



1. Would an Alawi be identifiable because of the way they look or their accent?

Sources located made mixed claims on the presence of recognisable identifying features possessed by Alawis. Although some sources made reference to physical differences, most sources discussing the Alawi population in Syria and Lebanon make no reference to any identifiable physical characteristic. These sources define the primary difference between Alawis and other Syrians/Lebanese as being tribal and based on an ancient religious dichotomy. Khoury and Kostiner¹ note that the Syrian Alawis (given their greater numbers and relative influence most sources discuss the Alawi community in Syria rather than Lebanon) are ethnically Arabs who “not only share Arabic as a common language but also claim a common Arab ethnic origin.”²

The Lonely Planet guide to Lebanon and Syria asserts that, in Syria, people “generally know” the ethnicity and religion of someone “by their dress, accent, or name.”³ James Minahan⁴ claims that the geographical isolation and intermarriage of Syrian Alawis meant they had retained their “distinct physical features.”⁵ It is noted that Minahan was referring to those Alawi who were based in Syria; it is not known whether Lebanese Alawi share these attributes. Author Samuel Pickering⁶ opines that (Syrian) Alawis have a distinct appearance demonstrated by the back of their heads being flatter and less rounded than other Syrians. There is a lack of supporting sources to verify this claim.

Contrary to the above, most sources discussing the Alawis make no reference to differences in appearance. For example, the *Middle East Review of International Affairs* comments that the former Syrian President Hafez Asad was “Alawi by virtue of his background and ... a Syrian by his bearing and appearance.”⁷

Alawi Accent

¹ According to the back cover of their book, Philip Khoury is Professor of History of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Joseph Kostiner is Lecturer in the Department of Middle East and African History at Tel Aviv University.

² Khoury, P & Kostiner, J 1990, *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, University of California Press, p.142 <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=YEjSNVZHH70C&lpg=PA138&dq=alawite%20ethnically&pg=PA142#v=onepage&q=alawite%20ethnically&f=false> Accessed 22 June 2012

³ Carter, T., Dunston, L., & Thomas, A (eds) 2008, *Syria and Lebanon*, Lonely Planet Publications, p.67 http://books.google.com.au/books?id=_R-I_Gx5OgQC&lpg=PA67&dq=Alawite%20accent&pg=PA67#v=onepage&q=Alawite%20accent&f=false Accessed 22 June 2012

⁴ James Minahan is a freelance writer and independent researcher living in Barcelona, Spain.

⁵ Minahan, J 2002, *Encyclopaedia of the Stateless Nations*, Greenwood Press, p.80 <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=OLKKVXgEpk0C&lpg=PA80&ots=UXR8c2ZW7r7&dq=alawite%20physical%20features&pg=PA80#v=onepage&q=alawite%20physical%20features&f=false> Accessed 22 June 2012

⁶ Note that Pickering is a lecturer in English literature and non-fiction prose at the University of Connecticut.

⁷ Zisser, E. 1998, ‘Appearance and Reality: Syria’s Decisionmaking Structure’, *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2 No. 2 <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1998/issue2/jv2n2a5.html> Accessed 22 June 2012

Several sources make reference to an “Alawi accent” although this is a misnomer as the accent is generally regional rather than ethnic. In Syria the “Alawi accent” is stated by sources as being a rural and/or mountain accent and forms part of the pejorative perception of Alawis being unrefined and backward.⁸ Despite the probability that the accent is regional rather than ethnic, there is a strong association between this accent and being identified as an Alawi. *Reuters* notes that the Alawi from the mountain villages near Lebanon speak Arabic with a distinctive accent that they must hide if they wish to avoid being identified as an Alawi.⁹

In other parts of Syria and in Lebanon the “Alawi accent” is often referred to as a coastal accent (it is not clear whether this is the same or different to the Syrian “rural” accent) and linked to the Alawi based in regions such as Tripoli.¹⁰ Irish journalist Stephen Starr¹¹ in 2012 wrote of a Syrian Alawi being subjected to public slurs because of their coastal accent.¹² Starr noted that the pronouncement of the letter *qaf* was a “dead giveaway” that the speaker was from the Alawi-dominated coastal region of Syria. Starr further noted though this was a sign of the geographical location of the speaker only, and that any Syrian (Alawi or not) from that region would speak that way.¹³

2. Would there be any restriction on Alawis moving from Tripoli to Beirut? In particular, are there reports of attacks on a) Alawis and b) atheists in Beirut?

No reports were located of Alawis being attacked in Beirut. Information on the number of Alawi living in Beirut is difficult to obtain as no official census has taken place in Lebanon since 1932.¹⁴ Several sources quote 2009 Lebanese general election results that state that 218 Alawis voted in Beirut, however, none of these sites list an original source and appear to have been taken from the Wikipedia article on Beirut.¹⁵ This information should therefore be treated with considerable caution.

Sources note that the majority of Lebanese Alawis are based in northern Lebanon.¹⁶ The Arabic news source *Al-Akhbar* states that roughly 60% of Lebanese Alawis live in Jabal

⁸ Kramer, M. 1983, ‘Taking Syria Seriously’, *New York Magazine*, 3 October <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=A7gBAAAAMBAAJ&lpg=PA32&dq=alawite%20accent&pg=PA32#v=onepage&q=alawite%20accent&f=false> Accessed 22 June 2012

MacFarquhar, N 2009, *Unexpected Encounters in the Changing Middle East*, PublicAffairs, p.320 <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=J9wxneNYDSwC&lpg=PA320&dq=alawite%20accent%20rural&pg=PA320#v=onepage&q=alawite%20accent%20rural&f=false> Accessed 22 June 2012

⁹ Karouny, M 2012, ‘Against Syrian anger, Assad's sect feels fear’, *Reuters* <http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/02/02/syria-alawites-idINDEE81109520120202> Accessed 22 June 2012

¹⁰ Dick, M 2006, ‘The Thin Red Lines: Censorship, Controversy, and the Case of the Syrian Soap Opera *Behind Bars*’, *TBS* <http://www.tbsjournal.com/Dick.html> Accessed 22 June 2012

¹¹ Stephen Starr is a freelance Irish journalist who has been reporting from Damascus since 2007. He covered the Syrian uprising for some of the world’s leading newspapers and his work has been published in The Washington Post, Financial Times, The Times and Sunday Times, The Los Angeles Times and The Irish Times.

¹² Starr, W. 2012, ‘Those who fear change in Syria’, *Hurst Blog*, 5 January <http://www.hurstblog.co.uk/those-who-fear-change-in-syria/> Accessed 22 June 2012

¹³ Starr, W. 2012, ‘Those who fear change in Syria’, *Hurst Blog*, 5 January <http://www.hurstblog.co.uk/those-who-fear-change-in-syria/> Accessed 22 June 2012

¹⁴ World Health Organisation n.d., *Health Systems Profile – Lebanon*, p.12 <http://gis.emro.who.int/HealthSystemObservatory/PDF/Lebanon/Health%20status%20and%20demographics.pdf> Accessed 22 June 2012

¹⁵ See for instance http://www.3ishbeirut.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58:beirut-population&catid=43:demographics&Itemid=37 and www.artistopia.com/beirut Original Wikipedia article: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beirut>

¹⁶ Minority Rights 2008, *Lebanon Overview*, June <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=5058> Accessed 22 June 2012

Mohsen (a district at the edge of Tripoli) with another 33% residing in the Akkar region.¹⁷ A (US) *National Public Radio* news report states that approximately 2,000 Alawis live in the village of Ghajar located in the disputed Golan Heights region in south-eastern Lebanon.¹⁸ [See Maps at the end of this response.]

Sources indicate that tension between neighbouring Alawi and Sunni neighbourhoods in Tripoli continues to result in violence between the two communities.¹⁹ This tension has been exacerbated by the continuing unrest in Syria where the Alawi-dominated government is perceived by Lebanese Sunnis as persecuting the Sunni-dominated Syrian opposition.²⁰

Atheists in Beirut (and Lebanon generally)

There is a lack of information on the number of atheists in Lebanon; however, a 2004 BBC survey found that less than three per cent of Lebanese “do not believe in God”.²¹ Sources note the strong role religion plays in Lebanese society, for example, parliamentary seats are allocated based on religious affiliation. Author Lara Deeb²² in 2006 opined “[i]t is difficult to be an atheist in Lebanon, or rather, it is impossible to refuse a religious identity.”²³ William Harris in 2012 added:

[L]oyalty to a religion-derived community does not necessarily mean religiosity; there are numerous agnostic and even atheist Maronites, Sunnis, and Shia.²⁴

Both of these above sources indicate that the linkages, even if they are historic, between a person and their “birth” religion is more important than the level of religious dedication. No information could be located on whether Lebanese atheists are targeted or attacked. It is also unclear whether a perceived non-practicing Muslim would be targeted or identified as such.

¹⁷ Nazzal M 2011, ‘Lebanon’s Alawi: A Minority Struggles in a ‘Nation’ of Sects’, *Al-Akhbar*, 8 November <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/1309/> Accessed 22 June 2012

¹⁸ Kenyon, P. 2009, ‘Divided Village On Israeli-Lebanon Border In Limbo’, *National Public Radio*, 30 September <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=111368610> Accessed 22 June 2012

¹⁹ Siddiq, N 2012, ‘Alawite-Sunni fighting erupts in Lebanon, 3 killed’, *Reuters*, 13 May <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/13/us-lebanon-sects-fighting-idUSBRE84C03K20120513> Accessed 22 June 2012

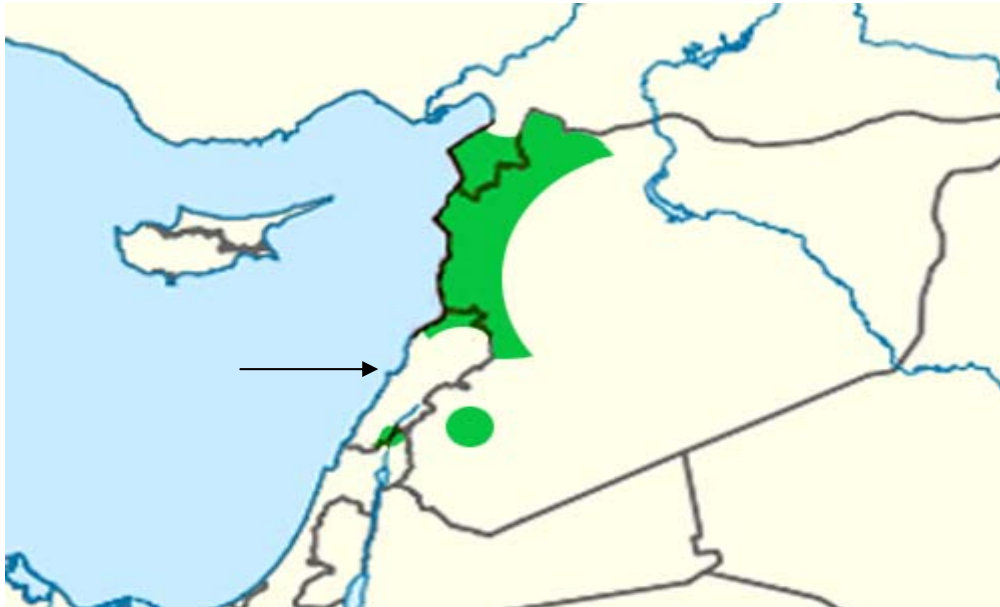
²⁰ Siddiq, N 2012, ‘Alawite-Sunni fighting erupts in Lebanon, 3 killed’, *Reuters*, 13 May <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/13/us-lebanon-sects-fighting-idUSBRE84C03K20120513> Accessed 22 June 2012

²¹ Martin, M 2007, *The Cambridge Guide to Atheism*, Cambridge University Press, p.54 <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=tAeFipOVx4MC&lpg=PA54&dq=atheists%20lebanon&pg=PA54#v=onepage&q=atheists%20lebanon&f=false> Accessed 22 June 2012

²² Lara Deeb is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Scripps College

²³ Deeb, L 2006, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*, Princeton University Press, p.10 http://books.google.com.au/books?id=Cs_IUECaLwwC&lpg=PA10&dq=atheists%20lebanon&pg=PA11#v=onepage&q=atheist&f=false Accessed 22 June 2012

²⁴ Harris, W 2012, *Lebanon A History*, Oxford University Press, p.278 <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=jY4ImTGnamUC&lpg=PA278&dq=atheists%20lebanon&pg=PA278#v=onepage&q=atheist&f=false> Accessed 22 June 2012



Map 1 – The green areas represent areas with an Alawi presence (no information is given by the map creator on threshold limits) showing the concentration of Alawi in northern Lebanon (Lebanon shown at arrow) close to the Syrian border. The map also indicates a smaller presence in the Golan Heights region in southern Lebanon. Beirut is located in central Lebanon.²⁵



Map 2 – Akkar can be seen at the top of the map, Tripoli on the left near the top.²⁶

²⁵ Joshua Project n.d., *Map of Alawite in Syria*, <http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?peo3=18805&rog3=SY> Accessed 22 June 2012

²⁶ Nonhores.com n.d., ‘Minister of health in Lebanon Khalifeh Mhammad Jawad’ <http://www.nonhores.com/ref-country-lbn.php>

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