental role of internal conflict forces, and the overall weak institutional development and relief structures across all regions (SCPR (Syrian Centre for Policy Research), 2023).

The Northwestern Syrian region is controlled by the Syrian National Coalition, which has certain territorial control as an alternative Syrian government supported by Turkey. This region was already facing severe humanitarian conditions, making it one of the most vulnerable areas in Syria.

Considerable criticism circulated, particularly among activists and human rights defenders, regarding the response to the earthquake. The humanitarian response has been strategically utilized as a negotiating card between the conflicting parties, namely the Syrian regime and Turkey. In addition to the double standards set by Western powers in response to

the Syria and Turkey earthquakes compared to the Ukraine war, Nawal Abdisamad extensively delves into this matter, expressing:

‘The US and Europe, as leaders of the West, have not provided immediate aid to Syria, which is still recovering from a long and devastating war, is facing harsh western sanctions, and has limited resources compared to Turkey. This raises questions about whether Western leaders have prioritised politics over human solidarity, or if their values have always been adaptable.’ (Abdisamad. 2023).

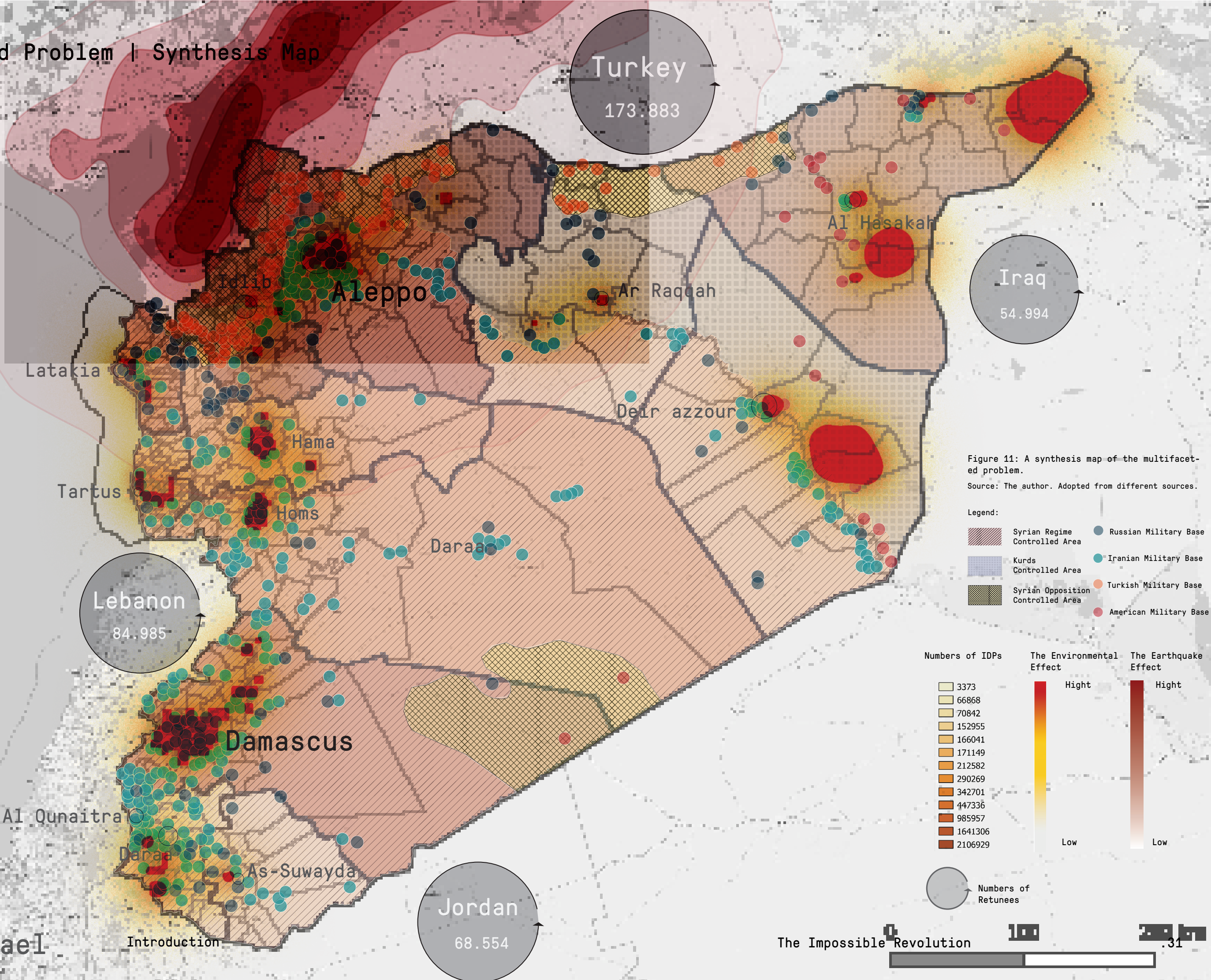


Figure 11: A synthesis map of the multifaceted problem.
Source: The author. Adopted from different sources.

Problem Statement

The Syrian conflict, which started in 2011, has evolved into a devastating and intricate turmoil. It has been extended by the Assad regime's offensive measures, supported by his allies, so as to prolong it and victimize millions of people in the long run. The geopolitical situation continues to change in response to power struggles among conflicting parties.

The humanitarian consequences of the conflict have been extensive and include displacement on a massive scale that has affected more than half the population. Refugees encounter difficulties in diasporic communities, while internally displaced persons struggle with continuous displacement. Thus, over 10 million people are in danger of losing their property rights.

Environmental degradation is an emerging issue following prolonged conflicts coupled with the use of chemical weapons, with the northeastern region being most affected. Northwest Syria also experienced an earthquake crisis in 2023, which further exposed how biased Western responses were.

The global story is compromised by oversimplification and selective sympathy, such as framing the conflict as a mere outcome of climate change. Research in academia lacks appropriate human contact and seems to be profit-oriented.

In essence, the Syrian narrative has been taken over, gone out of control, and turned into a commodity, thereby making Syrians feel as if their stories were stolen.

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Reasearch Approach

This research embarks on an exploratory journey, blending a nuanced approach with the innovative perspective of Critical Urban Planning. It aims to shed light on the under-explored realm of spatial planning during conflict, particularly within the complex context of Syria.

Within the exploratory framework, a dual methodology using both inductive and deductive research is adopted. The inductive approach comes from on-the-ground and current observations from Syria, delving into the shifting geopolitical terrains, demographic change crises, and the authoritarian regime’s spatial planning practices. A comprehensive analysis using an analytical framework will help to reveal the inherent oppression patterns, thus contributing to the formation of theories related to the discovered patterns. Simultaneously, the deductive approach draws upon established theories which will be used to form a hypothesis. Examining these concepts in the Syrian revolution, with the use of the analytical framework, will help to either validate or refute the hypothesis.

The Critical Urban Planning approach, inspired by Marcuse’s framework, introduces a multistep strategy that involves four important layers: Analyse, Expose, Propose, and Politicize. Recognizing the complexity of the Syrian conflict, an added layer involves a comprehensive timeline, disassembling the conflict into five separate stages - from pre-conflict dynamics to the ongoing

phases and eventual post-conflict repercussions. This integration of different analytical steps and deconstruction aims to provide a holistic understanding that helps to unravel the complexities of spatial planning within conflict zones. By conducting this comprehensive and critically informed approach, the research seeks to give deep insights that can help us better understand conflicts and come up with smarter planning strategies for recovery.

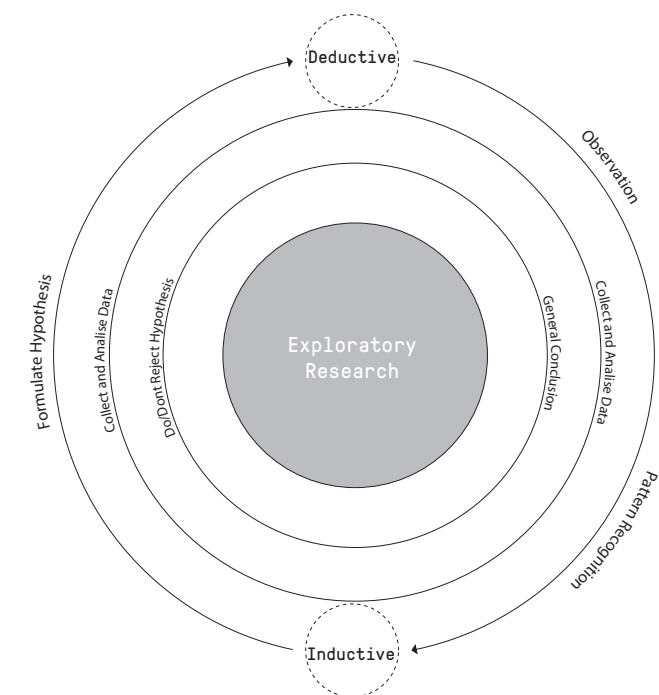


Figure 12: A representation of the research approach.
Source: The author

Methodological Framework overview

Problem Field	<div>Geo-political instability</div> <div>Demographic</div> <div>Urban Planning as a Weapon</div> <div>The Earthquake disaster</div> <div>Environmental Degradation</div>				
Keywords	Syrian Conflict, Displacement, Spatial Justice, Urban Recovery, Informal settlements, Syria.				
Problem Statement	The Syrian conflict has been going on since 2011, resulting in a very complex geopolitical situation. Half of the population is internally or externally displaced, and a huge amount of the country is severally damaged. Although a clear political solution is still not on the table, the Syrian regime has started with neoliberal reconstruction policies that tend to deal with the country as an absolute cadastral map without taking into account the socio-economic context, the demographic change, or even the new power-related geopolitical territories. Consequently, over 10 million individuals are at risk of being deprived of property rights and the opportunity to return to their homes. On top of that, an environmental crisis has been escalating since 2006, and the earthquake that hit the country in January 2023 has made the situation severely worse.				
Research Aim	The thesis will reclaim the Syrian narrative by researching the procedural urban practices that have contributed to the conflict and have led to the worsening of the violations. It will investigate how spatial planning can be a narrative tool to provoke change, provide alternative realities, and bring war-torn societies back together. That is, by first analyzing and mapping the unjust spatial consequences of the authoritarian practices before and after the uprising and, second, evaluating the current recovery practices.				
Research Question	How can spatial planning be a narrating tool to provoke change, provide alternative spatial realities, and improve the social cohesion of war-torn societies in Syria?				
Research Approach	Exploratory Research (Inductive / Deductive)				
Time frames	<div>1. Analyze</div> <div>2. Expose</div> <div>3. Propose</div> <div>4. Politicize</div> <div>Pre-conflict</div> <div>During Conflict</div> <div>Status quo</div> <div>Ongoing-conflict</div> <div>Post-conflict</div>				
Lines of Inquiry	<div>What were the root causes of the conflict?</div> <div>How and where did the uprising start?</div> <div>How were the authoritarian practices spatially translated?</div> <div>What is the current spatial planning practices in Syria?</div> <div>What are the current Authoritarian practices?</div> <div>How can the conflict stop?</div> <div>How can Justice be served?</div> <div>How to bring war-torn societies back together?</div>				
Methods	<div>Literature review</div> <div>Mixed Media Reviews</div> <div>Personal Experience?</div> <div>Analytical Framework</div> <div>Humanitarian statistic review</div> <div>Transcaler Mapping</div> <div>Mixed Media Reviews</div> <div>Case Study</div> <div>Stakeholder Analysis</div> <div>Literature review</div> <div>Interviews</div> <div>UN resolutions review</div> <div>Literature review</div> <div>Literature review</div> <div>Pattern language</div> <div>Transcaler Mapping</div> <div>Participation Strategy</div>				
Expected Outcomes	<div>Understanding the context</div> <div>A timeline of pre-conflict events</div> <div>Documenting the Spatial Tyranny</div> <div>Understanding the current situation</div> <div>Finding potential paths forward</div> <div>Spatial recovery framework</div> <div>A conciliation tool</div>				
Conclusion	<div>Documentation of the Syrian Conflict</div> <div>A Road-map for Recovery and Spatial Justice</div> <div>A Reflection</div>				

Research Structure

Problem Statement

The Syrian conflict, which started in 2011, has evolved into a devastating and intricate crumble. It has been extended by the Assad regime's offensive measures, supported by his allies, so as to prolong it and victimize millions of people in the long run. The geopolitical situation continues to change in response to power struggles among conflicting parties.

The humanitarian consequences of the conflict have been extensive and include displacement on a massive scale that has affected more than half the population. Refugees encounter difficulties in diasporic communities, while internally displaced persons struggle with continuous displacement. Over 10 million people are in danger of losing their property rights.

Environmental degradation is an emerging issue following prolonged conflicts coupled with the use of chemical weapons, with the northeastern region being most affected. Northwest Syria also experienced an earthquake crisis in 2023, which further exposed how biased Western responses were.

The global story is compromised by oversimplification and selective sympathy, such as framing the conflict as a mere outcome of climate change. Research in academia lacks appropriate human contact and seems to be profit-oriented.

In essence, the Syrian narrative has been taken over, gone out of control, and turned into a commodity, thereby making Syrians feel as if their stories were stolen.

Research Aim

The thesis will reclaim the Syrian narrative by challenging the reductionist narratives and uncover the nuanced realities of the Syrian conflict by engaging directly with impacted communities and adopting a comprehensive approach that embraces the complexities of urban landscapes in conflict contexts. It will investigate how spatial planning can be a narrative tool to provoke change, provide alternative realities, and bring war-torn societies back together. That is, by first analyzing and mapping the unjust spatial consequences of the authoritarian practices before and after the uprising and, second, evaluating the current recovery practices.

Research Relevance

The thesis will contribute to the research gap in spatializing authoritarianism, especially regarding the Syrian conflict. The research will build upon the previous studies done on the causes of the conflict and suggest a spatial recovery framework for post-conflict landscapes, which can lead to national reconciliation in Syria. By doing so, it will contribute to the increasingly growing literature that focuses on the weaponization of the built environment and the destruction of cities. Finally, the project is an advocacy effort to raise awareness about the conflict from a Syrian point of view.

Research Question

How can spatial planning be a narrating tool to provoke change, provide alternative spatial realities, and improve the social cohesion of war-torn societies in Syria?

Research Timeframes | Research Sub-Questions

Analyse

- Pre-Conflict

Sub-questions:

- What were the root causes of the conflict?
- How and where did the uprising start?

Expose

- During Conflict

Sub-questions:

- How were the authoritarian practices spatially translated?

- Status Quo

Sub-questions:

- What are the current spatial planning practices in Syria?
- What are the current Authoritarian practices?

Propose

- Ongoing Conflict

Sub-questions:

- How can the conflict come to an end?
- How can Justice be served?

Politicize

- Post-Conflict

Sub-questions:

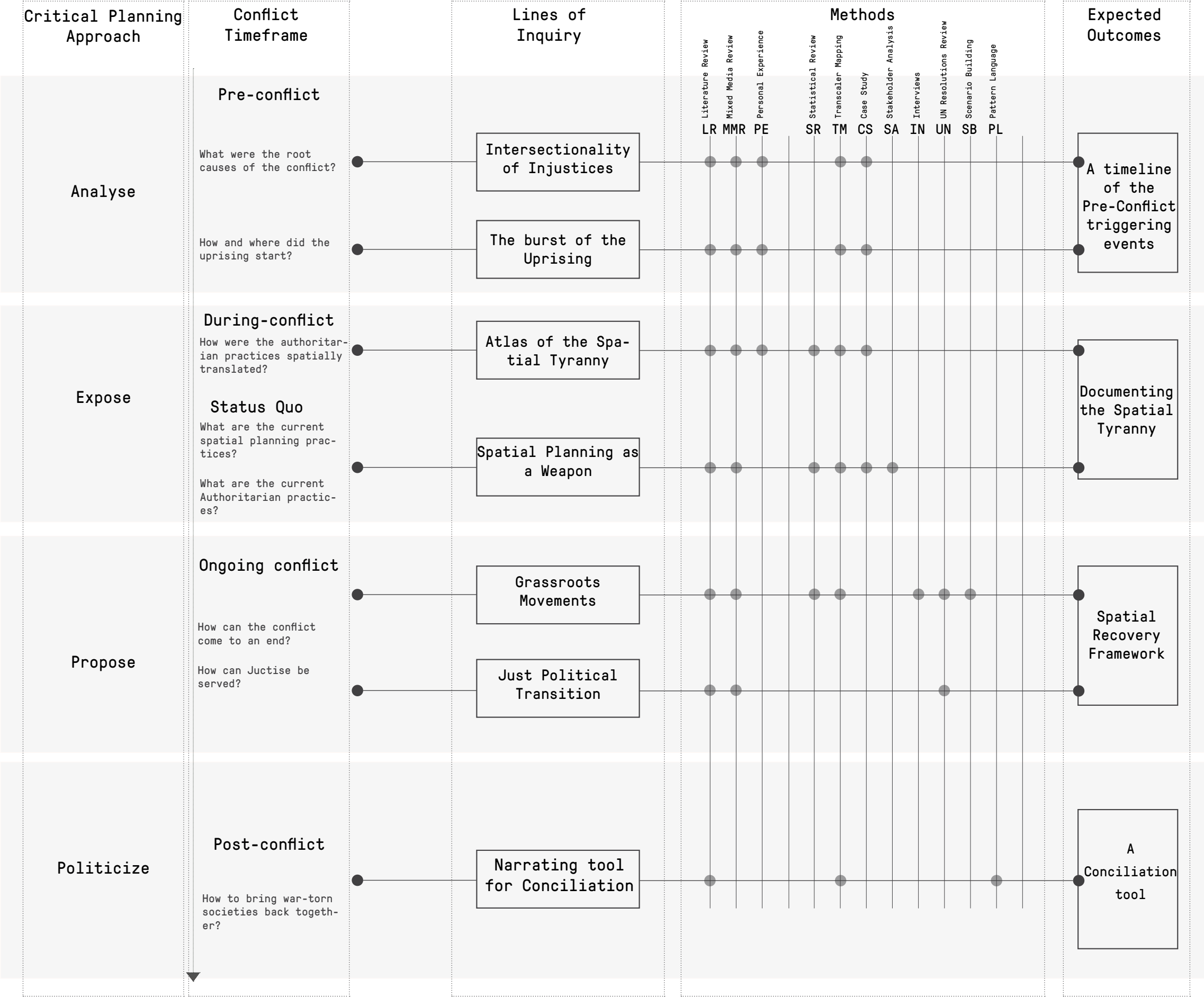
- How to bring war-torn societies back together?

Lines of Inquiry

To conduct this research, a combination of approaches is used. The first method is the Critical Urban Theory by Marcuse, which contributes to the line of inquiry and the structure of the research. This theory suggests four stages of dismantling an issue, starting with an analysis (discovering the root causes of the problem). Expose (unveiling the structural practices that have led to those causes and communicating them to those who need and can use them). Propose (collaborating with those affected to generate concrete proposals, programs, targets, and strategies for achieving desired outcomes). Critical urban theory should enhance the exposé and aid in formulating responses that tackle the exposed root causes. Politicize (clarifying the political action implications of what was exposed and proposed, supporting organization around the proposals by informing action).

Alongside this structure, a timeline of the stages of the conflict will take place. This alignment will allow for exposing each phase of the conflict in Syria. Starting from pre-conflict times to discover the root causes of the conflict, then moving on to the conflict itself and what happened during it. After that, an analysis of the status quo will be conducted to be able to find a just solution to the ongoing conflict. Finally, the research will go beyond the conflict and suggest scenarios for the post-conflict recovery phase. Deductive and inductive research approaches will also be used to formulate the sub-questions of the research.

This combination of approaches will act holistically to understand the issue, and it will be operationalized through the use of a combined set of methods.



Methods

Literature Review:

This method will be used as a tool to operationalize the exploratory nature of the research. Different sources, such as research papers, articles, and books, will be reviewed. The method will support both the inductive and the deductive aspects of the research. In terms of the deductive approach, an extensive set of literature will be reviewed to help explore the observed phenomena of the conflict. Simultaneously, different planning theories will act as a theoretical foundation for the inductive aspect and will be extensively reviewed in relation to the Syrian uprising and its spatial implications.

Mixed Media Review:

The mixed media method, involving the review of documentaries, articles, social media, and other alternative media sources, is crucial in conflict contexts where formal data is extremely limited. By exploring diverse sources, this approach aims to uncover a comprehensive understanding of the case, going beyond traditional knowledge channels. In times of conflict, it becomes essential to include nuanced perspectives and empower voices often marginalized in mainstream documentation. This method will enrich the research by providing a more inclusive and authentic image of the complex dynamics in Syria.

Personal Experience:

A critical part of this research involves leveraging my personal experience as a method. As an active participant in the revolution and someone directly affected by the consequences of the conflict, my direct involvement serves as a valuable lens for understanding the complexities of the issue. This thesis not only delves into academic inquiry but also integrates an activist dimension of my urbanist identity that comes from my commitment to advocating for justice and peace. This research reflects a proactive stance in addressing the multifaceted challenges arising from the conflict. By combining personal experience with rigid academic methods, the study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive and understanding of the case study.

Statistical Review:

In this research, quantitative data sources will be employed to help with the experimental exploration of the issue. An extremely important provider of this data is the humanitarian response statistical reports about Syria. Those reports reflect a more generic view of the societal aspect that is highly needed to have a holistic understanding of the situation.

Transcal Mapping:

This method will be used in this research to examine spatial dynamics at various scales, from local to global. This approach will provide a comprehensive exploration of the interconnected factors influencing the selected case. By transcending traditional boundaries, transcalar mapping will unveil hidden connections, power structures, and spatial patterns. Finally, its significance lies in revealing how local events resonate across different scales, which contributes to a more holistic understanding of the complex spatial dimensions of conflicts and urban issues.

Case Study:

Focusing the case study on the capital, Damascus, is a strategic method for delving into the complexities of the conflict that occurred nationwide. While the conflict happened across the country in varying magnitudes, the selection of Damascus as the focal point allows for an in-depth exploration of pronounced social, political, and religious disparities. The capital city serves as a microcosm where these disparities are particularly evident, which provides an illustrative lens to examine how such differences contribute to and are impacted by the conflict. Moreover, this exploration will explain how these dynamics played a crucial role in shaping the broader narrative of the conflict across the entire country.

Stakeholder Analysis:

In the context of the Syrian conflict, which has evolved into a complex proxy war involving global powers, stakeholder analysis becomes an indispensable method. This approach is crucial for uncovering the sophisticated network of diverse actors, ranging from regional and

international entities to local communities and non-state actors. Furthermore, in times of conflict where geopolitical interests are directly connected with local dynamics, understanding the motivations, interests, and alliances of these stakeholders becomes fundamental.

Interviews:

Given that one of the main goals of this research is to discover a road map for Syrian self-determination, interviews emerge as a vital method to include their voices in the recovery phase. By doing so, the research will amplify grassroots movements and also actively engage local perspectives by ensuring their meaningful participation in the recovery efforts in Syria. Another important goal of the research is to include Syrian voices in the potential future of the political reality in the country. This research will use their perspective as a foundation to navigate the possible political scenarios for Syria.

UN Resolution Review:

To have a holistic overview of the potential political pathways in Syria, an extensive critical review of the UN resolutions regarding the Syrian conflict is required. Moreover, this review will unveil how nations globally perceive the Syrian conflict and the power-related relations between the international stakeholders in Syria.

Pattern Language:

The pattern language method is used to formulate a spatial justice toolkit for the post-conflict phase that involves identifying recurring spatial patterns. Those patterns can contribute to peace, justice, and equity in the given context. This method seeks to translate these patterns into actionable spatial elements that can guide urban planning and development. Moreover, the Pattern Language method, in this context, serves as a valuable tool to capture effective spatial solutions that contribute to the broader goals of justice and equity in post-conflict urban landscapes.

Conclusion:

The scarcity of data in Syria, caused by the ongoing conflict and limited documentation, poses challenges for comprehensive analysis. To address this issue, the research will adopt a multifaceted approach, using various sources such as historical policy documents, official statistics, satellite imagery, a literature review, and a self-conducted small-scale survey. This strategy mitigates the limitations in the availability and reliability of official information, ensuring a more robust and nuanced understanding of the complex situation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework shows the relationships between the theories that are used to underpin the research. As we can see, the graph is divided into two main timeframes. The first one concerns conflict times, and the second one refers to the transition towards post-conflict times. The research will engage theoretically with three main concepts that help underpin the conflict. Those three concepts are authoritarianism, the revolution, and cities at war.

A critical perspective on spatial planning studies will be employed to integrate these three concepts, adding to the expanding literature that underscores the importance of diversifying planning perspectives. Transitioning to post-conflict times will involve an examination of three key theoretical concepts: storytelling in planning, peacebuilding, and insurgent planning.

Insurgency in grassroots movements will be the main concept to be examined in post-conflict times. It will be examined through different critical lenses.

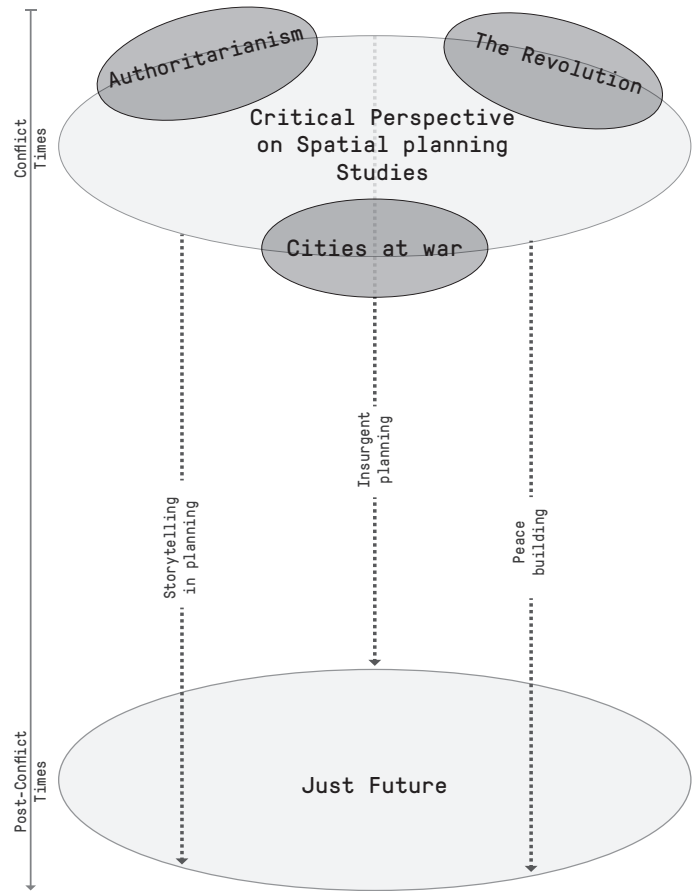


Figure 13: A representation of the main concepts used in the research.
Source: The author

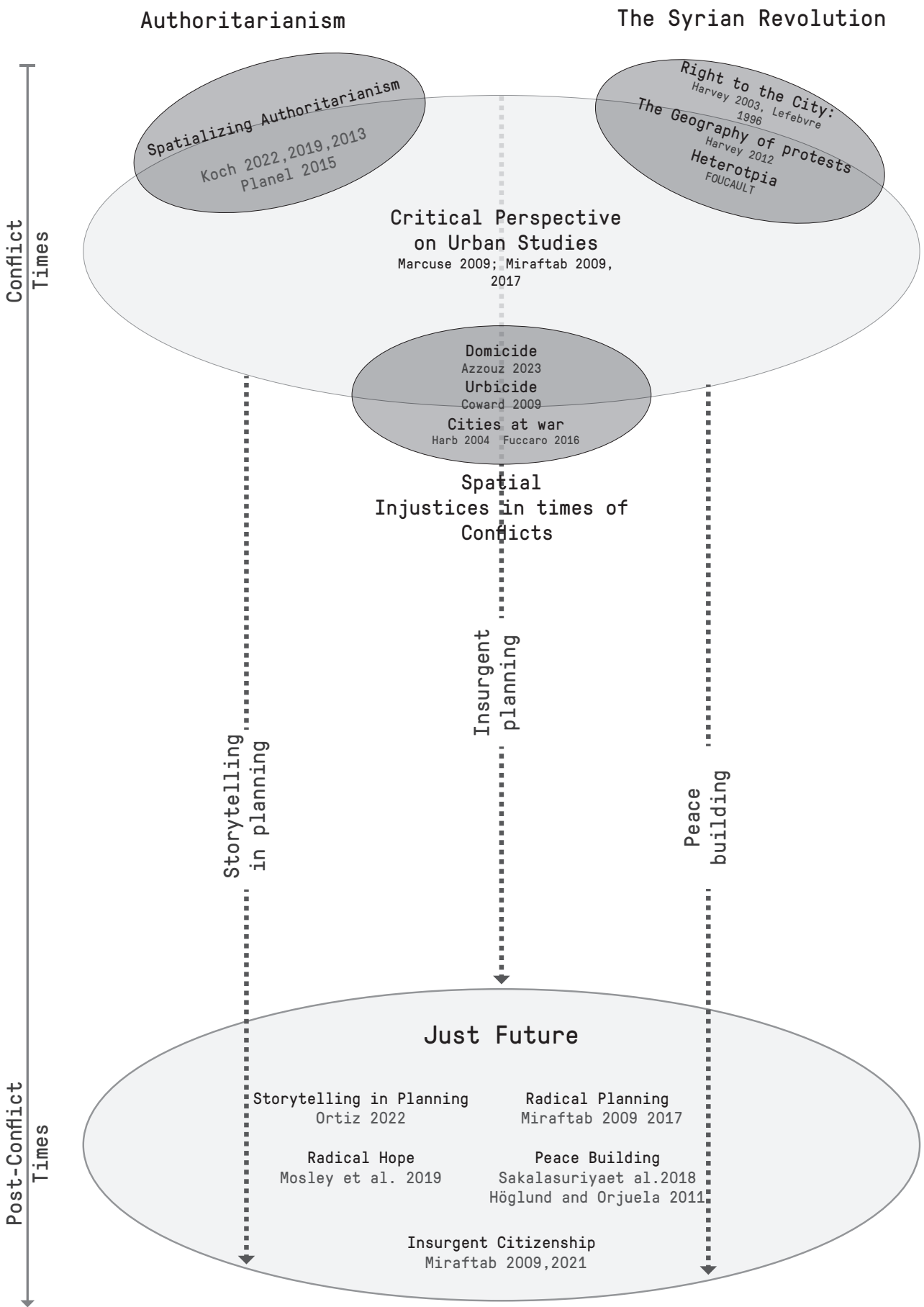


Figure 14: A representation of the main theories used in the research.
Source: The author

Theoretical Framework

Authoritarianism:

An authoritarian rule is characterized by a lack of democratic governance, marked by the absence of essential institutions and processes related to citizen participation, political competition, safeguarding fundamental rights, and overseeing the exercise of power. In contrast to democracies, authoritarian regimes lack democratic legitimacy due to the absence of key democratic features such as separation of powers, parliamentary systems, elections, and a diversity of political parties (Hans-Joachim, 2012).

Moreover, an interesting question would be: How is this reflected in space?

An existing and continuously expanding discourse is trying to discuss the spatiality of autocratic practices. Koch is one of the important contributors to this dialogue, as she argues: ‘...place and space remain central for understanding authoritarianism because governments or individuals may employ liberal or illiberal tactics in different spaces.’ (Wilson and Mitchell, 2022, p. 18).

She also explains that spatialization can manifest in various ways, ranging from strictly restricted and policed territories to more loosely controlled private spaces (Koch 2013; Koch and Vora 2019)

This research will explore the manifestation of authoritarian practices by the Syrian regime, including governance and policy aspects, and extend to more explicit actions like the mass destruction of cities while linking these practices to the broader scientific dialogue.

The Revolution:

In the last ten years or so, the concept of the right to the city has gained considerable prominence in discussions within urban studies. It is frequently cited and supported in policy circles, academic discourse, and by activists (Purcell, 2014).

In times of oppression, spaces, and squares can transform into platforms where discontent is voiced and anger finds expression. According to Lefebvre (1968), these revolutionary spaces become platforms for people to claim their right to the city. In the words of Harvey: ‘the spontaneous coming together in a moment of “irruption;” when disparate heterotopic groups suddenly see, if only for a fleeting moment, the possibilities of collective action to create something radically different. ‘That coming together is symbolized by Lefebvre in the quest for centrality.’ (Harvey, 2012, p. 18).

The notion of centrality is evident in the transformation of informal settlements in Damascus into heterotopic spaces where rebels have fortified themselves in their quest for justice and freedom. These peripheral, heterotopic places on the city’s outskirts became the focal point of the revolution. In the distraction of the centrality of the cities in quest for freedom, Harvey explains: ‘How else and where else can we come together to articulate our collective cries and demands?’ (Harvey, 2012, p. 18).

This study will expand on the aforementioned concept by examining the spatial dimensions of protests in Damascus and their correlation with social inequalities in the city.

Cities at War:

In Middle Eastern historical scholarship, violence in relation to cities has often been overlooked, with cities primarily seen as administrative centers and the sites of state activities. The violence occurring within these cities has been marginalized, and viewed as secondary to other social and political processes. This limited perspective has hindered the recognition of the mutually constitutive relationship between violence and the city throughout history (Fuccaro, 2016). Moreover, as cities emerge as the frontlines of conflicts, Saskia Sassin observes that in contemporary times, major cities are prone to becoming the primary battlegrounds in wars, in contrast to the two World Wars, where large armies required skies, oceans, and fields for combat (Sassin, 2017). In authoritarian regimes, the mass destruction of neighborhoods can serve as a tool for collective punishment against rebels. In his book *Domicide* (The Destruction of Home), Azzouz (2023, p:19) explains this by saying: ‘The levelling of people’s homes did not only mean the eradication of physical buildings and structures, but also meant the eradication of the conditions of possibility and existence for their personal identities.’

In “*Urbicide The Politics of Urban Destruction*” Martin Coward, in explaining the Bosnian War, argues that ‘the destruction of the built environment has a meaning of its own rather than being incidental to, or a secondary feature of, the genocidal violence’ (Coward, 2009, p. 36).

In the Syrian context, the deliberate and systemic distraction of neighborhoods has transformed them

into atopias—places devoid of the familiarity and history that once defined them (Gregotti, 1991).

The ‘Urbicide’ as a collective punishment tool, among others, will be analyzed further in the research.

The informal settlements, once completely destroyed by the regime during the Syrian conflict, have emerged as central focal points of the revolution, despite their positioning on the outskirts of the capital. These areas were deliberately obliterated in an attempt to quash any potential future uprisings. In the distraction of the new centrality of the rebel areas in quest for freedom, Harvey explains: ‘How else and where else can we come together to articulate our collective cries and demands?’ (Harvey, 2012, p. 18).

This study will expand on the aforementioned concept by examining the spatial dimensions of protests in Damascus and their correlation with social inequalities in the city.

Conceptual Framework

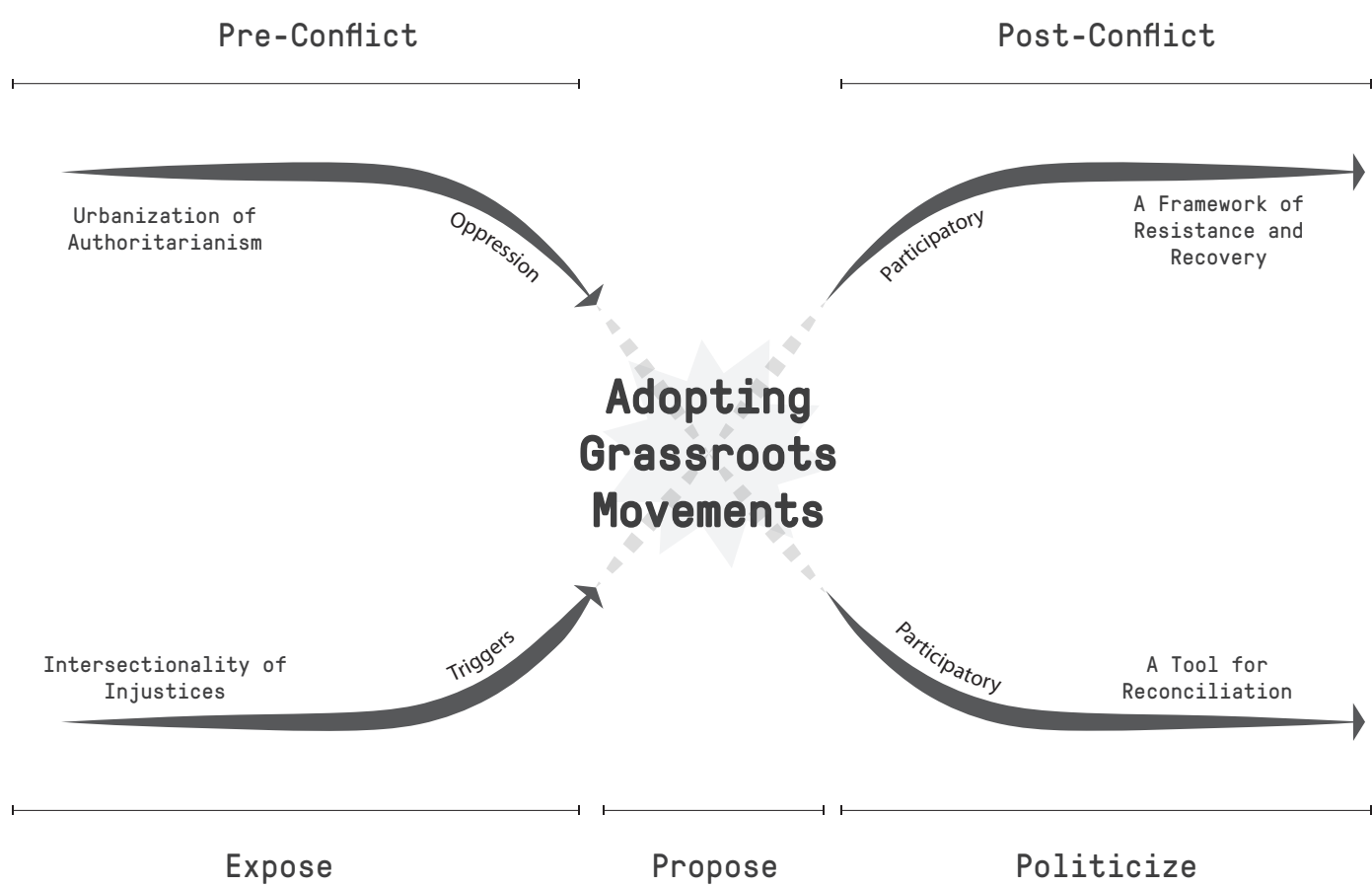


Figure 15: A representation of the Conceptual Framework.
Source: The author

The conceptual framework serves as a tool to illustrate the pathways of the research. The thesis will start by focusing on the root causes of the conflict and proving the intersectionality of the injustices that triggered the war. It will also address the procedural urban practices that were employed by the authoritarian regime to oppress marginalized groups and exclude them.

As the conceptual framework shows, a critical point in the research will be to embrace the currently happening grassroots movements. Moreover, this adoption is required to make the shift towards the post-conflict recovery phase.

The phasing out of oppression is illustrated in the emergence of the bottom-up approach to recovery. A tool for reconciliation will be suggested to bring the people a way to narrate their stories and expose them to different points of view.

Finally, a holistic recovery framework will be suggested to ensure the stability of the peace-building process after the recovery. Combining the participatory recovery approaches will be a tool to guarantee a resilient and stable transition towards a peaceful and just future in Syria.

Analytical Framework

Given the complexity of the research and the multi-faced dimensions of the conflict, an analytical framework will be used. This framework will combine the dimensions of the conflict with the associated time-frames. By doing so, a comprehensive understanding of the root causes of the conflict related to each one of the time frames will be achieved, and this will contribute later to the recovery plan that will address the dimensions and their implications.

The first layer of the analytical framework includes the dimensions of the conflict. The first dimension is the environmental one, which addresses the escalation of the environmental crisis from 2006 until now. The second dimension is the socio-economical one, which analyses the social triggers behind the conflict and its economic manifestations. Finally, the political dimension will be addressed to illustrate the political realm in which those issues have occurred, in addition to, the policies and the governance that have contributed to those disparities.

The three dimensions will be studied along the second layer of the framework which is the timelines. There are three timelines: pre-conflict, during the conflict, and status quo. The dimensions and the timelines are situated in a realm of three the time-spans of the conflict. This alignment will allow a holistic understanding of each dimension and its implications.

The interconnection of intersectional triggers of the conflict will serve as a counterargument against the Westernized perspective that simplifies the Syrian conflict as merely an environmental issue.

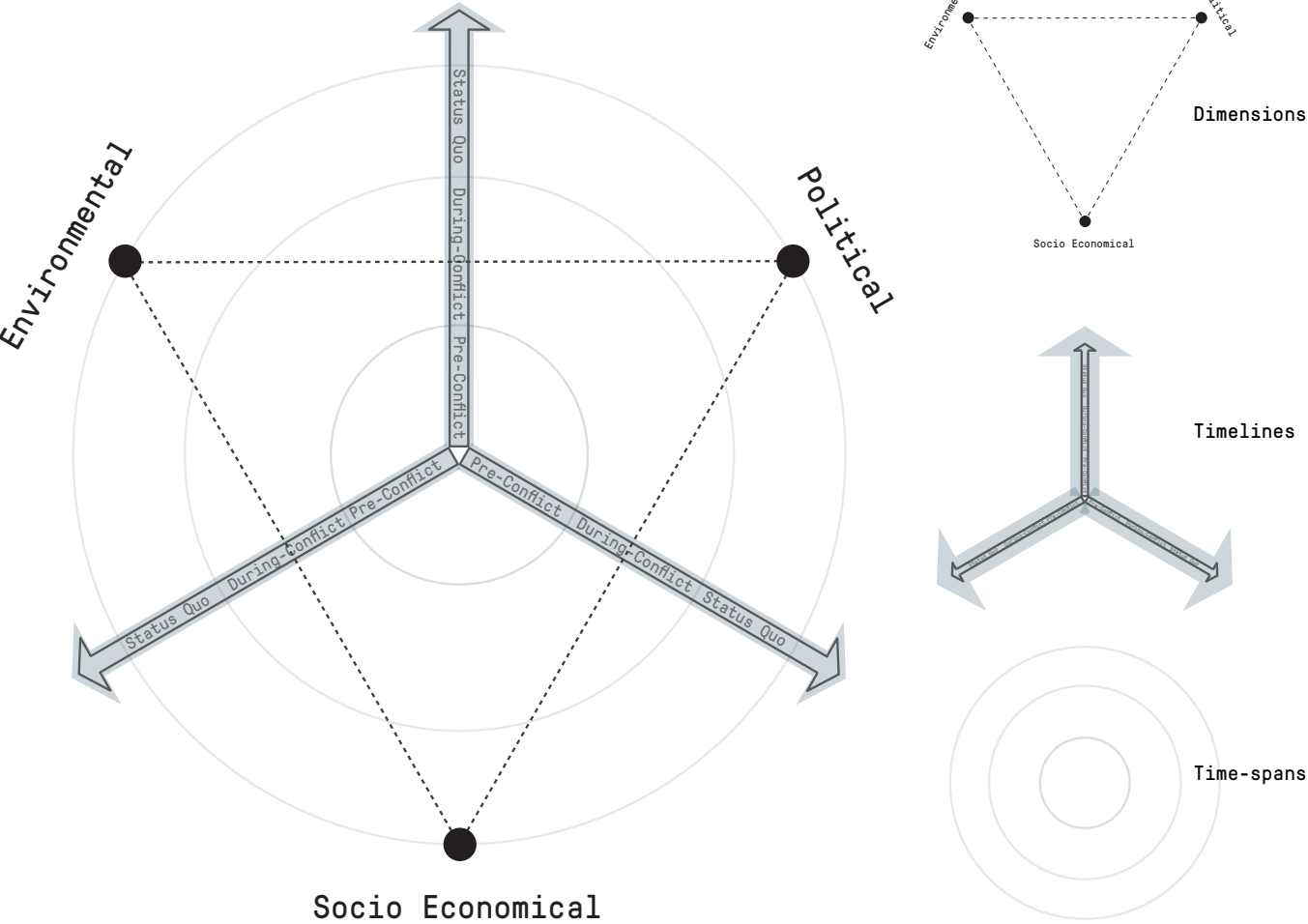


Figure 16: A representation of the Analytical Framework.

Source: The author

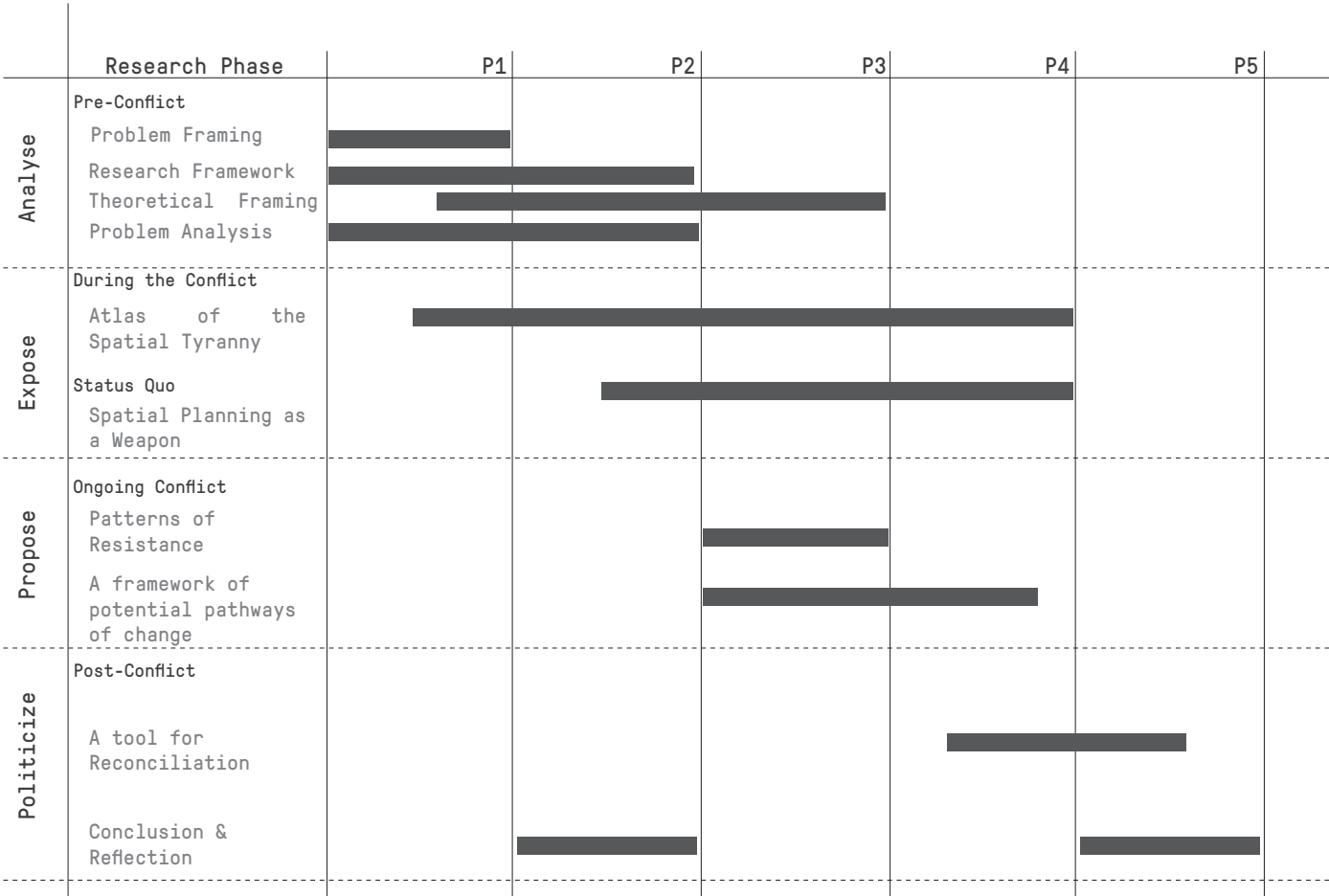


Figure 17: Graduation Project Timeline.
Source: The author

This research adopts a nuanced approach, employing Critical Urban Planning to explore spatial planning during the Syrian conflict. Utilizing both inductive and deductive methods, it analyzes current observations and incorporates established theories to understand spatial dynamics. Inspired by Marcuse’s framework, the research follows a multi-step strategy of Analyze, Expose, Propose, and Politicize. Aligning with the conflict stages, it investigates root causes, reveals structural practices, collaborates on proposals, and clarifies political actions. The integration of a timeline dissects the conflict into pre-, during-, and post-conflict stages, allowing to tell the narrative of the conflict extensively. Theoretical concepts of authoritarianism, revolution, and cities at war underpin the conflict, while post-conflict explores theories of conflict resolution, peacebuilding, insurgent planning, and spatial justice. The conceptual framework emphasizes addressing root causes, oppressive urban practices, and political scenarios, and adopting just political scenarios for post-conflict recovery.

This comprehensive and critically informed approach aims to contribute valuable insights for smarter planning strategies in conflict recovery.

ANALYSE

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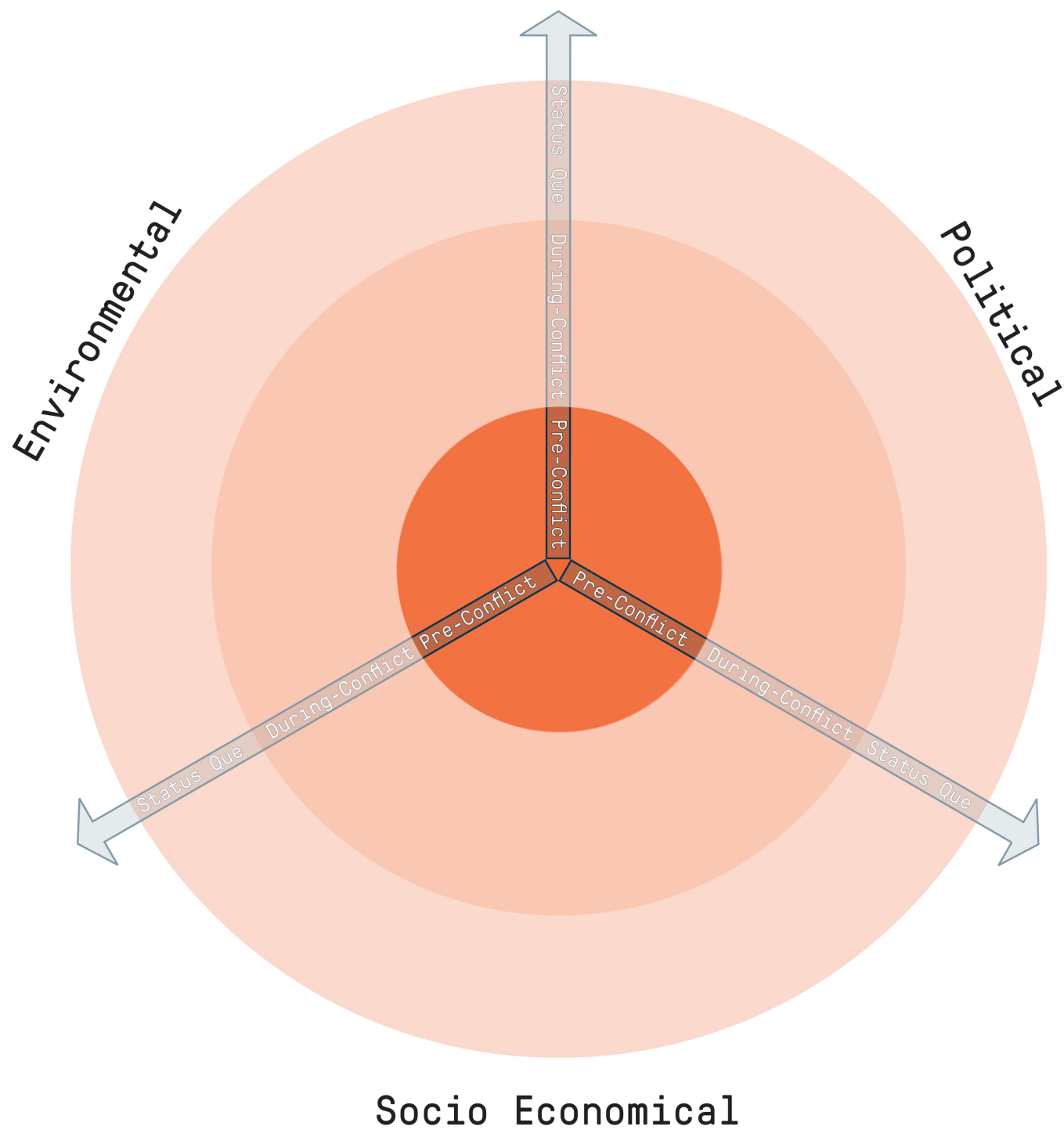


Figure 18: The Pre-Conflict phase in the analytical framework.
Source: The author

The Syrian uprising is often portrayed by international experts as an unexpected occurrence in the Middle East, catching many by surprise. Numerous analysts, even just days before the initial protests, believed that Syria, under Al-Assad, was impervious to the Arab Spring. Yet, the roots of social unrest existed beneath the surface for those observant enough to notice (Femia et al. 2012).

In this chapter of the report, the root causes behind the conflict are unfolded extensively, illustrating the interconnectedness between three main dimensions that contributed to the unrest.

This illustration serves as a counterargument to Euro-American allegations that simplify the conflict as solely driven by climate change. It adds to the reclaimed narrative, offering a comprehensive perspective from the viewpoint of the Syrian experience.

Given the scarcity of studies, determining the precise contribution from each dimension is challenging. Nevertheless, the objective is to unveil the interplay of various factors that collectively fueled the onset of the uprising.

This chapter aims to highlight the interconnectedness of three key dimensions—environmental, socio-economic, and political—within the

Syrian conflict. It's important to note that all three dimensions carry equal significance, allowing readers to approach them in any order. The interconnected nature of these dimensions is central to understanding the complexity of the conflict. Whether you start with the environmental triggers, delve into the socio-economic aspects, or explore the political realm, the goal is to emphasize how these dimensions intersect and influence each other throughout the conflict's different stages.

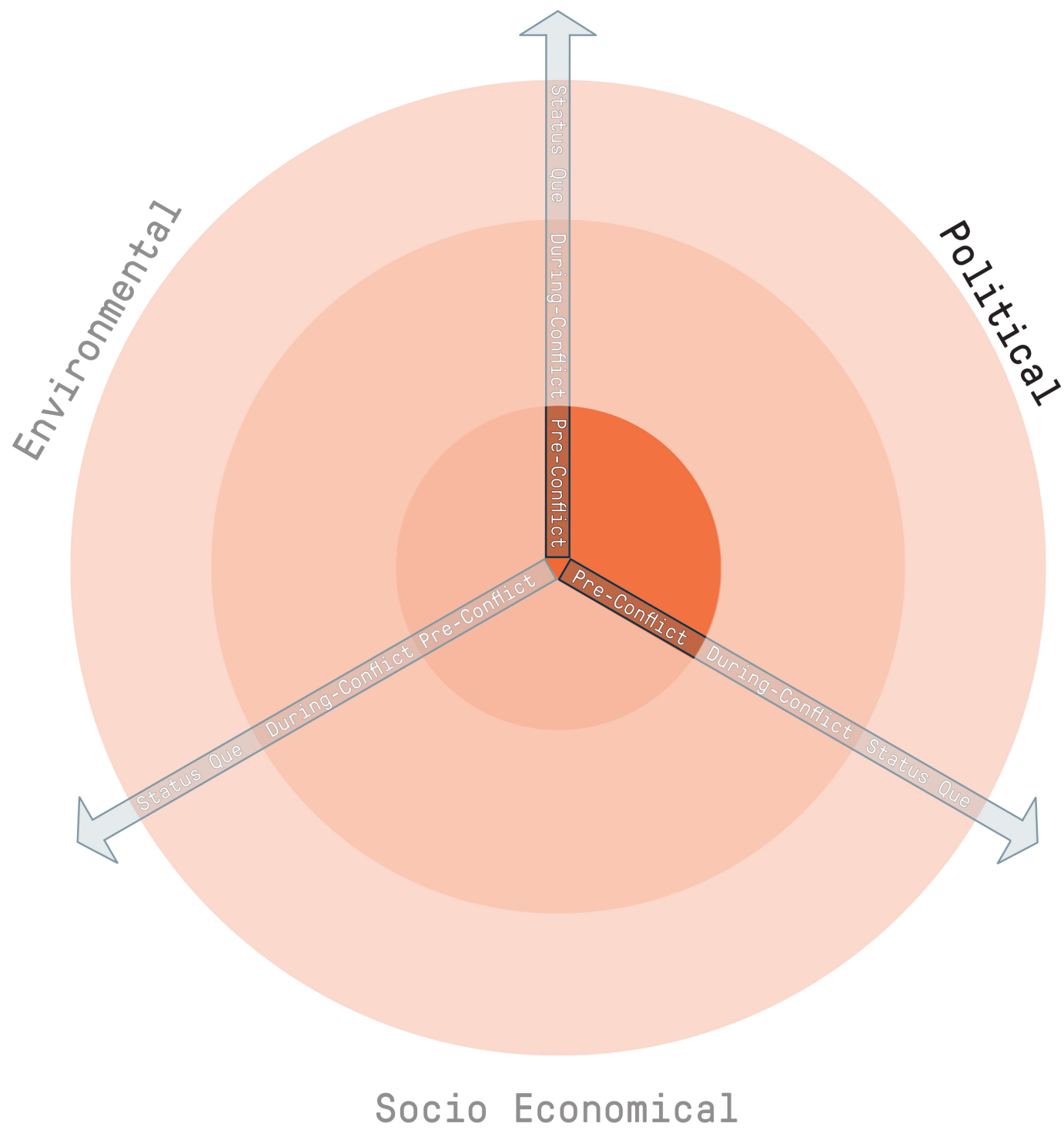


Figure 19: The Political Dimension in the Pre-Conflict phase.

Source: The author



Figure 20: A photo shows a statue of Hafez Al-Assad in the campus of Al Baath University.

Source: Al Baath University, 2011



Figure 21: Pictures of Bashar al-Assad in the streets of Damascus during his election campaign

Source: Middle East newspaper, 2021

Political Dimension

The pre-conflict political dimension in this research is focused on the period of Al-Assad -the father and the son- ruling period in Syria. In 1970 Hafez Al-Assad took over the rule in Syria through a bloodless military coup. He took the lead in the Al-Ba'ath part (The Syrian party that calls for the Arabs' unity, freedom, and socialism), and started his authoritarian socialism era. His coup was given the name of 'Corrective movement' which was allegedly meant to improve the living conditions of the working class and undermine the hegemony of the Sunni landlord-merchant elite. This was translated into the regime's developmental model, which appeared to align with import substitution industrialization, involving state control over key economic sectors, the initiation of infrastructure projects, the establishment of industrial factories, and the imposition of quantitative restrictions on international trade. Concurrently, the extensive Syrian bureaucracy brought a significant portion of the population directly under state control (Perthes, 1995). According to Bourdieu (1998), the primary objective of the state is to preserve the power hierarchy, whether attained through consensus or violence. In times of crisis, the state employs its coercive technologies to suppress any protests or social movements challenging its legitimacy, governing through force. This is exemplified by the regime's confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood, starting in 1979 and culminating in the notorious Hama Massacre of 1982 (Cleveland, 2000:

394; Fisk, 2002: 62).

However, because of the growing influence of a powerful business community, the regime opted for economic liberalization after a severe foreign exchange crisis in 1986. This period marked the beginning of economic liberalization. This involved policies opening up more sectors to private investment, liberalizing prices, reducing subsidies, and freeing up trade and exchange rates (Dahi and Munif, 2012).

Moreover, the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the perceived end of socialist ideology. The regime discarded any remaining Marxist discourse from its literature and educational programs. In a broader context, the Syrian economy saw increased integration with global capitalism (Dahi and Munif, 2012). In 2000, Bashar Al-Assad, Hafez Al-Assad's son, took over power after his father's death. His governance was characterized by authoritarian neoliberalism, signifying the state's dependence on the private sector. This expansion, however, came with the condition of maintaining control over the market by favoring those loyal to his regime (Dahi and Munif, 2012).

Consequently, the living conditions of Syrian citizens have significantly deteriorated, with 5% of the population possessing half of the country's wealth. The unemployment rate was over 30%, leaving between 11% and 30% of the population below the poverty line (Wieland, 2006).

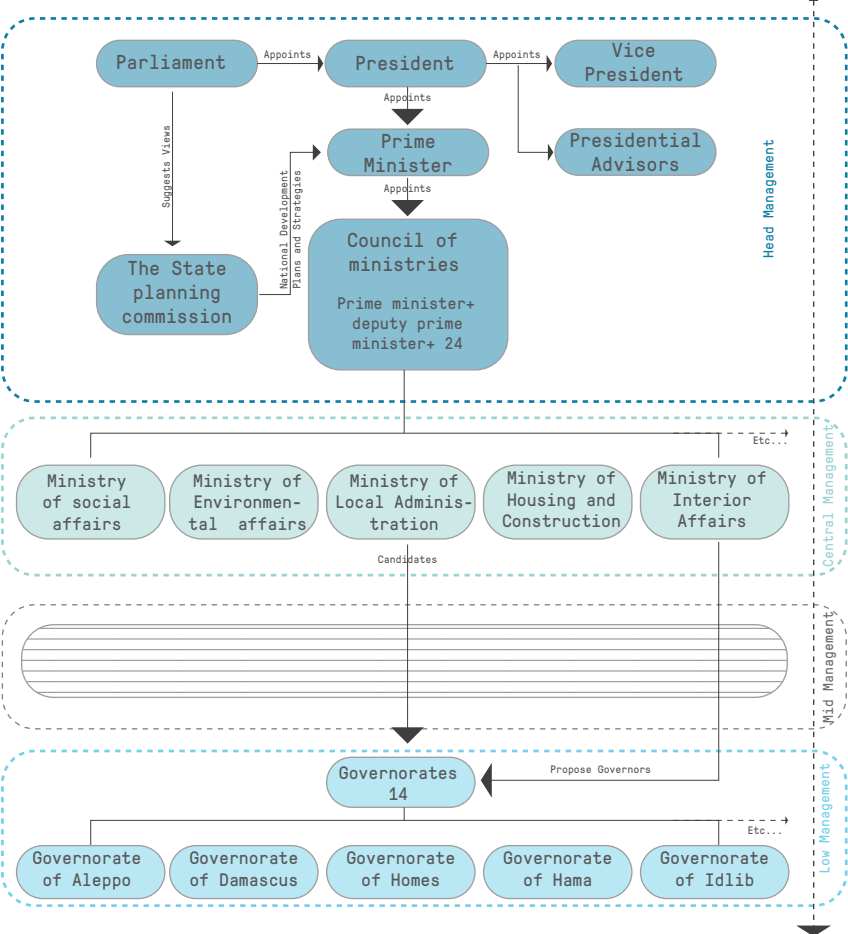


Figure 22: The Government hierarchy. With focus on urban development decision-making relayed bodies
Source: The author. Adopted from: (Hasan, 2012)

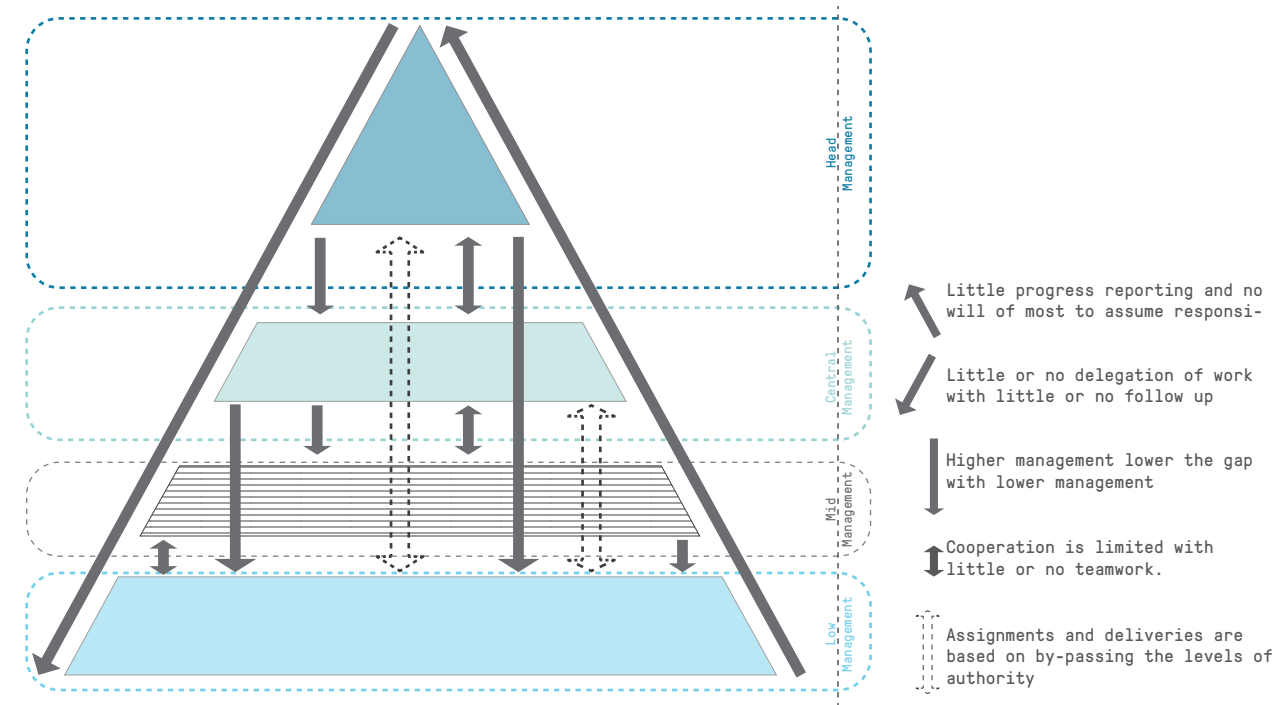


Figure 23: The UN baseline for critique of Syrian government structure.
Source: The author. Adopted from: (UNDP, et al., 2005, p. 5)

As illustrated in Figure 22, the Syrian regime’s governance structure is extremely hierarchical. The Syrian government is perceived as maintaining a strong grip on governance, particularly in the urban development sphere. The central government exercises authority over development decisions across various levels, ranging from strategic planning to local initiatives (Hasan, 2012). The UNDP provided a critique of the governance structure in 2005, which is extensively explained in Hasan’s Ph.D. research. Hasan explains that the state’s enduring tradition of centralism, coupled with deep-rooted issues of inefficiency, mismanagement, inadequate capacity, and corruption, has given rise to a multitude of obstacles and challenges. These hindrances have impeded the state’s efforts to implement decentralization, as highlighted by the UNDP (2005). The absence of a clear separation between legislative and executive bodies typically consolidated within the central government’s ‘head’, has led to several consequences: first, the emergence of gaps between the apex and the base of the governmental hierarchy (see Figure 22); second, the suboptimal delivery of local services; and third, an out-dated bureaucratic development process. (Hasan, 2012, P: 49)

In conclusion, Syria’s governance structure mirrors the authoritarian regime’s pursuit of absolute control over all levels and aspects of Syria.

To understand how authoritarian practices aligned with the dysfunctional way of governing were reflected in the daily lives of Syrians, an empirical investigation regarding policies was conducted. This comprehensive policy aligns the policies with the political timeline and incorporates economic indicators such as GDP and social indicators like the unemployment rate (see Figure 24). This chart aims to elucidate the impact of authoritarian practices under Hafez Al-Assad’s socialist regime and, subsequently, the neoliberal approach adopted by Bashar al-Assad, on the country’s socio-economic landscape. The examined policies, intricately linked to the dimensions within the analytical framework, include spatial development, agricultural policies, and economic strategies. The policies have been collected from various sources (Sukkar et al., 2021, SCPR, 2019, Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade, n.a.). The GDP and the unemployment rate are sourced from the World Bank. In summary, the economic situation experienced significant fluctuations under Hafez Al-Assad’s socialist era, heavily dependent on the regional geopolitical landscape. Furthermore, relative stability was achieved with the implementation of Bashar Al-Assad’s neoliberal policies. However, despite the implementation of the neoliberal economic plan, the socio-economic situation, as reflected in the unemployment rate, continued to deteriorate.

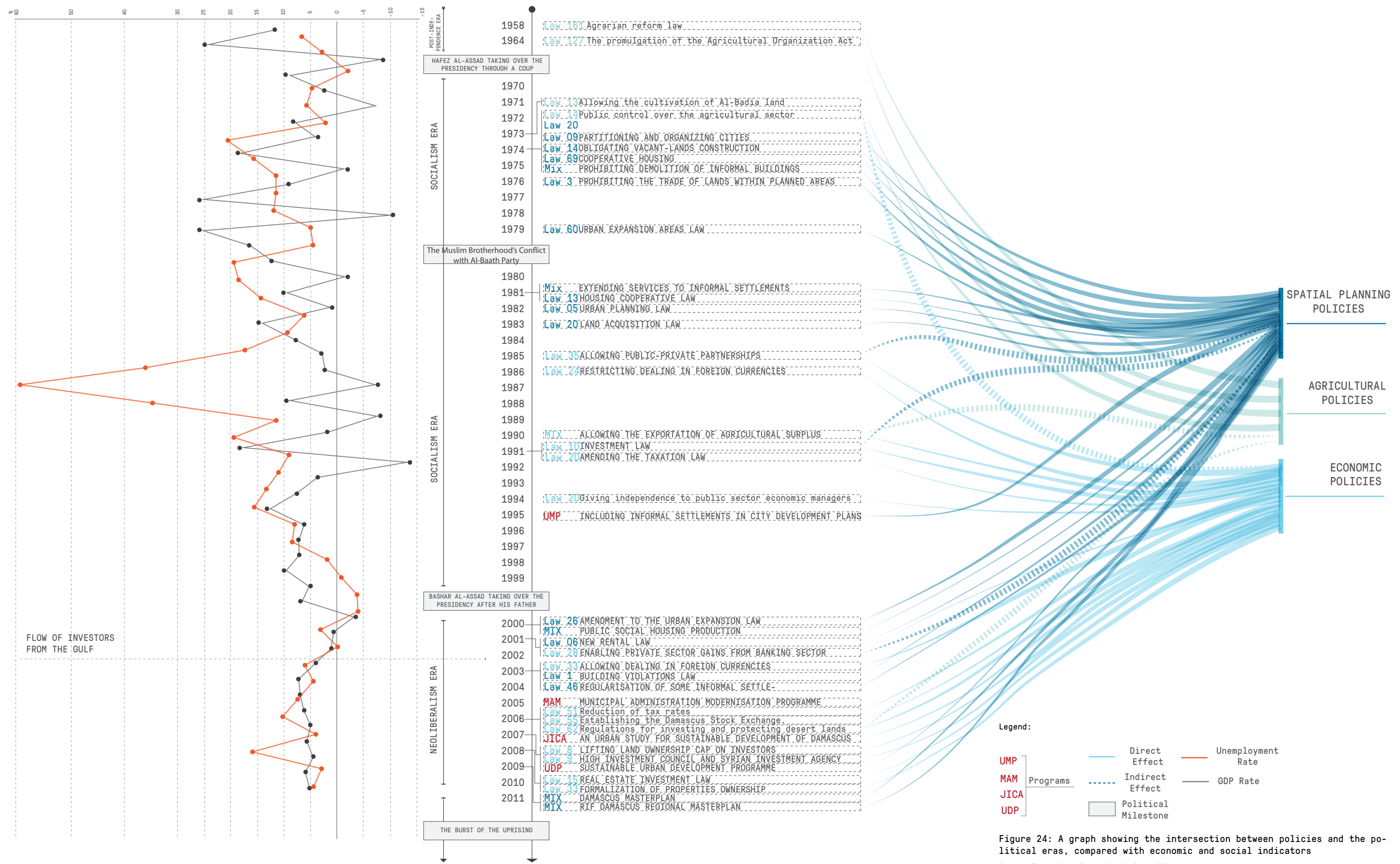


Figure 24: A graph showing the intersection between policies and the political eras, compared with economic and social indicators
Source: The author. Data adopted from different sources

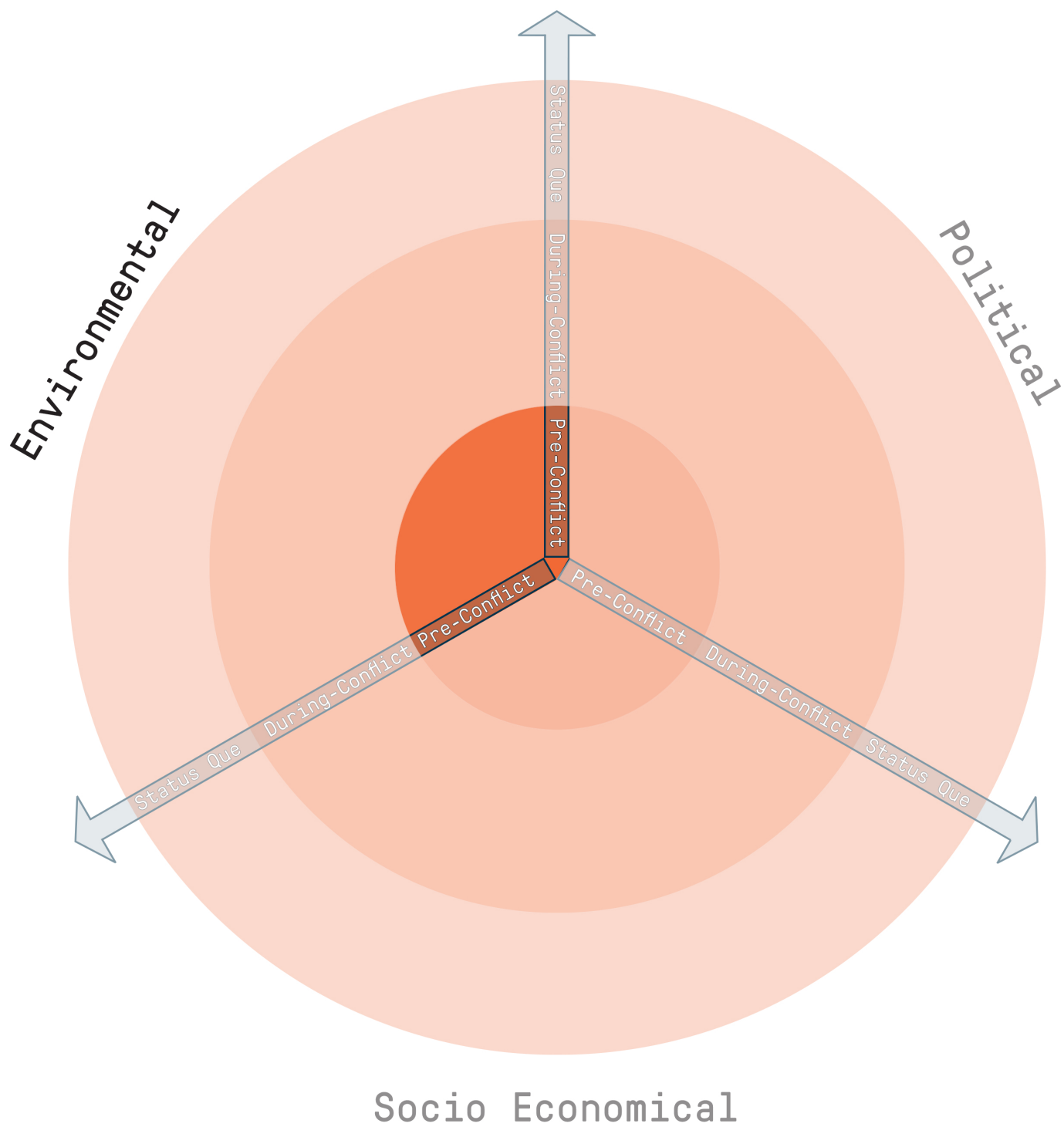


Figure 25: The Environmental Dimension in the Pre-Conflict phase.
Source: The author

The ongoing scientific debate regarding whether climate change played a central role in triggering the Syrian uprising has been extensive. This discourse has prompted scholars to delve into various perspectives and evidence. In a notable contribution to this conversation, Angermayr released a journal article that provides a comprehensive summary of this multifaceted debate. The article critically examines the arguments and counterarguments presented by scientists, shedding light on the complexities surrounding the link between climate change and the Syrian uprising.

The discourse surrounding the connection between the Syrian civil war and climate change, triggered by an extended drought, gained momentum in 2014 through key publications. In January of that year, De Châtel's article in Middle Eastern Studies and Gleick's contribution in Weather, Climate, and Society laid the foundation. In 2015, Kelley's article in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences garnered significant media attention, amassing over 1300 citations on Google Scholar. The debate peaked in 2017, marked by Selby et al.'s critique of Gleick (2014) and Kelley et al. (2015), generating responses from Gleick (2017), Hendrix (2017), and Kelley et al. (2017), along with a rejoinder from Selby et al. (2017a). Post-2017, the frequency of articles has averaged one per year, indicating an ongoing debate (Angermayr et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, this research will join this extensive debate by first acknowledging the environmental dimension as one of several triggers of the conflict. Second, offering a comprehensive understanding of the intersectionality of the injustices that have led to the uprising in Syria.

The relationship between water scarcity and conflict is rooted in history in the Mesopotamia region (Gleick 2014). Syria nowadays is facing the same challenge, Gleick explains: ‘...Pressures on Syrian water resources have been growing for a nearly a quarter century. Water is a scarce resource in the area—one of the driest in the world.’ (Gleick 2014, P.332).

Syria, with an annual average rainfall of less than 250 mm, is classified as water-scarce according to evaluations of water availability conducted by various research groups (Falkenmark, 1986).

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that 60% of the total renewal water sources in Syria, both surface and groundwater, originate outside its borders (FAO, 2012).

Apart from facing a general scarcity of freshwater relative to demands, Syria, akin to the broader region, witnesses considerable natural hydrological fluctuations. Between 1900 and 2005, the country experienced six notable droughts, characterized by a substantial reduction in winter precipitation—the primary rainy season—to approximately one-third of the usual levels. While five of these droughts were limited to a single season, the sixth endured for two seasons (Mohtadi 2013). However, from 2006 to 2011, Syria encountered an unprecedented, multi-season, multi-year extreme drought, leading to agricultural failures, economic disruptions, and population displacement (Worth 2010). This prolonged dry spell, now regarded as

the ‘worst long-term drought and most severe set of crop failures since agricultural civilizations began in the Fertile Crescent many millennia ago’ (Gary Nabhan, as cited by Femia and Werrell 2012), has persisted beyond 2011 (Gleik 2014).

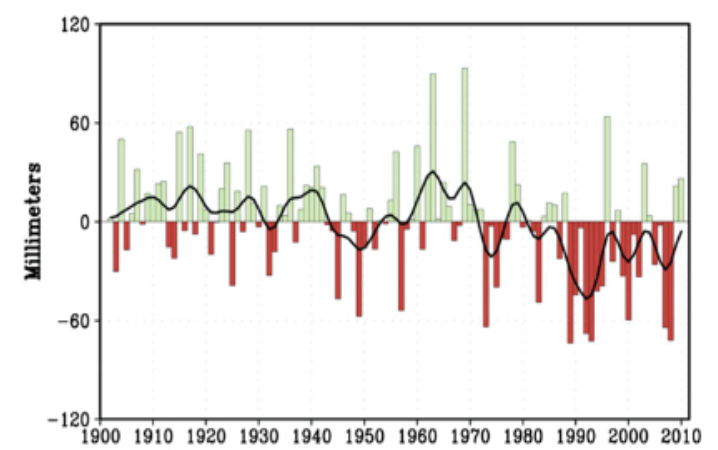


Figure 26: Millimeters of rain in the winter period from 1902 to 2010, showing a drop in rainfall in the 1971-2010 period.
Source: (Hoerling et al. ,2012)

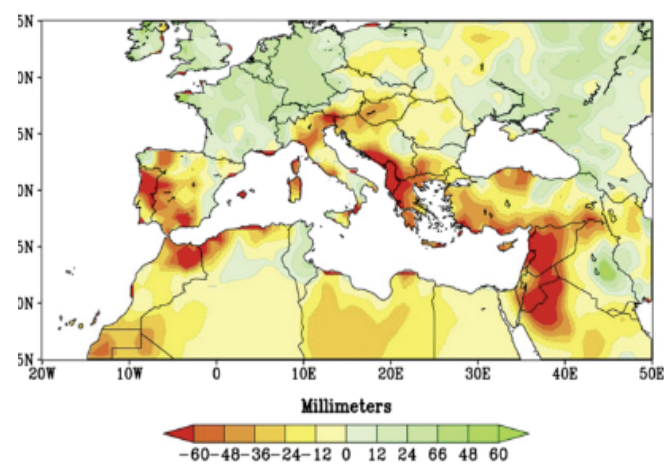


Figure 27: A Map showing the increased frequency of drought in the Mediterranean area
Source: (Hoerling et al. ,2012)

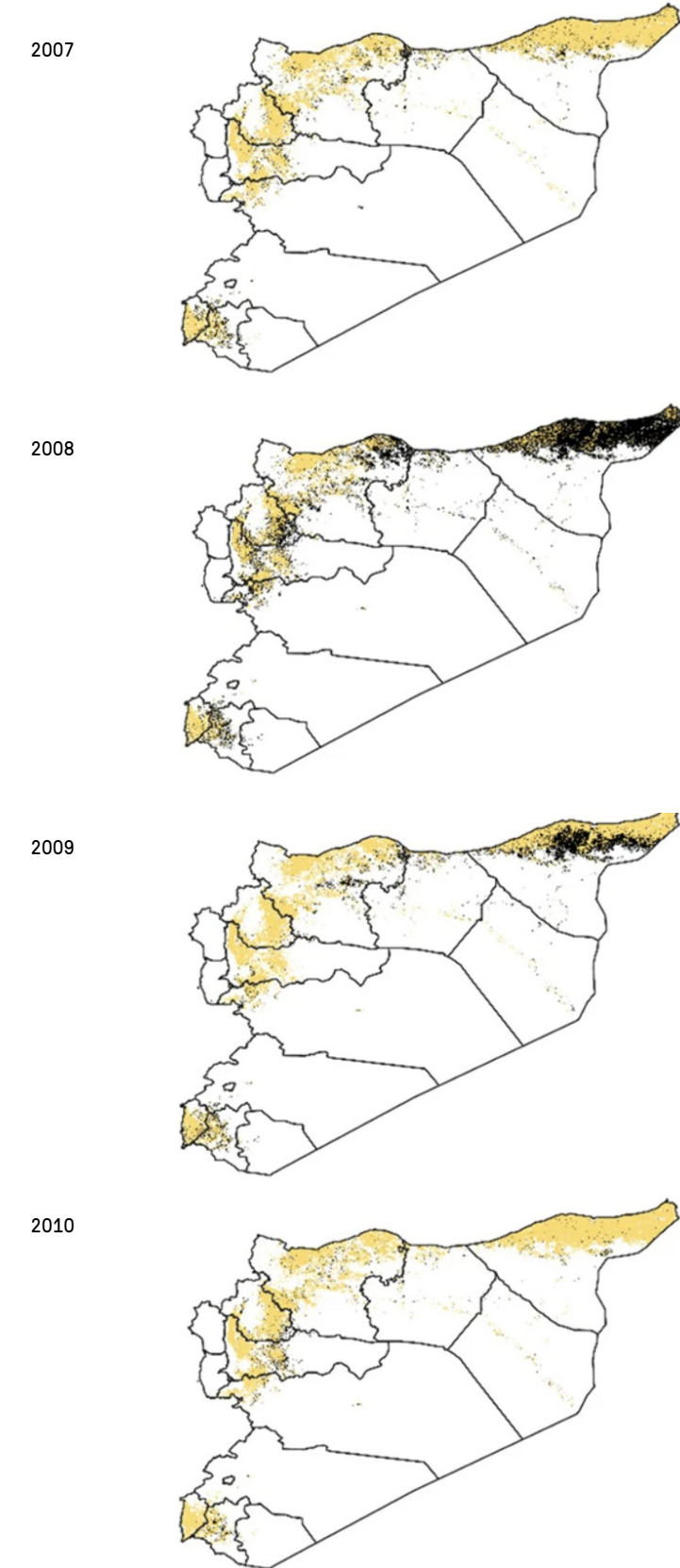


Figure 28: A series of maps showing the crop failure between 2006 - 2010
Source: (Eklund et al. ,2022)

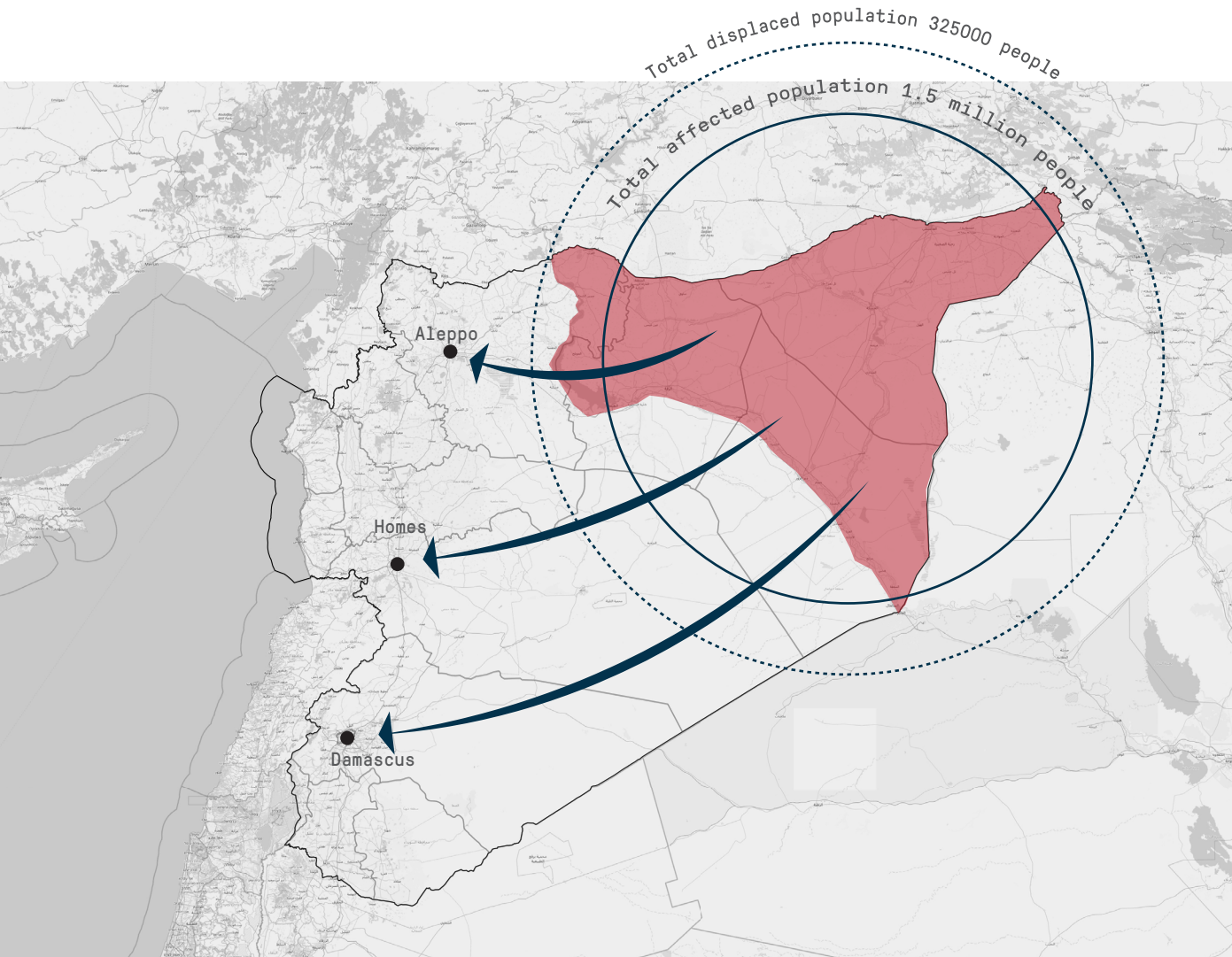


Figure 29: The internal migration due to the crop failure.
Source: (Eklund et al. ,2022)



Environmental Dimension

Moreover, agriculture is considered to be a vital contributor to the Syrian GDP. According to The Global Economy, in 2020, about 25% of the GDP will come from the agricultural sector. 15% of working Syrians are employed in farming, relying on year-to-year production.

Two third of the cultivated land in Syria is rain-fed. The remainder relies upon unsustainable irrigation methods, such as a total flood. All these factors contributed to the escalation of the problem (Erian W ,2011).

The breakdown of the agricultural system in the Northeastern “bread-basket” region, responsible for a substantial majority of the country’s crop yields, had profound consequences for rural Syria. With a heavy dependence on agriculture, especially during the severe and prolonged drought, the region faced insurmountable challenges. Approximately 1.5 million people engaged in farming directly felt the impact of this crisis. Faced with dwindling resources and livelihoods, a mass migration wave ensued, involving 65,000 families, totaling 325,000 individuals, as they sought refuge in larger cities. This migration not only highlighted the vulnerability of rural communities but also exacerbated the strain on urban areas, adding to the complexity of the unfolding crisis (Kelley et al., 2015).

The challenges stemming from water scarcity and land desertification in Syria have been exacerbated by inadequate governance. The al-Assad regime’s mismanagement and neglect

of natural resources, particularly water, have contributed significantly to shortages. By subsidizing water-intensive crops like wheat and cotton during periods of abundance, the government has encouraged inefficient irrigation practices. This, coupled with both climate and human-induced water shortages, has led to a surge in groundwater extraction, causing a drastic decline in groundwater levels and raising concerns about water quality. The over-grazing of land and a burgeoning population have further accelerated the process of land desertification, forcing farmers and herders to migrate or face dire consequences. Additionally, the liberalization program, initiated in the 1990s and intensified under Bashar al-Assad, triggered significant rural-to-urban migration, intensifying urbanization challenges. The shift towards a market economy, including privatization, trade liberalization, and subsidy removal, further strained the agricultural sector and exacerbated the impact of the drought on rural communities (Selby et al., 2017).

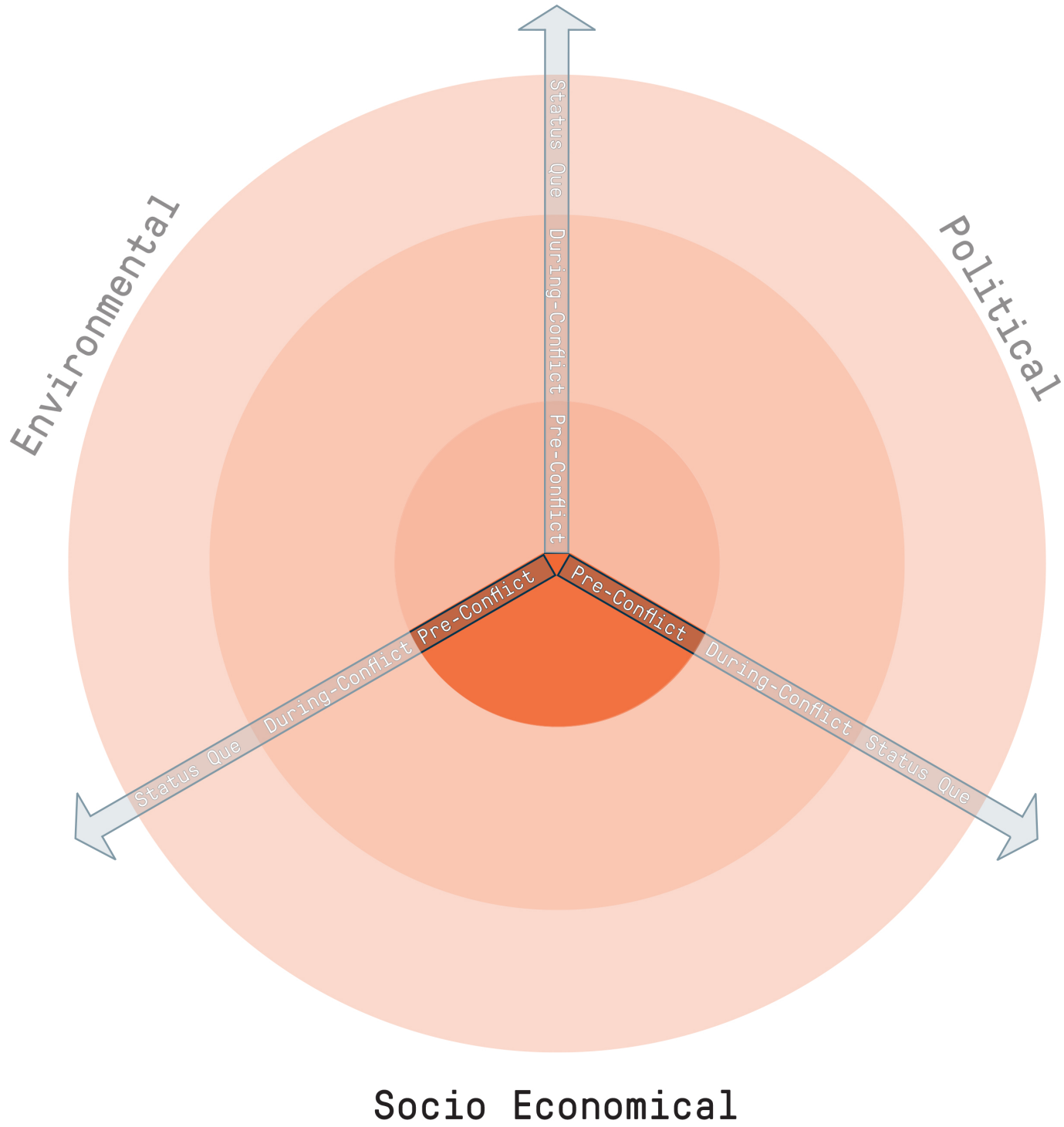


Figure 30: The Socio-Econical Dimension in the Pre-Conflict phase.
Source: The author

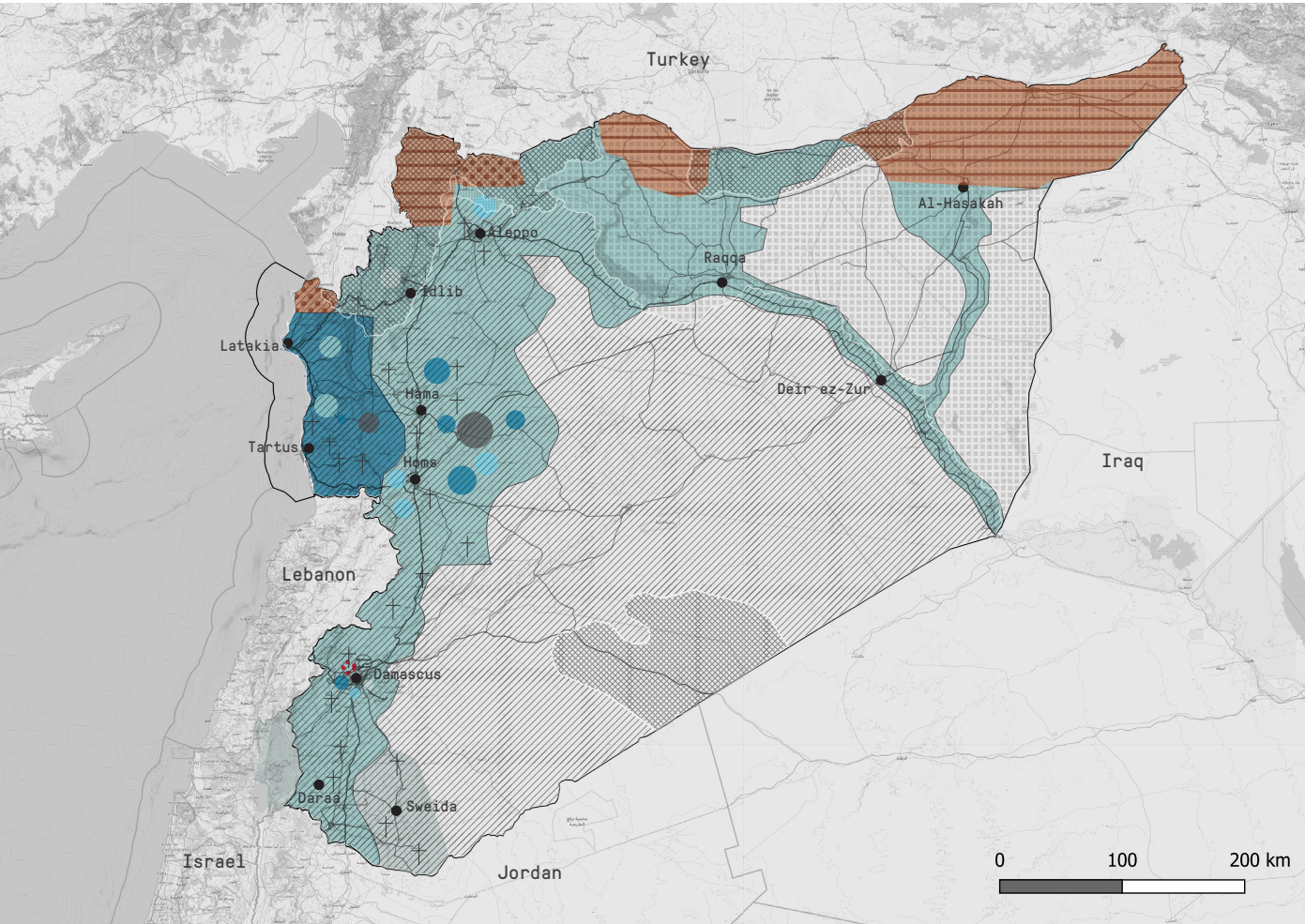
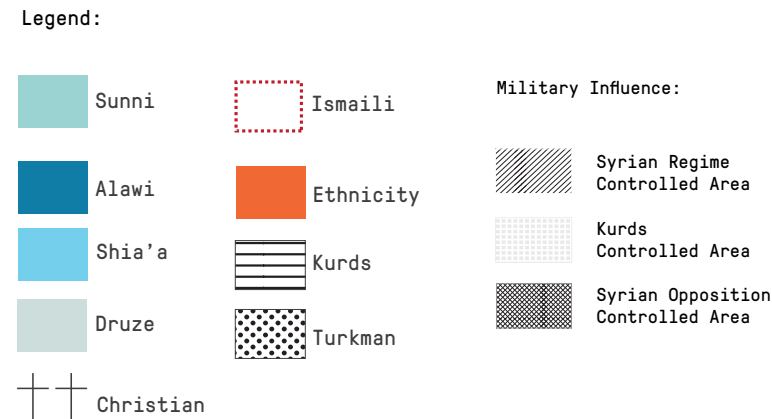


Figure 31: A map showing the Religious and Ethnic Diversity.

Source: The author. Adopted from: (Balanche, 2011)



Featured in The New York Times as ‘The one map that shows why Syria is so complicated,’ figure 32 adopts it to visually represents the religious and ethnic diversity in Syria. It also highlights the artificial borders imposed by the French and British colonial powers after World War I. These arbitrary divisions among various sectarian groups have significantly contributed to destabilizing the power balance in the region (Zakaria, 2013).

In Syria, most people are Arabs, mainly Sunni Muslims (see figure 31, who have historically been in charge. However, when Hafez Al-Assad took control in 1970 during a period of political instability, his minority group, the Alawites, became more powerful. They moved from their original areas to the capital, Damascus, and occupied top positions in the government and military. Al-Assad strategically strengthened his influence in the capital, which has historically been Sunni-majority, by systematically implementing measures to consolidate power in favor of his Alawite minority group. This led to a situation where the minority group started ruling over the majority and suppressing them (Middle East Institute, 2015).

Al-Assad regime in Syria, led by the Alawite minority, has not only marginalized Sunni Muslims but also other minorities like Druze, Christians, Kurds, and Ismailis. The regime maintained its control through fear and by creating divisions among

different religious and ethnic groups in the country. This strategy of ruling through fear and fostering division has led to the marginalization of various communities, contributing to a tense and fractured social fabric in Syria.

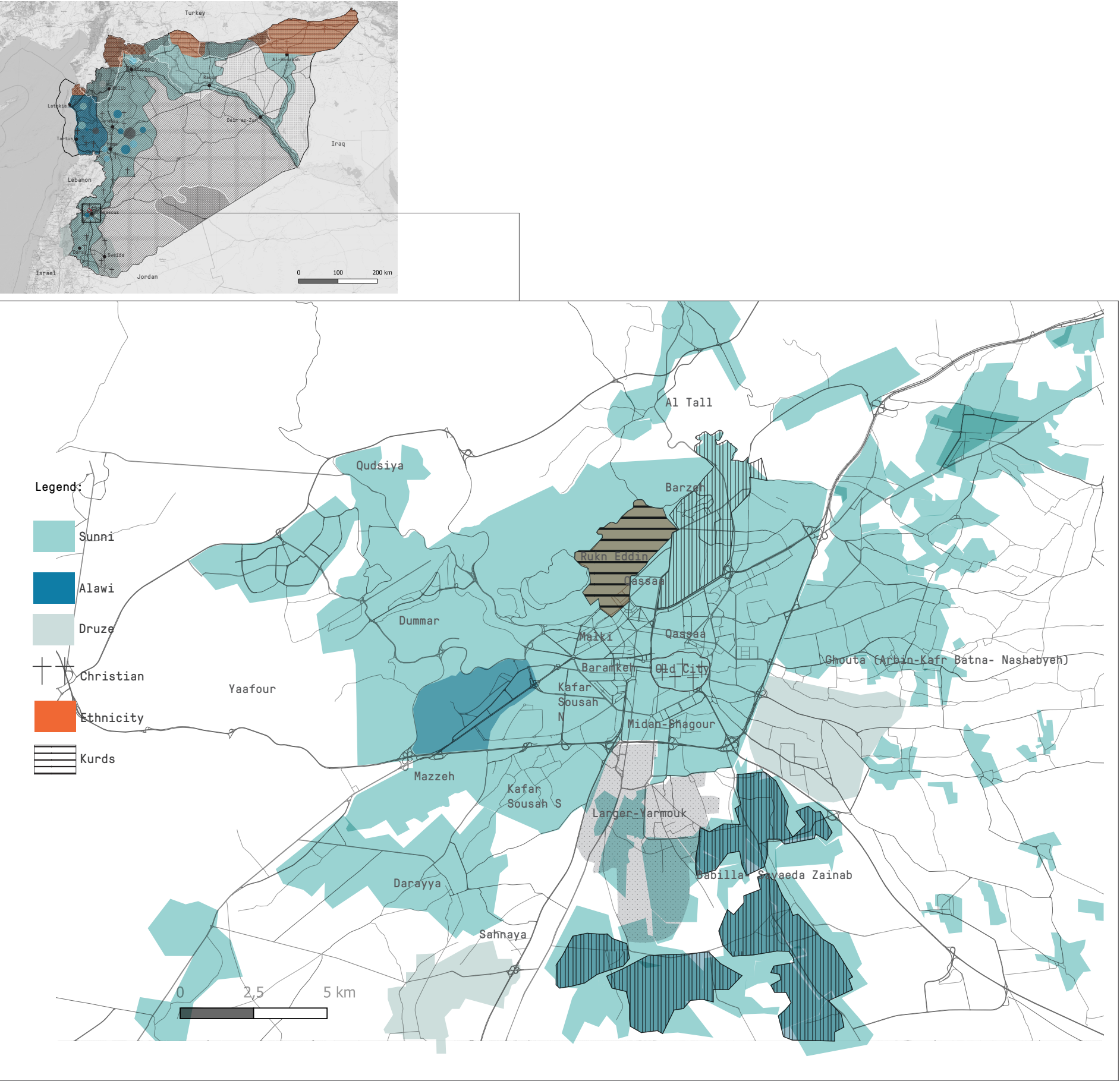


Figure 32: A map showing the Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Damascus.
Source: The author. Adopted from: (Wind et al. , 2020)

To grasp the sectarian divisions in Syria, we took a closer look at the capital, Damascus. The research focuses on Damascus because it vividly illustrates the various religious and social gaps and how they interact with each other.

Wind and Ibrahim have done extensive research to link the pre-conflict segregation patterns with what happened during and after the conflict. The researchers highlight historical accounts pre-dating the war that explore the segregation of people in Damascus based on ethnicity and economic standing using multiple sources. The depiction of the city in these sources portrays a contrast between wealthier, formally-constructed districts and less affluent, informally-built neighborhoods. Despite ethnic diversity across the city, certain areas have traditionally housed a higher concentration of minority groups such as Assyrian and Eastern Orthodox Christians, Shia Muslims, Alawites, Druzes, or Kurds. The researchers emphasize that these patterns of segregation trace back to planning and housing strategies implemented by ruling empires over the city's extensive 4000-year history. (Wind et al., 2020).

As a conclusion, In Damascus religious divisions are evident through the presence of distinct enclaves and neighborhoods, emphasizing the separation and isolation of different religious communities.



To grasp social segregation, it’s crucial to consider perceived social class. In the absence of official data, this study relies on a survey conducted by Wind and Ibrahim in 2020. They surveyed 234 participants, asking them to rank the social class of various neighborhoods in Damascus. The survey results categorize districts in Damascus based on their perceived social status hierarchy. Notably, Malki, Kafar Sousah, and Mazzeh on the western side of the old city are identified with high social status due to factors like historical elitist construction or modern planning since the 1980s. Conversely, districts with the lowest social status are situated in the southern and eastern outskirts, including areas with informal housing like Duma, Harasta, Arbin, and the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp and its surroundings (Wind et al., 2020).

It’s crucial to note that the wealthy neighborhoods are home to either Alawites (supporters of the Syrian regime’s sect) or the Sunni elite, who, in some manner, align with the Syrian regime. On the other hand, neighborhoods with lower social status accommodate either ethnic or religious minorities or lower-class Sunni residents.

Figure 33: A map showing the Perceived Social Class in Damascus.
Source: The author. Adopted from: (Wind et al. , 2020)

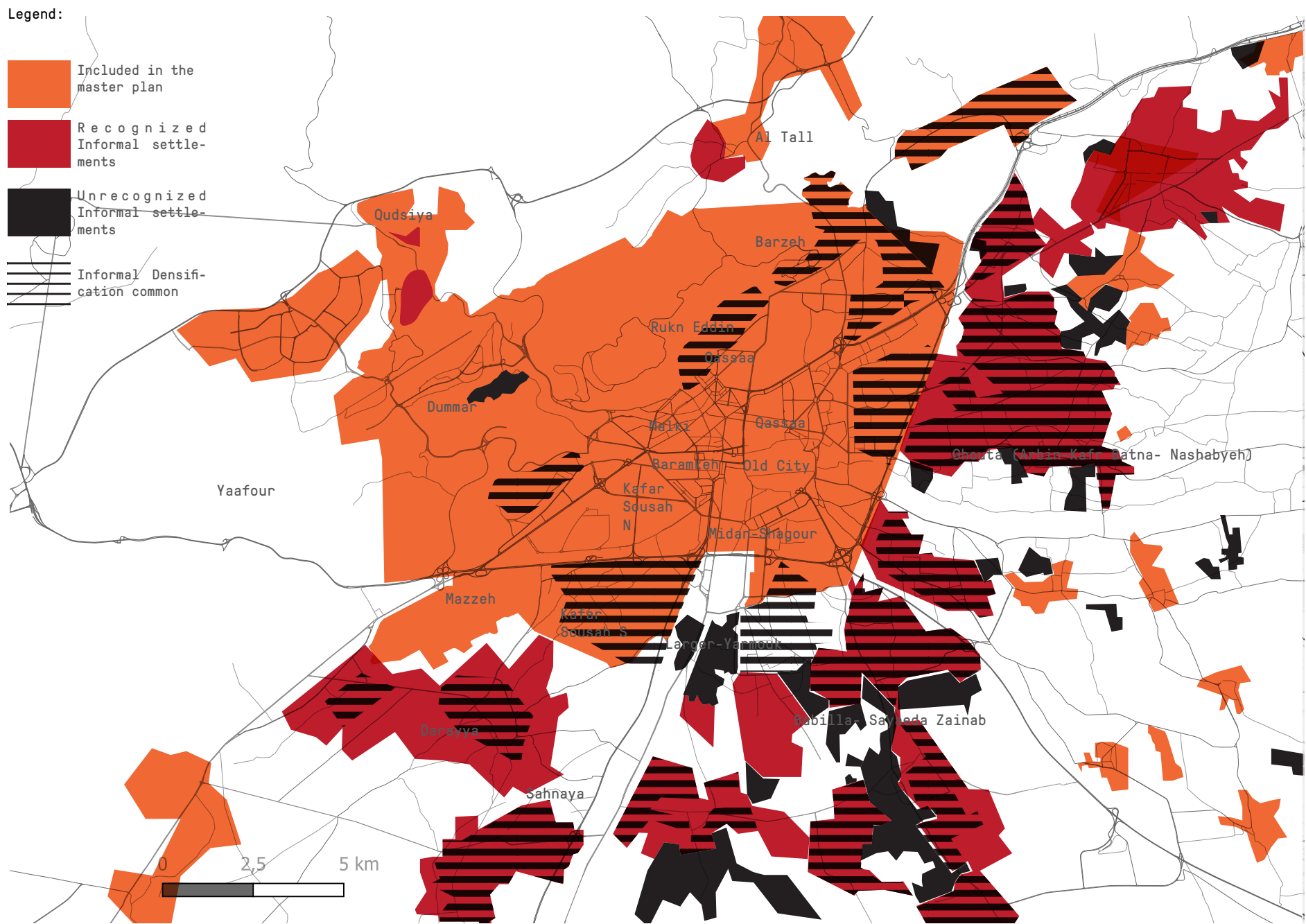


Figure 34: A map showing the Informal Settlements in Damascus.

Source: The author. Adopted from: (Wind et al. , 2020)

The way homes were planned and organized in Syria before the war, as well as the segregation observed, can be traced back to the spatial planning and housing policies established after Syria gained autonomy in 1946. During the early years of Ba’athist rule, various laws related to spatial planning and housing were introduced, shaping the quality, affordability, and segregation in housing for years to come (Wind et al., 2020; Sukkar et al., 2021). Al-Assad’s regime’s approach to informality was always fluctuating. In 1970, when the Ba’ath Party came to power in Syria with a socialist vision, the government aimed to be the main provider of land and housing. Strict land management laws were implemented to control the private real estate sector and increase land supply for development. However, the public sector couldn’t meet the high demand for housing, leading to the emergence of informal settlements. In the 2000s, under Bashar Al-Assad’s rule, there was a shift towards a more significant role for the private sector, adopting an open social market approach. Efforts to regulate informal settlements through new laws were ineffective, prompting the government to seek international assistance in the 2000s, partnering with organizations to reform urban planning and housing policies. The approach to dealing with informal settlements, whether enhancing them or demolishing and reconstructing them, remained unresolved until protests erupted in 2011 (Sukkar et al., 2021). As a result, a significant portion of Syria’s population resides in informal housing, with approximations indicating that informal dwellings constituted 30 to 40% of the total housing before the 2011 uprising (Sukkar et al., 2021).



Figure 35: A satellite image of Wadi Al-Mashare'e
Source: Google Earth



Figure 36: The urban fabric of Wadi Al-Mashare'e
Source: The author



Figure 37: An Image of Wadi Al-Mashare'e
Source: Facebook. URL: <https://shorturl.at/gwOPV>



Figure 38: A satellite image of Rukn Al-Dean
Source: Google Earth



Figure 39: The urban fabric of Rukn Al-Dean
Source: The author



Figure 40: An Image of Rukn Al-Dean
Source: Rasfef22. URL: <https://shorturl.at/nsAS9>



Figure 41: A satellite image of Mukhayam Al-Yarmouk
Source: Google Earth



Figure 42: The urban fabric of Mukhayam Al-Yarmouk
Source: The author



Figure 43: An Image of Mukhayam Al-Yarmouk
Source: Facebook. URL: <https://shorturl.at/glRS4>



Figure 44: A satellite image of Sbeneah
Source: Google Earth



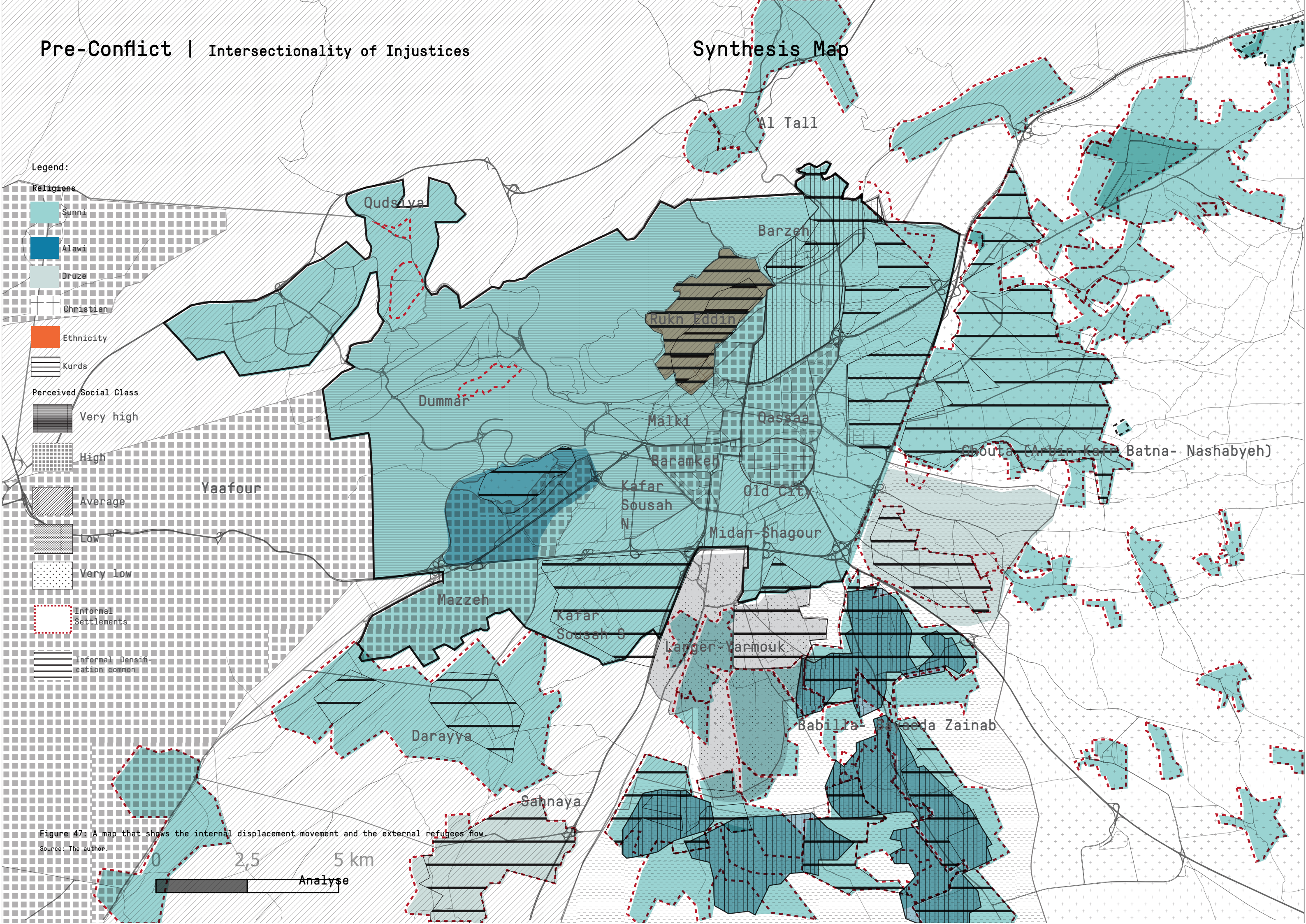
Figure 45: The urban fabric of Sbeneah
Source: The author



Figure 46: An Image of Sbeneah
Source: Facebook. URL: <https://rb.gy/fp0rcp>

As mentioned before, because the public sector couldn't keep up with the demand for housing, informal settlements appeared on the outskirts of the capital. These settlements make up over 50% of the built environment in Damascus and have relatively better services compared to slums in other parts of the world. In response to the growth of informal settlements and the government's inability to offer affordable housing, the Ba'ath Party's central committee decided in 1982 to extend essential services like water and electricity to these areas. While this decision brought relief to the people in these areas and acknowledged their existence, it wasn't a formal recognition of their land rights. (Sukkar et al., 2021). Informal settlements in Damascus can be understood as heterotopias by examining their characteristics through Foucault's conceptual framework. These settlements are real yet unreal spaces, providing a contrast to utopias and challenging societal norms. They present an inverted version of society, where marginalized groups such as religious and ethnic minorities, lower-class communities, and refugees coalesce, creating a space that embodies societal deviations. This juxtaposition of incompatible spaces within the city highlights the unique coexistence of diverse communities in a single physical location. Furthermore, these settlements exist in a distinct temporal context, often linked to historical and ongoing societal disruptions, reflecting a break from traditional urban development patterns.

They are structured with specific systems of access and exclusion, reinforcing their separation from formal urban areas while remaining accessible under certain conditions. Functionally, these heterotopic spaces expose the illusory nature of formal housing policies and compensate for the inadequacies of the public sector by offering a self-organized alternative. Thus, the informal settlements in Damascus embody the essence of heterotopias by providing a space that simultaneously challenges and complements the existing urban order. While these settlements provide a physical space for these diverse communities, the recognition of their existence and rights remains limited. The heterotopic nature of these spaces emphasizes their paradoxical status—simultaneously embedded within the urban fabric and yet existing as spaces apart, challenging conventional norms and hierarchies. This interplay between heterotopia, segregation, and the diverse composition of informal settlements contributes to the intricate social tapestry that characterizes Damascus.



Legend:

Religions

Sunni

Alawi

Druze

Christian

Ethnicity

Kurds

Perceived Social Class

Very high

High

Average

Low

Very low

Informal Settlements

Informal Densification common

Informal Densification common

Informal Densification common

Informal Densification common

Informal Densification common

Informal Densification common

Informal Densification common

Informal Densification common

Informal Densification common

Informal Densification common

Informal Densification common

Figure 47: A map that shows the internal displacement movement and the external refugees flow.

Source: The author.



As mentioned earlier, half of the buildings in Syrian cities are informal settlements with poor living conditions, segregation, and sectarianism. The situation worsened after Bashar Al-Assad came to power in 2000. From 2003 to 2007, about 1.5 million Iraqi refugees arrived in the cities due to the US invasion of Iraq. Additionally, around 200,000 Lebanese refugees came after the Israeli-Lebanese war in 2006. During the same period, as discussed in the environmental dimension, a severe drought affected the Northeast region, leading to crop failure and impacting 1.5 million people, forcing around 325,000 to migrate internally.

Most of these migrants ended up on the outskirts of Syria's cities, already strained by a high population growth rate of approximately 2.5% per year. This influx exacerbated the challenges faced by abandoned urban areas, particularly informal settlements, making living conditions extremely difficult. High unemployment rates, soaring food prices, and livestock losses following the drought further intensified the pressure on these already struggling communities (Selby et al., 2017; Kelley et al., 2015; Gleick, 2014).

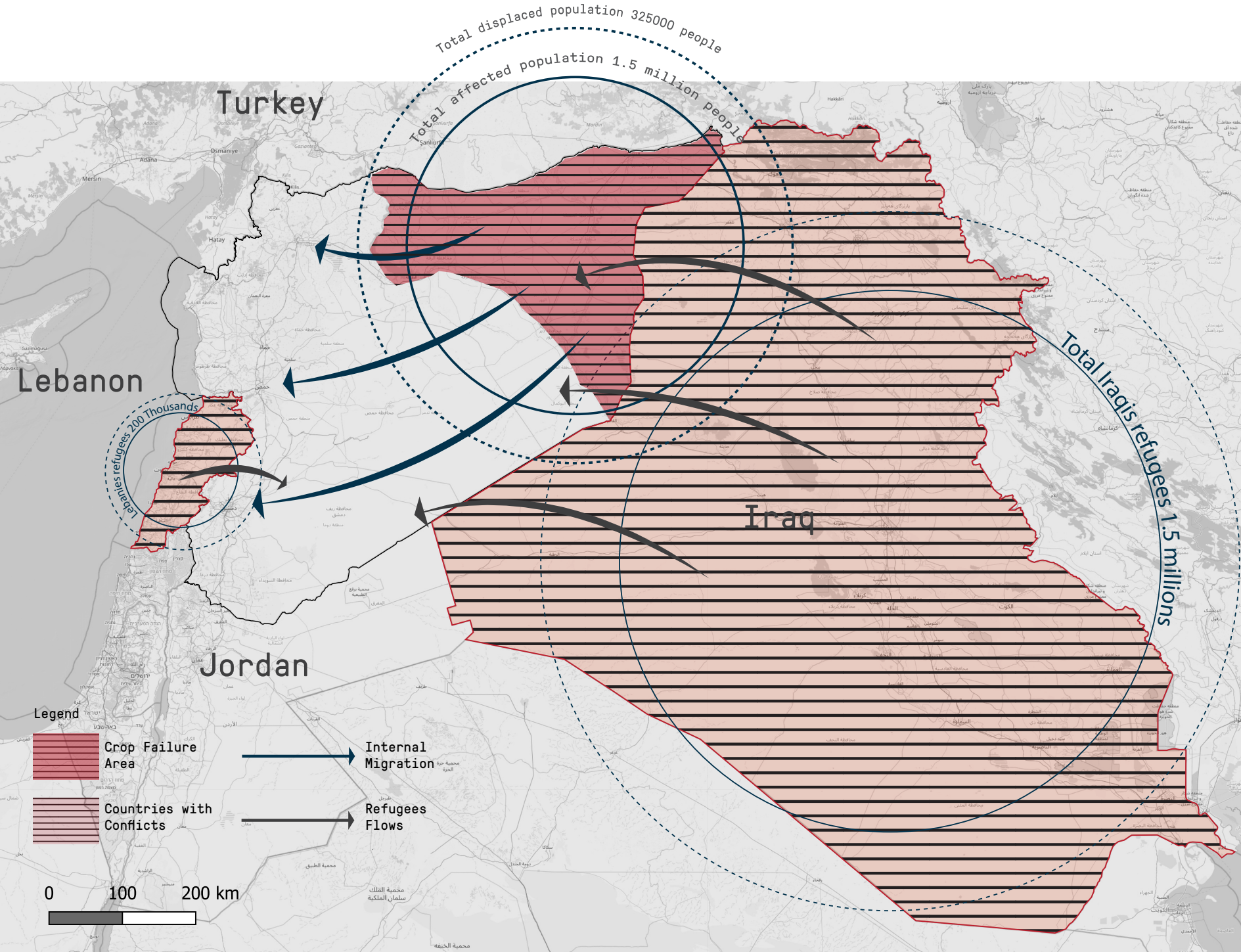


Figure 48: A map that shows the internal displacement movement and the external refugees flow.

Source: The author.

Pre-Conflict | Intersectionality of Injustices

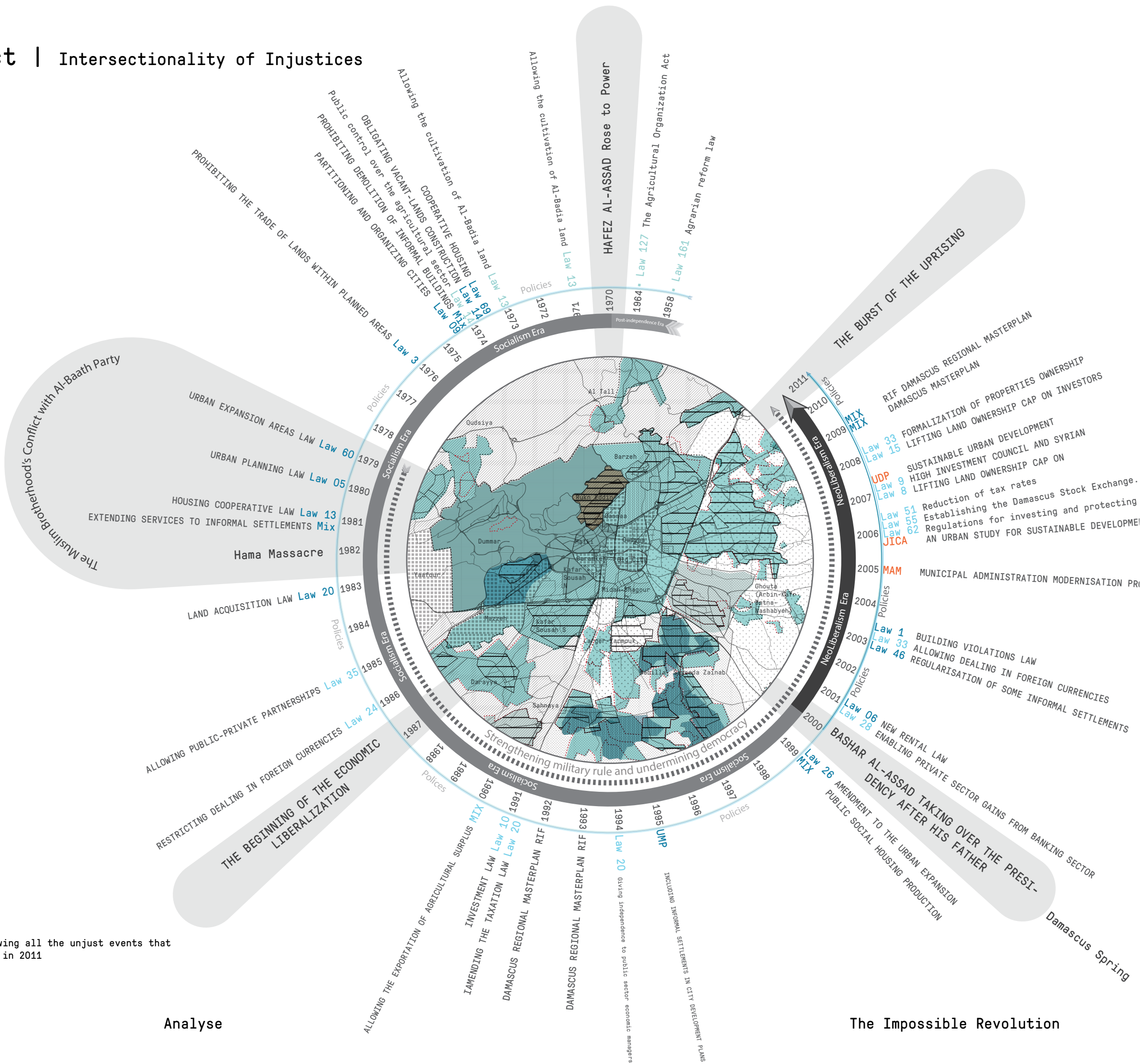


Figure 49: A diagram showing all the unjust events that have led to the uprising in 2011

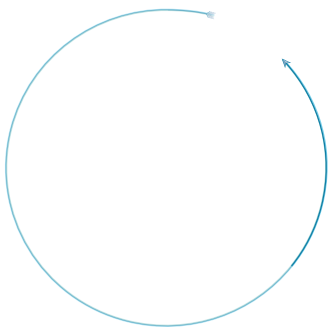
Source: The Author



Figure 50: Unfolding the Intersectionality of Injustices Diagram
Source: The Author

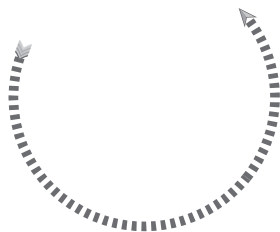
- The political milestones that have directly affected the three dimensions.

Read more on page: 63



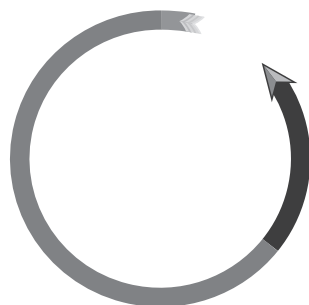
- A timeline of the different policies that have contributed to the unjust living conditions.

Read more on pages: 66/67



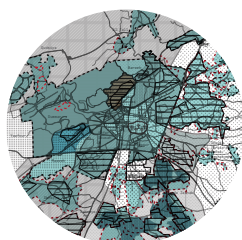
- A timeline indicates the beginning of military rule, in which democracy was undermined.

Read more on page: 63



- A timeline indicates the different types of political rules.

Read more on page: 63/66/67



- A synthesis map indicating social and religious segregation in relation to the informal settlements.

Read more on the Socio-economical Dimension on Page: 77 >> 86

This chapter aimed to unravel the intricate web of factors that fueled the 2011 uprising, emphasizing their interconnectedness. It delved into the political landscape spanning from the socialist era of Al-Assad the Father to the neoliberal era of Al-Assad the Son, marked by an authoritarian governance model that adversely impacted Syrians' living conditions. The environmental crisis, characterized by a devastating drought leading to crop failure and internal migration, was explored. Additionally, the socio-economic dimension revealed injustices through social and religious segregation, linked to the emergence of informal settlements.

In conclusion, this chapter challenges the Western tendency to oversimplify the Syrian conflict and advocates for a more comprehensive understanding. It narrates the pre-conflict Syrian story from a holistic perspective, reclaiming the Syrian narrative.

The next chapter will explore the burst of the uprising and its spatial dimension.

Fuccaro (2016) explains in his book ‘Violence and the City in the Modern Middle East’ how Western media analysts and scholars often portrayed cities during the Arab Spring as mere backdrops for clashes between governments and citizens, overlooking the profound influence of urban spaces on social and political struggles. The specific dynamics of crowd mobilization and the significance of conflicted places were frequently underestimated or neglected in their analyses.

The widespread protests that originated in Tunisia and extended to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have unveiled a fresh collective awareness carrying significant political implications. These demonstrations were fueled by the desire for transformation, the quest for democratic representation, the struggle for political integrity, and opposition to nepotistic variants of neoliberal capitalism (Aras et al., 2015).

The Arab Spring ignited a flame of long-suppressed grievances in Syria. Once unleashed, this call for freedom reverberated across Arab capitals, echoing the spirit of protests and revolt observed in Europe after the French Revolution, as Harvey notes (2012, p. 135).

The widespread movement became unstoppable, symbolizing a collective demand for change and justice. Different authorities responded in various ways, leading to diverse outcomes in Arab countries. Unfortunately, Syria found itself amid an enduring conflict, one of four Arab states facing ongoing turmoil.

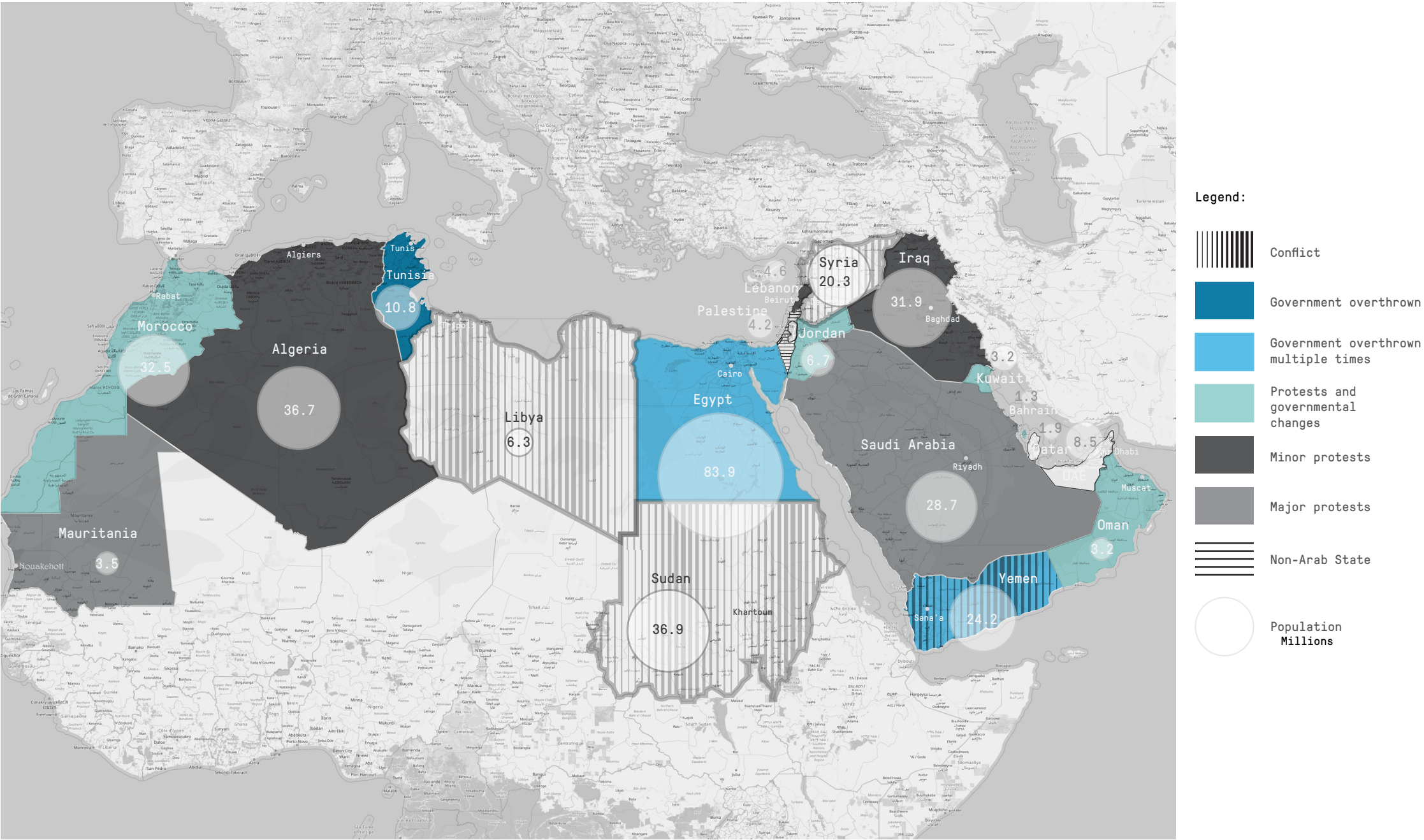


Figure 51: A map of the Arab States after the Arab Spring
Source: The Author



Figure 52: A photo of a child participating in the protests in Syria.

Source: Agence France Presse. URL: <https://shorturl.at/jlFIO>



Figure 54: Syrians deploy a large opposition flag as they gather to protest against a proposal from the Turkish foreign minister for reconciliation between the Syrian government and the opposition. Aleppo, 2022

Source: AFP. URL: <https://t.ly/9WCD2>



Figure 56: Syrians gather in Idlib in March 2023 to commemorate the 12th anniversary of protests against the regime.

Source: Al Jazeera. URL: <https://t.ly/ys1LJ>



Figure 53: A photo of women protesting in Eastern Aleppo, 2016

Source: opendemocracy. URL: <https://shorturl.at/aKTWZ>



Figure 55: A photo of Syrian women protesting.

Source: Marxism . URL: <https://t.ly/RH2t1>



Figure 57: Thousands of anti-Syrian government protesters shout slogans and wave revolutionary flags to mark 10 years since the start of a popular uprising against President Bashar Assad's rule, March 15, 2021.

Source: FILE. URL: <http://tinyurl.com/m6n6be46>

In 2011, a significant turning point for Syria, the Al-Assad regime had maintained 40 years of oppressive rule, suppressing any potential rebellion through intimidation and division. Despite the regime's efforts, the spark of the Arab Spring burst into flames in Syrian cities, pushing the people to bravely take the streets, expressing their cry for rights and freedom.

Men, women, and even children actively joined the protests, as if the Syrian people had been anticipating this moment for four decades. The intensity of their shouts and the yearning in their voices reflected the pent-up struggle and desire for change. Families, unified in their pursuit of a better future, collectively raised their voices against the longstanding oppression they had endured. The streets echoed with a shared determination to challenge the status quo.

The protests gained unstoppable momentum, like a snowball rolling downhill. Every week, a new city joined the demonstrations, fueling the strength of the revolution. The collective wave of discontent and calls for change spread rapidly across different urban centers, creating a unified force challenging the existing order. The growing participation from various cities showcased a widespread desire for reform and a shared determination to bring about a transformation in the country's political landscape. The revolution, once ignited, continued to gather support and momentum, becoming a force that could not be contained.

Despite the growing momentum of the protests, the regime responded with extreme violence. Instead of addressing the people's grievances and attempting to quell their anger, the Al-Assad regime opted for a heavy-handed approach, using force to suppress dissent. The regime's brutal tactics escalated tensions and fueled further discontent among the population. This choice of repression over dialogue deepened the divide between the government and the protesters, intensifying the conflict and setting the stage for a prolonged and brutal struggle for change.

In his book 'The Impossible Revolution,' Al-Haj Saleh (2017), a Syrian writer and political dissident, describes how the tactics employed by the Syrian regime compelled the rebels to take matters into their own hands for self-protection. As a result, the initially peaceful protests transformed into an armed conflict, evolving the revolution into a civil war. 'How could it be possible for those who run the country to treat those who are presumably their own people with such brutality and villainy, and with so much hatred?' (Al-Haj Saleh, 2017, p:8).

Pre-Conflict | The Burst of the Uprising

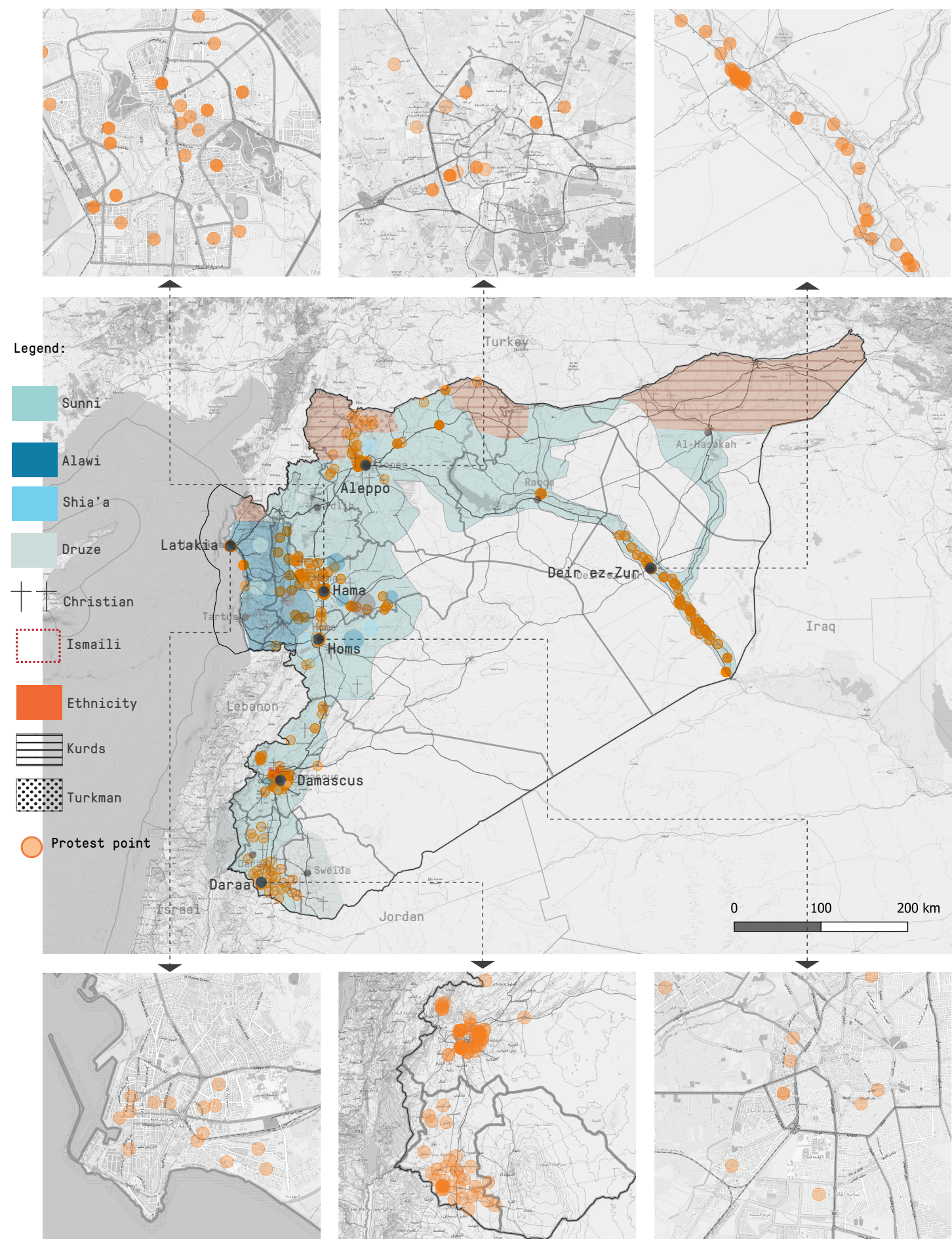


Figure 58: Maps for Protests locations during the Friday of (22-06-2012)

Source: The Author. Adopted from: <http://tinyurl.com/yc6zfap6>

The Syrian Spring

The Syrian uprising unfolded as an insurgent movement across various cities, giving rise to new symbols embedded in the collective memory of the people. Due to the authoritarian restriction on gatherings of more than three individuals, Fridays became a significant day for protests, allowing for larger gatherings after Friday prayers. This day emerged as a symbolic and strategic choice for nationwide demonstrations.

A typical Friday was selected to showcase simultaneous protests across the country (see Figure 58). The protesters assigned names to each Friday, and this particular one aimed to criticize the world's indifference to Al-Assad's suppression of demonstrations; it was named: 'If the rulers are negligent, where are the people?'

When examining the spatial aspects of these protests, a notable pattern emerges. The majority of the protests primarily occurred in cities and neighborhoods where Sunni Muslims form the majority, which is reflective of Syria's demographic composition. It is important to note that while Syrians from all backgrounds were oppressed by the regime, there was a particularly explicit and direct oppression targeted at Sunni communities, especially during the 1980s conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood. This historical victimization contributed to a stronger presence of protests in Sunni-majority areas, where voices of dissent were most prominent.

Additionally, the regime's claim of secularism, despite its authoritarian nature, led some Sunni protesters to embrace political Islam as a means of opposing the regime. This inadvertently created a fertile ground for extremist groups such as ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra to gain influence and hijack the revolution's narrative. These dynamics contributed to framing the civil and peaceful revolution as a sectarian conflict, which the regime exploited to label the protesters as terrorists.

This framing, along with the escalating violence, affected the participation of minorities in the protests. Many from minority communities eventually withdrew, with the exception of some educated elites who remained steadfast in their opposition. This complex interplay of factors ultimately shaped the nature and perception of the Syrian revolution.

In conclusion, the nuanced nature of the Syrian protests reflects a complex web of historical grievances, demographic realities, and political maneuvers. There are no clear lines to be drawn, and it is crucial to understand that this analysis does not seek to generalize the motivations or actions of any single group. Instead, it aims to highlight the multifaceted dynamics that have influenced the course of the revolution and its perception both within Syria and internationally.

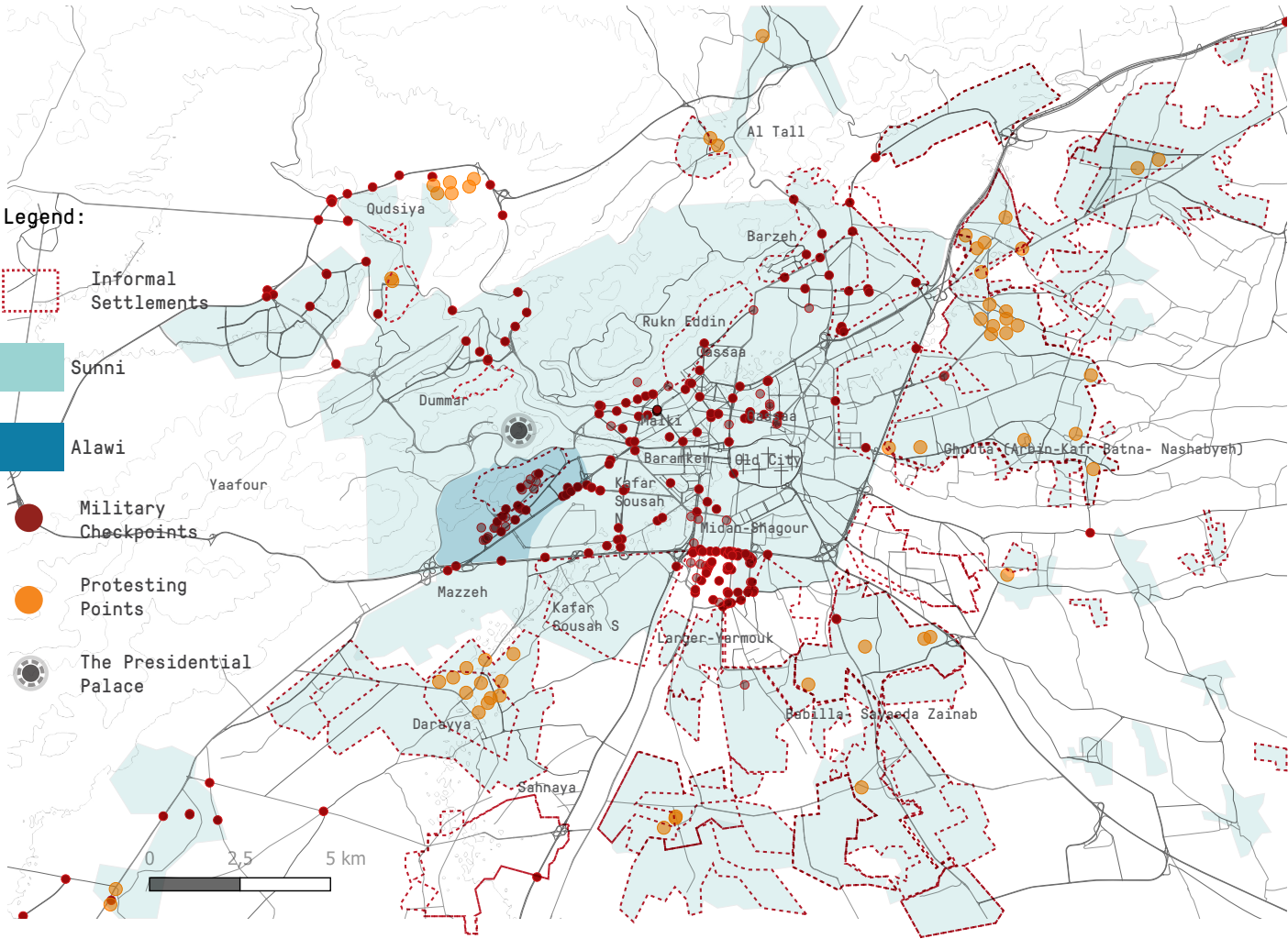


Figure 59: A map showing the religious dimension of the protests and the military procedures as a response.
Source: The Author

Examining the situation in the capital city, Damascus, reveals a clear sectarian conflict. The protests were primarily concentrated in Sunni neighborhoods, as discussed in the socio-economic dimension, notably those composed mainly of informal settlements. In contrast, Alawite neighborhoods surrounding the presidential palace, where Al-Assad resides, are heavily protected by a dense network of military checkpoints, creating a paradoxical divide in the city. Nevertheless, checkpoints are also present in Sunni neighborhoods, a phenomenon that is clarified when examining the situation through the lens of social class. The social class layer reveals that the central Sunni neighborhoods in Damascus belong to a high social stratum, constituting the Sunni elite who, paradoxically, support Al-Assad.

Examining the phenomenon of the Syrian revolution reveals how the denial of access to citizens' political rights in what Miraftab terms 'invited places' compels them to seek alternative methods in creating their 'invented spaces' of participation (Miraftab, 2004). The heterotopic nature of the informal settlements as Foucault explains it (see page 87), makes it a fertile soil for grassroots movements, where citizens challenge their imposed realities. This was also explained by Miraftab by saying: 'In informal settlements, which are the material expressions of poor citizens' insurgency, organized

residents enacting their universal citizenship mobilize to claim their entitlement to the city and to urban livelihood.' (Miraftab, 2016, p. 7) From a revolutionary standpoint, the focus of protests on the outskirts of Damascus has shifted the centrality of the city. The urban peripheries of Damascus have become the compass of the rebels. This concept is extensively explored by Harvey in his book 'Rebel Cities,' where he delves into Lefebvre's concepts of global revolutionary movements. Harvey poses a critical question in this context regarding informality and insurgent practices: 'How else and where else can we come together to articulate our collective cries and demands?' (Harvey, 2012, p. 18).

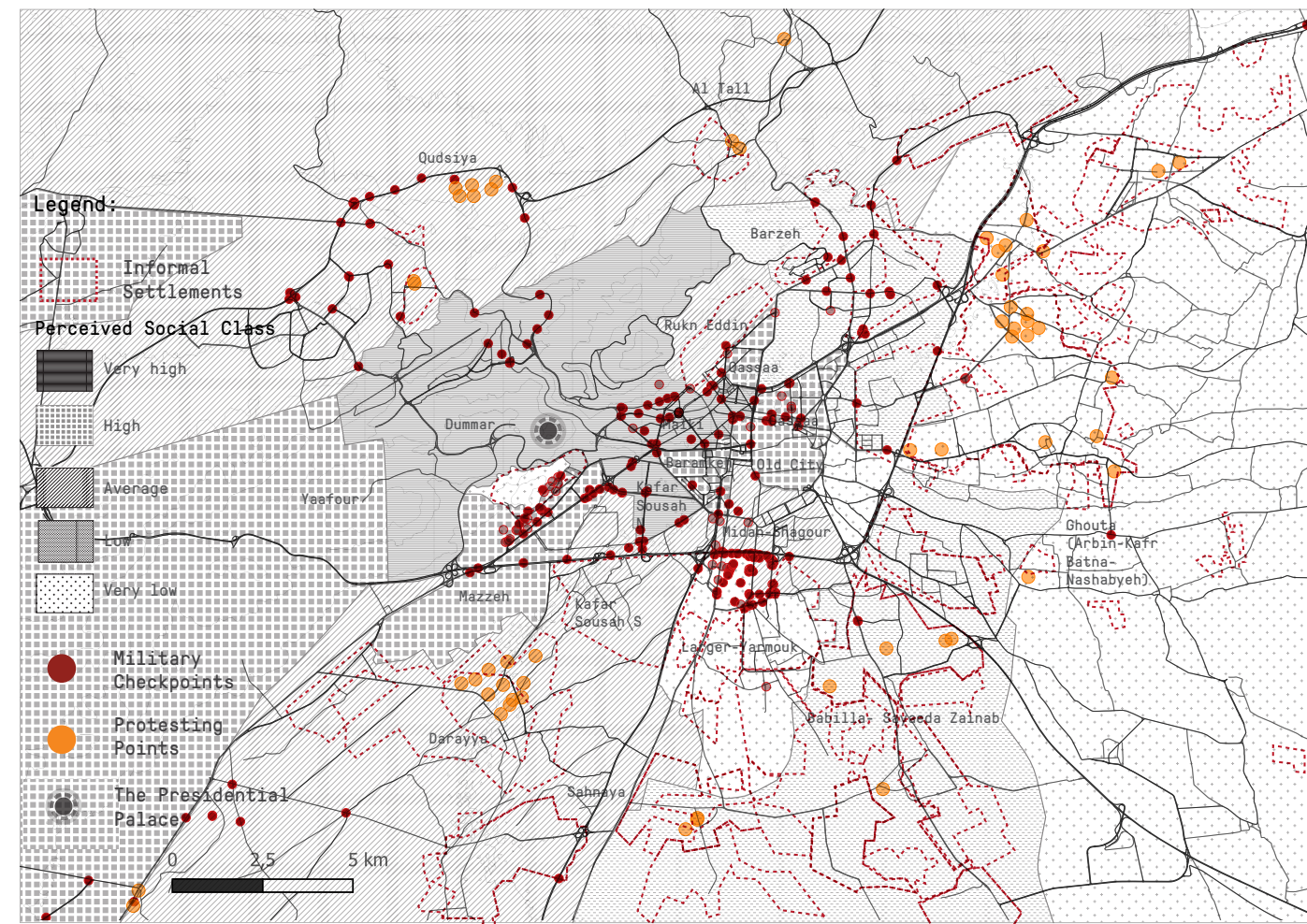


Figure 60: A map showing the social dimension of the protests and the military procedures as a response.
Source: The Author

Delving into the nature of the protestors involves analyzing the motivations driving their participation in protests to demand their right to the city. To conduct this analysis, Marcuse’s categorizations for entitlement to the right city are employed (Marcuse, 2009).

I would rephrase Marcuse’s two main categories as follows: the first is an urgent ‘demand’ made by those who lack basic material and existing legal rights, and the second is an ‘aspiration’ for the future expressed by those dissatisfied with their current life circumstances, perceiving them as constraints on their potential for growth and creativity (Marcuse, 2009, p. 190).

An analysis is applied to the Damascus context using these two categories, aiming to understand the nature of the protesters in relation to the spatial dimension of the protests.

In the first category, demand, Marcuse breaks it down into two sub-categories: production terms and cultural terms. In production terms, he discusses the excluded who operate at the margins of the system, in addition to the underpaid working-class people who generate profit for others. In social terms of demand, this is reflected in the concentration of protests in informal settlements within ‘low-class’ neighborhoods in Damascus. In cultural terms, Marcuse discusses the directly oppressed, considering factors like race, ethnicity, gender, and lifestyle. In the context of Damascus, this aligns with the substantial involvement of Sunni individuals in the protests. Additionally, the culturally alienated category in

these terms can be associated with the significant participation of the youth in the protests ‘in resistance to the dominant system as preventing adequate satisfaction of their human needs’ (Marcuse, 2009, p. 191).

In the second category, ‘aspiration,’ Marcuse discusses small business people, encompassing individual proprietors, small entrepreneurs, and craftsmen. This perspective helps us understand the focus of protests in Darayya city, known for its numerous craftsmen and industrial facilities. While not entirely excluded, these individuals aspire to achieve better living conditions.

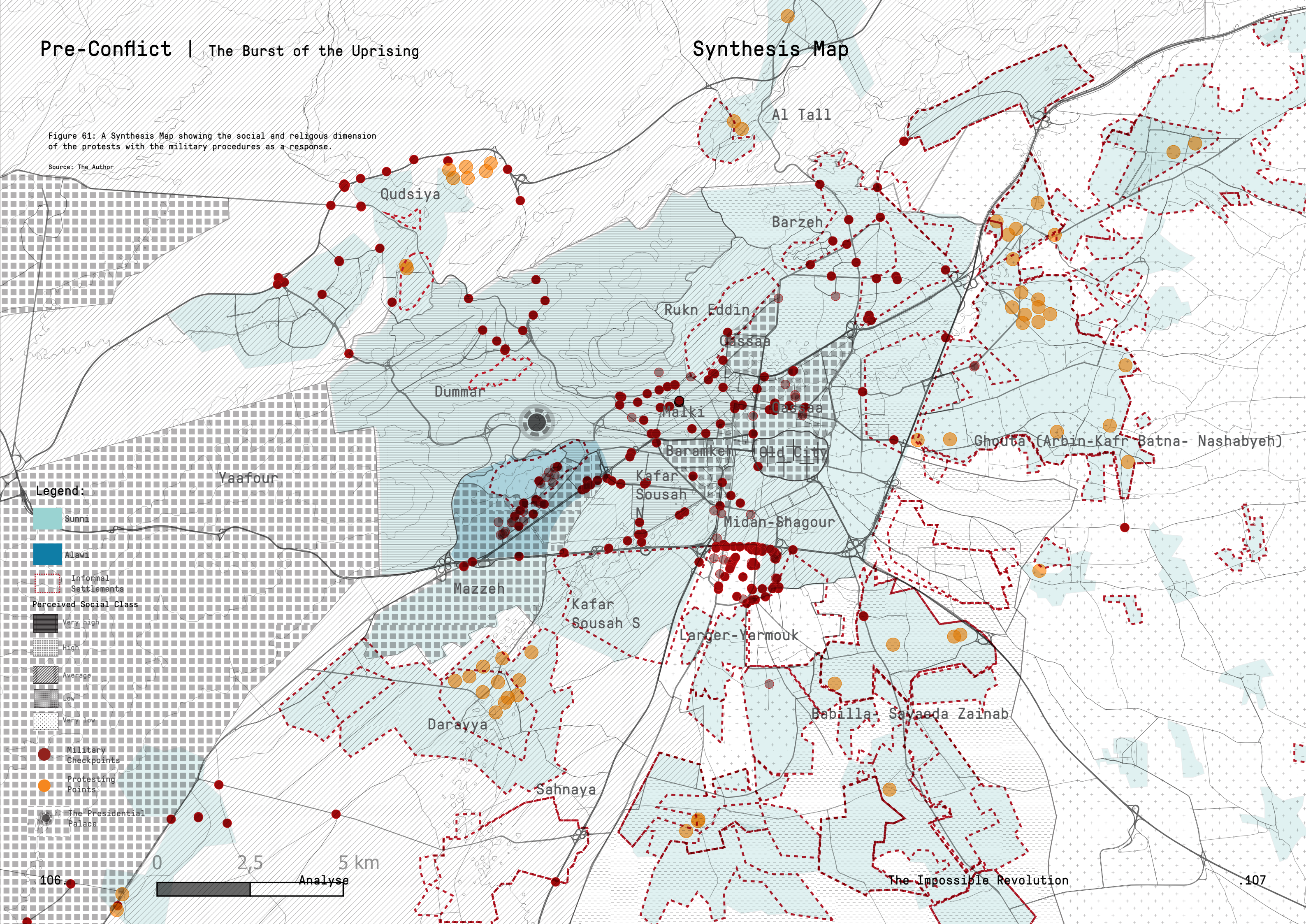
Another sub-category that aspires to better life conditions is ‘insecure’. Which is ‘...a shifting group, varying with conjunctural changes, e.g. level of crisis, prosperity’ (Marcuse, 2009, p. 191).

This category directly reflects religious and ethnic minorities that were initially involved in the protests at the beginning of the revolution but stepped back when it turned into a sectarian war between Sunnis and Alawis.

The ‘helpless lackeys of power’ represent intellectuals from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds who supported the revolution from the beginning, aspiring for a better life for all Syrians. They symbolize the nuanced aspect of the protesters, showcasing diverse individuals, especially intellectuals, who supported the revolution despite lacking significant influence.

Figure 61: A Synthesis Map showing the social and religious dimension of the protests with the military procedures as a response.

Source: The Author



Legend:

- Sunni
- Alawi
- Informal Settlements
- Perceived Social Class
 - Very high
 - High
 - Average
 - Low
 - Very low
- Military Checkpoints
- Protesting Points
- The Presidential Palace

0 2.5 5 km

Analyse

The Impossible Revolution

.407

The Arab Spring, which unfolded across the Middle East and North Africa, marked a turning point for Syria, provoking suppressed grievances and a collective desire for transformation. The Syrian uprising, initially peaceful, rapidly gained momentum, symbolizing a shared demand for change and justice. That being said, the four-decade-long oppressive reign of Al-Assad's regime gave rise to brave protests by Syrians, including men, women, and children. However, it is this violence that its government used to suppress opposition that plunged Syria into civil war, shifting the battleground to its suburbs of Damascus, where these protests occurred. When studied from Marcuse's categories of rebels (demanding and aspiring), these protests are shown as having diverse motivations ranging from basic rights to visions of a better future. Its spatial analysis outlined a sectarian divide in Damascus, exposing the role informal settlements played in realizing heterotopias that challenge imposed realities through bottom-up grassroots movements. Intellectuals supporting the revolution during this period came from various quarters, thereby shedding light on how these uprisings were multifaceted. In general, the Syrian revolution took place as an intricate, dynamic struggle, with urban dynamics playing a key role as well as socio-economic variables and a convoluted interplay of demands and aspirations.

EXPPOSE

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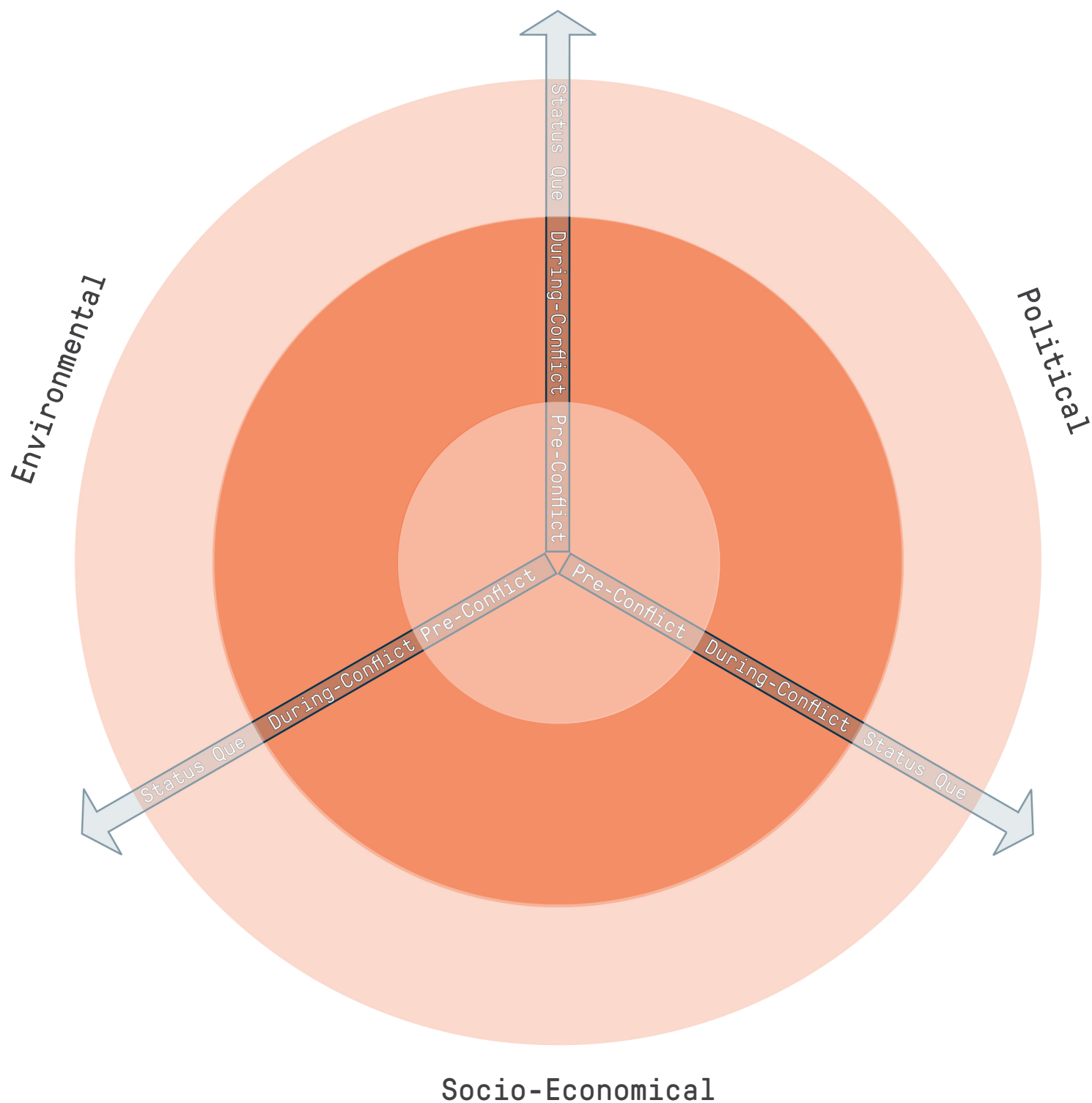


Figure 62: The (During the Conflict) phase in the analytical framework.
Source: The author

In the Expose part, the research will be contributing to the growing academic discourse of ‘Spatializing Authoritarianism’. According to (Koch 2016, 2018), authoritarianism encompasses various aspects: it constitutes a worldview, a mindset, a governing methodology, a mechanism for exerting control, a form of logic, a language, and an ethical framework. Primarily, it manifests as a collection of behaviors centered around control, discipline, and singular authority. These behaviors are dispersed and transient, yet they manifest in specific environments and locations, impacting individuals’ lives disparately. From a spatial standpoint, authoritarianism lacks a fixed essence; instead, it comprises practices that transcend geographical and corporeal boundaries, yielding vastly different outcomes across diverse contexts and periods. In the Syrian context, the authoritarian practices varied along the different timeframes of the conflict, as the research previously showed In the pre-conflict era (see pages 60 >>> 95) , the Syrian regime’s spatial authoritarian practices were characterized by oppressive and unjust policies, along with an unfair governance system. These policies contributed to an environmental crisis and the proliferation of heterotopic informal settlements. The lack of equitable resource distribution and inadequate infrastructure exacerbated

tensions, leading to social and spatial fragmentation. During the conflict, spatial authoritarianism became more explicit as the regime engaged in mass destruction of cities and neighborhoods, targeting areas perceived as opposition strongholds. This phase of the conflict will be thoroughly examined in the subsequent sections of this research, highlighting the devastating impact on urban landscapes and communities. Later on in this research, in the current status quo timeframe, we will observe the regime’s utilization of new urban policies to consolidate power, disregarding the prevailing geopolitical realities. These policies often prioritize regime interests over the needs and aspirations of the populace, perpetuating spatial inequalities and social unrest. Essentially, under the authoritarian rule of the Syrian regime, numerous authoritarian practices have employed the built environment as a means of control, oppression, and collective punishment. Those practices are referred to in this research as the (Spatial Tyranny), which will be documented in the case study of Damascus.

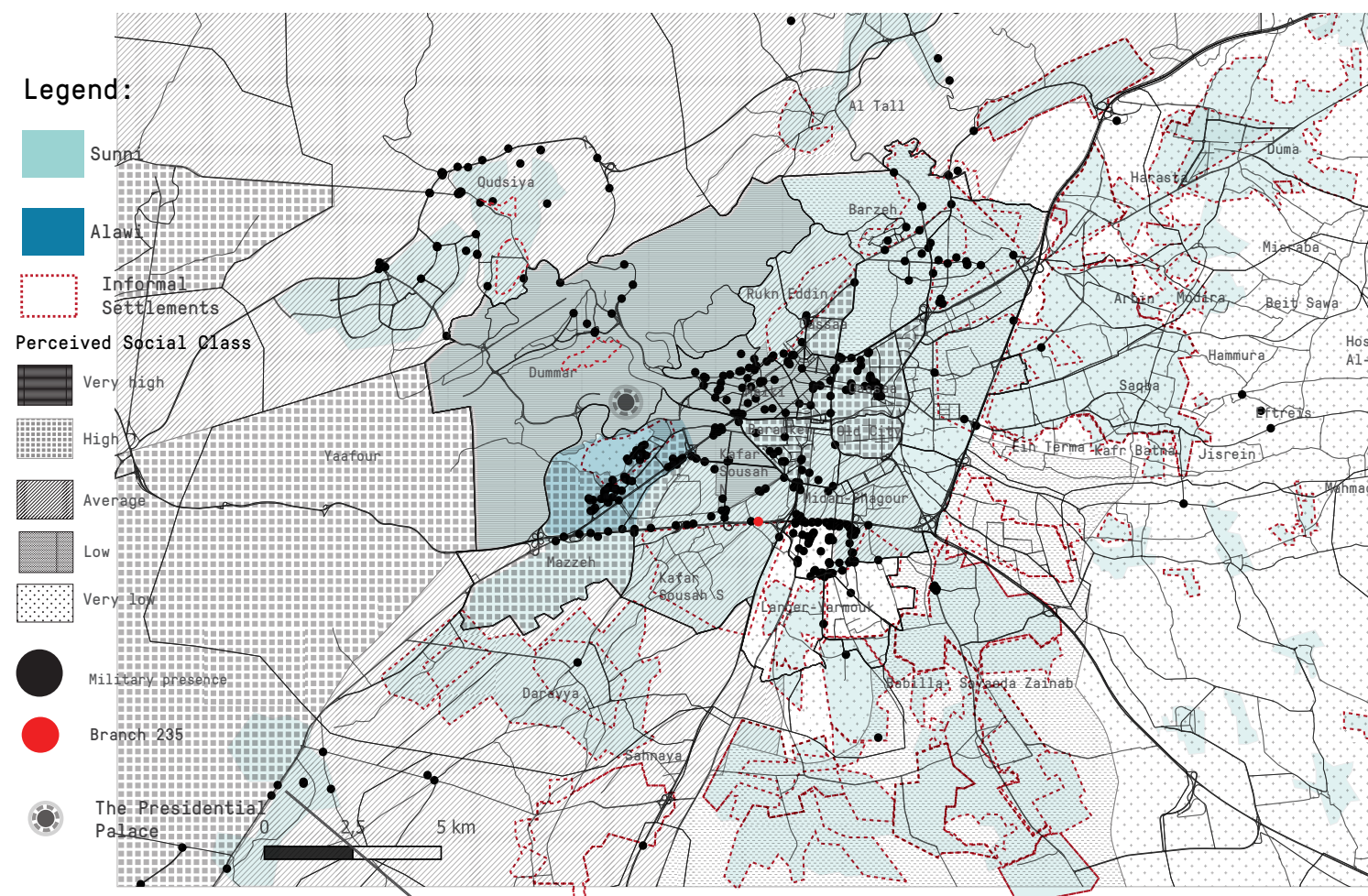


Figure 63: A map showing the heavily spread of checkpoints, buildings, focal-points affiliated with the regime.
Source: The author. Adopted from: <https://shorturl.at/hry0Z>



Figure 64: An explanation of the nepotism, favoritism and exploitation mechanisms on the regime's military check points in Jdaydet Artooz up until 2021.
Source: The author.

The imposition of spatial tyranny in Damascus traces back to the early 1970s with the ascent of Al-Assad the father to power. This era marked a significant dearth of comprehensive spatial policies, fostering the growth of socially and religiously segregated informal settlements. These settlements, often marginalized and neglected by official urban planning efforts, incubated simmering discontent that erupted into the 2011 uprising, a pivotal moment in Syrian history (see Figure 47). In response to the uprising, the regime swiftly erected a dense network of military checkpoints across the nation. These checkpoints not only served as physical barriers but also as symbols of state control and dominance over urban spaces. Their proliferation effectively fragmented the built environment, transforming neighborhoods into heavily monitored zones where inhabitants lived under constant surveillance and the looming threat of violent reprisals for any perceived dissent. The checkpoint network also served a sinister purpose in targeting and apprehending perceived threats to regime stability, primarily activists and dissidents identified by intelligence agencies. Passing through these checkpoints became a harrowing experience for citizens, characterized by invasive security checks and the looming specter of arbitrary detention. What's more, the treatment individuals received at these checkpoints often hinged on arbitrary factors such as accent, surname, or

place of birth, exacerbating existing social divisions and inequalities. Notably, Sunni individuals and residents of opposition strongholds bore the brunt of discriminatory practices, facing heightened scrutiny and harassment at these checkpoints. This systematic targeting of specific demographics underscored the regime's broader strategy of maintaining power through the systematic suppression of dissent and the reinforcement of sectarian divisions within society. The regime's cronies had the privilege of bypassing these checkpoints altogether, utilizing military routes that afforded them unrestricted passage. This preferential treatment starkly illustrates the unfairness and disparities in the regime's dealings with its citizens. While some were subjected to stringent security measures and potential harassment at checkpoints, others enjoyed unchecked mobility, highlighting the entrenched inequality and injustice within the system, (see figure 64). Moreover, these checkpoints were fortified by a network of militarized structures that symbolized the intimidating reach of the regime's power. Among these structures was the Palestine Branch, commonly referred to as Branch 235, (see Figure 63) a facility operated by Syrian intelligence. Passing by this building as a Syrian citizen, the awareness that thousands of political detainees languished within its coffin-sized and underground cells a chilling spatial presence, instilling fear and apprehension.

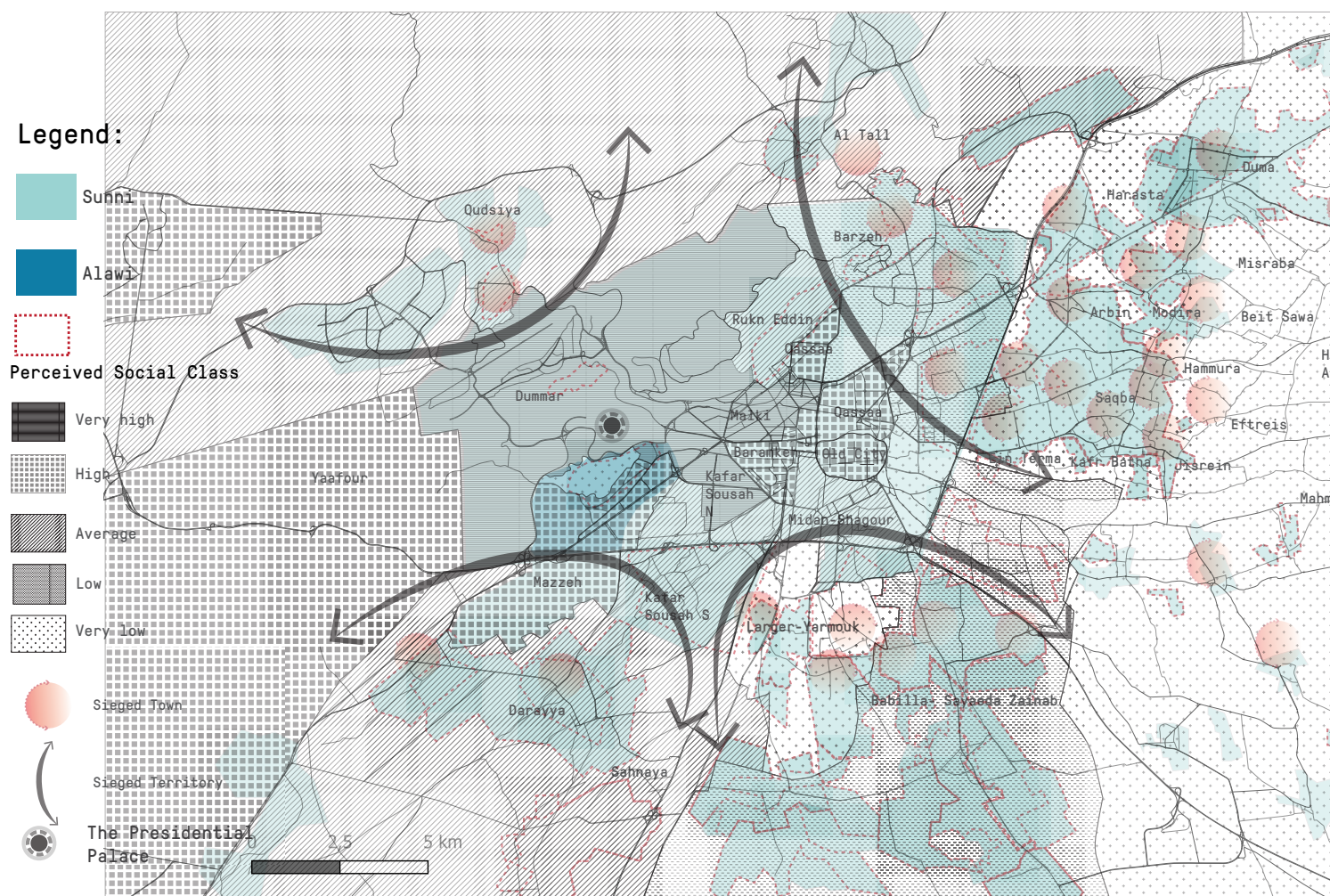


Figure 65: A map showing the overlap between the sieged territories and the informal settlements.
Source: The author. Adopted from: Siege Watch (2018).

Shortly after opposition forces gained control of the informal settlements surrounding the city of Damascus, the regime initiated an urban siege in April 2013, with support from its Russian allies.

“Tens of thousands of men, women and children across Syria are struggling to survive in inhumane conditions in towns under siege, under constant threat of deadly attacks and lacking access to basic necessities such as food, water and medicines” stated the opening remarks of a briefing report by Amnesty International (2014), detailing the severe humanitarian crisis in the besieged areas surrounding Damascus.

Over the course of the five-year siege, thousands of lives were lost, marking a harrowing chapter in the conflict’s brutality. The regime’s employment of siege tactics drew widespread condemnation, with numerous accusations of war crimes and crimes against humanity leveled by entities such as (The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 2018). These allegations encompassed egregious offenses including the use of banned weaponry, deliberate attacks on civilian populations, targeting of protected sites such as schools and hospitals, the deliberate use of starvation as a tool of warfare, and the obstruction of medical evacuations. The urban siege served as a strategic military maneuver aimed at halting the progress of opposition forces towards

Damascus. By imposing a blockade on the city, the regime sought to hinder the movement and logistical support of rebel factions, effectively isolating and weakening their foothold in the region. This tactic not only hindered the opposition’s ability to advance but also inflicted immense hardship on civilians trapped within the besieged areas, depriving them of essential supplies and exacerbating humanitarian crises.

The Syrian regime and its allies are primarily responsible for imposing sieges on Syrian civilians, with nearly 50 besieged communities identified. Among these, only two, namely the towns of Fuaa and Kefraya in Idlib province, are besieged by armed opposition groups (AOGs). Additionally, a group of neighborhoods in Deir Ezzor city is besieged by both ISIS and the Syrian government (PAX, 2016).

Figure 55 illustrates various regions of rural Damascus subjected to sieges spanning five years. While the duration and severity of these blockades varied among the depicted areas, the impact on the civilian population was uniformly dire, rendering the conditions unbearable for residents.

Such actions underscored the regime’s blatant disregard for international humanitarian law and the sanctity of civilian lives, perpetuating a cycle of suffering and devastation within besieged communities.

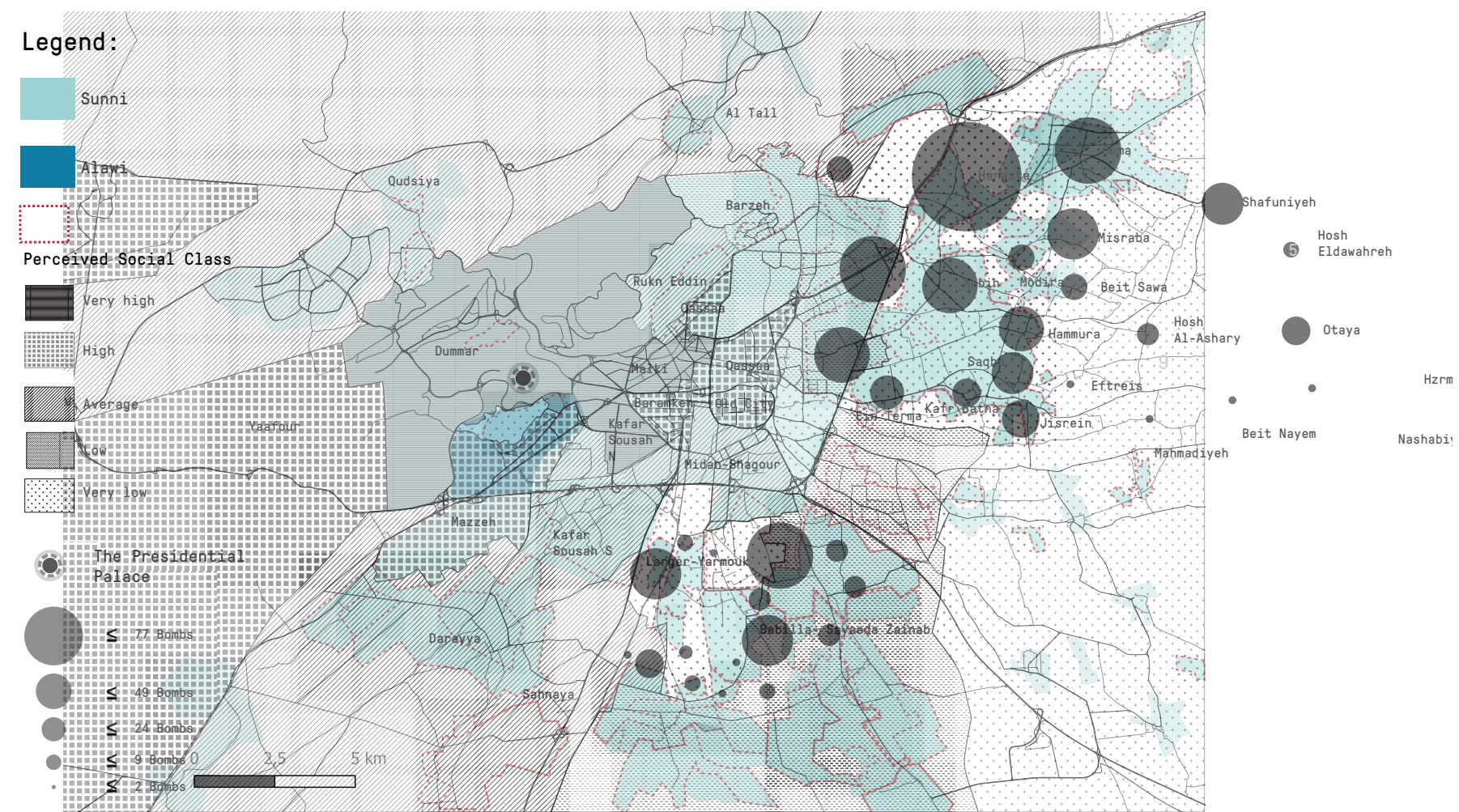


Figure 66: A map showing the overlap between the mass bombed territories and the informal settlements.

Source: The author. Adopted from: Multiple sources. (aljumhuriya, 2017; REACH, 2018).



Figure 67: Smoke rises from buildings following bombardment on the village of Mesraba in the rebel-held besieged Eastern Ghouta region on the outskirts of the capital Damascus, 2018.

Source: AFP, 2018.

Following five years of intense siege beginning in 2013, the regime escalated hostilities at the onset of 2018, intensifying its confrontation with besieged opposition forces to unprecedented levels. The resulting onslaught of bombings inflicted severe humanitarian consequences on vulnerable communities. Numerous humanitarian reports, including the REACH report, meticulously documented the airstrikes occurring between March 1st and 22nd, 2018. Data from these reports was utilised to create the mass bombardment map (see Figure 66). The situation on the ground was grim, as residents of Eastern Ghouta, already suffering from half a decade of siege, continued to endure increasingly dire living conditions. Access to essential resources such as food, water, and medical supplies remained severely constrained, exacerbating health issues and risking the spread of disease, particularly in overcrowded basement shelters. Moreover, the closure of markets and severe restrictions on movement due to relentless bombardment compounded the humanitarian crisis, leading to catastrophic circumstances. Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) characterised the sustained level of hostilities in the region as an “outrageous, relentless mass-casualty disaster.” (REACH, 2018).

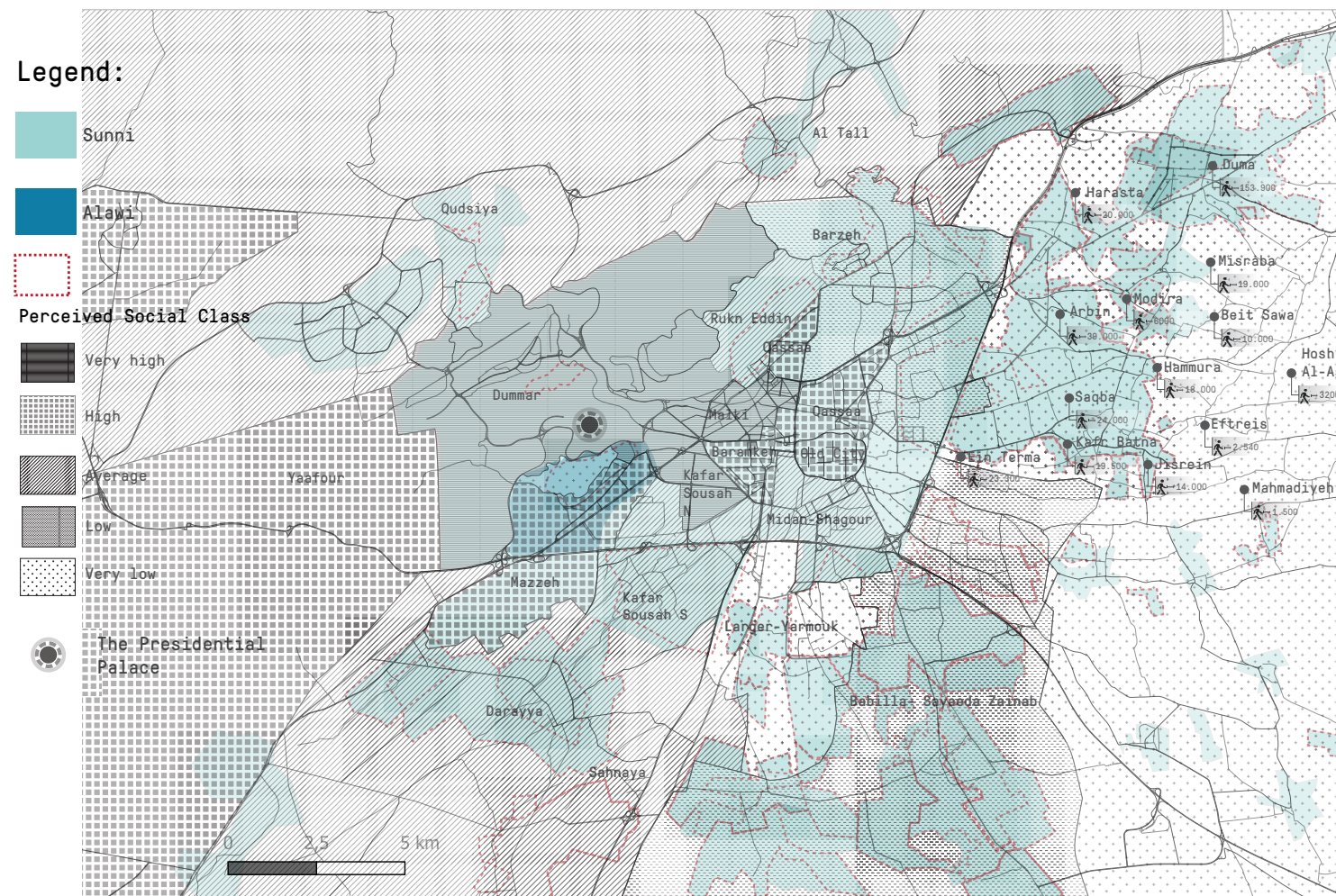


Figure 68: A map showing the overlap between the mass displacement and the informal settlements. Source: The author. Adopted from: REACH (2018).



Figure 69: March 22, 2018: Syrian rebel fighters wait by buses whilst Syrian government military stand by at the entrance of Harasta in Eastern Ghouta on the outskirts of Damascus, after a deal was struck with the rebels in the area to evacuate Source: VCG Photo, 2018

In 2018, a ceasefire agreement was reached in the besieged Syrian enclave of eastern Ghouta, allowing the evacuation of tens of thousands of civilians and fighters under Russian assurances. The deal, confirmed by a spokesman of a prominent rebel group in the area, offered residents the option to relocate to northern Syria or remain in their homes and reconcile with the regime of Bashar al-Assad, with guarantees of non-prosecution for opposition activities provided by Moscow. However, scepticism remained, as many feared trusting assurances from Russia, whose fighter jets had contributed to the month-long bombardment of eastern Ghouta. The agreement, affecting four major towns under rebel control, followed a prolonged period of siege, chemical attacks, and relentless bombardment, resulting in over 1,500 casualties (Shaheen, 2018).

Due to the relentless assault carried out by the regime and its allies, the United Nations estimated that over 50,000 individuals fled the besieged regions of Eastern Ghouta (UNHCR, 2018). The sight of Eastern Ghouta residents being uprooted, transported on those internal transport buses, remains etched vividly in the hearts of Syrians, a haunting image of displacement and upheaval that occurred all over the country.

This strategy of forced displacement was just one component of a larger plan being executed. One of the primary tactics employed by Al-Assad to ensure that the people would never rebel again is demographic change. As evidenced in Figure 68, based on Qutrib’s 2016 analysis, the percentage of Sunnis has significantly decreased over the course of the Syrian conflict, while the number of Shiites has increased. This shift can be attributed to the regime’s strategy, in collaboration with its allies, to collectively punish the Sunnis for their uprising against him, while resettling Shiites who are loyal to the regime and Iran in their place.

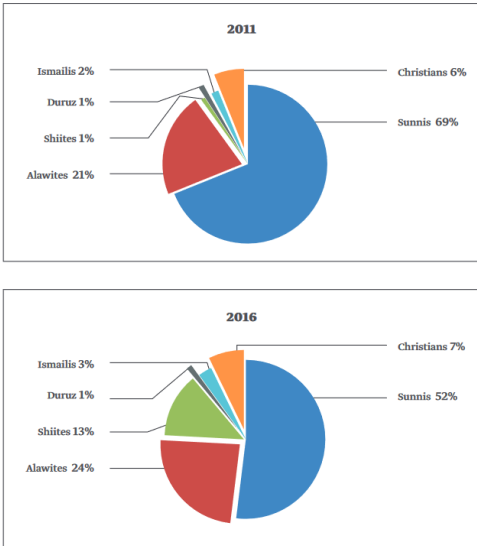


Figure 68: Population distribution according to religion or sect in regime control areas between 2011 and 2016 . Source: Qutrib, 2016

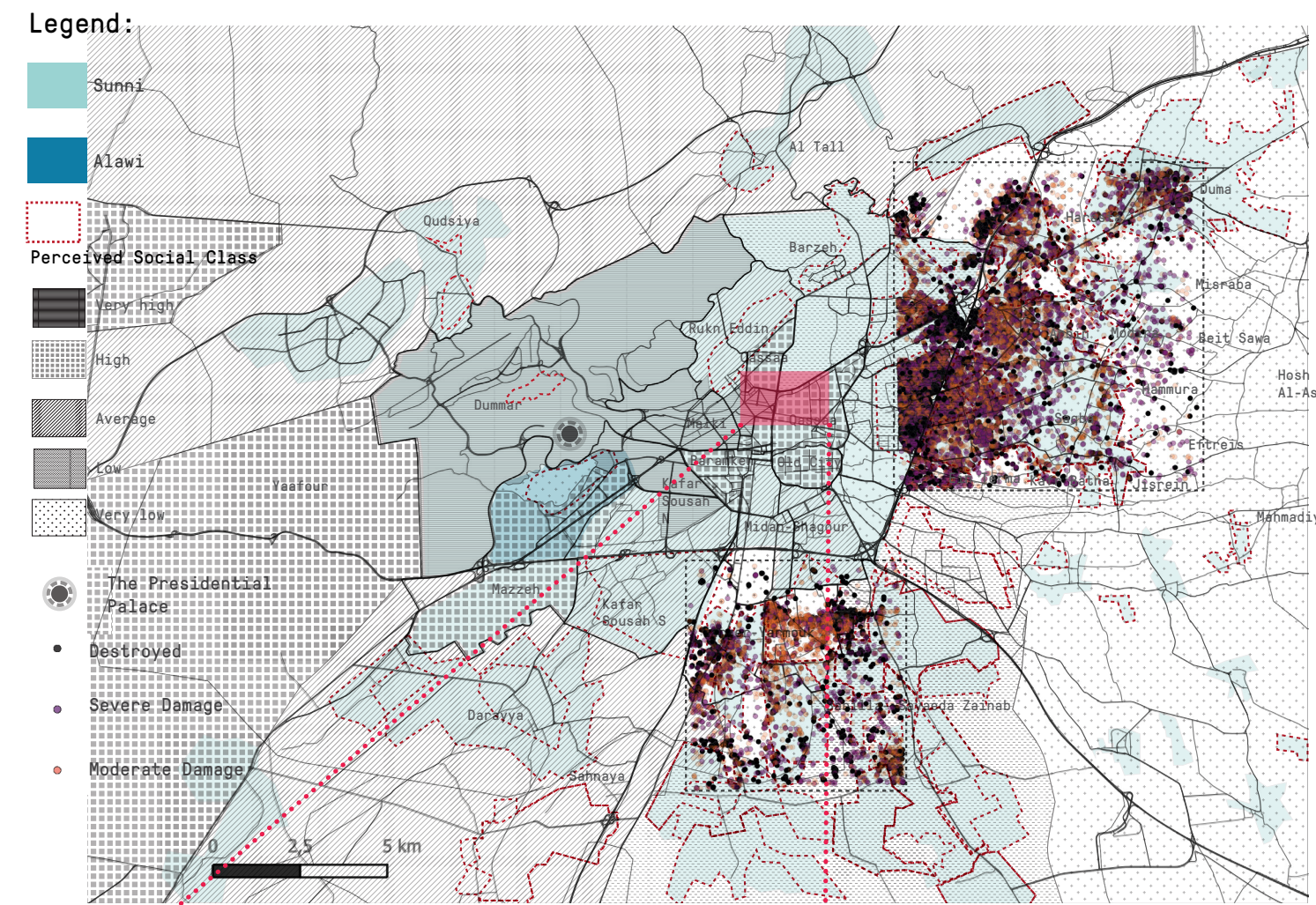


Figure 70: A map showing the overlap between patches of the mass destruction and the informal settlements.

Source: The author. Adopted from:UNOSAT(2017). URL: <https://unosat.org/products/1132>.

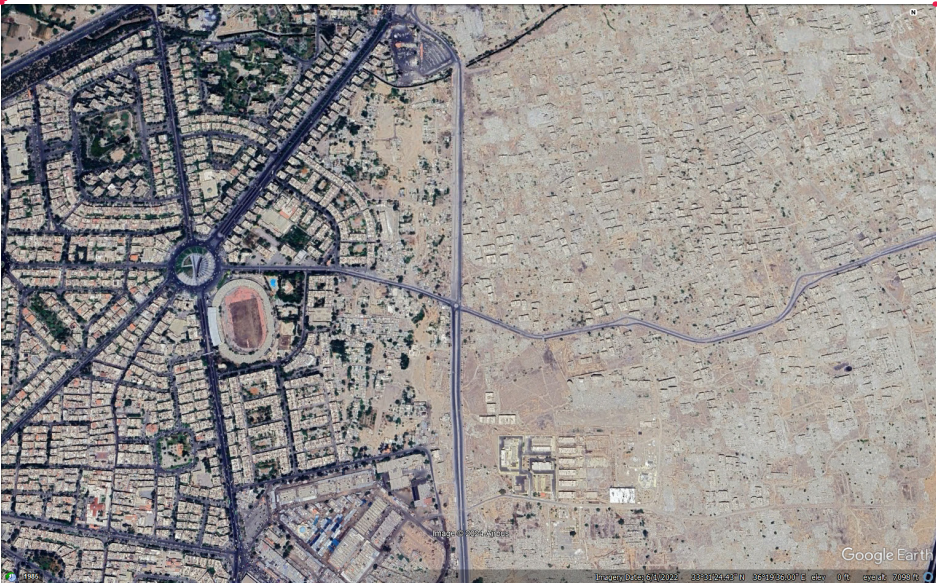


Figure 71: A seattleite images showing the destruction in Joubr neighborhood.

Source: Google Earth.

Mass Destruction

As highlighted earlier, authoritarianism can take various forms, including the deliberate destruction of cities. Despite the massive displacement of Eastern Ghouta residents, the regime’s thirst for retribution remained unquenched. In a chilling display of power, entire neighbourhoods were systematically obliterated, serving as a stark warning to rebels and non-rebels alike. It was as if the dictator sought to instill fear and subjugation, sending a chilling message: “This is the fate that awaits anyone who dares to challenge my authority.” In his book: Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Dissolution, Coward thoroughly explores this concept, stating: “the destruction of the built environment has a meaning of its own, rather than being a to, or a secondary feature of, the genocidal violence” (Coward, 2009, p. 36).

Furthermore, the regime seized upon the destruction of informal settlements as a convenient resolution to the longstanding debate surrounding their management, which had been a contentious issue prior to 2011, as discussed earlier (refer to page 85). Prior to the conflict, the discourse revolved around whether to improve, demolish, or rebuild these settlements. However, with the onset of war, the regime easily gravitated towards the latter option of eradication. Clerc (2014) further contends that the erasure of informal settlements served as a strategic tool of war, facilitating

the advancement of urban renewal plans conceived prior to 2011. According to REACH (2019), in early December 2017, 71% of all structures in Ein Terma and 93% in Jobar neighbourhoods were damaged or destroyed.

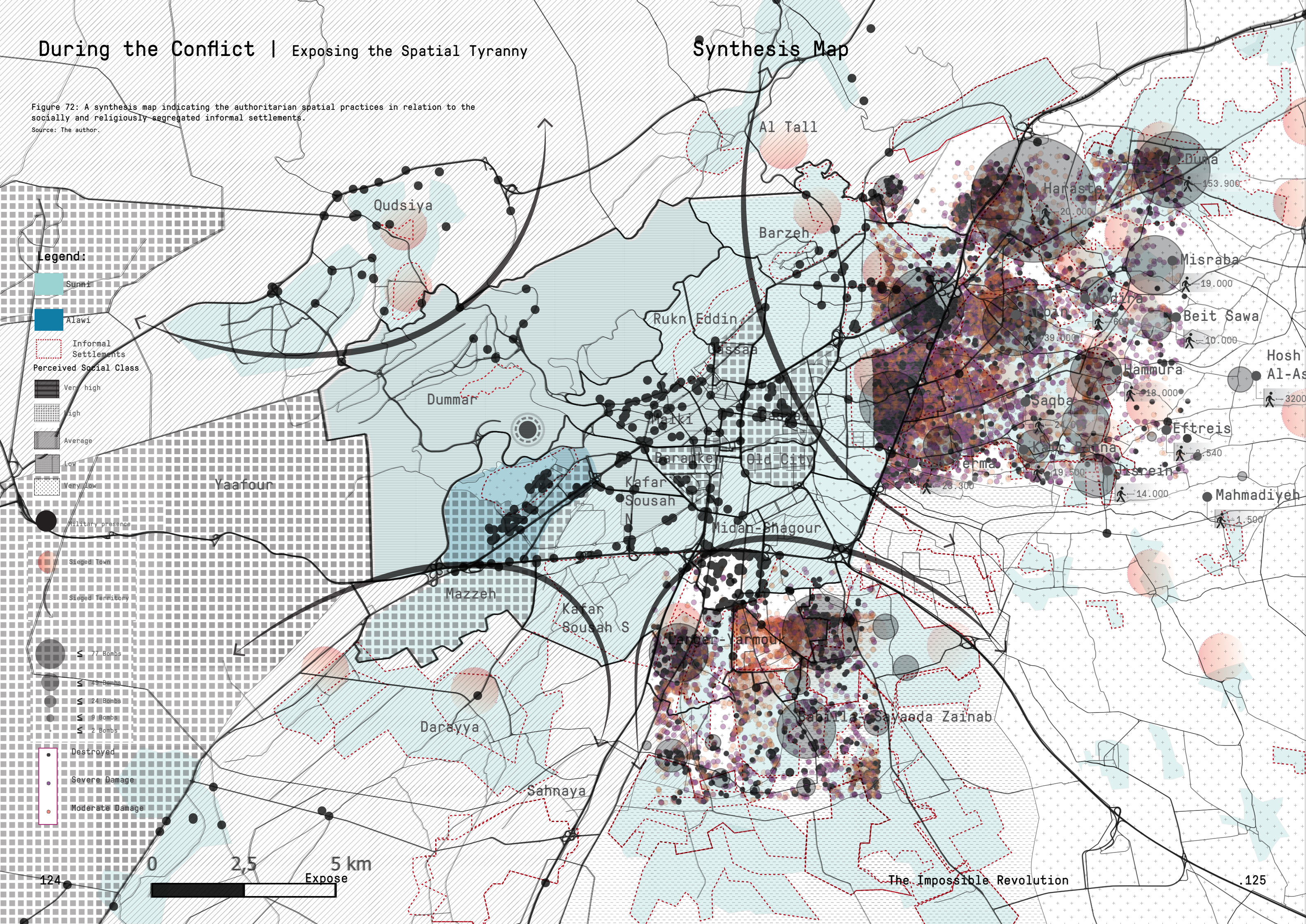
In his book ‘Domicide Architecture, War and the Destruction of Home in Syria’, Ammar Azzouz argues that the destruction of the built environment is extremely important in grasping urban violence. By examining the destruction of the built environment, cities can be viewed as repositories of history. The recounting of wars can be unravelled by scanning attempts to manipulate historical narratives, the displacement of communities, and the destruction of their records, homes, and, at times, even the grave sites of their loved ones. (Azzouz, 2023, p. 5)

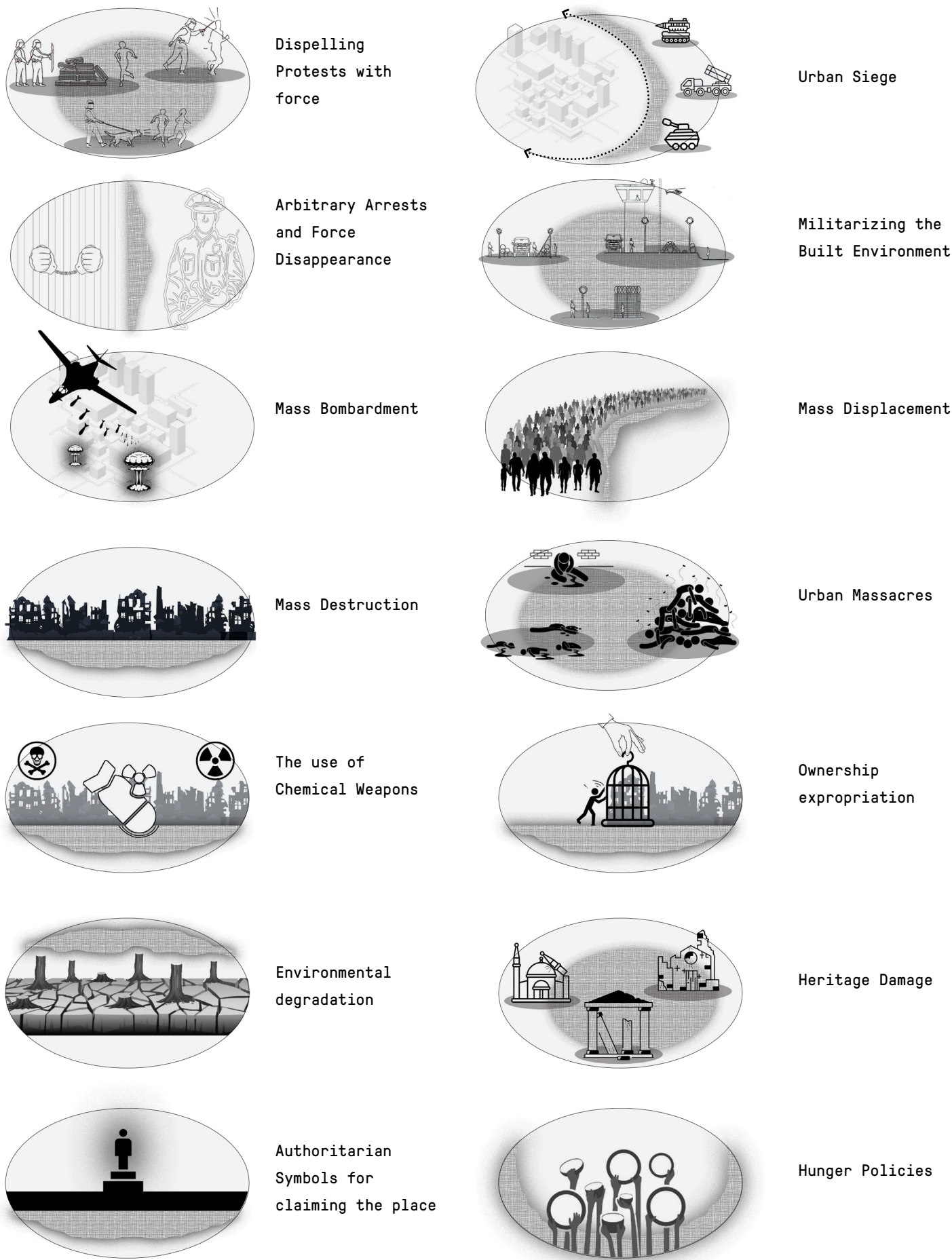
Hence, the erasure of collective memory within these communities enables the victor to reshape history and craft a narrative without needing to obscure the undeniable truth.

However, a significant data gap persists in the holistic documentation of these authoritarian practices. Despite concerted efforts, only fragmented information has been uncovered, as depicted in (Figure 59). This underscores the urgent necessity for additional research to ensue a more comprehensive understanding of the events unfolding during the Syrian conflict.

Figure 72: A synthesis map indicating the authoritarian spatial practices in relation to the socially and religiously segregated informal settlements.

Source: The author.





As spatial tyranny unfolded simultaneously across the whole nation, the previous analysis primarily zoomed in on the dynamics within the capital, Damascus. However, it serves to establish the (Typologies of Making Authoritarianism, illustrating how authoritarianism permeated Syrian society at large. This attempt aims to paint a comprehensive picture of the prevailing circumstances and underscore the applicability of these patterns to all Syrian cities. These oppressive mechanisms represent the strategic tools that the Syrian regime has honed over its five-decade authoritarian reign, underscoring its mastery of perpetuating control and repression.

Furthermore, these patterns of oppression play a significant role in fueling the broader and ever-expanding discourse on the spatialization of authoritarianism. This contribution has been a central objective of this research since its inception. Despite the fact that those patterns are extracted from the Syrian context, they can serve as a tool to understand and analyse other authoritarian practices worldwide.

In conclusion, the examination of spatial authoritarianism within the context of the Syrian conflict reveals a multifaceted and deeply entrenched system of control, oppression, and manipulation of urban spaces. From the pre-conflict era to the present day, the Syrian regime has employed a variety of tactics, including forced displacement, militarization of the built environment, urban sieges, mass bombardment, mass destruction, and demographic change, to maintain its grip on power and suppress dissent. These oppressive practices have had devastating consequences for Syrian society, leading to widespread suffering, displacement, and loss of life.

Moreover, the study of spatial authoritarianism in Syria offers insights into broader patterns of oppression and control that extend beyond the Syrian context. By identifying and analysing these patterns, we can better understand the mechanisms through which authoritarian regimes exert power and control over urban spaces and populations. This research contributes to the growing academic discourse on the spatialization of authoritarianism, shedding light on the ways in which regimes manipulate the built environment to perpetuate their rule and suppress opposition.

Moving forward, it is essential to continue documenting and analysing authoritarian practices in Syria and other contexts to build a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of oppression and resistance. By doing so, we can better equip ourselves to challenge and resist authoritarianism in all its forms and to advocate for justice, freedom, and human rights for all people.

STATUS QUO

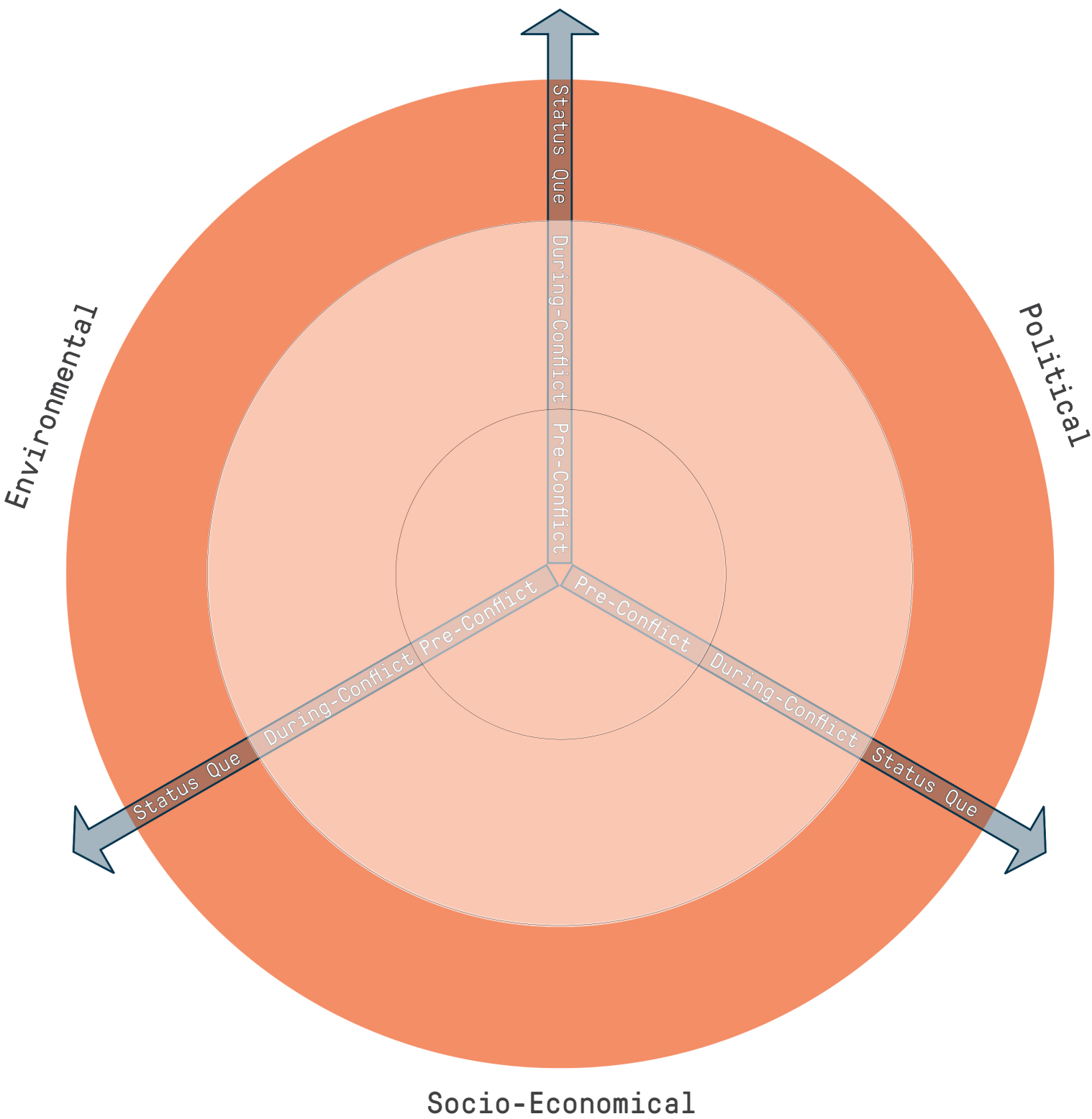


Figure 74: The (Status Quo) phase in the analytical framework.
Source: The author

Transitioning to the final phase of the research’s analytical framework, the examination now delves into the Status Quo timeframe. This crucial stage entails uncovering the contemporary practices of the authoritarian regime, while also shedding light on the evolving geopolitical landscape.

This part of the research attempts to illustrate the evolving authoritarian strategies and methodologies that are currently employed by the regime. Presently, the Syrian regime has adopted alternative techniques to solidify its power, including urban planning, involvement in the drug economy, and land expropriation. This shift in approach reaffirms the dynamic nature of authoritarianism, which is not bound by a static, unchanging form but rather exists in a fluid state, influenced by myriad local and international factors.

Through this comprehensive approach, the research aims to encapsulate the entirety of the conflict’s trajectory, tracing its origins from the root causes to the present state, spanning nearly 14 years of turmoil.

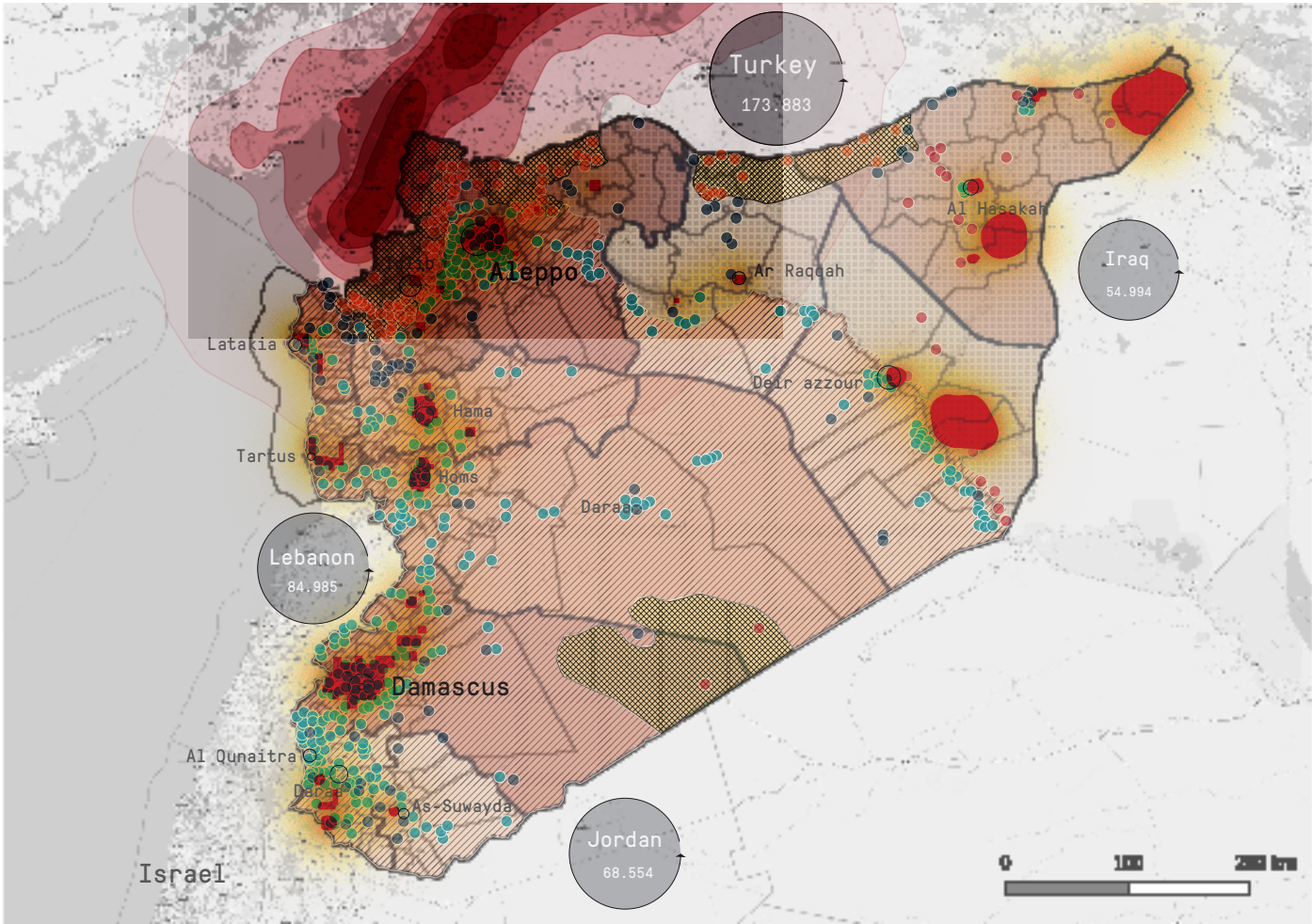
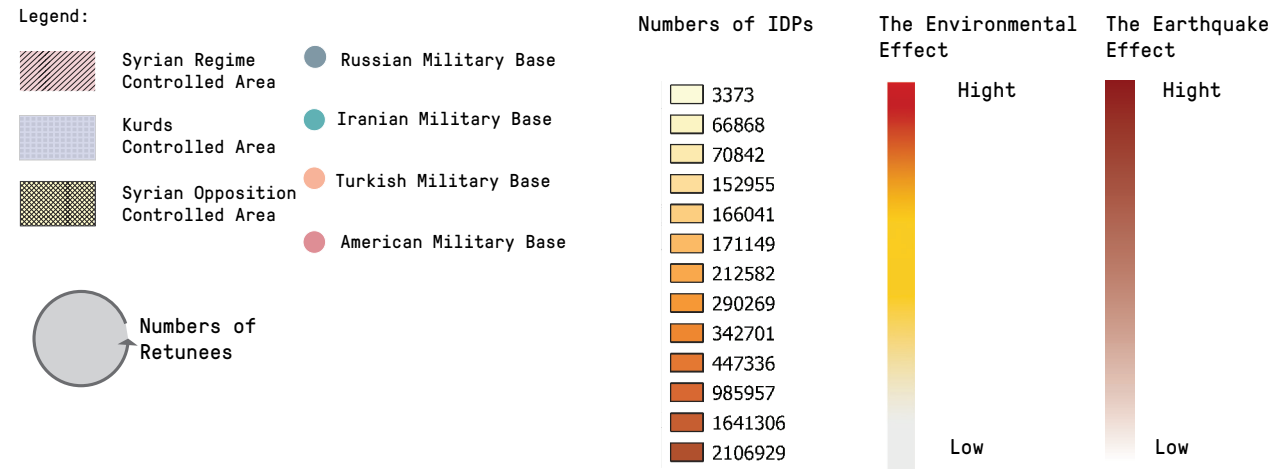


Figure 75: A synthesis map of the multifaceted problem for the current situation.

Source: The author. Adopted from different sources.



Back to the starting point, this map initially was employed to illustrate the complexity of the Syrian situation and counterbalance the globally circulated oversimplified narrative will once again serve a pivotal role in the Status Quo timeframe. It will be utilized to depict the current state of affairs in the country after nearly 14 years of conflict.

The Syrian conflict, which started in 2011, has evolved into a devastating and intricate crumble, the geopolitical situation continues to change in response to power struggles among conflicting parties. These global conflicting parties have extended their military reach across the nation, compromising Syrian sovereignty..

The humanitarian consequences of the conflict have been extensive and include displacement on a massive scale that has affected more than half the population. Refugees encounter difficulties in diasporic communities, while internally displaced persons struggle with continuous displacement. Thus, over 10 million people are in danger of losing their property rights.

Environmental degradation is an emerging issue following prolonged

conflicts coupled with the use of chemical weapons, with the northeastern region being most affected. Northwest Syria also experienced an earthquake crisis in 2023, which made the situation worse.

Essentially, the country is grappling with a multifaceted problem for which no solution is currently evident.

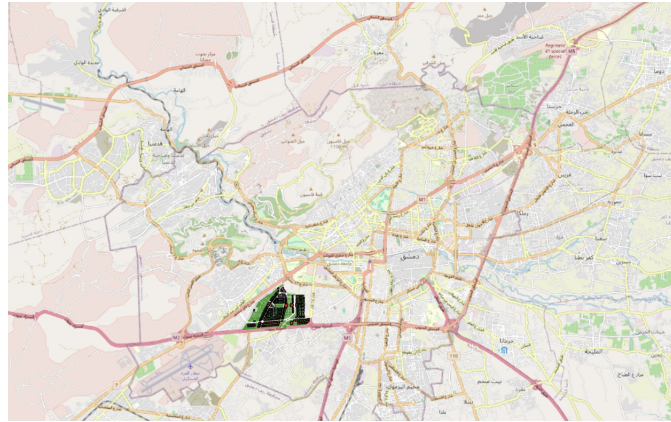


Figure 76: A map showing the location and the scale of Marota City within the capital Damascus.

Source: Marota city. URL: <http://marotacity.sy>



Figure 77: An example of one of the towers that has been approved to be built in Marota City.

Source: Marota city. URL: <http://marotacity.sy>

The regime's tactical manoeuvring has been evident throughout all phases of the conflict, with a stark illustration seen in the recently unveiled National Spatial Planning Framework. An unusual initiative entailed the involvement of the Higher Institute for Regional Planning in crafting the National Vision for Spatial Development, representing an initial collaboration between the government and Syrian scientific bodies. However, this collaboration was exploited, as customary, to further the regime's agenda by subtly conveying political messages. The report's introduction asserts that the primary cause of Syria's deteriorating conditions is the perceived cosmic warfare waged by Western powers against Syria, purportedly aimed at countering the rising influence of Russia and China, allies of the Syrian regime (Regional Planning Authority, 2022, p:3).

This narrative conveniently overlooks the regime's complicity in implementing unjust centralised governance policies, which exacerbated spatial disparities between urban and rural areas, as detailed in the analysis of the conflict's root causes, (see pages:64 - 87) . Moreover, the report's study of the entire Syrian territory fails to acknowledge the de facto forces controlling these areas, thereby impeding access to comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data

and information. Consequently, this raises significant doubts regarding the accuracy and impartiality of the statistics utilised in the study, which are inherently biased in favour of the Syrian regime.

Yet another instance of planning policies being used as a weapon was the regime's exploitation of its failure to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 as leverage to pressure the West into lifting conditional political and economic sanctions imposed upon it. Additionally, the regime demanded that international institutions swiftly and impartially support the provision of emergency financing by international economic and financial entities to member countries grappling with natural disasters, free from delays or politicisation, as critically explained in the Syrian Center for Policy Research view of the report (2023).

In this report, the Centre investigated the data utilised by the regime, exposing its superficial nature, while concurrently presenting alternative data that underscores the extent of the regime's involvement and its significant contribution to the failure to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Furthermore, as Abou Zainedin and Fakharani show in their report (SYRIA'S URBICIDE THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AS A MEANS TO CONSOLIDATE HOMOGENEITY), the Syrian regime's reconstruction efforts are exemplified by the development of Marota City, a pilot project under Decree 66 aimed at redeveloping informal settlements through private sector investments. However, this process has been criticised for its expulsion of residents without fair compensation and the favouritism shown towards regime cronies. Law No. 10, an expansion of Decree 66, further empowers local authorities to designate zones for reconstruction, extending beyond informal areas. These laws reflect a broader strategy of manipulating urban planning to engineer demographic change in favour of the regime's interests, potentially resulting in a more tightly controlled Syria. Other areas designated for reconstruction include Basilia City, a massive development planned for southern Damascus that has faced objections from affected residents. Negotiations are underway for joint investments between the Public Corporation for Housing and Russian companies (Abou Zainedin et al. , 2019).

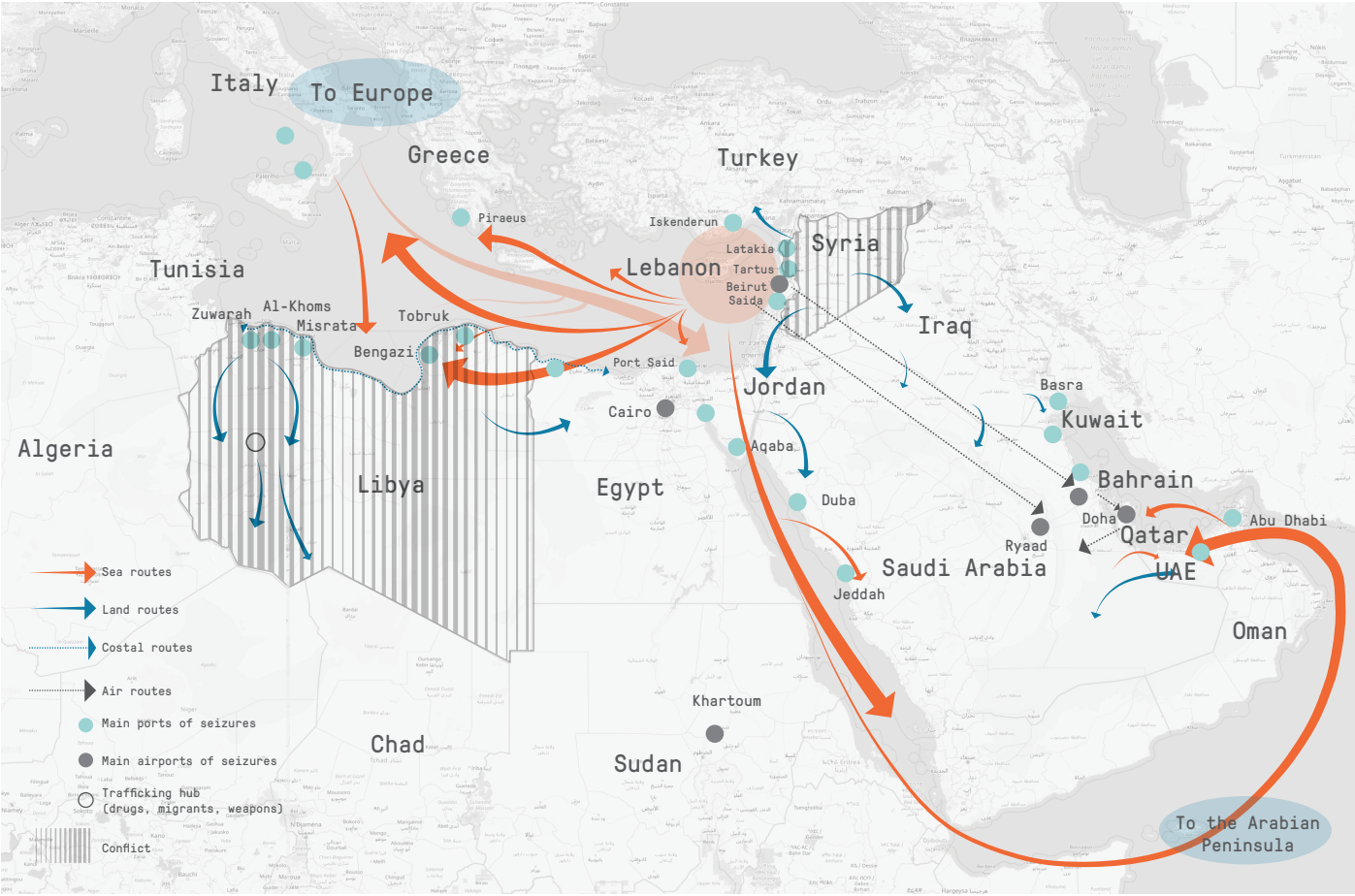


Figure 78: Main Trafficking routes for counterfeit “Captagon” in the Middle East and North Africa overlaid with the map of political conflicts in the region.
Source: The author. Adopted from: UNODC, 2022. URL: <https://shorturl.at/ADFN9>

Amid the Assad regime’s international isolation and the economic decline stemming from Western and US sanctions, it seems that it has found a strategy to maintain its global presence and leverage negotiation with countries. This strategy is commonly known now as the “Captagon Economy”. Captagon, initially introduced as a medicinal treatment, was subsequently prohibited in the 1980s due to its highly addictive properties. However, this strategy is not only supporting the regime’s collapsed economy but also forcing other Arab nations into normalizing political relations. In exchange for this normalization, the regime is required to stop smuggling routes directed towards these countries, particularly Jordan and the Gulf states.

A large number of local and international journalistic investigations have revealed the huge economic size of this trade, where the Syrian regime, with the support of its Lebanese ally Hezbollah, controls 80% of the global Captagon trade, which is estimated at \$57 billion. In his thorough investigation, journalist Taim Alhajj unveils the staggering scale of this trade and the intricate network that underpins it, stating: “In mid-December 2018, Greek authorities intercepted a cargo vessel named Noka coming from the Syrian port of Latakia, bound for eastern Libya. The trade freighter was loaded with about six tons of Indian processed

cannabis and three million super-strength Captagon pills, together worth 100 million USD. The shipment was—literally and metaphorically—the flagship of the al-Assad regime’s multibillion dollar drug operation, yet only one instance of the illicit Syrian export network that stretches across various countries in the region.” (Al-Haj, T. 2022).

In the World Drug Report (2022) conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), a map illustrating the primary trafficking routes for counterfeit “Captagon” in the MENA region was shared. This map serves to underscore Syria’s role as a manufacturing and distribution hub for Captagon in the region. Smuggling methods encompass sea, land, and air routes, originating from key ports in Syria and Lebanon and extending to other regional ports in Europe and North Africa. Additionally, significant smuggling routes pass through the cities of As-Sweida and Daraa in southern Syria towards Jordan and the Gulf region (see Figure 78). Notably, Libya, a nation embroiled in prolonged conflict, is also utilized as a distribution hub for trafficking into Africa.

In conclusion, the emergence of the “Captagon economy” serves as an authoritarian instrument, highlighting the ongoing evolution of authoritarian practices favouring the consolidation of the Syrian regime’s presence and power.

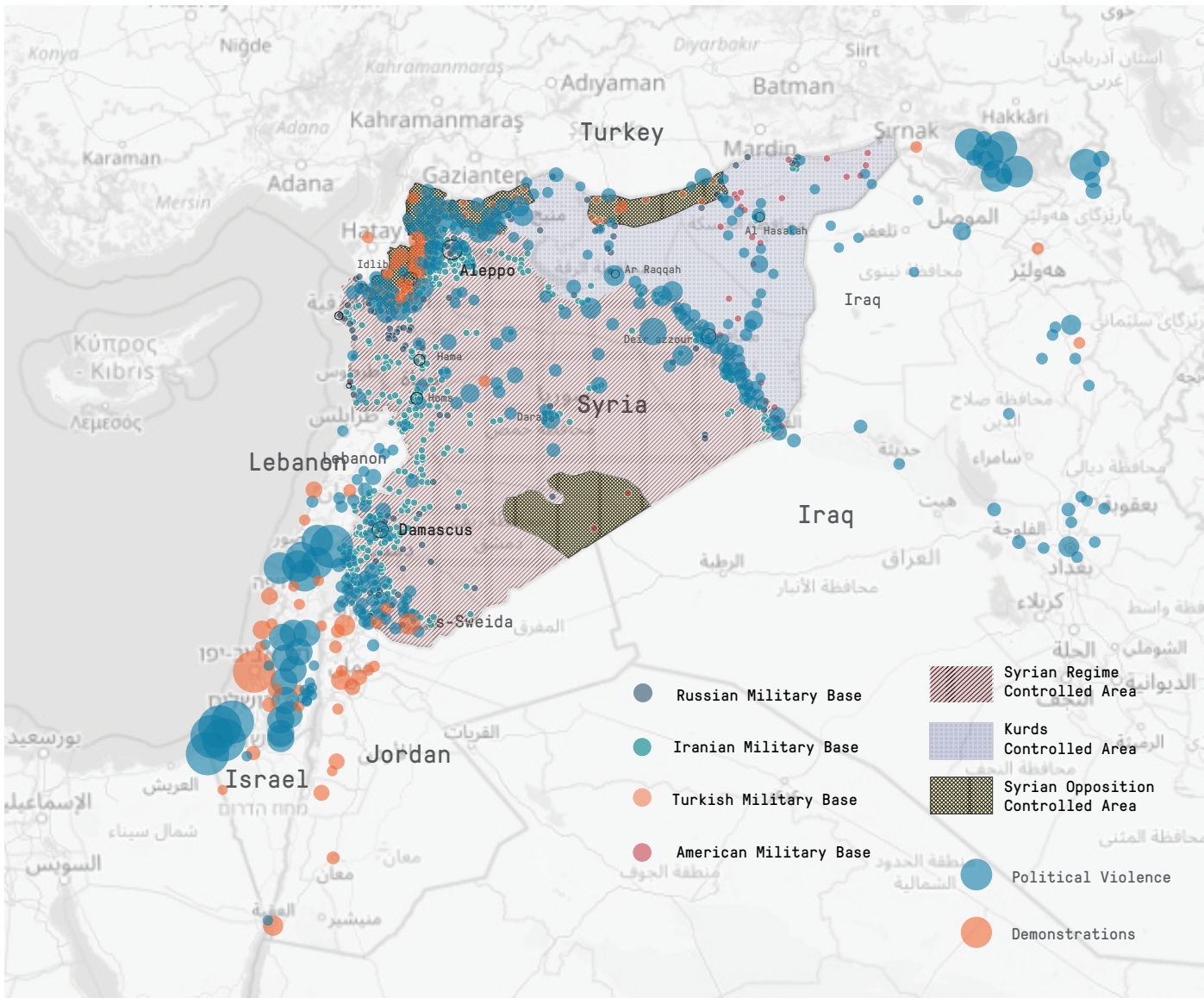


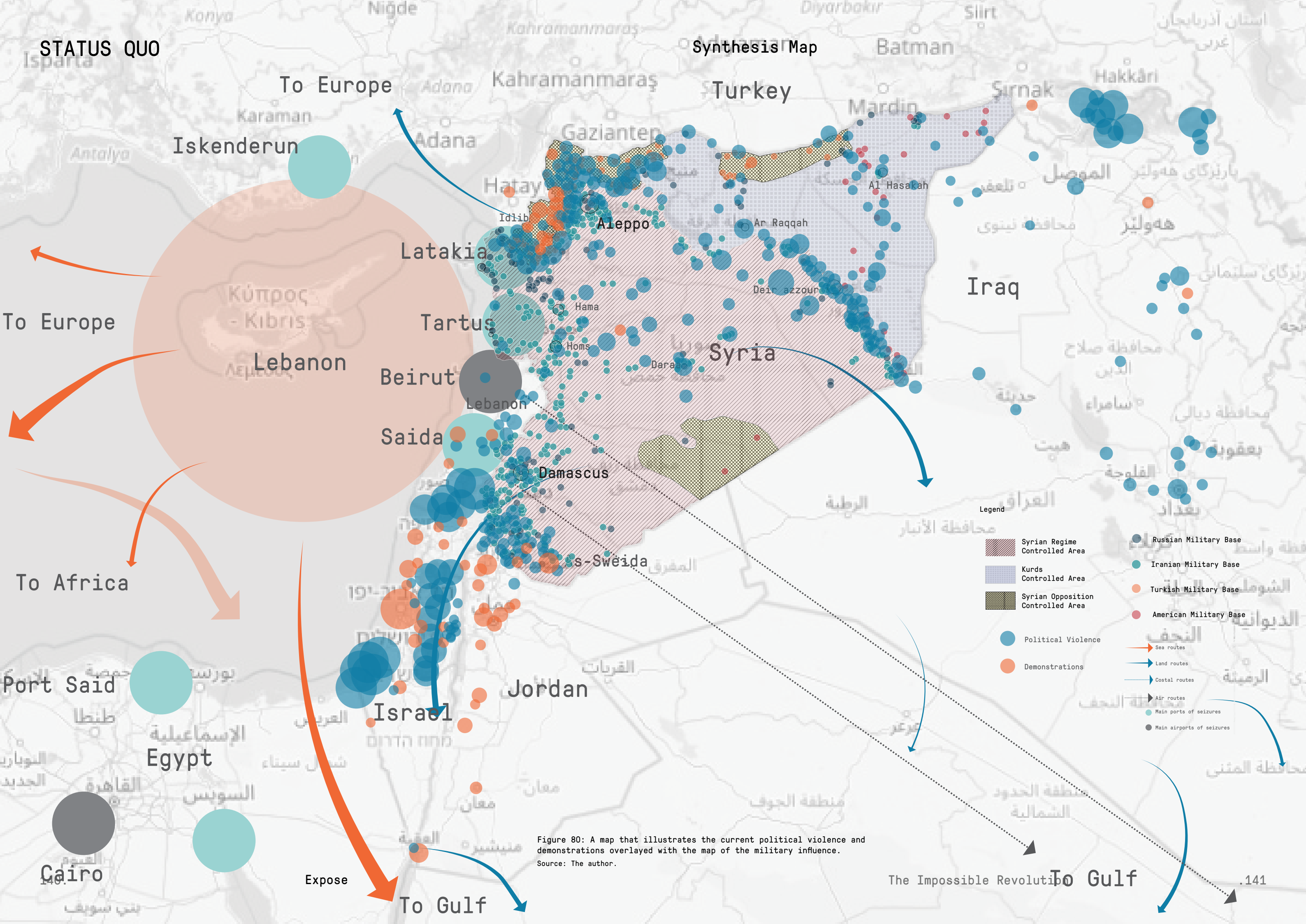
Figure 79: A map that illustrates the current political violence and demonstrations overlayed with the map of the military influence.
Source: The author. Adopted from multiple sources: (ACLED, 2024; Olwan et al. ,2023)

As previously explained in the problematization section of the research (see page 20), the conflict in Syria has evolved into a proxy war between global powers backing the regime on one hand and opposing factions on the other hand. This dynamic has resulted in the emergence of a new geopolitical landscape in the region, with Syria divided into various territories aligned with the interests of the conflicting parties. Over the past 13 years, zones of military dominance and influence have undergone significant shifts, highlighting the fluid nature of the geopolitical landscape.

As the weakest link in the region, Syria finds itself occupied by numerous local and international factions and armies, making it an attractive arena for international power wars and impunity. Following Israel’s recent assault on Gaza that started in October 2023, a fresh chapter of political and military reckoning has unfolded in Syria, further intensifying regional tensions. As shown in figure 78, hostilities between Israel and Iran-backed groups in Syria and Lebanon have intensified. Israel conducted airstrikes in Syria, targeting Hezbollah and Iranian-backed forces, resulting in casualties. Amid rising fears of a broader regional conflict, exchanges of fire between Hezbollah and Israel along the Lebanese border have intensified (ACLED, 2024).

Simultaneously, the Syrian regime, supported by its allies, is conducting offensives on two fronts. In the northwest, it is bombing villages south and east of Idlib with Russian support, while in the northeast, it is targeting SDF positions with backing from its Iranian ally (The Syrian Network for Human Rights, 2024).

The ongoing proxy war appears to benefit all regional actors, capitalising on Syria’s political deadlock and the failure of conflict resolution efforts. Internally and externally, Syrians are experiencing heightened frustration and anger, exacerbated by the dire humanitarian and economic conditions, which are now at their worst since the conflict’s inception. Amidst this frustration, interestingly, new grassroots movements are surfacing across all corners of Syria, boldly challenging the status quo (see figure 79). These movements fearlessly advocate for the ousting of existing forces and push for a cohesive, inclusive political resolution spanning the entirety of Syrian territory.



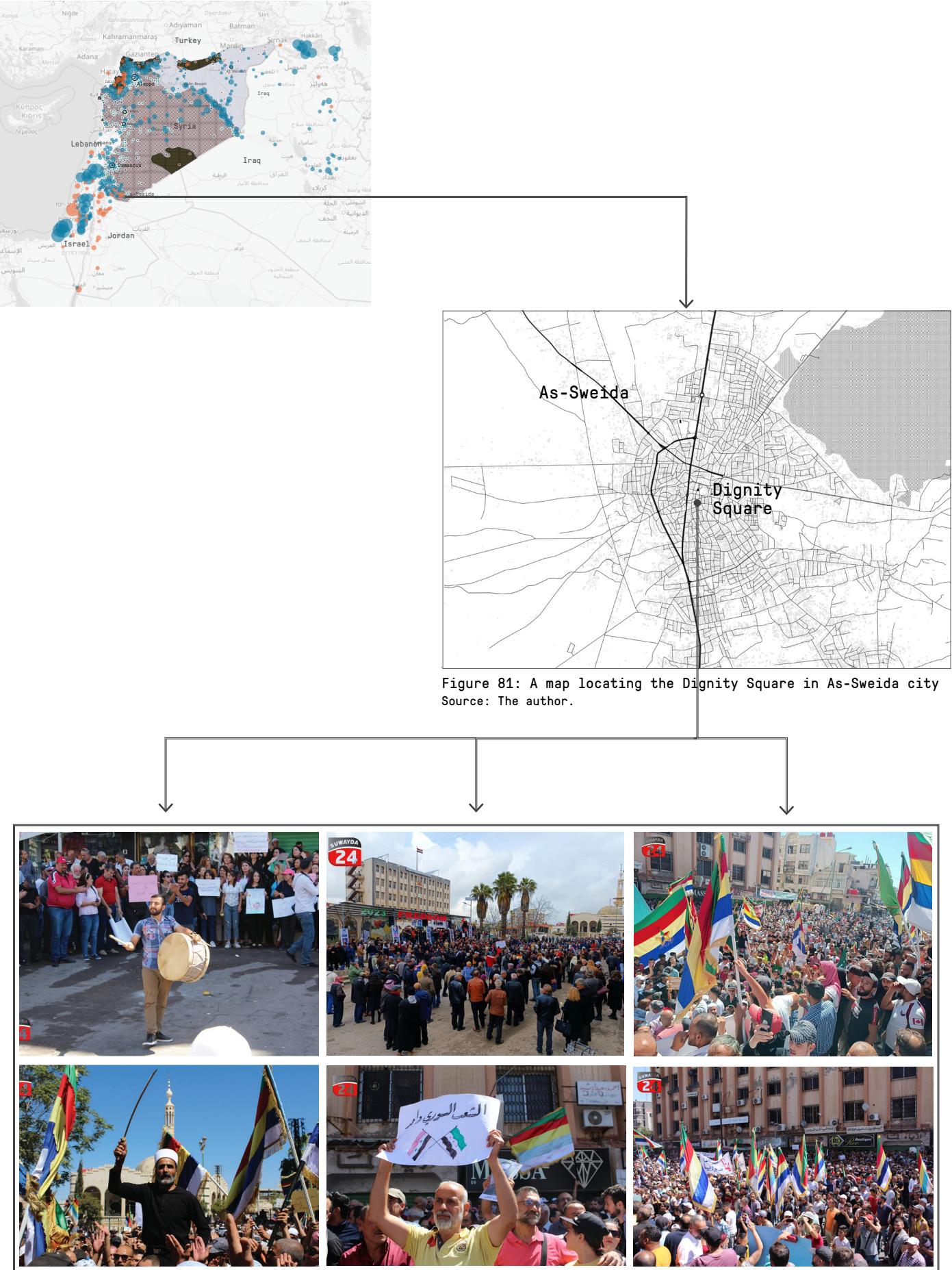


Figure 81: A map locating the Dignity Square in As-Sweida city
Source: The author.

Figure 82: Photos of Protesters in the Dignity Square in As-Seiwda.
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/Suwayda24>

The protests in As-Sweida, Syria, began in mid-August 2023 as a response to economic dissatisfaction, particularly regarding high gasoline prices. However, they quickly evolved into a larger political movement, with demonstrators demanding an end to the Assad regime, similar to the 2011 revolution. The protests have been effective, leading to the occupation of the central square (Dignity Square), and the closure of Al-Assad’s hegemonic Al-Ba’ath party offices. They epitomise grassroots resistance and the defiance of marginalised communities against oppressive regimes, reflecting the principles of the Insurgent Planning Theory proposed by Faranak Miraftab in 2016. The occupation of the main square in As-Sweida aligns with Miraftab’s concept of “invented spaces of participation.” In this framework, insurgent movements do not limit themselves to the spaces for citizen participation endorsed by the authorities, known as “invited spaces.” Instead, they create or reclaim alternative spaces where they can assert their citizenship rights to advance their counter-hegemonic goals. The occupation of the main square (Dignity Square) represents a re-appropriation of public space by the protesters, where they exercise their right to assemble and express dissent against the government. By occupying this central location, they symbolically challenge the authority of the regime and assert their agency as citizens. This movement across invited and invented spaces of citizenship reflects the fluidity

of insurgent citizenship practices, characterised by a blend of inclusion and resistance. Furthermore, previously in this research, the nature of the protesters in the 2011 revolution was analysed as framed by Marcuse’s categories (see page 105). The analysis sheds light on the motivations of the different protesters behind the 2011 uprising. One extremely relevant aspect here is the category of the ‘insecure,’ described as a shifting group influenced by conjunctural changes. This category reflects the participation of religious and ethnic minorities in the early stages of the revolution in 2011 but their subsequent withdrawal after the beginning of the sectarian conflict. Drawing parallels to what is happening in As-Sweida now, we can observe a similar dynamic among the Druze minority in the region. As-Sweida city is a home for the Druze religious minority in Syria. While initially participating in the protests against the Assad regime in 2011 but withdrawing later on, the Druze community in As-Sweida has once again sparked a new uprising, expressing dissatisfaction with the government’s handling of the economic crisis and political repression. Thus, their participation has been marked by caution and fluctuation, reflecting concerns about potential reprisals and the broader geopolitical context. This illustrates the nuanced and shifting nature of minority engagement in protest movements, influenced by evolving circumstances and perceptions of risk.

To unravel the oppressive rule of the Al-Assad regime in As-Sweida city, the patterns of making authoritarianism previously discussed were revisited. While documenting every instance of spatial tyranny over the past five decades of oppression is impractical, the research aimed to highlight how these patterns of oppression manifest in various Syrian contexts, transcending religious and ethnic divides. This collage seeks to illustrate the universality of authoritarian practices, shedding light on the common experiences shared by Syrians across different regions.

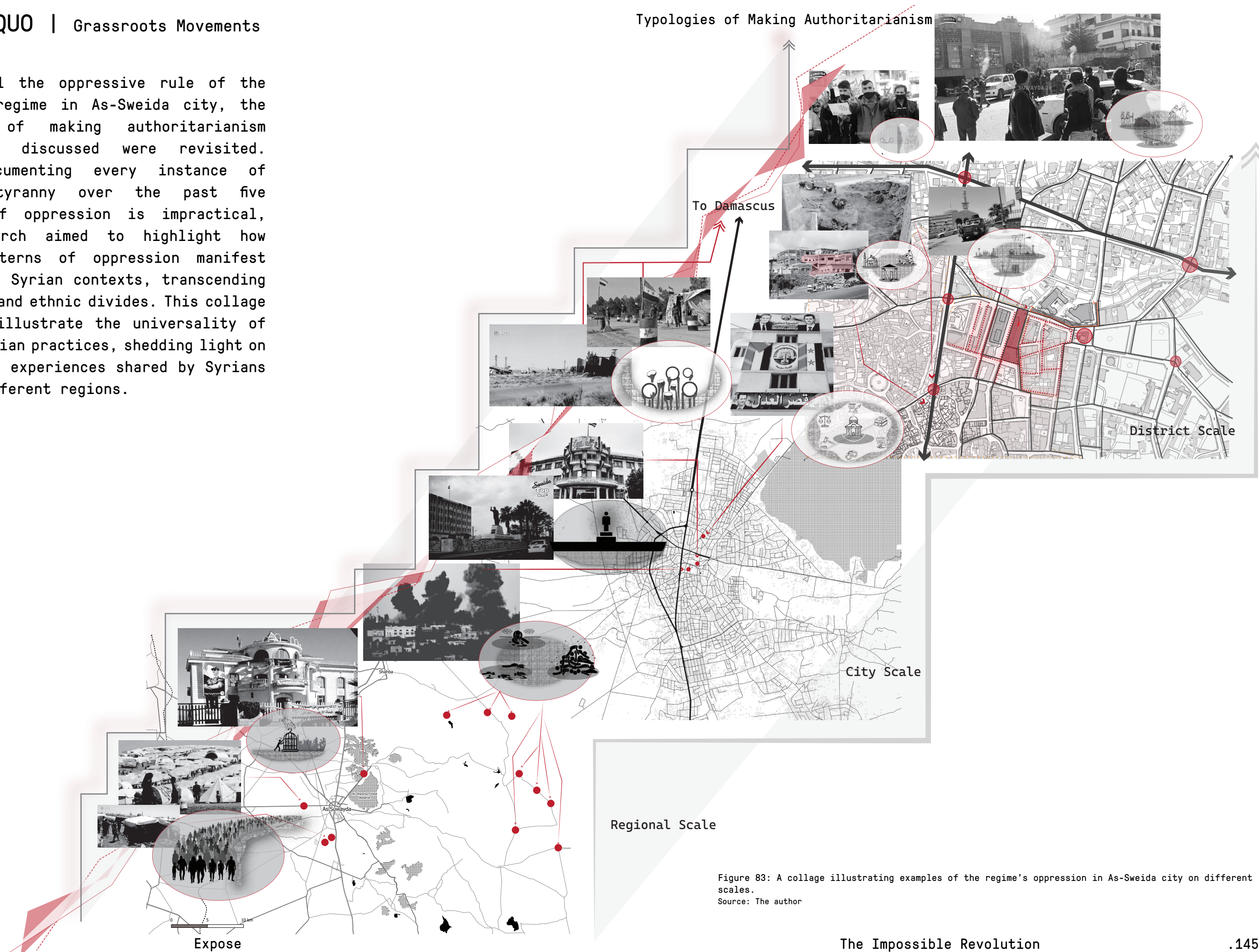


Figure 83: A collage illustrating examples of the regime's oppression in As-Sweida city on different scales.
Source: The author

Conclusion

In the culmination of this research, the analysis has traversed the complex trajectory of the Syrian conflict, spanning nearly 14 years of turmoil and shedding light on the multifaceted nature of authoritarianism in the country. Transitioning from the root causes of the conflict to the present status quo, the examination has unravelled the evolving strategies and methodologies employed by the regime to maintain its grip on power.

The emergence of the “Captagon economy” stands as a stark testament to the regime’s adaptability, illustrating how authoritarian practices evolve to suit shifting geopolitical landscapes. By leveraging the drug trade, the regime not only sustains its collapsed economy but also manipulates regional dynamics, leveraging international dependencies to solidify its presence and influence.

Simultaneously, the regional geopolitical situation continues to morph, with Syria serving as a battleground for global power struggles and proxy wars. Amidst escalating tensions and external interventions, grassroots movements like the As-Sweida protests exemplify the resilience of marginalised communities, challenging the status quo and asserting their agency in the face of oppression.

Through the lens of insurgent planning theory, these movements underscore the nuanced and fluctuating nature of dissent, reflecting the interplay

of socio-political dynamics and shifting perceptions of risk.

Furthermore, the typologies of making authoritarianism provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the pervasive nature of oppressive practices, transcending religious and ethnic divides. By documenting these patterns of spatial tyranny, the research elucidates the common experiences shared by Syrians across diverse contexts, emphasising the universality of authoritarian repression.

As the conflict enters its fourteenth year, Syria remains entrenched in a complex web of political, economic, and humanitarian crises. With no clear solution in sight, the struggle for justice, freedom, and human rights continues, underscoring the urgent need for concerted international action and support for grassroots movements advocating for change.

STAKEHOLDERS ANALYSIS

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Identifying Stakeholders

At this stage, a Stakeholders analysis was conducted to examine the positioning of all parties involved in the Syrian conflict, with a specific focus on the Syrian people. This analysis sought to assess the extent of agency they possess in shaping the country’s trajectory in the post-conflict era.

Formal Institutions

Given the complex geopolitical, socio-economical, and humanitarian landscape in Syria, a comprehensive stakeholder analysis is crucial for providing a holistic understanding of the landscape of the Syrian conflict. The Syrian conflict has transcended its initial status as a national issue, evolving into a geopolitical arena wherein international powers exert considerable influence.

A list was created to identify all the people and groups involved in or influenced by the conflict, whether directly or indirectly. Then, two kinds of connections were established to show how these different parties relate to each other. These relationships were determined by whether they were in conflict or allied with each other. These relationships are not binary, as they involve multiple actors and factors. Additionally, they are not static, meaning they can change over time, influenced by the ever-shifting dynamics of the international political landscape. The interactions between various parties are complex and subject to ongoing developments. Noteworthy here is the hierarchical structure deeply embedded within the Syrian government (24). Reflected in the centralized authority wielded by an authoritarian ruling regime, epitomizing a concentration of power at the apex of the governing structure.

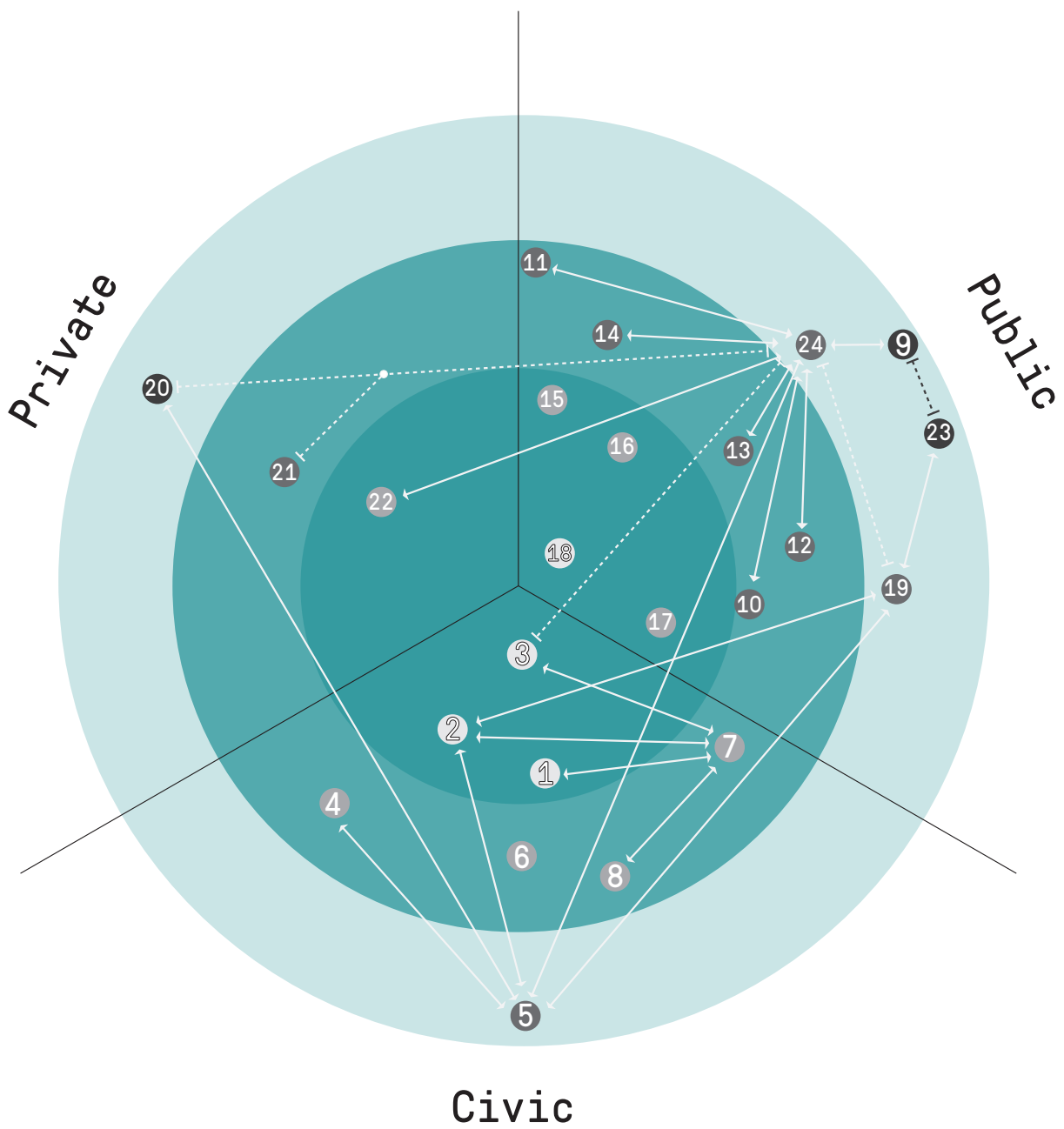
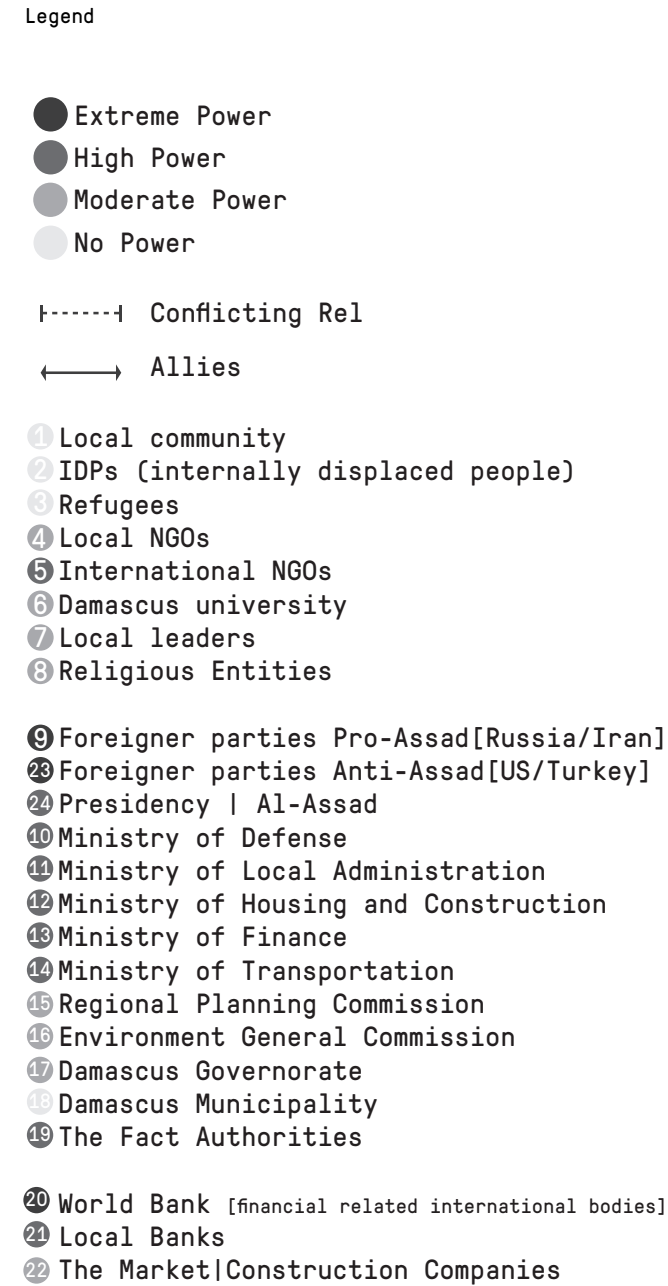


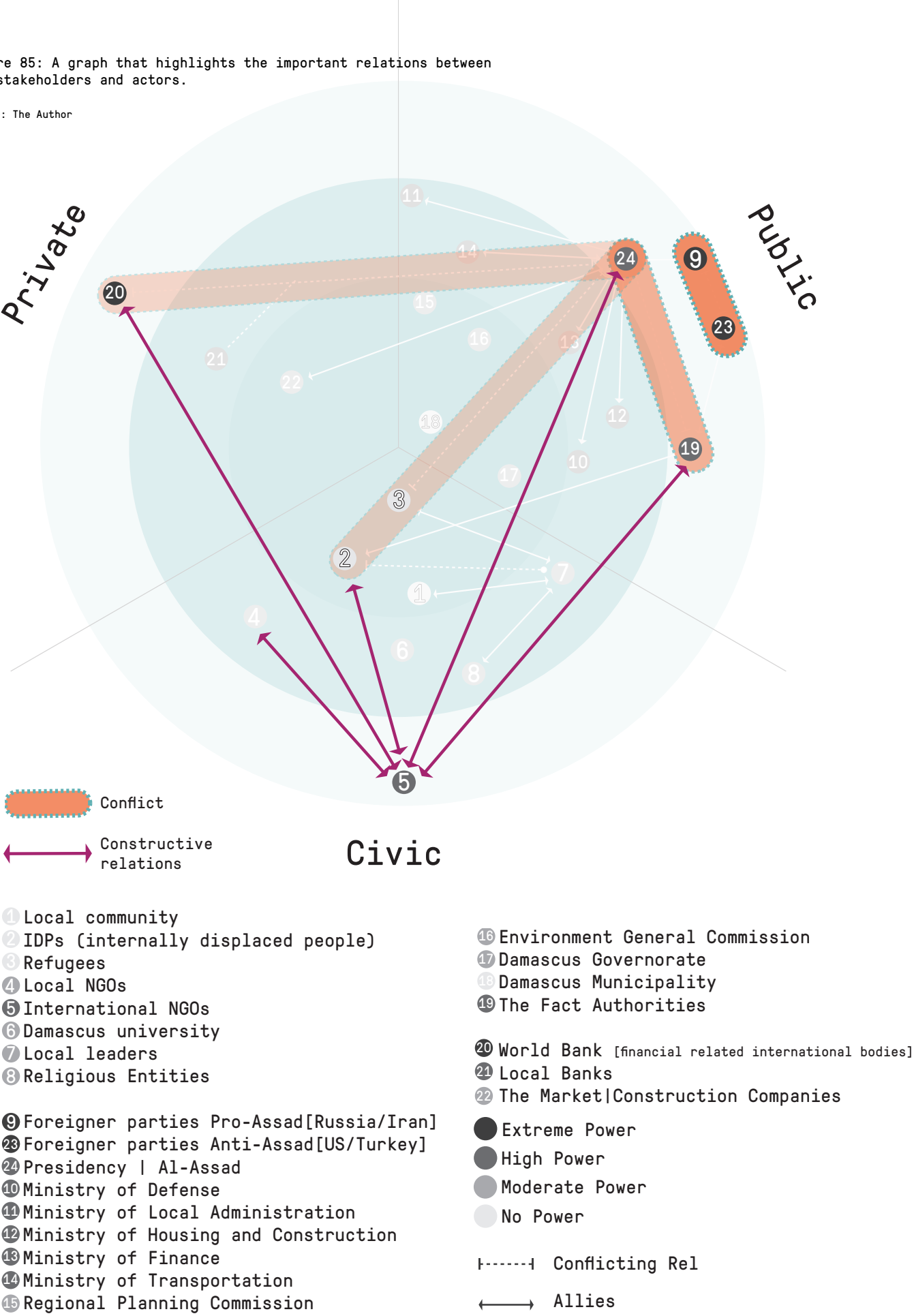
Figure 84: A graph that illustrates the different stakeholders and actors in relation to each other.

Source: The Author

Identifying Stakeholders

Figure 85: A graph that highlights the important relations between the stakeholders and actors.

Source: The Author



Formal Institutions

The Syrian conflict is characterized by a multi-faceted and multi-scalar nature, involving a myriad of actors ranging from the international to the local level. Delving into this complexity is instrumental in identifying and prioritizing the most pressing clashes that demand immediate attention and resolution.

Foreigner parties Pro-Al-Assad [Russia/Iran] Vs. Foreign parties Anti-Al-Assad [US/Turkey]

The Syrian conflict transcends the conventional notion of a civil war between the regime and its populace. Instead, it has become a universal battleground where global opposing forces have chosen to wage their conflicts. This shift has marginalized the influence of both the Syrian regime and its civilians, rendering them powerless in determining the conflict's resolution and the initiation of the much-needed post-conflict phase.

The Presidency [Al-Assad] Vs. The Fact Authorities

The Syrian government has lost control over significant swathes of the country, comprising areas of vital economic and environmental importance essential for urban reconstruction. Moreover, the conflict between Al-Assad and his supporters against opposition forces and their allies commenced 13 years ago and persists unabated as of the current research phase.

24 23

The Presidency [Al-Assad] Vs. IDPs and Refugees

The examination of the underlying causes of the Syrian conflict reveals a systemic pattern wherein citizens who opposed the Al-Assad regime, were subjected to forced displacement through the demolition of their neighborhoods and the confiscation of their property rights. Consequently, the conflict is deeply ingrained, casting uncertainty on the safety and security of Syrians contemplating a return to their original residential areas.

24 20

The Presidency [Al-Assad] Vs. The World Bank

Due to the sanctions imposed on the Syrian regime, international organizations such as the World Bank and other relevant entities, which could potentially provide financial support for the recovery efforts, find themselves impeded from participating in the current circumstances.

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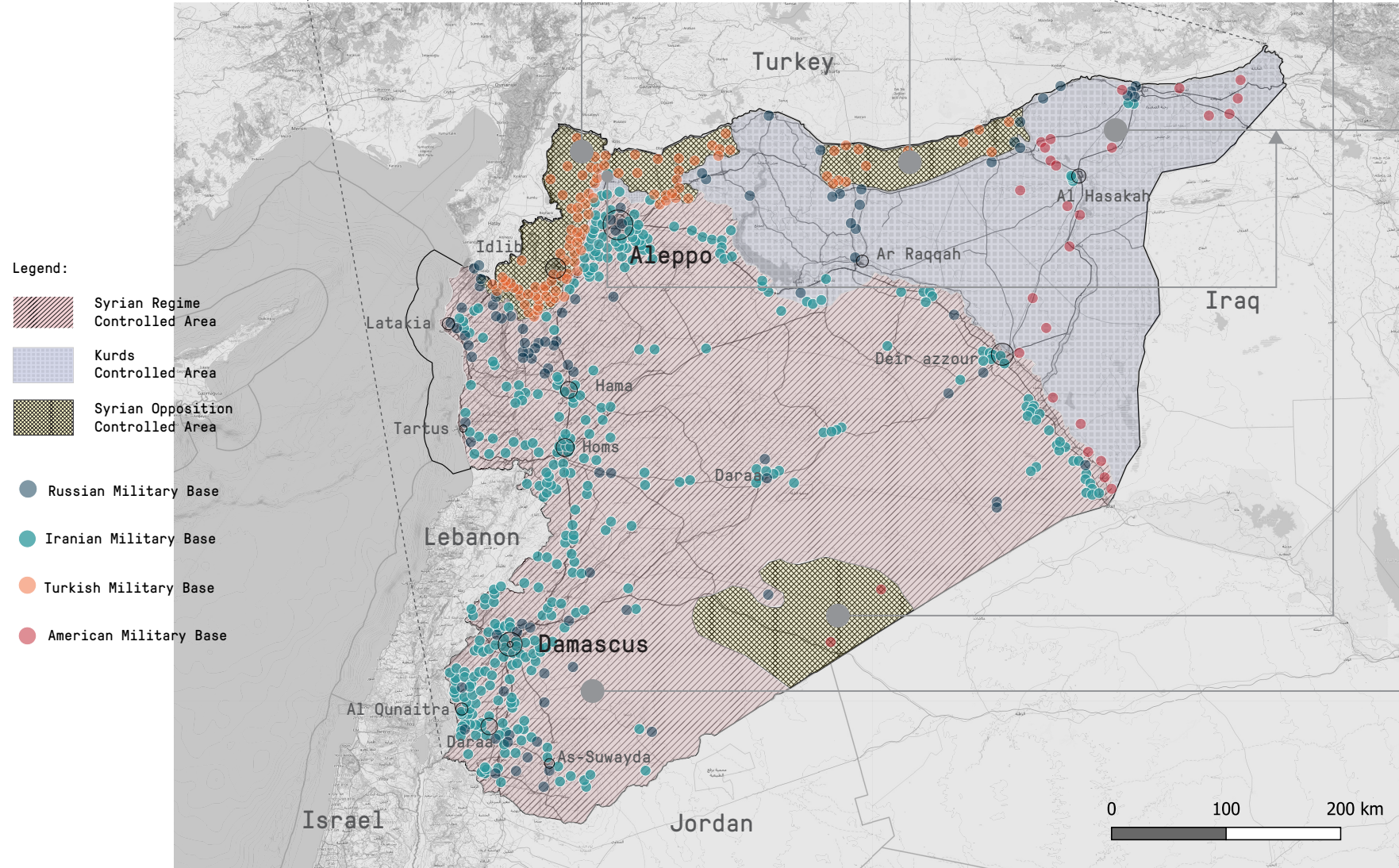
International NOGs <<>> World Bank, Local NGOs, IDPs, Refugees, The Regime, The Fact Authorities

A significant actor within the Syrian conflict are the international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as they remain impartial and devoid of vested interests in the conflict. These entities possess the unique capability to establish and maintain constructive relations with all conflicting parties. Additionally, their operational capacity enables them to engage effectively in both political and humanitarian interventions.

Identifying Stakeholders



Figure 86: A map that shows the different spatial claims of the different stakeholders and actors.
Source: The Author



- ② IDPs (internally displaced people)
- ③ Refugees

A significant number of the internally and externally displaced people have lost their property rights due to the unjust planning policies, more specifically, the planning policy number 66. Which allows the government to expropriate the land of the informal settlements in Damascus in a legal manner. People have spatial claims for their ownership rights.

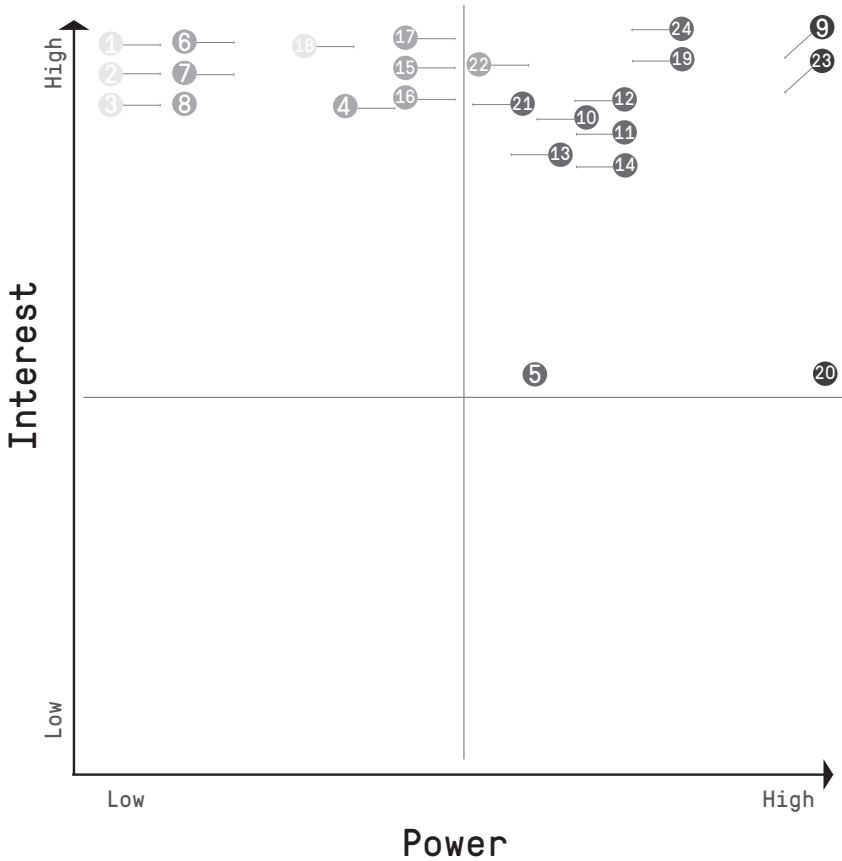
Spatial Claims

②③ Foreigner parties Anti-Assad[Turkey]
①⑨ The Fact Authorities | Syrian Opposition Factions
These regions are entirely beyond the control of the Syrian regime. It is essential to recognize that while the local authorities in these areas are Syrian, their operational autonomy is significantly influenced and directed by foreign forces who primarily pursue their own vested interests, which may not necessarily align with the welfare of the Syrian population.

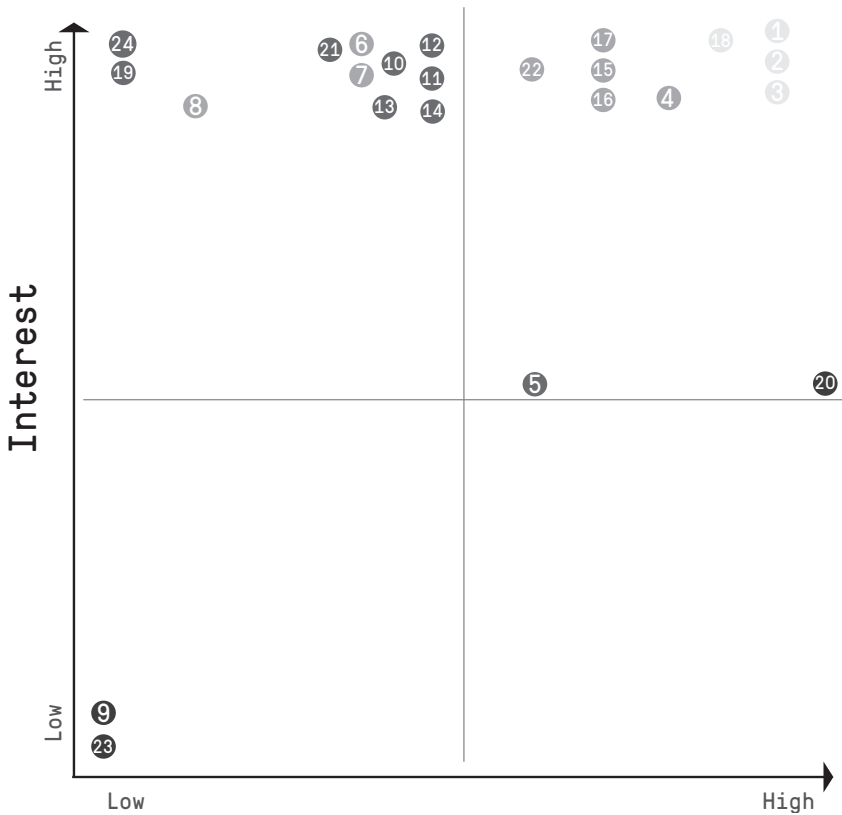
②③ Foreigner parties Anti-Assad[US]
①⑨ The Fact Authorities | Syrian Democratic Forces
The predominant demographic in this region comprises Syrian Kurds, who receive support from the United States and assert control over crucial resources, including oil fields, crop fields, and water sources. While the Syrian regime maintains a presence in this area, it lacks effective control over it.

⑨ Foreigner parties Pro-Assad[Iran]
②④ Presidency | Al-Assad
Iran exerts significant military influence within Syria, effectively controlling all border crossings with Lebanon and Jordan. Additionally, Iran pursues a Shiite-oriented agenda that seeks to alter the demographic composition of the region. Notably, in exchange for their support to the Syrian regime, Iran has received areas that suffered severe distraction during the conflict as part of their compensation.

⑨ Foreigner parties Pro-Assad[Russia]
②④ Presidency | Al-Assad
Russia holds a substantial military presence in Syria, extending its influence over critical assets such as the port, phosphate fields, and offshore gas reserves. Concurrently, Russia has been actively disseminating its cultural influence across the nation. This influence is notably evident in the integration of the Russian language into the Syrian educational curriculum, a practice initiated since the onset of the conflict. Furthermore, various Russian national celebrations and cultural elements have been imposed over the Syrian society.



Shifting



The power/interest matrix is a valuable tool in stakeholder analysis as it helps identify and understand the dynamics of various actors involved in the Syrian conflict. The graph highlights the division among stakeholders and underscores the widespread impact of the conflict on almost everyone involved. The key determinant of power in this context is military strength, revealing that those with significant military capabilities hold sway in the situation.

It's crucial to delve deeper into the nature of power dynamics, particularly as the most influential players are international entities. This emphasises that their involvement may not primarily be driven by a commitment to the welfare of the Syrian people or the betterment of the country. Instead, their focus tends to align with their own regional political agendas and interests. This insight underscores the complex nature of the conflict, where external actors exert considerable influence, potentially shaping the trajectory of events in Syria based on their strategic goals rather than the immediate needs of the local population.

As a conclusion, a crucial shift in power dynamics is essential to prioritising the interests of Syrian citizens over external agendas, fostering stability and prosperity within the country.

Figure 87: A graph that shows the Interest/Power Matrix.

Source: The Author

Understanding the Syrian conflict requires a comprehensive analysis of the various stakeholders in order to grasp its geopolitical, socio-economic, and humanitarian aspects. As the conflict transcends national boundaries towards geopolitics, the role of international powers becomes more visible. Therefore, understanding who is involved and how they relate to one another is essential for grasping what sets the way in which conflicts unfold. The complex interplay of numerous players is defined by two different types of links: conflicting or allied. This recognises that geopolitical relationships are fluid and dynamic. Consequently, this has led to a concentration of power within the hierarchical structure of the Syrian government. The power/interest matrix sheds some light on dynamics among stakeholders, thus indicating that military strength is a dominant factor. Such involvement by influential international actors usually aligns with regional political interests rather than the immediate needs of Syrians themselves. In summary, it should be noted that acknowledging international actor's territorial claims necessitates a paradigm shift that gives priority to Syrians' welfare over foreign interests aimed at stability and prosperity.

PROPOSE

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In As-Sweida city, the revolution is fueled by the concept of radical hope, as described by Neville et al. (2019) and Ginwright (2011), which involves becoming whole as a collective despite historical and ongoing oppression. The component of the ‘Psychological Framework of Radical Hope’ by Mosley et al. (2019) See figure 88, are all present in this grassroots movement; the people demonstrate an unwavering faith in the possibility of positive change starting from the individual and heading towards the collective, drawing inspiration from past resistance and resilience. Sharing a collective memory, embracing ancestral pride, and envisioning possibilities for liberation are key aspects of their hope, driving them to challenge the status quo and work towards a better future. Ultimately, their sense of meaning and purpose derive from a commitment to social justice goals, driving their actions towards collective justice.

In a lecture by Professor Faranak Miraftab at the Centre for the Just City, she recounts the grassroots movement of Bon Gardine, an informal settlement in Fortaleza, Brazil, fighting for recognition. She emphasises their relentless determination, stating, “Choosing to fight and embracing the potential for change, every single day, one day at a time, one door knocked at a time, one flayer at a time, they cannot afford to give up.” (Miraftab, 2021). This sentiment resonates universally, transcending geographical boundaries. Similarly, in As-Sweida, people have been protesting daily since mid-August 2023 for the same reason: they cannot afford to give up.

Furthermore, the uprising in As-Sweida embodies insurgent planning practices outlined by Miraftab, particularly evident in their transgression of time, place, and action. As documented by Miraftab, these practices involve challenging false dichotomies between invited and invented spaces of activism while also transcending national boundaries through transnational solidarity and a historicized consciousness. This perspective resonates with the protests in As-Sweida, where solidarity extends beyond national events within Syria to include support for transnational causes like Gaza. Furthermore, the protests exemplify characteristics of counter and anti-hegemony by fostering inclusivity across diverse segments of society, including individuals from various religious, political, and social backgrounds. This inclusivity disrupts normalised relations of dominance, challenging established power structures and hegemonic narratives. Moreover, the protestors in As-Sweida exhibit an imaginative approach to activism, reflecting a longing for a just future for all Syrians. Drawing inspiration from Miraftab’s notion of recovering idealism for a just society, the protestors envision a future founded on principles of justice and equality, inspiring hope and mobilising collective action towards this vision (Miraftab, 2016).

However, given the current vulnerable position of Syrian citizens within the power/interest matrix as explained in the stakeholder analysis, a paradigm shift is imperative to elevate this ‘radical hope’ and ‘insurgent movement’ to a higher level. It’s essential to empower people with more agency and ensure their demands and aspirations are not only acknowledged but also built upon. This shift aims to transform their envisioned nation into a tangible reality, where their radical, insurgent hope evolves into their everyday existence.

In conflict contexts, insurgent planning and the embrace of grassroots movements are vital for effective future interventions. Insurgent planning prioritises bottom-up approaches, community participation, and local knowledge, recognising communities’ invaluable insights into their needs and aspirations. By engaging with grassroots movements, researchers gain a deeper understanding of social, cultural, and political dynamics, co-creating responsive and sustainable solutions. Embracing grassroots movements helps identify local champions and initiatives, foster resilience and offering models for innovative interventions. Partnering with grassroots organizations mobilizes collective action towards shared goals, challenging top-down power structures. Insurgent planning and grassroots movements empower marginalized voices, promote social cohesion, and contribute to peace-building efforts. This collaborative process fosters trust, legitimacy, and accountability, leading to long-term

impact and positive social change. Overall, they offer alternative frameworks for inclusive, contextually relevant, and transformative design in conflict contexts, addressing root causes and promoting sustainable peace and development.

Thus, this research will embrace the grassroots movement as a sustainable way of moving forward.

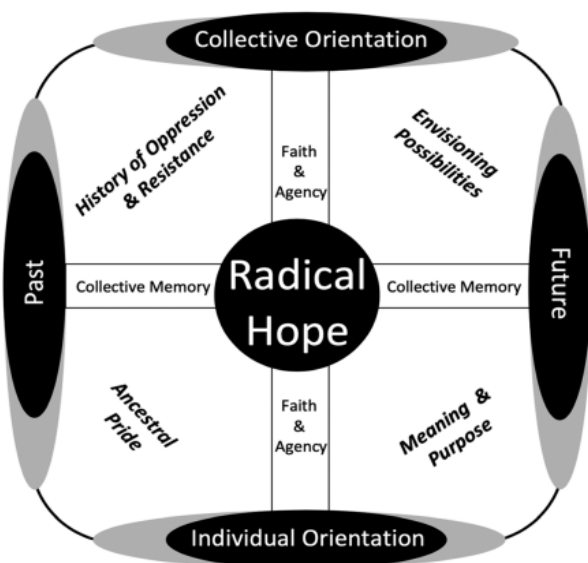


Figure 88: A graph shows the ‘Psychological Framework of Radical Hope’.

Source: (Mosley et al. 2019)



Figure 89: A collection of some of the pictures that were used to analyse the grassroots movement.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/Suwayda24>

Indeed, insurgent planning and the embracing of the grassroots movements is crucial, signifying the importance of people having a voice and actively participating in shaping a just reality. However, the research faces a significant challenge: conducting fieldwork amidst safety concerns. Despite this obstacle, the study will address it by turning to the voices of those who have been tirelessly communicating their demands to the international community since the onset of the uprising. Their efforts, including the translation of banners into English for broader dissemination, underscore their desire for widespread attention to their cause.

This research will actively engage these citizens in the journey towards a just future for Syria by aligning with their movement. By doing so, the study will incorporate mechanisms that operationalize the principles of bottom-up and community-led participation. This adoption of the grassroots movement will not only enrich the research but also ensure that the voices of the people are central to the quest for justice and transformation. The ultimate objective is to collaboratively develop a transitional framework with them, involving their narratives and efforts of change, steering the transition towards a just future in the post-conflict phase.

In the following section of the research, we will immerse ourselves in the depths of this radical insurgent movement, providing a detailed exposition of the methods employed to explore its intricacies. Thus, the research will actively

engage in co-constructing narratives of change alongside the people by fully embracing the insurgent grassroots movement. Advocating for a bottom-up and community-driven approach to change, the study will delve deeply into the people's demands, behaviors, and recovery practices as integral pathways of transformation. The goal is to collaboratively establish guiding principles within the framework of "narratives of change".

These principles will then be translated into concrete spatial or policy-driven interventions aimed at fostering a just transition that reflects the will and aspirations of the people. A unique methodology will be employed to extract these principles: around 1500 flyers and banners meticulously analyzed to discern the protesters' demands. Ranging from direct, explicit demands to the nuanced expressions of songs, poetry, and political sarcasm used to convey messages, these banners will be interpreted by the researcher and classified into overarching principles.

Moreover, the behaviorisms exhibited by the protesters in their efforts to democratize the square and reclaim the city will be closely explored to demonstrate the values underpinning the insurgent movement. Additionally, the research will analyze the various recovery initiatives undertaken by the people as they navigate the challenges they face, establishing the "recovery" category within the framework.

What sets this method apart is its dual qualitative and quantitative nature, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

Demands

The Demands of the Protectors

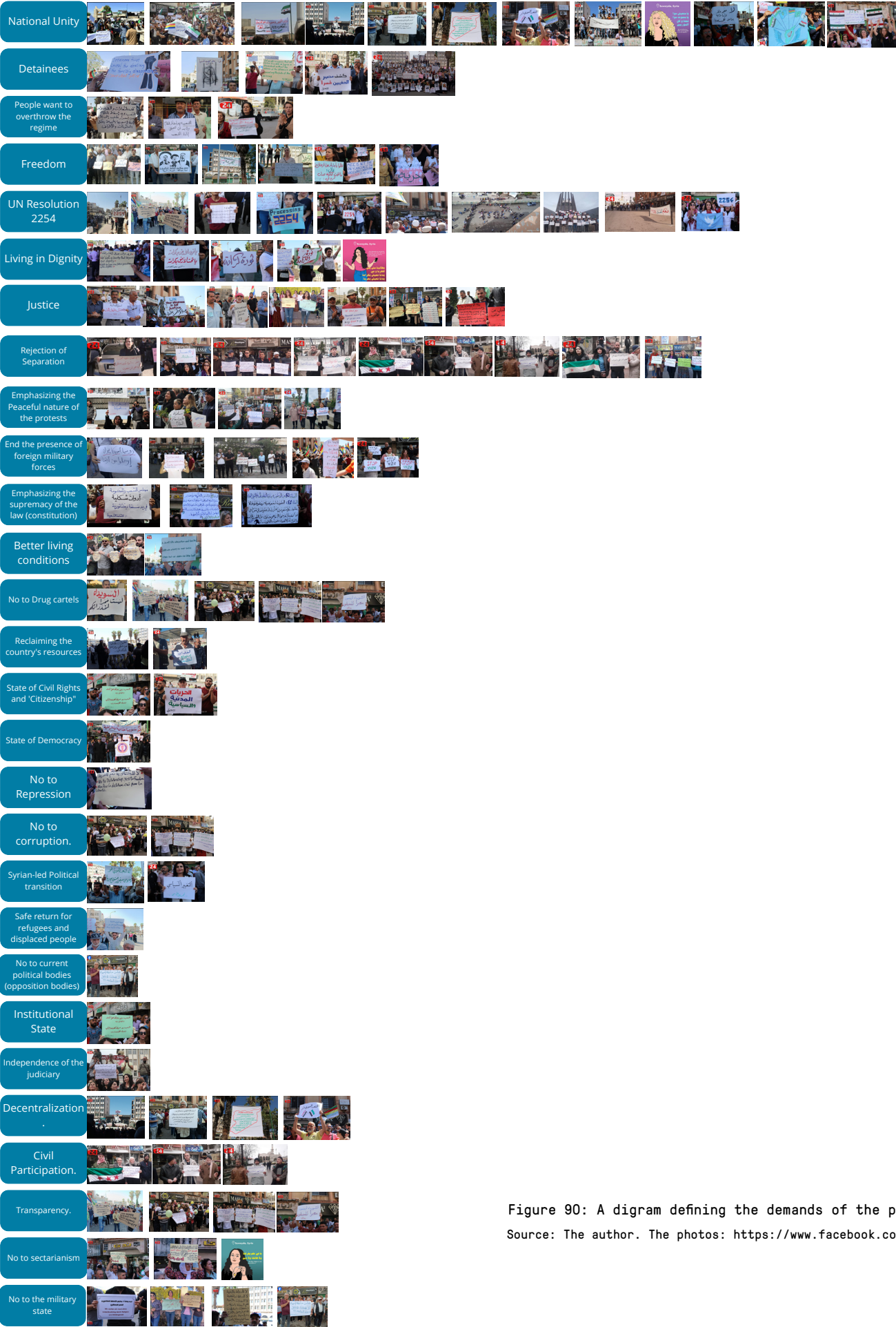
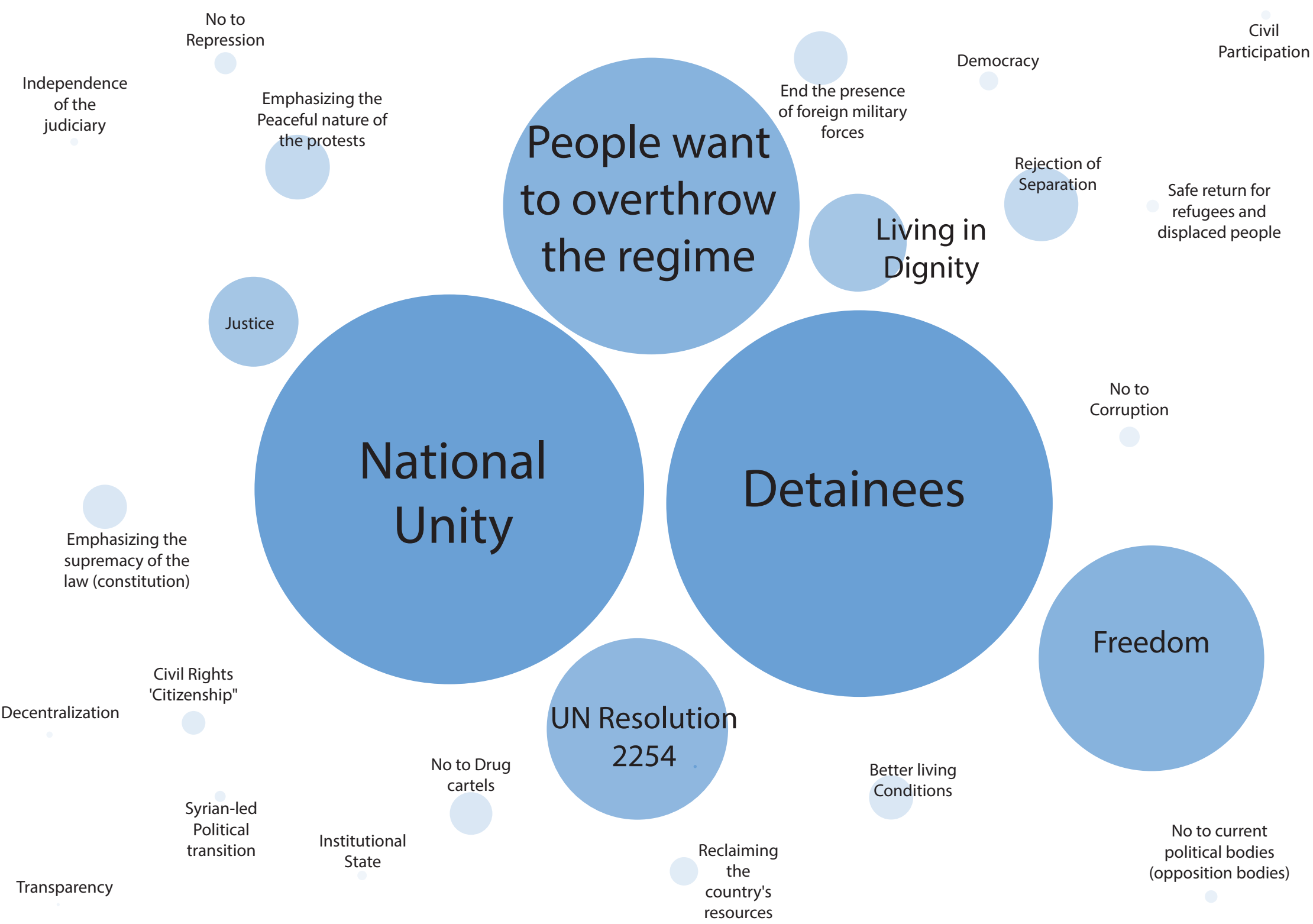


Figure 90: A digram defining the demands of the protesters.
Source: The author. The photos: <https://www.facebook.com/Suwayda24>



After analysing approximately 1500 banners and posters, overarching principles were distilled from their content. These principles were further categorised, and an additional step involved documenting the frequency of each demand. A visual representation of this frequency was created, as depicted in Figure X, where larger and more saturated circles indicate more frequent demands.

A hypothesis was proposed: that the frequency might serve as an indicator of the demand's importance. To test this hypothesis, an interview was conducted with one of the protest organising committee members. The interviewee affirmed that all demands are equally important, yet the frequency may indeed reflect the urgency of each demand. A higher frequency suggests a greater sense of urgency in addressing it as a crucial step in the transition process.

Moreover, the frequency of demands aligns with both national and international events, illustrating how the protesters transcend their local context to show solidarity with pressing issues in the broader Syrian and global landscape.

Figure 91: A digram defining the frequency of the protesters' demands.
Source: The author.

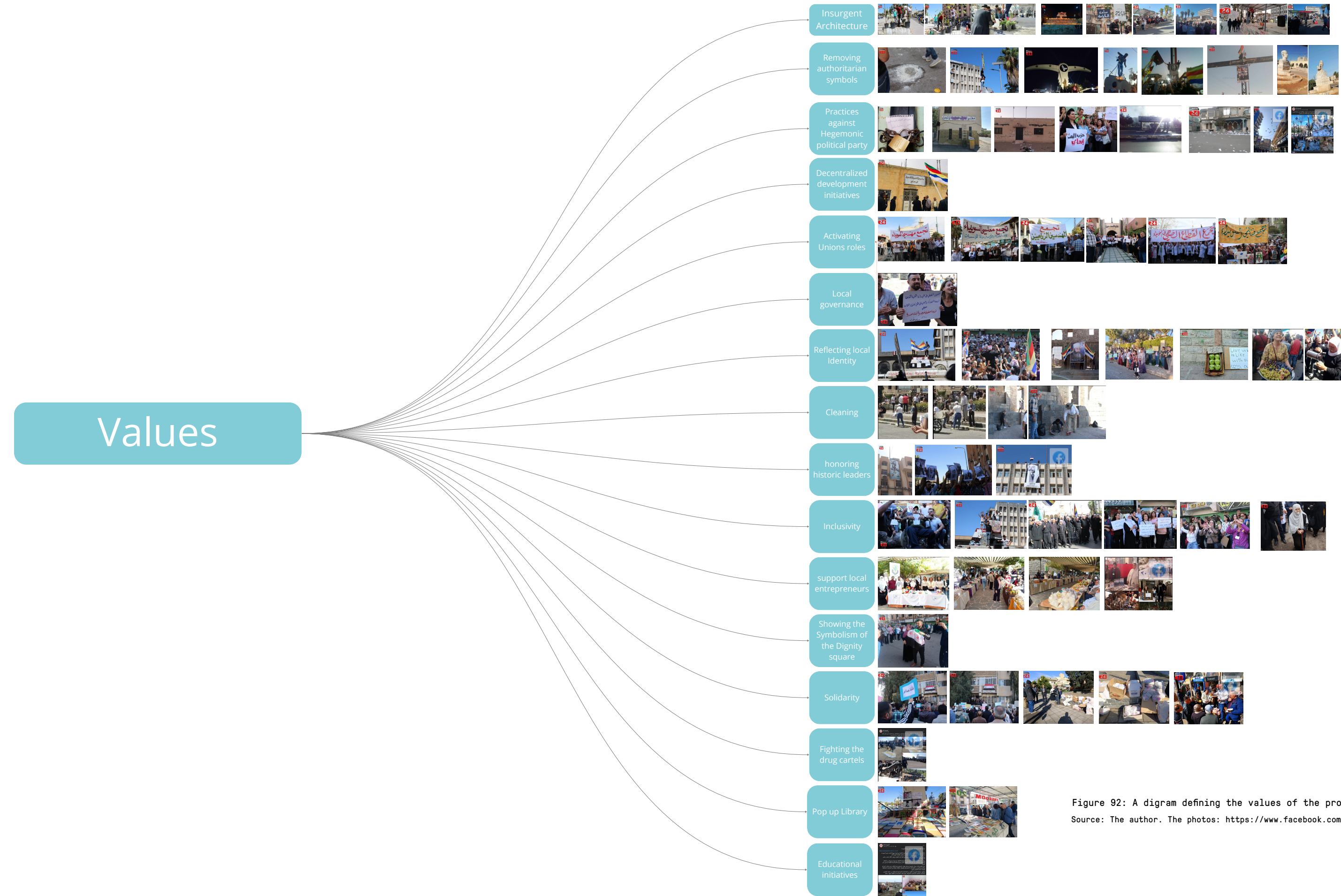


Figure 92: A digram defining the values of the protesters.
Source: The author. The photos: <https://www.facebook.com/Suwayda24>

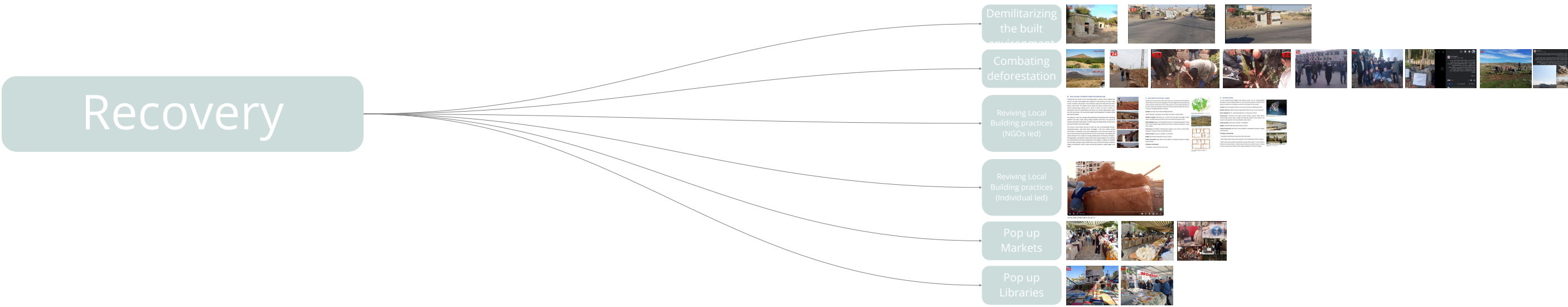


Figure 93: A digram defining the recovery efforts of the protesters.
Source: The author. The photos: <https://www.facebook.com/Suwayda24>

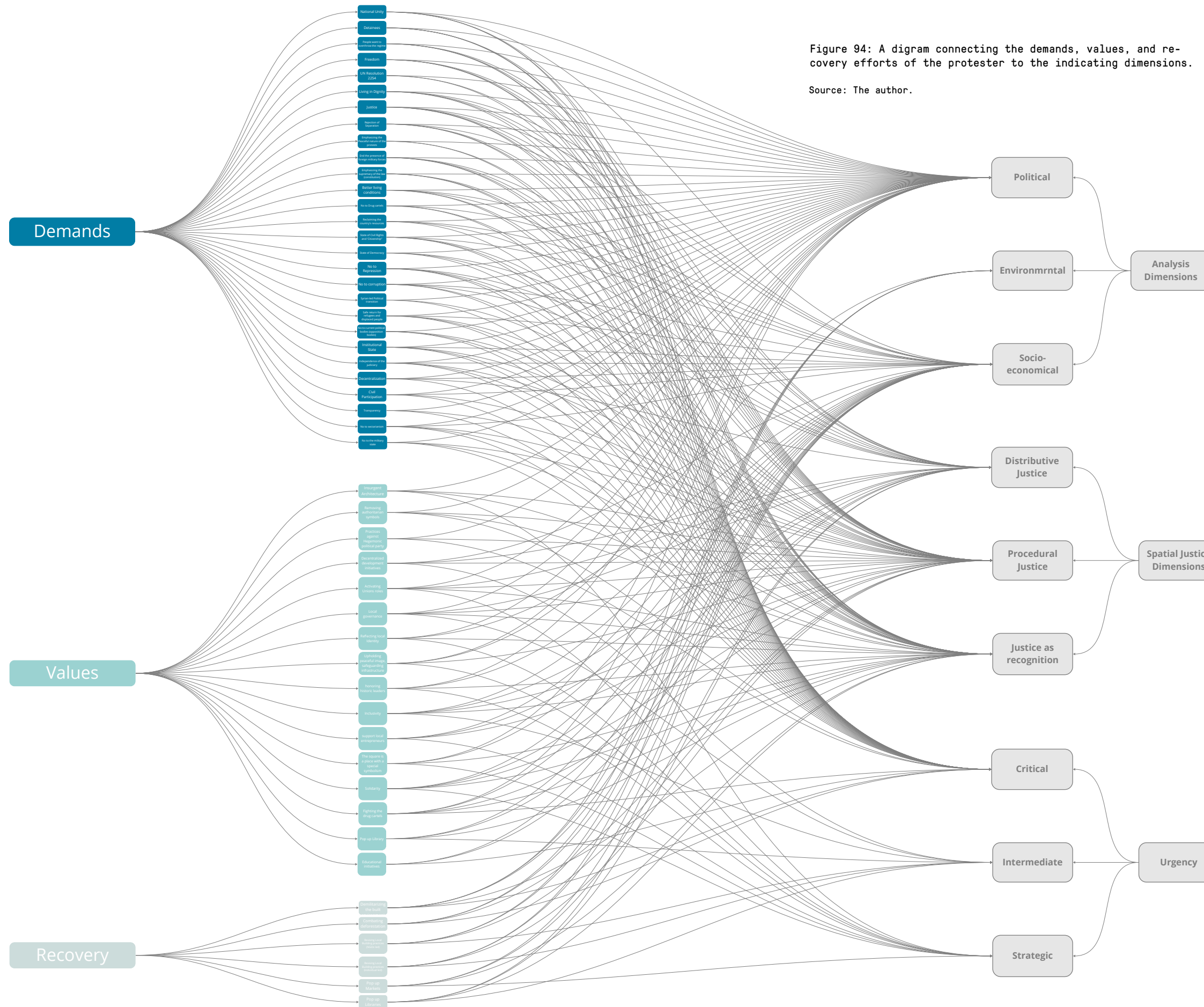


Figure 94: A digram connecting the demands, values, and recovery efforts of the protester to the indicating dimensions.

Source: The author.

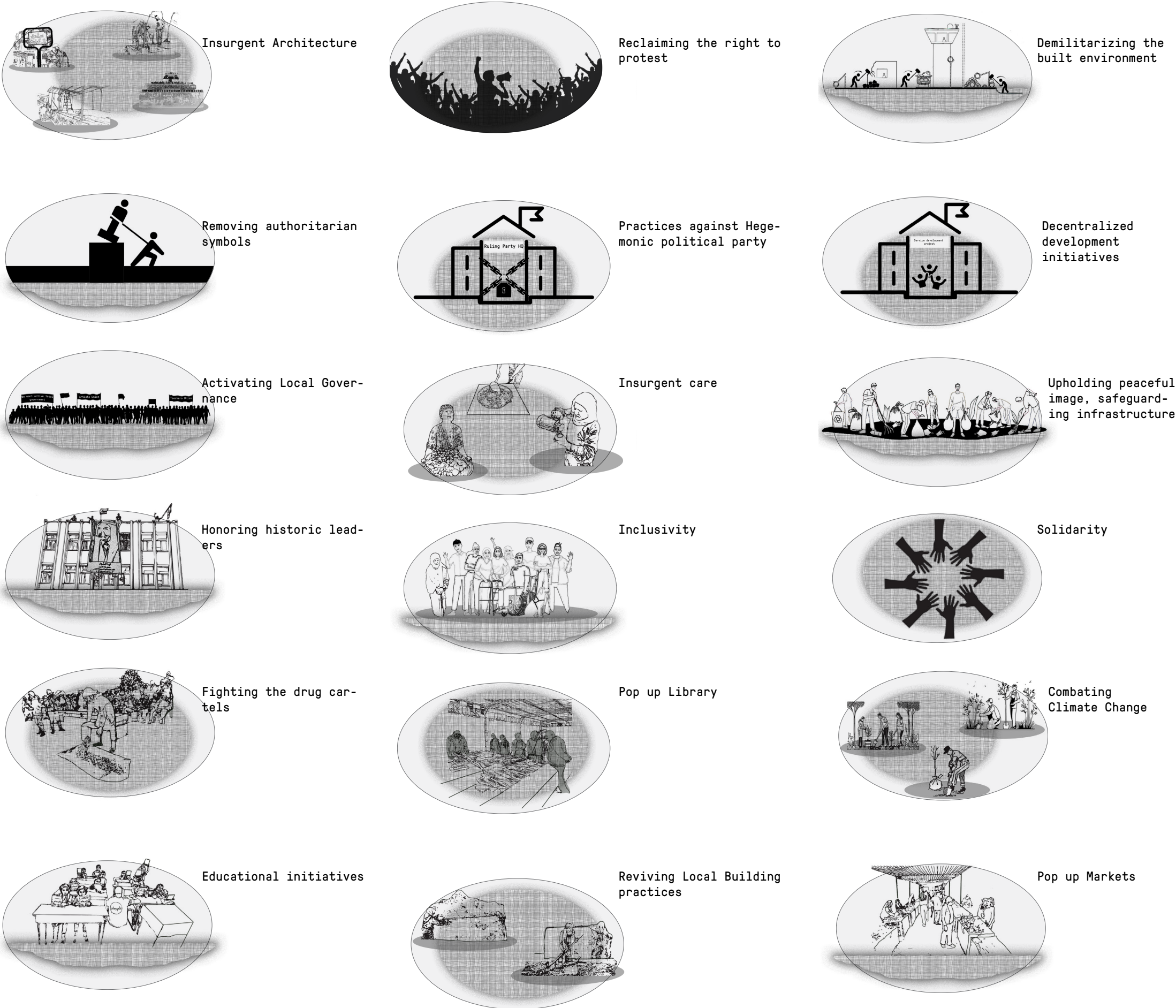
To assess the impact of these principles, specific dimensions were employed for analysis. Three primary categories of indicators were chosen for this purpose. Firstly, the research analysis dimensions encompass political, environmental, and socio-economic aspects. It became evident that the majority of principles contributed to the political and socio-economic dimensions, with minimal connection to the environmental dimension. This suggests a lack of awareness among the people regarding the unfolding environmental crisis in the country, challenging the framing of the Syrian conflict as a climate change conflict in Western narratives.

Secondly, the spatial justice dimensions were considered, with the principles found to contribute to all dimensions, particularly procedural justice and justice as recognition. This highlights the significance of these principles in shaping the transition period following the conflict.

Lastly, the urgency of the principles was categorised into critical, intermediate, and strategic. Most demands were classified as critical due to the critical political and socio-economic situation currently witnessed in the country.

On the following page, the “narratives of change” framework is introduced, translating these principles into spatially or policy-driven interventions spanning from the micro to the national scale. Serving as an informative tool for transition, this framework guides policymakers and stakeholders towards a more just future for Syria.





The grassroots counter-authoritarian practices emerging from the community-led movement were translated into typologies aimed at dismantling authoritarianism, thereby forming patterns of resistance. These patterns serve as counterpractices to the oppressive patterns extracted from the regime's spatial tyranny practices (see page 126).

While these typologies are rooted in the local context of As-Sweida city, their applicability extends to the national scale. As observed during the analysis of spatial tyranny, similar practices were concurrently occurring across the country. Therefore, the As-Sweida-specific counteractions can be adapted nationally, with adjustments tailored to the specifics of each local context.

These patterns will be employed to illustrate resistance practices across all scales of the city (see figure 97). This demonstrates how the community collectively worked to eradicate tyranny from its roots, employing both tangible and intangible interventions.

In conclusion, the typologies of resistance practices derived from the grassroots movement in As-Sweida exemplify a localized response to authoritarianism that holds broader applicability at the national level. By illustrating how these patterns of resistance were implemented across various scales of the city, it becomes evident that the community's concerted efforts were aimed at uprooting tyranny through diverse means, both tangible and intangible.

In an effort to render the spatial dynamics in a more tangible and accessible manner, a cross-section analysis along Dignity Square was conducted (see figure 99). This section portrays the community's endeavors to assert ownership and democratize the space. However, juxtaposed against this grassroots initiative is the enduring presence of military forces flanking the police and municipality buildings on the square's northern perimeter. This dual perspective underscores the complex reality and inherent contradictions that currently define As-Sweida's urban landscape. Despite the ongoing occupation by regime forces, residents persist in their defiance, actively resisting and challenging this entrenched authority.

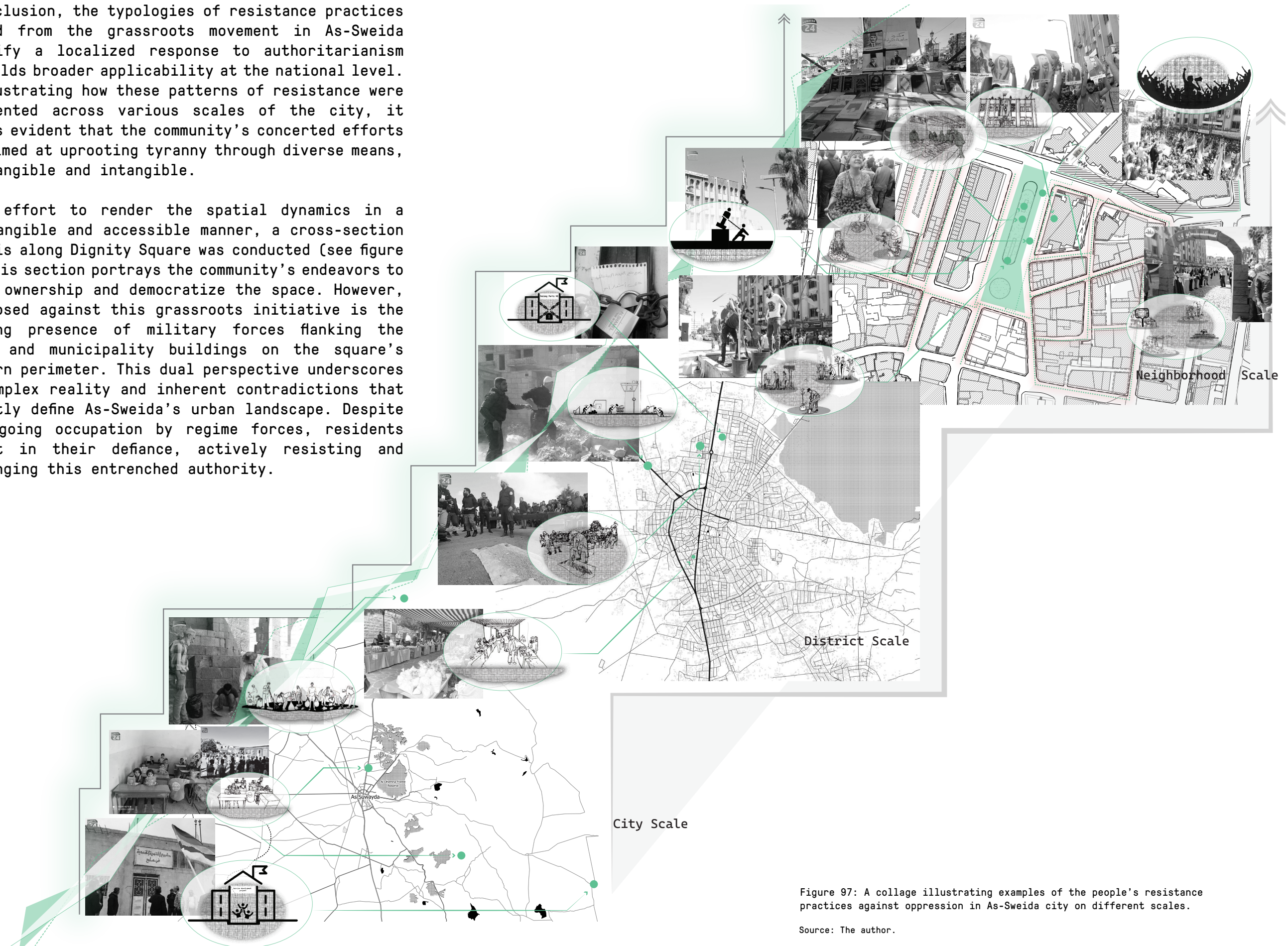
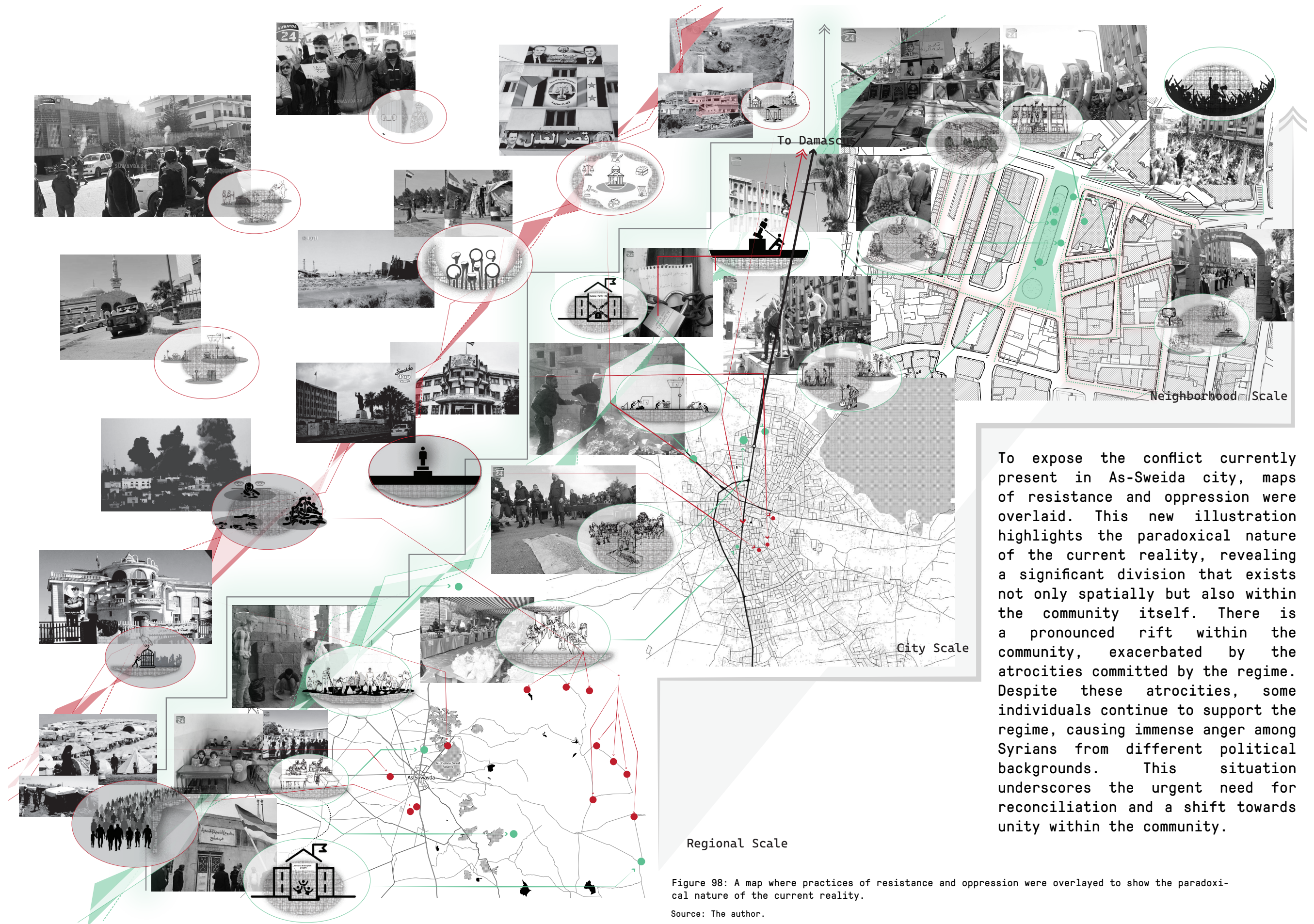


Figure 97: A collage illustrating examples of the people's resistance practices against oppression in As-Sweida city on different scales.

Source: The author.



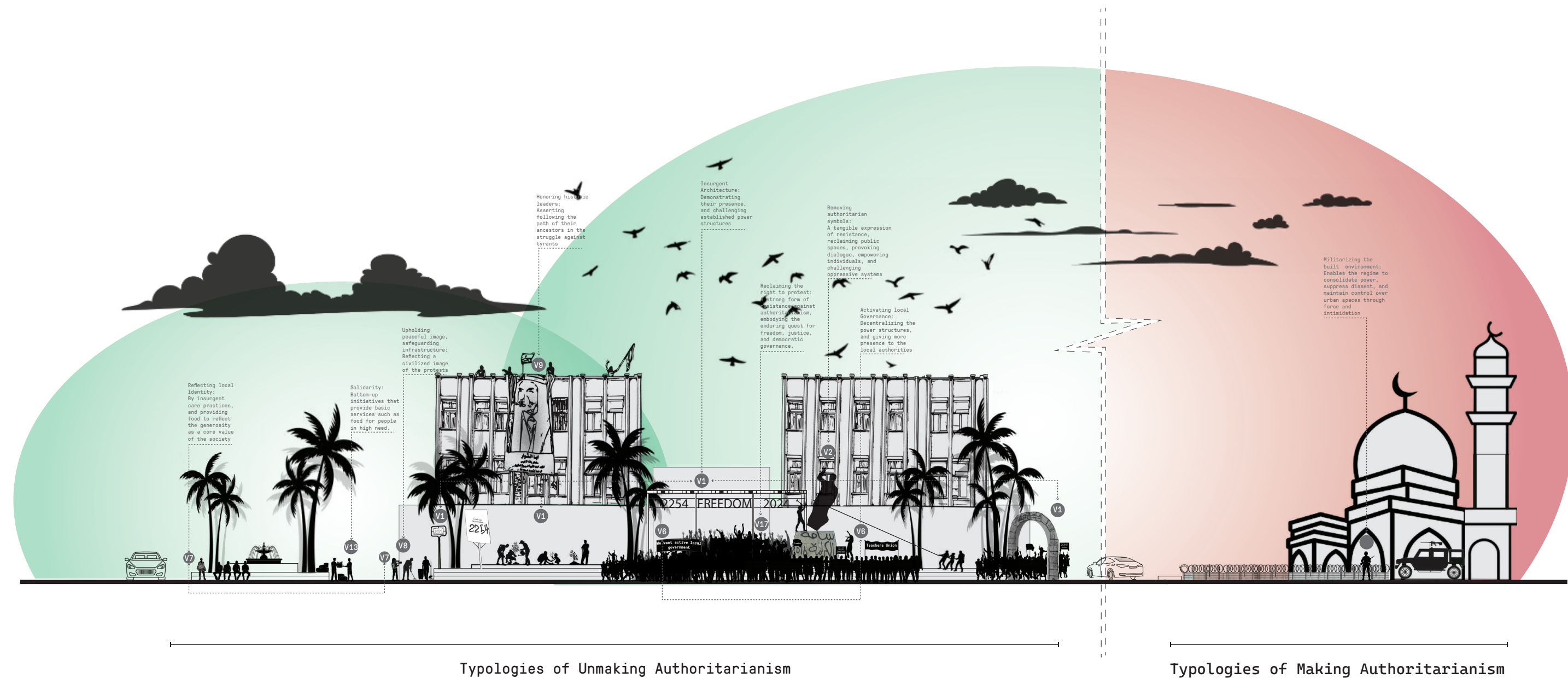


Figure 99: A section in the Dignity Square showing the paradox of making authoritarianism VS un-making authoritarianism that is currently present on the ground.
Source: The author.

In summary, the grassroots movement in As-Sweida epitomises the embodiment of radical hope and insurgent planning practices, drawing inspiration from scholarly frameworks and real-world experiences. The ongoing protests reflect a steadfast commitment to challenging oppressive structures and envisioning a just future for all Syrians. Despite facing formidable challenges and risks, the people of As-Sweida continue to mobilise, propelled by a collective sense of urgency and determination.

As the research endeavours to delve deeper into understanding and amplifying the voices of the community, it adopts a bottom-up, participatory approach to co-constructing narratives of change. By closely examining the demands, behaviours, and recovery practices of the protesters, the study aims to distil guiding principles that will inform tangible interventions for a just transition post-conflict. This methodology, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative analysis, ensures a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play.

Moreover, the research highlights the interconnectedness of spatial justice dimensions and the urgency of addressing political, social, and environmental challenges within the Syrian context. By translating principles into actionable policies and spatial interventions, the

study seeks to pave the way for transformative change guided by the aspirations of the people.

Furthermore, the typologies of resistance practices emerging from the grassroots movement offer insights into localised strategies for dismantling authoritarianism, with broader applicability at the national level. By illustrating how these patterns manifest across various scales of the city, the research underscores the community's resilience and collective agency in confronting tyranny.

In conclusion, the analysis of As-Sweida's urban landscape provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in grassroots resistance and spatial justice. By documenting the community's efforts to reclaim public spaces and challenge oppressive forces, the research sheds light on the ongoing struggle for justice and liberation in Syria.

POLITICIZE

POST-CONFLICT

Designing in Contexts
torn by conflict 191

Storytelling as a tool
of reconciliation 193

In post-conflict societies, the vulnerability to renewed violence looms large even after the cessation of armed conflict (Sakalasuriya et al., 2018).

In the intricately diverse fabric of Syrian society, characterised by a tapestry of ethnicities, religions, and social affiliations, the spectre of renewed conflict looms darkly on the horizon. The protracted conflict has left behind a trail of unspeakable atrocities, fracturing communities along political and religious fault lines. The scars of violence run deep, exacerbating existing divisions and fostering deep-seated distrust among the Syrian populace.

Furthermore, the conflict has left the majority of the population deeply traumatised, laying bare the raw wounds of war that threaten to ignite fresh unrest at any moment.

As Höglund and Orjuela emphasise, the mere absence of violence achieved through military intervention does not guarantee sustainable peace; proactive measures are essential to prevent future conflicts and ensure long-term stability. Peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts play pivotal roles in this endeavour, aiming to address underlying grievances and socio-economic disparities.

Moreover, post-conflict reconstruction efforts frequently exacerbate ethnic divisions within societies that have experienced conflict (Sakalasuriya et al., 2017).

However, the conventional approach

to designing in such contexts, often rooted in technical education, may fall short of comprehensively addressing the complex socio-political dynamics at play. This traditional model, emphasising problem-solving within controlled environments and technical skills, tends to overlook crucial aspects such as socio-cultural factors, historical grievances, and power dynamics. Consequently, solutions generated through this approach may be technically sound but fail to address root causes or meet the needs of affected communities. Moreover, the top-down nature of conventional design processes can sideline local expertise and community participation, perpetuating dependency rather than fostering sustainable solutions rooted in local contexts. Therefore, a critical reevaluation of design pedagogy is imperative, integrating interdisciplinary perspectives from fields like anthropology, sociology, and conflict resolution. By embracing alternative tools of reconciliation and community engagement, designers can navigate the complexities of post-conflict contexts more effectively, promoting sustainable peace and development.

This approach critically examines the role of spatial planners in conflict-affected contexts, presenting them with a significant challenge to break free from conventional approaches and pursue genuinely effective strategies.

In present-day Syria, there is no clear victor as all parties involved have suffered immense losses, leaving the question of who will ultimately document history unanswered.

Historically, narratives have been crafted from the perspective of the victors, inherently biased in their favour. However, amidst conflicts, myriad untold stories and perspectives emerge, demanding attention and acknowledgment.

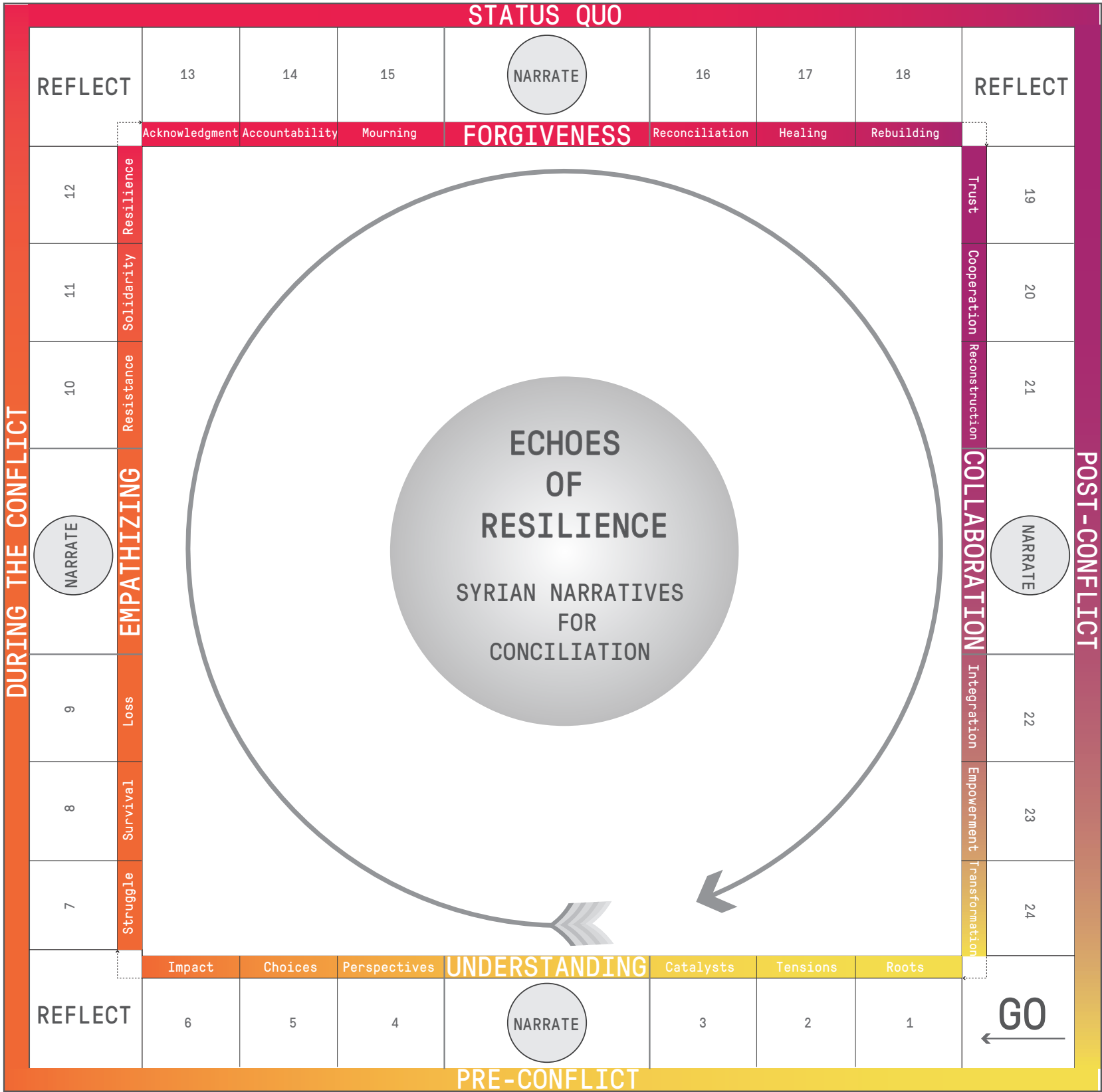
Storytelling has long served as a significant tool across the Arab world and various civilisations, facilitating the transmission of knowledge and the preservation of historical events. Additionally, it holds the potential to safeguard society's collective memory of oral history, which fosters greater awareness.

Ortiz (2022) argues that storytelling has the potential to be integrated into a wider range of planning tools utilised in emancipatory and transformative practice, theory, and pedagogy. By employing storytelling, individuals can expand their cognitive horizons beyond the norm, enabling them to explore unconventional perspectives and consider other points of view (Ortiz, 2022).

By harnessing the power of storytelling as a transformative tool for navigating the transition to the post-conflict era, this research endeavours to offer a path towards healing the profound traumas inflicted by the conflict. Through the

art of storytelling, individuals can begin to process their experiences, find solace in shared narratives, and embark on a journey of emotional recovery. This approach recognises the importance of acknowledging and addressing the deep wounds left by the conflict, paving the way for reconciliation and resilience in the rebuilding process. By giving voice to personal stories and collective experiences, storytelling becomes not only a means of catharsis but also a catalyst for societal healing and renewal.

In summary, the objective of the tool is to utilise storytelling as a tool of conciliation, fostering collective healing, addressing the trauma caused by the conflict, and preserving the collective narrative through oral history. Participants collaborate to explore the intricate layers of the Syrian conflict, highlighting the resilience and agency of individuals and communities. In addition, they collectively construct pathways towards reconciliation and healing by sharing narratives that cultivate understanding, empathy, and constructive dialogue. Through this shared process, participants not only aim to foster solidarity and promote peacebuilding efforts in Syria but also endeavour to safeguard the collective narrative by preserving the oral history for future generations.



How
to
use
the
tool?



First, select a token representing a Syrian character. Remember to bring along the narratives associated with your chosen token. (See Appendix page 2013 for details.)

Next, gather 6 fact cards of each timeframe, organising them according to the conflict’s different timeframes, resulting in a total of 24 fact cards.

Position your token at the “GO” corner, and once everyone is prepared, read aloud the code of conduct. (see page 220 in the Appendix for the code of conduct.) If all participants agree to abide by the code of conduct, proceed to commence the conciliation round.

In sequence, use the tool board (see figure 100) to start the experience. Advance your token through the pre-conflict timeframe, reading the corresponding fact cards at each step. When arriving at the “Narrate” phase, share the story of your token before the conflict began. Upon reaching the “Reflect” corner, take turns reflecting on the various stories and facts you’ve encountered, sharing your own pre-conflict narrative.

Repeat this process for the remaining three timeframes. However, upon reaching the post-conflict era, participants must imagine and share their token’s story after the conflict has ceased.

Conclude the activity with a discussion about the emotions experienced during the round, and envision how each participant imagines their story and their character story unfolding ten years after the conflict’s resolution. Participants are also encouraged to write new fact about the post-conflict time frame in Syria.

Figure 100: A graph showing the board of the reconciliation tool, (Echoes of Resilience).
Source: The author.

“Echoes of Resilience: Syrian Narratives for Conciliation” was designed at three main levels of conciliation. It serves as a reconciliation tool for Syrians as well as for others interested in understanding the conflict.

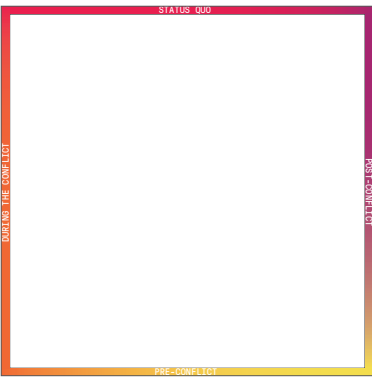


Figure 101: A graph showing the first level of conciliation.
Source: The author.

The primary objective of the first level (see figure 101) is to foster awareness by disseminating the findings of this research. It involves presenting the research data in an interactive format designed to educate participants about the facts surrounding the Syrian conflict. This is achieved through the reading of the “fact cards” (see page 216) extracted from the comprehensive analysis spanning all phases of the conflict. Through engagement with these informative cards, participants gain insights into the multifaceted dynamics of the conflict across its various stages.

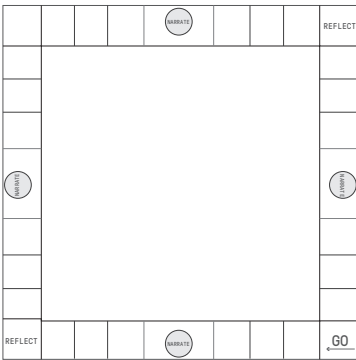


Figure 102: A graph showing the second level of conciliation.
Source: The author.

The second level (see figure 102) is crafted to immerse participants in the diverse narratives of individuals from varied socio-political backgrounds in Syria. Participants will listen to firsthand accounts from Syrians and subsequently share their own experiences within the specified timeframe, complemented by insights from the corresponding factual data. This approach aims to broaden participants’ perspectives by exposing them to a range of viewpoints and allowing time for reflection on personal stories and traumas.

The third level (see figure 103) marks the peak of the journey, inviting participants to navigate through four pivotal cycles of conciliation, each mirroring a distinct phase of the Syrian conflict’s evolution.

Commencing with the “understanding” phase, participants delve into the pre-conflict era, seeking comprehension of the underlying factors and historical dynamics that paved the path to turmoil. Transitioning into the “empathising” cycle, participants confront the stark realities of the conflict period, immersing themselves in narratives that shed light on the atrocities and hardships endured by diverse individuals.

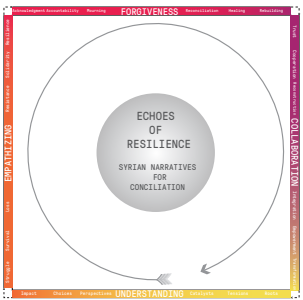


Figure 103: A graph showing the third level of conciliation.
Source: The author.

Progressing further, the “forgiveness” phase prompts participants to grapple with the complexities of the present, exploring the contemporary landscape of the status quo and confronting the lingering impacts of past actions. Finally, the journey culminates in the “collaboration” cycle, where participants are empowered to embrace collective action and forge pathways towards a future characterised by cooperation and reconciliation.



Figure 104: A combination of photos showing the tool testing process.
Source: The author.

Testing
Given the political and emotional sensitivity of the tool, and in consultation with my mentors, we decided not to test it among Syrians, as it might be triggering for some and we lacked the presence of a psychologist to mediate. Instead, the tool was tested with four international students, two in their thirties and two in their twenties, including three women and one man. I started the session by reading the code of conduct, explaining the rules and participants' rights to withdraw if they felt triggered. The participants successfully completed the round, and food and drinks were shared to create a hospitable and welcoming atmosphere.

Observations and Findings
Despite not being Syrians and unfamiliar with the context, the participants were positively involved during the session. Some fact cards were challenging for them to understand, but they grasped and empathized with the narratives. The reflection moments were crucial, engaging participants in constructive dialogue and showing potential for conciliation. However, I realized that reflection should be guided by stimulating questions to ensure all participants engage. Sharing food significantly contributed to creating a hospitable environment. Overall, it was gratifying to see the tool fostering conversations, especially when participants shared post-conflict narratives and facts (see page 221), which would have been the tool's main goal if tested with Syrians.

User Feedback
Participants provided valuable feedback on the setting, suggesting that the food helped break the ice. They recommended placing the facts in the center of the board to symbolize reaching out for conciliation. Additionally, they suggested color-

coding or rephrasing the facts for better understanding and reading them in chronological order. They also proposed changing the board format to be circular rather than linear and graphically highlighting the reflection standpoints more. Notable quotes from participants included, "When Syrians are involved, it's gonna be epic," and "The strong thing is that there are no restrictions; you walk through a landscape of experiences, grievances, and possibilities."

Performance and Usability
The round took longer than anticipated, approximately an hour and a half, and might take longer with Syrian participants due to the topic's complexity. The tool performed accurately, fulfilling its purpose of educating about the conflict, stimulating conversations, and enabling participants to draft Syria's future narrative and facts. It was user-friendly, and participants quickly navigated through it after the initial explanation.

Improvements and Next Steps
Improvements will include rephrasing the facts for clarity, placing them in chronological order, and possibly adopting a circular format for the board. The next steps involve testing the tool with Syrians, with the support of a psychologist. I plan to reach out to Syrian NGOs involved in conflict resolution to facilitate this testing.

Personal Reflection
Testing the tool was fulfilling and relieving. It was gratifying to witness its impact and raise awareness about the Syrian conflict. I learned the significant role of spatial planners in moderating and facilitating dialogue. In my future work, I will strive to find and implement creative ways to listen to and learn from people, fostering meaningful conversations and solutions.

In conclusion, the chapters presented underscore the imperative for transformative approaches in post-conflict contexts, particularly in the realm of design and reconciliation efforts. The conventional paradigms of design, often rooted in technical education and top-down methodologies, are ill-equipped to address the multifaceted socio-political dynamics inherent in conflict-affected societies. As evidenced by the case of Syria, where the specter of renewed violence persists amidst fragile peace, there is a pressing need for innovative strategies that prioritize community engagement, cultural sensitivity, and holistic understanding.

The incorporation of storytelling as a tool for conciliation emerges as a promising avenue for navigating the complex landscape of post-conflict transition. By amplifying diverse narratives and facilitating dialogue, storytelling transcends conventional boundaries to foster empathy, understanding, and healing. Through initiatives like “Echoes of Resilience,” participants embark on a journey of collective introspection, confronting the traumas of the past while envisioning pathways towards a shared future. This participatory approach not only empowers communities to reclaim agency in shaping their narratives but also lays the groundwork for sustainable peacebuilding efforts grounded in empathy and collaboration.

The recent testing of the “Echoes of Resilience” tool provided valuable insights into its mechanism and impact. Conducted with international students due to the political and emotional sensitivity of involving Syrians directly, the testing highlighted the tool’s potential to engage participants meaningfully, even those unfamiliar with the specific context of the Syrian conflict. Participants were positively involved, empathizing with the narratives and engaging in constructive dialogue during reflection moments. Feedback suggested enhancements in the presentation and organization of factual content, as well as the overall structure of the tool to better facilitate understanding and engagement. This testing phase underscored the tool’s capacity to foster dialogue and reflection, laying a solid foundation for its use in more sensitive contexts with appropriate support systems.

Moreover, the proposed framework for conciliation operates at multiple levels, from disseminating factual knowledge to facilitating personal reflections and collective action. By engaging participants in critical dialogue and experiential learning, this approach catalyzes shifts in perception and behavior, paving the way for meaningful reconciliation and social transformation.

Moving forward, it is essential to recognize the inherent complexities and nuances of post-conflict

contexts, acknowledging the interplay of historical legacies, power dynamics, and socio-cultural realities. Embracing interdisciplinary perspectives and participatory methodologies, designers and peacebuilders can co-create inclusive and contextually relevant interventions that resonate with the lived experiences of affected communities.

In essence, the chapters presented advocate for a paradigm shift in post-conflict reconstruction efforts, one that prioritizes human-centered approaches, cultural sensitivity, and grassroots empowerment. By harnessing the power of storytelling and participatory design, and building on the insights gained from tool testing, we can forge a path towards healing, resilience,

CONCLUSION

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Conclusions

Answering the main research question:

How can spatial planning be a narrating tool to provoke change, provide alternative spatial realities, and improve the social cohesion of war-torn societies in Syria?

- Spatial planning as a narrating tool:

The research’s utilisation of the various stages of the conflict as narratives, aligned with Marcuse’s Critical Planning Theory, proved invaluable. This approach facilitated the incorporation of storytelling into planning by providing clear trajectories for the narratives and key milestones for synthesis and conclusions at each stage. It allowed for the exploration of a wide range of facts while ensuring the reader’s focus remained on the section’s synthesis. Moreover, this alignment served as a powerful tool for illustrating the fluctuations in authoritarian practices across different stages of the conflict, thereby addressing a significant research gap in the spatialization of authoritarianism. Ultimately, by showcasing the complexity of the Syrian conflict, the research provided a counter-narrative to the oversimplified global discourse surrounding it. In doing so, it successfully reclaimed the Syrian narrative and presented it comprehensively.

- Provoking Change:

The documentation of the conflict’s root causes and the interconnectedness of various elements has proven to be an invaluable tool for raising awareness among Syrians and others alike. I observed this firsthand among my fellow Syrians, who were often surprised by the diagram illustrating the unjust events leading to the 2011 uprising, as many were previously unaware of these factors. Furthermore, shedding light on the spatial tyranny and atrocities committed during the conflict serves as a powerful catalyst for igniting people’s attention and anger, compelling them to desire change. Additionally, highlighting the regime’s current spatial policies, particularly concerning people’s rights to return, acts as a provocative mechanism for raising awareness about the compromised state of these rights. As such, these efforts not only document the past but also serve as vital instruments for inspiring action and advocating for meaningful change in Syria.

- Providing Alternative Spatial Realities:

Embracing the insurgent movement unfolding in As-Sweida city and dissecting the practices and aspirations of the grassroots protesters has been an invaluable endeavour. This milestone in the research underscores the potential for change that already exists and is actively unfolding. The essential action required is to pay attention to the voices of those fearlessly driving this change and to support their efforts on a larger scale. The framework derived from the grassroots movement serves as a guide for future stakeholders, offering alternative spatial and policy-driven interventions aimed at realising a more just future reality. Crucially, it emphasises that the path to this just future lies in the hands of the Syrian people themselves. They are at the forefront of crafting an alternative reality and illuminating the possibilities, with the research serving as an amplifier for their voices.

- Improve the Social Cohesion of War-Torn Societies:

The research has shed light on the indispensable role of spatial planners in conflict settings, showcasing their capacity to act as facilitators of change. The development of a tool aimed at fostering dialogue, listening, and reflection has proven to be a pivotal intervention. Conciliation emerges as an inevitable step in addressing conflict zones, particularly if sustainable peace and stability are to be achieved. Leveraging the knowledge accumulated and documented throughout the research, the dialogue steered and awareness raised among Syrians serve as a testament to this pivotal step. This critical step underscores the expansive role of spatial planners, transcending traditional boundaries. It underscores our ability to influence the well-being of communities and offer pathways to reconciliation by innovatively equipping them with suitable tools. The narrating tool stands as a genuine endeavour to enhance social cohesion in Syria through storytelling.

Discussion

Summary of Findings:

The research utilised the stages of the conflict as narratives to integrate storytelling into planning effectively. This approach provided clear trajectories for narratives and milestones for synthesis, addressing authoritarian practices across different stages of the conflict and countering oversimplified global narratives regarding the Syrian conflict. Documentation of the root causes of the conflict and atrocities committed during the conflict and now can raise awareness among Syrians, inspiring action for change. Moreover, embracing the insurgent movement in As-Sweida City highlighted the existing potential for change and the role of grassroots voices in crafting pathways of change. The framework derived from this movement offers alternative interventions for a just future, emphasising Syrian agency. Finally, the research proved how spatial planners play a crucial role as facilitators of change when providing tools for dialogue and reflection, which can trigger conciliation. This expansive role of spatial planners transcends traditional boundaries, aiming to enhance social cohesion through more innovative approaches.

The implications of the findings for:

-In Theory:

The research has effectively utilised a theoretical framework to explain the relationships between key concepts underpinning the study. This framework defines two main timeframes: one focusing on conflict periods and the other on the transition towards post-conflict phases. Within the conflict timeframe, the research engaged theoretically with three primary concepts: authoritarianism, the revolution, and cities at war. The research has strived to build upon different notions such as the right to the city, heterotopias, domicile, urbiside. The research has contributed to the research gap in spatializing authoritarianism and to the increasingly growing literature that focuses on the weaponization of the built environment and the destruction of cities.

By employing a critical perspective on spatial planning studies, the research has contributed to the growing literature, emphasising the need for diverse planning perspectives. Transitioning to post-conflict times involves an examination of three key theoretical concepts: storytelling in planning, peacebuilding, and insurgent planning. The research contributed to these theoretical concepts by reflecting them on the Syrian context and drawing operationalized interventions out of them.

-In Practice:

The research innovatively challenges the conventional practices of spatial planning while at the same time expanding its role to address the complexities of intervention in conflict contexts. Through various methods, it offers practical solutions to the challenges encountered by spatial planners in such contexts.

Firstly, it introduces a practical approach to embracing grassroots movements, elevating their impact to inform policymaking and guide design interventions. Secondly, the research operationalizes the role of spatial planners as moderators, providing them with effective tools to facilitate dialogue between conflicting parties. The narrating tool is versatile, and by changing the facts and the narratives, it can be applied globally to initiate conversations as a means of reconciliation in diverse contexts.

Limitations:

-Lack of spatial data:

The Syrian conflict has undergone thorough research across various disciplines, including political, social, and humanitarian fields. However, from a spatial perspective, there is a notable absence of comprehensive documentation. Despite the researcher's efforts to access GIS datasets, particularly from UN agencies, challenges were encountered. This lack of spatial data sometimes posed obstacles to the research process. Nonetheless, the study persevered in addressing this gap by gathering information from diverse sources and spatializing it to contribute insights into the conflict's spatial dimensions.

-Field work

Due to the ongoing nature of the Syrian conflict, numerous safety concerns restricted fieldwork during the research process. As a result, direct engagement with grassroots movements was not feasible, leading to reliance on videos, photos, social media posts, and reports for analysis. While this approach provided valuable insights, the absence of fieldwork limited the depth of firsthand experience and interaction that could have enriched the research.

-The narrating tool:

Given the prevailing absence of justice in Syria, where war crimes remain unaddressed and perpetrators unpunished, individuals may struggle to move past the atrocities committed. Therefore, the effectiveness of the tool may be enhanced in the future, particularly after holding those responsible accountable. This accountability could pave the way for more equitable avenues towards reconciliation.

Future Research Directions:

As previously noted, a significant gap persists in documenting the spatial dimensions of the Syrian conflict. Despite this research's endeavour to address the gap, considerable needs remain unmet in this area, indicating avenues for future research.

Furthermore, this research did not employ comparison as a tool. However, conducting comparative research across various case studies in conflict zones can also yield valuable insights and lessons learned. This can also pave the way for further research in the future.

Discussion

Ethical Considerations

The Syrian conflict has suffered from a spread of misleading and partial information. As a committed researcher, I was determined to adhere to the principles of scientific ethics, relying exclusively on trustworthy data sources. Given my personal connection as a member of the Syrian diaspora, I have personally experienced the results of the unjust Syrian war. This direct perspective shapes my position on the conflict, a standpoint that has been explicitly laid out at the beginning of my thesis. This disclaimer is intended to provide a transparent and comprehensive framework for understanding my research in light of my personal experiences and beliefs.

Moreover, my research entailed conducting workshops to test the narrating tool. I am cognizant of the sensitivity surrounding the topic, recognising that participation in such workshops may pose triggers or risks for the participants. Therefore, I was committed to ensuring that participants are fully informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, I provided comprehensive explanations about the tool, its purpose, and how their data will be handled, ensuring responsible and careful management of the gathered information.

Reflection

On the research methodology

The methodological framework

The research employed a combination of methodologies. It utilised Peter Marcuse’s Critical Urban Planning Theory, which outlines four stages for addressing issues: analysis, exposure, proposal, and politicisation. This theory guides the exploration of root causes, structural practices, concrete proposals, and necessary political actions. In conjunction with this framework, a timeline of Syria’s conflict stages was employed, aiding in understanding pre-conflict conditions, during the conflict, status quo, the ongoing conflict, and the post-conflict recovery. The integration of these methodologies proved crucial, especially in leveraging spatial planning as a narrative tool. The research unfolded as a multidimensional story, serving various purposes from documentation to raising awareness, exposing injustices to provoking change, and advocating for a grassroots-led, just future. This methodology can be applied to other contexts where spatial planning serves as a narrative tool.

The theoretical approach

The research contributes to understanding and addressing the Syrian conflict’s Socio-economic, political, environmental, and spatial dimensions. It utilised a theoretical framework to explore key concepts such as authoritarianism, revolutions, and cities at war, shedding light on the conflict’s complexities. This research employed a nuanced approach, blending critical urban planning with exploratory methods, to investigate spatial planning during conflict, with a focus on Syria. It combined inductive and deductive research methodologies, drawing from on-the-ground observations in Syria, to explore geopolitical shifts, demographic changes, and the spatial planning strategies of the authoritarian regime. However, given my personal experience and deep involvement in the context, there was a natural inclination towards employing the inductive methodology. This involved observing phenomena that unfolded across the conflict’s timeframes, identifying recurring patterns, collecting and analysing data, drawing conclusions, and ultimately connecting these findings to broader urban theories. Incorporating this approach into many aspects of the research enabled a deeper understanding and a more hands-on approach to the problems at hand. This is particularly valuable when investigating conflict contexts, as it fosters a more nuanced comprehension of the issues involved.

The analytical approach

The analytical framework was employed to understand the multidimensional Syrian conflict. It combined conflict dimensions with associated timeframes to comprehend root causes and inform recovery plans. Dimensions included environmental, socio-economic, and political aspects analysed across pre-conflict, during the conflict, and status quo timelines. This approach has managed to counter the oversimplified

Reflection

Western perspectives, providing a holistic understanding of the conflict’s complexities. Distinguishing between analysis dimensions was clearer during the pre-conflict timeframe than in the subsequent phases. However, during the other frames, particularly during the conflict and status quo, this differentiation posed challenges. Additionally, employing these three dimensions occasionally felt confining, narrowing the research’s focus to specific aspects that may not have been equally discernible across all timeframes.

The methods

The scarcity of spatial data in Syria due to the conflict presented a significant challenge for conducting this research. However, to address this issue, a combination of methods was employed to alleviate the constraints posed by the scarcity of official information. This approach ensured a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex situation. However, despite my efforts to adhere to scientific standards, it’s important to note that the data utilised in this research was primarily sourced from organisations operating in the human rights sector, documenting the atrocities committed by the Syrian regime. While the data is deemed reliable, it’s crucial to acknowledge its inherent political stance, which may be perceived by some as biased. Furthermore, the research has effectively transformed a perceived weakness into a strength. Due to security and safety concerns, conducting fieldwork in Syria was unfeasible, depriving me of the opportunity to observe grassroots movements firsthand. However, this limitation led to the development of an innovative method: analysing the banners of protestors. This approach proved to be invaluable, offering unique insights that may not have been possible through traditional fieldwork methods.

The outcomes

It’s crucial to highlight that the research yields four key outcomes of equal importance. These include Figure 47, illustrating the unjust events culminating in the 2011 uprising; Figure 71, documenting spatial tyranny; Figure 91, presenting the narratives of change framework; and finally, Figure 94, showing the conciliation tool. Each of these outcomes contributes to the primary goal of this research: reclaiming the Syrian narrative and empowering Syrians to construct a just future on their own terms. Numerous milestones occurred throughout the research, altering the trajectory of the analysis and outcomes. These pivotal moments were often preceded by thorough self-reflection, aimed at preventing the imposition of personal biases and viewpoints on the research. The initial milestone marked a shift in my approach, as I aimed to unlearn conventional methods of intervention in spatial planning. This transition involved moving away from the typical top-down spatial strategies derived from pre-defined post-conflict recovery frameworks, often rooted in Western studies and irrelevant to the local context. Instead, I embraced a community-led, bottom-up approach that prioritised insurgent grassroots movements and challenged

existing power structures. The second milestone was my decision to refrain from imposing my vision of Syria’s future during the post-conflict timeframe. Recognising the potential for bias and reductionism, I opted instead to provide a tool for individuals to collectively shape the narrative of the future. This pivotal moment operationalized the role of the spatial planner as a mediator in conflict contexts, emphasising the importance of empowering communities to construct their own narratives of a just future.

The role of spatial planners

The research challenged conventional spatial planning practices when employed in conflict contexts. In post-conflict Syria, the risk of renewed violence persists amidst deep ethnic, religious, and social divisions exacerbated by the prolonged conflict. Trauma lingers among the populace, fueling potential new unrest. Conventional design approaches often overlook socio-political complexities, emphasising technical solutions that prove to be superficial when addressing complex contexts. To address these challenges, a reevaluation of design pedagogy was necessary, integrating interdisciplinary perspectives and alternative tools for reconciliation. This critical examination extends to spatial planners, urging them to adopt more effective strategies beyond conventional norms. Spatial planners, in particular, are requested to break free from conventional norms and adopt strategies that are more nuanced, adaptable, and responsive to the unique needs of conflict-affected communities. Such an approach is essential for fostering sustainable peace and development in fragile contexts. The research aimed to demonstrate one approach to achieving this goal. However, there exist myriad possibilities for accomplishing it by embracing a more open-minded stance towards diverse and innovative solutions tailored to the unique needs of the affected communities.

The Academic neutrality

The concept of academic neutrality often implies an objective, unbiased stance in research endeavours. However, it’s essential to recognise that true neutrality may be an unattainable ideal. As humans, we inherently possess biases shaped by our experiences, beliefs, and social contexts. In conflict contexts where fundamental human rights are at stake, maintaining strict neutrality may even be ethically questionable. Researchers cannot divorce themselves entirely from their political, social, and moral convictions, particularly when advocating for justice and human rights. In conflict settings, neutrality may inadvertently perpetuate injustices by failing to confront systemic oppression or atrocities. Researchers who claim neutrality may inadvertently uphold the status quo or contribute to the marginalisation of vulnerable populations. Thus, in this research, taking a principled stance became not only justifiable but necessary for ethical research practice. By acknowledging my biases and political perspectives, I could strive for transparency and integrity in my work while actively advocating for the rights and well-being of affected communities.

Reflection

Moreover, academic neutrality, when viewed through Haraway's concept of situated knowledge (1988), challenges the notion of a universal, unbiased perspective in research. Instead, it emphasizes that all knowledge is produced from specific standpoints shaped by individual bodies, histories, and social contexts. In the context of research on the Syrian conflict, acknowledging the situated nature of knowledge becomes crucial to avoid perpetuating injustices. Researchers must adopt a principled stance, centering the voices and experiences of affected communities and critically examining their own biases. By doing so, they can contribute to a more honest, accountable, and inclusive understanding of the conflict dynamics.

The Focus:

The Syrian conflict witnessed atrocities committed by multiple actors, including the Syrian regime, opposition fighters, and ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). While the focus of this research is on the actions of the authoritarian regime, it's acknowledged that other groups were also involved in perpetrating unspeakable acts of violence.

Furthermore, while this research primarily documents the authoritarian practices of the Syrian regime in the capital, Damascus, and As-Sweida city, it's crucial to recognise that atrocities occurred throughout Syria. However, due to limitations, it was impossible to comprehensively document all these actions within the scope of this study.

The relation between the research's topic and the Planning Complex Cities topic:

The focus on disparities, conflicts arising from the distribution of spatial resources, and the examination of institutional causes and drivers of spatial inequities aligns with the core principles of this research. The project delves into the complexities of spatial planning practices in conflict contexts, which requires analysing and understanding the interplay between spatial and institutional factors. This project aimed to address the manifestations of inequity in conflict zones, which is deeply interlinked with the theme of the studio. Furthermore, exploring the role of institutions, whether formal or informal, in causing patterns of injustice is also a shared value.

The research contributed to the broader theme of the graduation studio by exploring how recommended institutional changes might contribute to more sustainable spatial outcomes and thus improve spatial justice in contexts of conflict.

Moreover, the project is also aligned with the Department of Urbanism's mission to enhance knowledge of adapting the built environment to societal and environmental changes. This connection lies in the shared emphasis on sustainable urban development values.

The relevance of the research in the larger social, professional and scientific framework:

The thesis contributed to the research gap in spatializing authoritarianism, especially regarding the Syrian conflict. It managed to build upon the previous studies on the causes of the conflict and suggest pathways for enhancing spatial justice dimensions in post-conflict landscapes, which can lead to national reconciliation in Syria. By doing so, it contributed to the increasingly growing literature that focuses on the weaponization of the built environment and the destruction of cities. Finally, the project acts as an advocacy effort to raise awareness about the conflict from a Syrian point of view. This helped to reclaim the stolen Syrian narrative.

Closing Remarks:

This 10-month journey has been profoundly transformative for me. When I initially pitched my project in September, it evoked a flood of emotions, and I found myself overwhelmed with doubt about my ability to conduct the research. As a displaced person directly affected by the conflict, the topic was deeply triggering, especially considering that atrocities are still being committed and justice remains elusive.

However, over the course of this journey, I found a sense of healing. Through the process of research and analysis, I was able to channel my anger into productive avenues, expressing it through maps, texts, and diagrams. Moreover, this experience allowed me to transition my activism in the Syrian revolution into a more structured form of academic activism, which felt empowering and fulfilling.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to my mentors, Caroline Newton and Jonathan Subendran. Their support and open-mindedness were essential to the success of this research. Thank you for believing in me and giving me the freedom to explore this complex topic.

Finally, as we all Syrians say:
'No Justice, No Peace'

Disclaimer:

- Regarding the tokens and the narratives:

The narratives presented in this conciliation tool are fictional and do not represent real-world individuals. These characters are created to offer diverse perspectives from different social and political backgrounds, aiming to foster understanding and empathy among participants. It is important to note that these narratives are not intended to stigmatize or portray any particular group negatively. Their sole purpose is to provide a range of viewpoints for discussion and reflection within the context of the storytelling tool.

- Regarding the fact cards:

Given the focus of this research and the acknowledgment that the Syrian conflict involved atrocities committed by various actors, including the Syrian regime, opposition fighters, ISIS, and international parties, it is important to clarify the scope and intent of this study. This research primarily documents the actions of the authoritarian regime, especially in Damascus and As-Sweida. While atrocities occurred throughout Syria, comprehensive documentation of all incidents was beyond the study’s limitations. Therefore, the fact cards derived from this research do not encompass all facts about the Syrian conflict. They are intended to operationalize the conciliation tool and demonstrate the potential of storytelling as a means of reconciliation. These cards do not claim to represent all facts or the entirety of events in Syria.

Ghada

Pre-Conflict:

Ghada worked as a nurse in Madaya, located in the countryside of Damascus. She witnessed the oppression of peaceful protesters at the onset of the revolution in 2011. Her brother was arrested during a demonstration against the regime and has been forcibly disappeared since then; they know nothing about his whereabouts. This was one of the main reasons that motivated her to join field hospitals to treat those injured by the regime’s gunfire and shelling.

During the Conflict:

Ghada witnessed the siege of Madaya from July 2015 to April 2017. During this siege, she lost her husband due to a chemical attack by the Syrian regime. The situation during the siege was catastrophic in every aspect; 23 people lost their lives due to malnutrition. Residents were forced to eat grass to survive. The siege and starvation were used as systematic weapons of war. Ghada was forced to relocate to Idlib through the Four Towns Agreement, which involved population exchange based on sectarian lines.

Status Quo:

Ghada currently lives in Idlib. The situation in Idlib is deteriorating on all fronts. Security is unstable, the economy is struggling, education is faltering, and the social situation is complex. Like all women, Ghada faces significant challenges and oppression due to the strict restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities. Ghada believes that hope for improvement lies in achieving comprehensive political stability and receiving international support to revive the economy, education, and protect human rights. Thus, she strongly supports the current uprising in Idleb.

Hassan

Pre-Conflict:

Hassan is a young Kurdish man who lived with his family in the predominantly Kurdish city of Kobani in northern Syria. Like all Kurds in Syria, Hassan faced political and cultural marginalization before the war. They were prohibited from using their native language in education and official communications, and their cultural identity was not recognized. Hassan saw the revolution as an opportunity to demand freedom and justice, and to strive for his cultural and political rights, so he joined the anti-regime protests.

During the Conflict:

With the escalation of conflict in Syria and increasing threats from ISIS and warring factions, Kobani became a severe conflict zone. In 2014, ISIS stormed the city, leading to intense battles and catastrophic humanitarian conditions that forced Hassan and his family to flee after witnessing the destruction of their homes and the killing of many neighbors and friends. From Turkey to Greece, passing through the Balkans, Hassan and his family endured fear, anticipation, detention, and mistreatment. Eventually, they reached Germany in late 2015, where they applied for asylum and settled in Berlin.

Status Quo:

Hassan faces cultural adaptation and academic pressures in Berlin. Additionally, he faces significant challenges in keeping up with his studies and excelling due to the language barrier and the psychological pressures stemming from the harsh experiences he and his family endured. Despite language barriers and past trauma, he’s committed to justice in Syria. Actively engaged in civil society, he raises awareness about Syrian suffering. He envisions a future where all Syrians live with dignity and freedom. Despite challenges, he remains steadfast in his pursuit of social justice.

Shadi

Pre-Conflict:

Ali is a man living with his family in Damascus in the Mazzeh 86 area. His situation before 2022 was characterized by relative stability and prosperity. As a government employee, his job was secure and stable, and as a taxi driver in the evenings, he had the opportunity to increase his income. He felt proud of the Syrian regime and believed it worked hard to ensure the country’s stability and the welfare of its people. Ali acknowledges the existence of corruption in the state structure but sees the protests as representations of external agendas aimed at destroying the country due to its resistance to imperialism.

During the Conflict:

Ali describes what happened: The protests quickly turned into acts of sabotage funded by international parties. This led to the emergence of terrorist organizations targeting the army and security forces, revealing a plan aimed at destroying the Syrian state and spreading fear among civilians to incite chaos, paving the way for the establishment of an extremist Islamic state in Syria. The living and economic conditions began to deteriorate due to decreased production and the consequences of war. Ali believes that the Syrian regime was defending the unity and stability of Syria.

Status Quo:

Ali sees that the deterioration of the economic situation is a result of the war and the immense destruction inflicted on infrastructure and various economic sectors. Therefore, he believes that the state should prioritize activating economic development plans and reconstruction efforts. Ali believes that achieving justice lies in ensuring security and stability, enhancing dialogue between conflicting parties, and combating corruption. Therefore, he sees that justice requires cooperation between the government and the local community.

Abeer

Pre-Conflict:

Abeer used to work as a teacher before the war in the predominantly Druze city of Sweida. She was a member of the Women’s Union in her city and was an activist in the field of women’s rights. Abeer joined the Syrian revolution in 2011, believing that issues such as freedom, democracy, and civil state were tools for liberating women from societal authority.

During the Conflict:

Abeer bravely joined protests in her city despite risks and suppression. Her participation brought social stigma, hindering her teaching job. With protests intensifying, authorities cracked down harshly. Consequently, Abeer lost her job and benefits unfairly. Escalating military operations, violations by all sides, revolution deviation, and economic collapse impacted protests, causing Abeer to withdraw.

Status Quo:

The deteriorating economic situation and high cost of living sparked a new popular uprising in Sweida city. Abeer quickly rejoined these protests, which soon took on political dimensions, calling for the overthrow of the Syrian regime and the implementation of UN Resolution 2254. Abeer and her comrades have been protesting daily since August 2023, believing in the necessity of ending the Syrian conflict and directly challenging the regime’s authority. Abeer sees the path to justice in Syria tied to a Syrian-led dialogue for a unified, democratic civil state.

Fact Cards

Pre-conflict Facts

1. In 1970, Hafez Al-Assad seized power in Syria through a bloodless military coup, initiating his authoritarian socialist era.	13. Scientific debate surrounds whether climate change-triggered drought and agricultural breakdown in northeastern Syria contributed to the uprising and population displacement.
2. The coup was termed the “Corrective Movement,” aimed at improving living conditions for the working class and challenging the hegemony of the Sunni landlord-merchant elite.	14. From 2006 to 2011, droughts in Syria caused agricultural failures, economic disruptions, and population displacement, heavily impacting a sector crucial to GDP and 15% of the workforce.
3. Hafez Al-Assad’s regime implemented import substitution industrialization policies, entailing state control over key economic sectors and infrastructure projects.	15. Inadequate governance and mismanagement exacerbated water scarcity and land desertification in Syria.
4. Syrian bureaucracy expanded significantly under Hafez Al-Assad’s rule, bringing a large portion of the population under direct state control.	16. Ethnic and religious diversity in Syria, compounded by artificial borders imposed by colonial powers, contributed to destabilization.
5. The regime faced opposition from the Muslim Brotherhood, leading to the notorious Hama Massacre of 1982.	17. Hafez Al-Assad’s regime marginalized Sunni Muslims and other minorities, consolidating power for the Alawite minority.
6. Economic liberalization began in Syria after a severe foreign exchange crisis in 1986, opening up sectors to private investment and reducing subsidies.	18. Damascus exhibits religious and social segregation, with distinct enclaves and neighborhoods reflecting divisions among various communities.
7. The collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of socialist ideology in Syria, leading to increased integration with global capitalism.	19. Informal settlements, constituting a significant portion of Syrian cities, emerged due to housing demand outstripping supply, with those in Damascus becoming focal points for protests.
8. Bashar Al-Assad took over power in 2000, initiating a period of authoritarian neoliberalism, favoring those loyal to his regime in the market.	20. Urbanization challenges intensified with the shift towards a market economy, aggravating socio-economic disparities.
9. The living conditions of Syrian citizens deteriorated under Bashar Al-Assad’s rule, with a significant wealth gap and high unemployment rates.	21. Syrian cities witnessed influxes of refugees from Iraq and Lebanon, exacerbating population pressures, particularly in informal settlements.
10. The Syrian government maintains strong hierarchical governance, particularly in urban development, with authority centralized at various levels.	22. Syrian protests escalated despite regime violence, leading to a transformation from peaceful demonstrations to armed conflict.
11. Challenges including inefficiency, mismanagement, corruption, and inadequate capacity hindered decentralization efforts in Syria.	23. Fridays became significant for protests in Syria, symbolizing unified demonstrations after prayers, as mosque gatherings provided a way to circumvent the ban on large assemblies.
12. Economic fluctuations characterized Hafez Al-Assad’s socialist era, while Bashar Al-Assad’s neoliberal policies brought relative stability but failed to improve socio-economic conditions.	24. The dynamics of protests mirrored calls for political rights, contesting authoritarian-imposed norms that had endured for over four decades.

Fact Cards

During the Conflict Facts

1. Authoritarian practices manifest as behaviors centered around control, discipline, and singular authority.	13. Treatment at checkpoints often hinged on arbitrary factors such as accent, surname, or place of birth, exacerbating existing social divisions and inequalities.
2. The Syrian regime’s authoritarian practices varied along different timeframes of the conflict.	14. Sunni individuals and residents of opposition strongholds faced heightened scrutiny and harassment at checkpoints.
3. Pre-conflict era in Syria was characterized by oppressive and unjust policies, contributing to environmental crisis and proliferation of informal settlements.	15. The regime’s cronies had the privilege of bypassing checkpoints, highlighting entrenched inequality within the system.
4. Lack of equitable resource distribution and inadequate infrastructure exacerbated tensions and led to social and spatial fragmentation.	16. Regime checkpoints were used to divide the urban landscape and control citizens by restricting their movement.
5. During the conflict, the regime engaged in mass destruction of cities and neighborhoods targeting opposition strongholds.	17. An urban siege was initiated by the regime in April 2013 on Rural Damsacus with support from Russian allies.
6. Authoritarian practices became more explicit during the conflict phase.	18. The urban siege led to severe humanitarian crises in besieged areas surrounding Damascus.
7. The built environment was used as a means of control, oppression, and collective punishment under the authoritarian rule of the Syrian regime.	19. The regime’s employment of siege tactics drew widespread condemnation and accusations of war crimes.
8. The militarization of the built environment in Damascus began in the early 1970s.	20. Nearly 50 besieged communities were identified in Rural Damascus, primarily due to the actions of the regime and its allies.
9. Socially and religiously divided areas in Damascus were the center of protests, facing severe siege, displacement, and widespread destruction.	21. Mass bombardment intensified hostilities in besieged areas, resulting in severe humanitarian consequences.
10. A dense network of military checkpoints was erected by the regime in response to the 2011 uprising.	22. The sustained level of hostilities in Eastern Ghouta was characterized as an “outrageous, relentless mass-casualty disaster.”
11. Military checkpoints served as physical barriers and symbols of state control and dominance over urban spaces.	23. Ceasefire agreements allowed for the evacuation of civilians and fighters from besieged areas and this evacuation was the start of the demographical change.
12. Passing through checkpoints became a harrowing experience for citizens, characterized by invasive security checks and the looming threat of violent reprisals.	24. The destruction of cities served as a form of authoritarian control and retribution by the regime.

Fact Cards

Status Quo Facts

1. The Syrian regime has adopted alternative techniques to solidify its power, including urban planning, involvement in the drug economy, and land expropriation.	13. Syria finds itself occupied by numerous local and international factions and armies, making it an arena for international power wars.
2. Authoritarianism exists in a fluid state influenced by myriad local and international factors.	14. Recent hostilities between Israel and Iran-backed groups in Syria and Lebanon have intensified, resulting in casualties.
3. The Syrian conflict has evolved into a devastating geopolitical situation with changing power struggles among conflicting parties.	15. The Syrian regime, supported by allies, is conducting offensives in northwest and northeast Syria.
4. Over half the population in Syria has been affected by displacement on a massive scale.	16. Syrians are experiencing heightened frustration and anger due to dire humanitarian and economic conditions.
5. Environmental degradation is an emerging issue following prolonged conflicts and the use of chemical weapons.	17. New grassroots movements are surfacing across Syria, challenging the status quo and advocating for inclusive political resolution.
6. The regime's National Spatial Planning Framework subtly conveys political messages, attributing Syria's deteriorating conditions to Western powers.	18. Protests in As-Sweida began in mid-August 2023 as a response to economic dissatisfaction, evolving into demands for regime change.
7. The regime's reconstruction efforts, exemplified by projects like Marota City, have faced criticism for expelling residents without fair compensation.	19. The occupation of the main square in As-Sweida reflects grassroots resistance against oppressive regimes.
8. Law No. 10 empowers local authorities to designate zones for reconstruction, potentially resulting in demographic changes favoring the regime.	20. The insurgency in As-Sweida is represented in people's efforts to reclaiming public realm in a direct challenge to the Status quo.
9. The "Captagon economy" supports the Syrian regime's collapsed economy and is used as leverage in negotiations with other countries.	21. Protesters in As-Sweida represent a blend of inclusion and resistance in insurgent citizenship practices.
10. The Syrian regime controls 80% of the global Captagon trade, estimated at \$57 billion.	22. The Druze community in As-Sweida initially participated in protests against the Assad regime in 2011 but has sparked a new uprising in 2023.
11. Smuggling routes for Captagon originate from key ports in Syria and Lebanon, extending to Europe, North Africa, and other regional ports.	23. Minority participation in protest movements fluctuates based on concerns about potential reprisals and the broader geopolitical context.
12. The conflict in Syria has evolved into a proxy war between global powers, resulting in a new geopolitical landscape.	24. Minority engagement in protest movements illustrates the nuanced and shifting nature of their involvement influenced by evolving circumstances.

Fact Cards

Post-Conflict Facts

Participants are encouraged to envision their ideal future for Syria and articulate these aspirations to share with subsequent participants.

[illegible]

Code of Conduct

Active Listening Rule

Players must listen attentively to each other's stories without interrupting. Only one person speaks at a time to ensure everyone's voice is heard.

Empathetic Responses Rule

Players must respond to each other's narratives with empathy and compassion, acknowledging the emotions shared and validating their experiences.

Non-Judgmental Environment Rule

Create a safe space where participants feel comfortable sharing their perspectives without fear of judgement. Disrespectful or judgmental behaviour is not tolerated.

Constructive Feedback Rule

Players are encouraged to provide feedback that is constructive and supportive. Comments should contribute to deeper understanding and dialogue.

Open-mindedness Rule

Players must approach the game with an open mind, willing to consider alternative viewpoints and perspectives. Curiosity and exploration are encouraged.

Cultural Sensitivity Rule

Respect cultural differences and sensitivities when discussing sensitive topics related to the Syrian conflict. Avoid assumptions and strive for cultural competence.

Conflict Resolution Skills Rule

Players must employ conflict resolution techniques such as active listening, compromise, and finding common ground to address disagreements respectfully.

Reflection Rule

Incorporate regular reflection periods throughout the game to allow players to process their emotions and thoughts. Reflection promotes self-awareness and deeper engagement with th.

Facilitator Support Rule

Designate a facilitator or moderator to guide the discussion and ensure a positive atmosphere. The facilitator can intervene if tensions arise and provide guidance on maintaining constructive dialogue. The moderator should be a trained psychologist equipped to handle and intervene in situations where emotional triggers arise.

Community Building Rule

Players are encouraged to build a sense of community by collaborating, supporting, and showing solidarity with each other. Working together towards reconciliation and healing is essential.

Freedom to Withdraw

Participants have the freedom to withdraw at any stage of the game especially if emotional triggers arise.

Participants contributions to the Post-Conflict fact cards and narratives

Ali wants the post to be... ^{see your booklet}
back to "pre" : stable / prosperous / secured / proud, but with an embrace of the new economical and political situation. "During" disrupted the pre, and Status Quo ensured kind of... *

Post-Conflict
Ghada continues to fight for empowerment and has had some breakthroughs to get women equality by creating women social groups. They are grassroots institutions that help support other women & children to have a safe space.

Abeer imagines to have a women led / included political state, where her & fellow women ^{have their} rights implemented which could change how the future changes through reforming the rights for women of all walks of life (forming a community led by women)

A place to live in happiness wherever he chooses, B. Berlin, anywhere.
any other place.
#NO BORDERS

Civilians having the right to choose their governing body and voice their opinion

3. Grassroot initiatives are cooperating with local ^{appointed} querna councils to collaborate with locals

Grassroot initiatives become local institutions for empowering human rights

2. The state prioritizes activating economic development plans and reconstructs efforts.

Abeer also tries to form social networks with women from different communities to help them have a voice of their own.

Western Reparations for the middle east

Have the economy shift towards providing job opportunities to ^{education} youth who are the future of the country. + exchange generation

1. Justice requires cooperation between government and local comm.

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THANK YOU.