

Druze identity study

June 2015

Claude Meillet

Definition

This study analyses the present situation of the Druze community in Israel, in itself and within its environment.

Identity

Identity as a concept: other words, like personality, soul, uniqueness, specificity, ADN, are parts of the notion of identity.

Identity comes from "idem", the same. Attached to identity is the notion of permanence.

This study looks after the constant central concept that insured the continuity and the uniqueness of the Druze community throughout centuries.

Identity is a force: identity does exist only if it is a living concept. A society without identity is due to die. Identity is a living force that cross time.

The Druze created a transmission society. Faithful and respectful of their past, they are still inspired by its genetic characteristics.

Study

Operational study: this study is not an academic study. The methodology used for it comes from the professional study on companies identities, dedicated to help them to better conduct their activities.

This study aims at helping the Druze community to better lead its present and future developments.

Druze in Israel: as it was impossible to include the Druze from Lebanon and Syria in the study, the research applied to Druze in Israel only.

Those two communities were just token in part in the analysis of the environment of the Israeli Druze community.

Qualitative study: its subject is conceptual. As such, it is not a quantitative one. Its process runs through 4 phases.

- . observation: open interviews of a sample of 20 diverse personalities, Druze or not, look into existing, books, articles, films, web sites
- . interpretation: analysis, detection of major factors, diagnosis,
- . creation: definition of the identity concept, conception of the identity system,
- . application: identity manual: lexicon, user's guide
Identity program: internal, external

Interpretation

(it applies to the material acquired in a previous phase, "Observation" through interviews and sources looking)

Analysis

Characteristics

Behind a stereotyped image of the Druze community, it does exist a reality much more sophisticated.

Effectively, the Druze lives in villages on top of mountains, their religion is secrete, they believe in reincarnation, they stick together and marriages are strictly and only between them, they are loyal to the country they live in, and they are very good soldiers.

But, more in depth, the Druze have maintain through centuries a society of transmission: their religion feeds the community with ethic principles such as dignity, modesty, solidarity, honesty, the distinction between the enlightened and the unenlightened at the individual level, is developed in distinction between secular and religious at the society level, they are Arabs by roots and Israeli by citizenship, they are deeply attached to their land and their traditions, the basic social structure is the family.

Historical

The mix of determination in keeping during a thousand years the specificities of their community, their own secrete religion, a strict endogamy, and of flexibility allowing their minority to go along with stronger majorities, help the Druze to survive through history.

It makes think of the Druze community as "a reed that bends but never breaks".

Culture and tradition

Clan solidarity, very strong link to the village, deep hospitality, respect of religion values as well as religion belief, all those cultural characteristics, and the traditions inherited from their Arabic roots are preserved by the closure of the Druze society.

Those Druze culture and tradition have now to be preserved in their cohabitation with the Israeli's ones and their confrontation with the modernist trends.

Economy

Under impulse coming from education, army conscription, the Druze economy *evolved from an essentially rural structure to a more equilibrated one, with third parts, in defense activities, liberal business and services plus farming.*

Handicapped by lack of managerial culture, the centralization of investments by family leaders, it is hampered by the brakes the Israeli policy imposes on it.

Religion

Historically and sociologically cement of the community, the Druze religion defending monotheism, God fearing, social and justice, reincarnation, earned its reputation through its secret dimension.

Its secret is effectively a specificity, but secret hides in fact its real originality. Based on Greek philosophy, it develop a corpus of ethic principles which irrigates the civil society, a spirituality and wisdom that, in turn, fed the respect of religion and of the enlightened.

Education

There is a consensus amongst the Druze to consider education as the number one factor of development and wealth of the community. It is already a success since 70% of the Druze women get high level education.

However it exists a double risk that have to be avoided. Outside education has to be balanced by family education in order to keep alive the principles of the Druze society. And the imbalance of level of education between women and men has to be analyzed and redressed.

Sociology

The Druze community is more complex at first glance. Solidarity is undermined by internal inequality and animosity, the benefit of conscription for men are lessened by the need to work immediately after, Israeli allegiance is in balance with Arab links. Yet, inside attachment, association of flexibility and resistance, bridges between secular and civil rules, confer its price to the Druze community.

Major danger to the continuity of Druze specificity come from possible assimilation to Israeli lifestyle by new generations, and excessive split between modern and traditional sections of this society.

Women

There is still an ambiguous situation for women in the Druze society, insofar as the evolution toward high education, liberalization with possibilities for working, driving in and out, modern clothing, give them a new position, and in the same time, religious women mainly are most often limited to their classic role of house mistress. As respected as they are, their key role in the modernization of the Druze community will probably put the pressure to treat this ambiguity.

Lebanon/Syria/Israel Druze communities

Common denomination, Arab in descent and Druze in religion, strong communal sense, history, bind those communities together.

Recent historical events, differences of political structures, loyalty to their respective countries, creates sensible differences between them, without destroying a same sense of belonging, and continuous exchanges.

Druze / Arabs

The differences of religions have led to internal differences of traditions and of identities and of external position in matter of tolerance, , relationship with Palestinians. But, culturally, Druze are Arabs in matter of language, family importance, sense of honor, food and clothing habits, attachment to land and villages.

Differences between both minorities are emphasized by the Israeli political strategy.

Druze / Israel

Loyalty from the Druze to Israel is a basis of their relationship, concretized by the conscription to the Israeli army, and various job possibilities in the security sector. It gives to the Druze a special place as a minority and some benefits.

On the other side, land confiscation, discrimination in investments, freezing of building licenses, electricity and water limited access, generates a strong frustration feeling that damages this relationship.

+ / -

There is a certain equality between solidarity, religious cement, attachment to tradition, real spirituality, on one side and internal splits, blocked society, religious ignorance by young people, economic weakness on the other side.

Internet

For the Druze community, perhaps more than for other communities, internet and informatics evolutions and tools, represent the best and the worst. It penetrates irresistibly into a society until now very much closed in itself, bringing openness to external world, but upsetting tradition centuries old, access to technology for the younger, but difficulties for the older, introducing modernity, but provoking defensive reactions.

As the outpost of the inevitable modernization, internet acceptance and assimilation will become a key item of the Druze community next future.

Image and communication

There is no real, organized Druze communication, which leaves the field to an image forged by the Israeli side, a mirror image of the Israeli community, religious, independent, traditional.

Even the use of a series of symbols, flag, colors, related to the religion content, are not sufficient to make visible the deep reality and truth of the Druze community.

Evolution

The positive tendencies are the progress of education, the new opening of the society toward more freedom for women, for new fields of economic activity, the persisting attachment of Druze going outside of the community to their tradition, family, village.

The negative trends are the declining demography, the persistent gap between leaders and the overall population, between educated women and less educated men, the remoteness of the Druze villages from the big urbanistic zone where economic and technologic are booming.

Challenges

The Druze community will be engaged into a set of challenges in order to master the invasive modernity wave.

To integrate modernity without losing or weakening its essence and spirituality.

To maintain the right balance between religious and secular.

To liberalize its tradition while limiting the growing individualism trend.

To participate fully to the Israeli society without accepting a paternalist partnership.

To develop the villages activities by entering in the urbanization process.

To find an holistic way if interlinking history, religion, modernity.

Major Factors

1 – Original religion basis

Basic fundamental factor of the creation of the Druze community, their religion developed basic specificities amongst all others religions.

Secret by necessity, it has never been invading public the Druze life, it remained at the individual level.

Irrigated by Greek philosophy, it diffused to civil side of the community essentially moral principles. It transcended the geo-political frontiers between Lebanon, Syria and Israel. It played an internal preservative role as the essence of a community federated as much by respect as by belief. The religious leaders have preeminence in the community life.

But, its role risks to be disturbed by the irresistible wave of modernity, by the handicaps attached to its protective secret, closed society and religion ignorance.

2 – Original Israeli membership

The Druze community has de facto a special status amongst the Israeli minorities, even if it is partly the result of an Israeli policy aiming at separating Druze from the Arabs.

Israel brings to Druze, security, education and health infrastructures and access, Druze schools, jobs in public services, liberty of movement. The conscription system of the Druze men makes from the Israeli army a place of evolution, opening of mind. Druze brings to Israel good soldiers, multi-cultural enrichment, an additional culture and touristic territory.

But, the Druze/Israel relationship could be weakened. Land spoliation policy, social and economic discrimination, administrative locking, focalization of dialog on the Druze leaders only, conducted by the Israeli Government, give birth to a “Druze in the army, Arabs at home” resentment. Although new generation of Druze men are still willing to go to the military service, the proportion of them declaring to “feel Israeli” is declining.

3 – Original culture and tradition

The social basis of the Druze community is the family.

The strength of the familial solidarity extends itself to familial clans, till to make the Druze community as a federal clan structure.

Strong elements reinforced this social and cultural unity, such as the localization in villages in mountainous environment, the obligation of intra-marriages, the belief in reincarnation.

This solidarity takes a spiritual depth through the principles issued by the religion, and participates in making the Druze community as a society of transmission.

But, a series of phenomena endangers this multi-secular culture foundation.

The strength of tradition could become a weakness in time of invading modernity.

The Druze society is still largely blocked. The under educated young men get frustrated. Generalized growing urbanization may confront the Druze rural and isolated position.

And, the economic development is strongly prevented by the bad redistribution of the Israeli investments, by the absence of programing by most of Druze areas, by limitation of hi tech knowledge.

4 – Original Arab linkage

Muslim, Christian, Druze Arab minority, constitutes in Israel a bloc of population.

A set of similarities link them together. Arabic language, even if uses have introduced some variations between them, food, sense of hospitality, geographic situation in villages, in rural areas, family centering structures and traditions.

Inter relationships between the populations, are generally good.

But, many items make this Arab/Druze linkage controversial.

Islamists considers the Druze as entering into a pact with the enemy, Israel, in particular in going to the Israeli army. Arabs are mostly pro-Palestinian when the Druze are mostly anti-Palestinian.

More in depth, Druze are clearly culturally pacifists whereas the Arab community is pacific by obligation.

5 – Originality of evolution

A number of current developments are consolidating the Druze community in its present structure.

The priority which has been given to education enlarges the possibilities for Druze to find a better place in the society and within the Druze community.

The relative emancipation of women, together with the fact that 70% of young Druze girls go to University, stimulate their position and role into the community.

A multi-yearly program for modernization of the Druze environment – roads, transportation, signalization, touristic infrastructure - has been engaged and will be deployed in the coming years.

But, a series of numerous others factors threaten changes.

The most impossible to avoid is the global invasion of the high technology new world that will inevitably impact the life style, and the internal life of the Druze community.

Internet, the social networks, the growing media presence, will also confront the blocking force of the Druze society.

Specific problems will appear such as the cultural inequality between a majority of young women highly educated versus young active men under educated, the way to ensure the continuous loyalty to Druze faith and tradition of young Druze people bathed professionally into the occidental and urbanistic environment.

Diagnosis

Historically through a thousand years, across multiple successive critical periods, the Druze minority has succeeded in preserving its singularity in matter of religion, culture and tradition, in a highly complicated Middle East region, besides and sometime against Arab and Christian communities.

This success is mainly due to the constant, individual and collective respect kept alive by the Druze to the fundamental principles brought by their original religion to the Druze community.

In modern time, this constant respect of those principles, together with the also permanent strategy of a weak minority to avoid the confrontation with strong majority, allowed the Druze to find a place in the new state of Israel, without ignoring its Arab roots.

However, the rapidity of emergence of a new world, not only of a new State, will soon change drastically the conditions of adaptation by the Druze community to the coming configuration.

The way to enter into this new open, technologic world, and so to ensure the continuity of the Druze history and presence, should only be defined if it preserves the spirituality and the singularity of the Druze community.

At this vital crossing point, Druze have to call on the essential concept that maintained their existence through centuries, in order to balance its integration into modernity, with the attractiveness of its spirituality.

Creation

Identity concept

TOTAL RESPECT

- it has a moral sense that encompass the rules and principles which religion has given to the Druze society: honesty, dignity, modesty, freedom, wisdom, together with intermarriage law and reincarnation,
- it has a practical sense that encompass the behavior and the life style of the Druze community,
- it has a transmission sense which represents and defends Druze identity from the historical beginning to present time,
- it has an individual sense, regarding attitude to family, religion, principles, tradition, community and land,
- it has a community sense regarding the relationship with Israel, the brotherhood with Lebanon and Syria Druze communities, the Arabic linkage,
- it has a federative sense, stimulating the generations linkage, allowing the community to federate individuals instead of individuals taking the lead upon the community,

Religion, with culture and tradition, are the backbone of the Druze community. The identity concept and the identity system does not pretend to change this fundamentals. But it gives pulpit and muscle to consolidate them at a time when the community has to find a new strength in front of the external world.

Modernization is alike tsunami. It is impossible to stop it. And it is so more impacting when the epicenter is quite near.

In Middle East, Israel, the “start-up nation”, is this epicenter. Which means that its minorities have to integrate as much as possible this modernity tide, to stay above the flow.

The Druze community has to add to its constant effort in respecting its unity, the secretion of its religion, its rules and its traditions, its family and clan structure, another new effort, in respecting also the necessities of modernity.

Double respect is the key for perpetuating the Druze community in all its specificities, keeping its very soul alive in the new world.

But, on the other hand, The Druze may bring to this world in making, an example of a society respecting and preserving humankind while entering into modernization.

Modernity brings with itself, beside openness, inventions, new opportunities, networking, health progress, education access, growing individualism, invading media, virtual reality, materialism, excessive speed, religious radicalism, intolerance. And this dual face of modernity is present at its utmost in the Israeli society. Independently of any political opinion, it seems obvious that its initial spirituality has in good part vanished.

A Druze community able to combine its modernization with the respect of its intimate spirituality would present to Israel a renewed face, worthy of respect.

Identity system

The identity concept expresses the Druze identity, but it federates also a number of complementary notions characterizing the Druze community.

This set of notions that allow to deploy the whole richness of the Druze identity, under the umbrella of the identity concept, constitutes the Druze identity system.



TOTAL RESPECT

RIGOR

UNIQUENESS

OPENESS

Religion

Transmission

Loyalty

Principles

Solidarity

Education

Knowledge

Villages

Adaptability



The identity system is not only a faithful summary of what makes the specificity of the Druze community, it is a reservoir of ideas that should help the Druze to find in their own way, the responses to the future challenges they will encounter.

Application

Identity manual

Lexicon

Every notion participating to the identity system has to be well understood and known by the Druze, in order to be used easily.

This lexicon constitutes a kind of Druze specific dictionary.

RIGOR: in the Druze world, it is essentially related to a moral attitude, linked to observance of religious rules and fidelity to the ethic principles religion has infused in civil life.

Contrary is weakness, softness, easiness,

RELIGION: essence of the Druze essence, its secret practice gives to it a kind of subliminal presence in the Druze life, related to wisdom, to Platonism philosophy, Inspiring but separated from civil life, not ecumenical by definition, it is a unique as being non-invasive, pacific, limited to its only territory.

Contrary is agnosticism, extremism, libertinism

PRINCIPLES: rules of action, based on values such as modesty, solidarity, moral rules such as truthfulness, honesty, inducing individual and collective behavior, coming from the religion, shaping the Druze community.

Contrary is indiscipline, permissiveness, free will.

KNOWLEDGE: linked to education which brings understanding of various disciplines as science, history, languages, mathematics, technology, extended to wisdom that knowing display.

Contrary is ignorance, incompetence, incapacity

UNIQUENESS: Druze have to defend and to perpetuate their originality as a people and their unicity as a community. Secrecy of their religion, closeness of the community by only intra-marriages, villages and mountains localization, belief in reincarnation, loyalty to Israel make their singularity amongst others populations.

Contrary is common, ordinary, generality.

TRANSMISSION: the Druze community is a society of transmission. Its continuity, as a minority, through one thousand years, has only be possible because of the persistence of its religious rules and its principles of life, because of continuous strategy of adaptation of the weak to the strong.

Contrary is interruption, nonlinearity, disappearance.

SOLIDARITY: characterizes the relationship between Druze within their family at first, within their community then, including a moral obligation for mutual assistance,

Contrary is individualism, egoism, indifference,

VILLAGES: the attachment to their villages is a key point of the faithfulness of Druze to their community. The isolation of those villages, on top of mountainous areas, materializes its uniqueness, and contributes to maintain its need for protection as well as for its confinement on oneself.

Contrary is anywhere, impersonal, soulless.

OPENESS: the focus of the Druze religion in the field of spirituality and wisdom leaves the field to the civil side of the society to open freely itself toward Israel society. And moreover, the Druze community appears as one only example of an enriching entanglement between both religious and civic sides.

Contrary is contraction, egocentrism, closing.

LOYALTY: the pragmatism of the Druze community as a minority not to oppose to a majority, makes it loyal to the country in which she lives. This strategy takes its value not only from its efficiency, but also because loyalty is in line with the moral principles that sustain together the Druze society.

Contrary is duplicity, occasional, trickery.

EDUCATION: it is central to the evolution of the Druze society and to its capacity to better enter into the coming new world. It is the essential lever to make the community to find a place in the rapidly changing and sophisticated Israeli society.

Contrary is behind hand, outdated, ignorant.

ADAPTABILITY: the long life of the Druze community has learned it the necessity to take into consideration external constraints and opportunities, and the internal way to avoid the first ones and to benefit from the second ones.

Contrary is stubbornness, inattention, rigidity.

Users guide

For every subject, the process consists at:

- 1 – looking which notions, part of the Druze identity system, are relevant for it,
- 2 – using those notions to imagine answers to the demand.

Examples

- Demand: how Druze women can participate in helping young Druze to have a good knowledge of Druze religion principles and of Druze tradition rules,
 - 1 - selection of notions : principles, knowledge, transmission, education
 - 2 – creative answer: to define a minimum program of knowledge and to organize in every Druze village, periodic lessons ensured by some educated women from the village

- Demand: how to combine the preservation of Druze villages as an eminent piece of Druze life style and identity, with the irresistible process of urbanization as an eminent piece of modernization.
 - 1 – selection of notions : openness, knowledge, adaptability,
 - 2 – creative answer : to conceive and to develop, via internet, a virtual town interconnecting the Druze villages with a common web site, the implementation of common projects, and if possible in relation with Haifa University, local incubators, a big high tech company.

Identity program suggestions

Until now, the Druze strategy, minority confronted to majorities, has most of the time, be mostly and successfully defensive.

The difference between the present situation and the past ones is that the Druze community is no more only faced to a superior community, but to a change that affects every community, worldwide.

The consequence is that, at this time, Druze cannot simply be defensive. It has to behave offensively, in order not to stay on the road side, whereas the society as a whole and others communities, minorities or majorities, will evolve and will integrate the modern new world.

Offensively means anticipation. The material to anticipate can be found partly in the Druze identity system. The field of anticipation is either internal to the community, either external.

In order to build on its identity the answers to address to the changes that the invading modernization requires, the Druze society should develop a program of actions inspired by its religion and tradition fundamentals, such as the Druze identity system represents.

This program has to be thought upon and defined by the Druze community itself

.

Yet, the following suggestions for an identity program come from information gathered along this study, and have for object to propose some precise examples for this programing effort.

Internal

- Integration into high-tech world.

Key identity notions: openness, transmission, adaptability, education

It could become a menace but it could also become an opportunity. The opportunity comes from the fact that Druze can jump directly to the last state of the art of the technology, without having to pass through the previous phases of development.

To acquire the knowledge, a serial of actions could be defined:

- . census of existing expertise in the whole Druze territory in matter of people, field of activity, material, place,
- . creation of a scientific Druze committee, managing the integration process,
- . large consultation to receive ideas, suggestions...
- . definition of an annual multi integration program adapted to Druze environment, such as agriculture, wood, tourism, craft, building,....covering education for general learning and specialized knowledge,
- . proposal to some big High-tech companies and to incubators surrounding the Druze place, to become partners of the Druze community, as well as the Haifa Teknion University, Druze schools,
- . negotiation with the Israeli Government to propose investment associated with the benefits the Israeli society will get from the Druze modernization program,

To ensure that this move of the Druze into modernization will stay compatible with the perpetuation of its spirituality its rules and its tradition, a serial of actions could also be made:

- . a committee of Uqqal will be installed and will be in constant dialog with the scientific committee,
- . a special education program will be developed in two ways. For the parents to get a sufficient knowledge in matter of technology to be able to follow the use made by their children. For the children for them to know the risks of wrong uses and what culture and rules of life may add to technical knowledge.

Economic development

An offensive strategy should be of great help to stimulate the Druze economy. One of its advantages is that it will allow to reverse the relation with the Israeli Government or administration.

Key identity notions: rigor, openness, solidarity, principles

Instead of opposing, Druze will propose.

- . a specific economic development Druze Authority could be created representing the Mayors of the villages and the leaders of the community.

Its role will be to define a common development program, to initiate the actions and to give or not agreement to proposals, to focus efforts on the most relevant economic sectors for the Druze, such as agriculture, crafts, forests, tourism, or software creation, all sectors allowing to fix the Druze working population within the Druze territory, to become the common interface with the Israeli authorities, to allocate the money to be invested relatively to needs and equity principles, to stay in close relation with the scientific committee to cross and enrich both programs possibilities.

- . the already existing Druze actor, industrials, banks, craftsmen, farmers, will be associated to the programming process as much as they will, and to the execution phases as much as they could.

Every village, every mayor and his team, will get in charge of a part of this program in order to maximize efficiency and to make it visible to every family,

- . the program will be presented, discussed and coordinated with the Authority for the economic development in the minorities sector.

It will integrate the 5 years program of investment already existing, concerning electric and water distribution, improving the roads network and the transportation system.

Others action should be part of the internal actions programmed, such as

- . redefining the place and role of Druze women in the working side of the community, in benefiting of their high education level,

- . to increase the education effort on the knowledge of religion, tradition, and on the good practice of new technologies, including internet,

- . to develop, culture, music, sport infrastructure and participation.

External

Urbanization

Key identity notions: knowledge, transmission, openness, adaptability

To participate, rather than to resist, to the strong trend for urbanization that accelerates everywhere in the world, is a must for a rural society like the Druze one. The objective here would be to find a way that does not weaken the villages tradition and role that is a decisive element of Druze identity. It could be obtain in two ways.

To initiate special relationship between the Druze community and significant town in its surrounding:

- . creation of a committee for urban/rural relationship, including some village mayors, and representatives of economy, education, culture,
- . selection of towns, such as Haifa, Nazareth, Akko,
- . conception of project for special relationship, in different fields such as financing, innovation, economic development, tourism, education, to be submitted and discussed with authorities in every town,
- . exchanges of ideas, definitions and planning of actions,

To solidify the attachment to the Druze community by Druze men and women who go out of villages for Israeli towns:

- . creation of a special page for them in the Web site of the Druze community,
- . to associate them into the various programs developed by the Druze, by asking them to participate, to bring ideas, to propose complementary actions,
- . to organize in the villages lectures about Druze religion and tradition, for the children of Druze couples living outside,

Relationship with Israel Authorities

Respect, the Druze identity concept, applies to internal life within the community. In the relationship with external world it should apply too, in particular toward Israeli society and Authority, but in a reciprocal way.

To succeed in getting revers respect from the Israeli, Druze have not to stay in demand but to anticipate and take the initiative.

Key identity notions, rigor, loyalty, openness, adaptability

To take the lead in this relation, Druze could at first prepare a White Paper, summing the different subjects, the present status for every one of them, the precise demands to the Israeli Authority, a suggested planning for realization,

This White Paper will be prepared depending upon the precedent programs, for economic development, urbanization.

It will make specific proposal concerning the protection of what is left of Druze land, the necessary equity for investments in Druze villages relatively to Jewish settlements.

In order to get maximum impact and to ensure its inclusion, this White Paper will be publicized

A review of its application will be made on a yearly basis.

Others actions could be programed in the direction of external publics:

- . organization of exchange of information, experiences, knowledge, with corresponding external entities in every field of main Druze activities, agriculture, crafts, tourism.....
- . organization of tours and meetings for the Young Druze outside of the Community, in order to make known to them this external world in an organized way.