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CLIMATE CHANGE & CIVIL WAR: THE SYRIAN CASE

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İKLİM DEĞİŞİKLİĞİ VE İÇ SAVAŞ: SURİYE VAKASI

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to answer the question to what extent climate change does the climate change triggers violent conflicts with reference to Syrian Case. Syria is a unique country which possesses a lengthy history. Speaking in geopolitical terms, it is defined as an important crossroad for civilizations. Since the inception of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, scholars have been arguing to diagnose the actual causes of the conflict. For some, the fundamental cause solely related with political factors. For the others, drought and anthropogenic climate change had a pivotal impact. In other words, the exact cause of this multi-layered conflict is still nebulous. The fundamental finding of this study is the fact that neoliberal policies of Bashar Assad, to a certain extent, human induced climate change, consecutive droughts and squandering the countries limited resources to make profit exacerbates grievances between the countries already fragmented subjects. This research perceives that above mentioned determinants altogether ignited the eruption of the Syrian Civil War.

Keywords: Climate Change, Neoliberalism, Social Metabolism, Syria, The Syrian Civil War.

ÖZET

Bu araştırma Suriye İç Savaşı'nın iklim değişikliği ile ne ölçüde ilintili olduğunu analiz edecektir. Suriye köklü bir tarihe ev sahipliği yapan özel bir ülkedir. Jeopolitik olarak düşünüldüğünde medeniyetler ölçeğinde önemli bir kavşak noktası olarak tanımlanmaktadır. 2011 yılından beri süre gelen Suriye İç Savaşı'nın asıl sebebi üzerindeki tartışmalar bilim insanları arasında devam etmektedir. Birçoğuna göre, savaşın salt nedeni politik faktörlerdir. Diğerlerine göre ise kuraklık ve insan kaynaklı (antropojenik) iklim değişikliği savaşı körükleyen başat etkenlerdir. Başka bir deyişle bu çok katmanlı savaşın asıl nedeni belirsizliğini korumaktadır. Bu araştırma sonucunda elde edilen en temel bulgu Beşşar Esad'ın neoliberal politikalarının başlangıcı ile birlikte, insan kaynaklı iklim değişikliğinin ve art arda gelen kuraklıklar ile kısıtlı doğal kaynakların kâr amaçlı hesapsızca tüketilmesinin, zaten parçalara bölünmüş Suriye toplumu arasındaki hoşnutsuzlukların daha da alevlenmesine sebebiyet verdiğidir. Bu araştırmaya göre, yukarıda bahsedilen etkenler ayrılmaz bir bütün olarak Suriye Savaşı'nın patlak vermesine zemin hazırlamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İklim Değişikliği, Neoliberalizm, Sosyal Metabolizma, Suriye, Suriye İç Savaşı.

INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring of 2011 was a time of hope and caution for the Middle East. Wonderful things seemed possible, yet it was unclear how governments were to respond to empowerment of the populous. In March 2011, there was a large gathering of citizens as well as the organized groups who hoped to take a more active role in the governance of the country. But the Syrian Government did not have a welcoming response for this grassroots political optimism. Instead, the government security forces sought to reimpose the dominance of the Bashar Assad government (Brownlee *et al.* 2013: 29). Just like the Egyptian, Tunisian and the Libyan cases, the main motive behind the Syrian Uprising was the government's authoritarian position as well as societal grievances but also included Syria's ethnically fragmented social fabric. Since the so-called Golden Age of Islam, there were not any major ethnic or sectarian conflict in this geography. However, after the end of the Ottoman sovereignty, the social order collapsed and Islam was divided into various sects, ethnicities and interest groups. These fractious components acting against the backdrop of an authoritarian government, transformed Syria into a battleground (Hourani 2013).

The Syrian Conflict is often perceived as the result of ideological struggles created between the Assad Government (Nusayris) and the Sunni majority. But as I will argue, the factors that created and intensified Syria's civil war also include resource scarcity, environmental damage and climate change in the Levant Region. Throughout the history of the world, water stress, climate change and environmental issues have often resulted in conflicts especially after the invention of agriculture and artificial irrigation, particularly in the Fertile Crescent (McMichael 2017). Agrarian societies tend to thrive on predictable weather conditions and are stressed by dramatic changes in the climatic patterns and are often unable to cope with climate change.

Therefore, while conducting a research about the Syrian experience, it is necessary to consider the political ecology in relationship to the ecological climate. In the Syrian case these two factors played a dynamic and interconnected role in the unfolding of the conflict and the resulting exodus (Runciman 2014). But because of the authoritarian stance of the government, who, instead of building of an amicable dialogue with newly empowered populace, embarked on a campaign of brutal repression and reprisal in a questionable attempt to restore and strengthen their dominance.

In doing this, however, they underestimated the political will of the people and soon found themselves in a precarious position that required reinforcements and the only world power that they could turn to was Russia a Faustian bargain at best. Since 2000, Syria has sought to transform its economy from a command economy into a market economy. Soon after taking power, the Bashar Assad Administration gave up distributing farm subsidies and other forms of social welfare to citizens and began commodifying social resources and accelerated foreign trade activities. In the beginning, this was favourable to the Administration and increased their fortune. But this policy also stressed the country's food supplies and required the country to purchase more of its food. At the same time, because of less of subsidies the farming became less feasible as a means of livelihood and the country saw a lowering of farm production resulting urbanization. With fewer farmers raising food crops, the land was now available for use to grow high value commodities such as cotton and prioritized mercantile enterprises over agricultural development. Increasing wealth, however, was not evenly distributed in society and was primarily used to enhance the personal wealth of the elite and middle classes which paved the way for later social disharmony and class conflict.

In addition to urbanization, some of the peasantry sought remedy through emigration to neighbouring countries during this time. As a result of the increased affluence of the upper classes there was a corresponding rise in consumerism which further underscored the growing class divisions. These trends also increasingly neglected the environmental health of the country and placed greater stress on Syria's natural resources (Akhmedkhodjaeva 2015). The mismanagement of national ecological capital pushed Syria into an environmental crisis (Smil 2017). Despite these problems, Syria is in fact located in a breadbasket region which has been providing many benefits for its residents over the long stretch of time it has been inhabited (Hourani 2013). Situated in the *Fertile Crescent* region, it has also access to the prominent trade routes (including renowned *Silk Road and Spice Road*) and port cities such as Latakia.

Therefore, Syrian residents fostered a long history of vibrant cultural and economic with a strong mercantile culture (Bryce 2014). Its lands are favourably composed of the fusion of three different geographical ingredients: 'the urban area' also described as the land of plain; 'the desert, oasis' and 'the arable land' (Hinnebusch 2001: 14). They have all had a direct and bountiful impact on Syria's destiny from deep prehistory. On the contrary, the severe climate and the lack of essential natural resources such as water have always been a burden on the country's back. The scarcity of resources and the wrong political decisions altogether emboldened rival communities to compete over shrinking supply of Syria's resources.

Unlike our classic conflict paradigm where two strong players face off with each other, the Syrian conflict is characterized by many players both internal and external competing for various prizes with various strategies. (Wolff 2007: 2). Assad's change to a more expansionist economic policy was particularly significant, given the anthropogenic climate change. Instead of stressing the social structure his policies combined with the drastic change in climate, undermined the social structure and put Syria in a road that led to economic inequalities, civil unrest and an ever-growing litany of atrocities. Those atrocities have now made reconciliation an increasingly distant dream (Runciman 2014: 18).

There is a plethora of determinants and variables underneath the emergence of the Syrian Civil War, particularly from the political ecology point of view. Political ecologists who are investigating the Syrian case are strictly polarized as will be discussed below. Apart from the domestic issues and the climatic variables, it is vital to mention the conflict of interests among the international political actors involved in the Syrian crisis. Abundance of natural gas and many other valuable energy resources such as oil has always been an obstacle for establishing stability in the Levant Region (Gleick 2014). Possessing rich oil and natural gas reserves place Syria at the centre of attraction for external threats (Van Dam 2017).

In addition, Syria's past affiliations and alliances with the USSR, Iran and Hezbollah have been posing a threat to the Western World. After the World War II, the USSR and the US began to compete with each other over decades in the context of the Cold War. In 2018, this situation evolved into a set of proxy conflicts between the two superpowers. The current context in Syria could be considered, therefore, as the continuation of the Cold War paradigm. From the gaze of the imperialist actors, the outbreak of the Civil War came out as a perfect excuse to interfere into the Syrian soil. In order to control Syria's prosperous resources, every political actor has invented their own legitimate reason to launch their act of exploitation (Güner & Koç 2017). Metaphorically speaking, Syria has become an arm-wrestling periphery for superpowers in order to satisfy their political aspirations and appropriate Syria's energy resources (Hoffmann 2018). The actors who support the regime side could be identified as the Syrian Arab Army, Hezbollah, YPG, Druzes, Russian Federation, National Defence Forces, Islamic Republic of Iran and China. On the other hand, the major antagonists of the Assad Regime are Turkey, United States, Israel, Free Syrian Army, ISIS, Saudi Arabia, Al Nusra, Jeish al Islam, Jeish Al Fatah, France and United Kingdom (Phillips 2016). The multiplicity of the actors involved in the fighting is an indication of the complexity of the Syrian Civil War.

Overall, the main objective of this research is to highlight the climatic aspects of the Syrian Civil War. There is a danger, however, of exaggerating the climate change as the only, or the most dominant, factor that led to the Syrian Civil War. By putting the climate change phenomenon as the sole cause of the Syrian War, pro-climate induced conflict supporters assert that Syrian conflict emerged due to the climate change and climate induced drought (Femia & Werrel 2012; Femia *et al.* 2015). For others, those kinds of arguments are rudimentary as they often tend to disregard the multiplexed aspects of the conflict (Selby *et al.* 2017). To put it another way, that kind of approach tends to disregard the impact of the Arab Spring Revolts, and the war crimes of the Assad regime (Taştekin 2015: 465).

If the current environmental degradation trend and execution of imprudent societal engineering policies will continue, as a matter of fact, it will collapse Syria's already impaired ecology. It will not only turn the economy upside down but it will also push Syrian nation into oblivion (Fröchlich 2016). As the climate change evolves, resource vulnerabilities and contagious diseases will terminate millions of Arabs and stimulate scattered migrations of the disadvantaged people (Issar & Zohar 2004). By benefitting from quantitative data analysis and through investigating 40 case studies, JSRP's (2013) report asserted that there is an indirect linkage between war and climate change. However, the actors of popular culture prefer to construct a direct analogy between the war and climate change thesis.

As the issue became popular, climate change phenomenon became one of the most prominent subjects in the global agenda. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the concerns about the climate change and possibility of its interrelationship between the violent conflicts have escalated. The culmination of those fears and discontents on the climatic issues led authorities to consider more about this subject. According to *The Economist* magazine's November 2016 issue entitled *Climate Change in the Trump Era*, USA's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the projected abortion from the Nuclear Weapons Treaty increased public concerns and anxieties, since it will have a potential to give damage and pose a threat for the sustainability of our planet. Thus, human induced climate change and environmental annihilation could be considered as major determinants which directly break down the bilateral relationship between men and the nature. Realist politicians such as Donald Trump prefer to ignore the climatic reality for the sake of capitalist development. In 2017 he has also sparked a debate by positioning Rex Tillerson (the chairman of Exxon Mobil) as his former Secretary of State. In order to protect their interests, Trump and many other Western leaders will attempt to terminate any obstacle that collides with their capitalist ambitions.

From the scope of the Marxist Ecology, there is an invisible boundary between humans and the nature which is also named as the *social metabolism* (Foster 2000). The social metabolism generates the life itself through bestowing a habitable ecosystem and making contributions to the well-being of individuals. Therefore, the sustainability of our planet and continuum of a political entity highly depends on living under a healthy social metabolism. When the nature is well preserved, social metabolism rewards the planet earth through prospering its resources (Saito 2017). However, the idea of Anthropogenic growth destroys this metabolism by composing ruptures among men and nature.

Within the perspective above, to address these issues my research question is as follows: to what extent does climate change disrupt the social metabolism in Syria and contribute to the Syrian Civil War? While answering the research question, I will construct my arguments by utilizing from Marxist Ecology and the social metabolism concept. Therefore, this text will rely on academic journal articles on political ecology and governmental reports about the Syrian Case. This research also aims to contribute to the wider theoretical question related to the link between climate change and conflicts. As, changing patterns in the climate, security issues, and the risk of massive migrations have always been redundant themes which puzzled the minds of the Middle East experts for decades. Therefore, climatic troubles currently emerge in the Syrian Arab Republic should be considered as an important reminder for nations which are located in fragile regions. The climatic aspects of the Syrian Conflict will designate the future of the perpetual peace among the nations for being precursor of the prospected resource struggles in the volatile places. To do that, we must avoid from the prejudiced narratives on Syria.

By looking into the Syrian case, one can easily deduce that the efforts to create a neo-liberal state have resulted in environmental depletion which caused ecological rifts and created inequalities between artisans and peasants. The great transformation from socialism to crony capitalism not only lavished countries' important resources but also ignited hostility towards the Assad Regime. In order to materialize his hereditary dictatorship, the first task for Assad was to appropriate the wealth of Syrian economy. For this purpose, he privatized hundreds of companies, agricultural lands and stigmatized many Kurdish and non-Alawite peasants for their historical associations with the regime insurgents. Short after his modern authoritarian success in the political arena, dissatisfaction towards the Assad regime has escalated. Today, these groups are taking their prolonged revenge.

While composing my research, I will utilize above-stated multiplexed aspects of the conflict such as property and class relations in the Syrian soil, the impact of the climate change and its contribution to the Syrian Civil War. Since the earlier days of Bashar Assad's rule there were multiple enemies to obliterate for the sustainability of Baath Regime. Those enemies could be formulated as the radical Sunnis, ex-party members and insurgent Alawites. As it is mentioned previously, Assad cleverly subjugated most of the dissident voices through implementing containment policies. These policies, consequently, impoverished, alienated and dispossessed them from their land. Before mentioning these determinants, it is important to outline the trajectory and the structure of this research.

The primary objective of Chapter I consists in revealing whether the climate change has also an effect on the outbreak of conflicts between the government and the population in general. Chapter I will also provide with the theoretical debates, case studies on climate change-based conflicts and the current situation of Syria as part of literature review. In Chapter II, the root causes of the Syrian civic unrest, the geopolitics and history of modern Syria and the codes of the Baath Regime will be discussed. Furthermore, in Chapter III, the impact of climate change, limits of geography, subsistence and their contribution to the outbreak of Syrian Civil War will be analysed. In Chapter III, this research will also examine the property relations, exclusionist agricultural policies, accumulation of capital through dispossession of the peasantry and reproduction of power under Bashar Assad's dictatorship. The following sections will review and criticize the major narratives on climate change, mass mediated misconceptions and showcase reports published by the governmental front about the issue.

Since, the Syrian crisis has broken out in 2011, we witness a considerable number of documents which have appeared either in the visual/printed media or in the electronic/social one. In order to formulate my research question, I have attended several academic seminars on political ecology and the Syrian Conflict in Barcelona. Then, I have constructed the building blocks of this research. While composing this research, I have combined my empirical observations with the existing theories. Overall, this research deduced that, alongside the anthropogenic actions of the government and the climate change led disasters, dismissing the political dimensions and societal dynamics would also be an erroneous strategy to follow. As, the socio-political determinants receive the lion share on contributing to the outbreak of the Syrian conflict. The inferences of the results will be argued particularly in findings and the conclusion part.

CHAPTER I

1.1 The Literature Review and Theoretical Debates

After posing the research question and making a generic introduction, this research will recapitulate the existing literature. Although climate has always been an enormous source of change in human history, its academic discussion is more recent. The history of civilization is the history of people coping with change either successfully or unsuccessfully. Whether the change is in forms of government, forms of religion, forms of economic systems or in weather systems the status quo is always on the move, spelling disaster for some and opportunity for others. For example:

In human history; climate change...has also been a reason for collapse of civilizations in orgies of killing and widespread savagery. Ability to adapt may make conflict less likely, allow countries to suffer fewer adverse consequences...On the other hand, a mistaken or errant adaptation may actually hasten and exacerbate the conflict. (Lee 2009: 4).

Understanding the impact of climate change is just as essential to comprehending the success and the failure of the civilizations as changes in weaponry and technology. Thanks to the ideal climate and fertile geography of the Nile Valley, Mediterranean and the Mesopotamia regions, communities which dwelled in those geographies were more capable of prospering their civilizations compared to others which are located in unfavourable climactic and/ or terrestrial conditions (Scott 2017: 3-7). Mild climates are usually ideal living spaces for human groups to establish and to maintain their civilizations (Khaldun (1989) [1377]). Regardless of the hospitability of their environment, power holders must continually satisfy the security and well-being of those they lead. With regards to their stewardship of the land in an agrarian society, these needs are fundamentally comprised of *nutrition of the soil, accessibility of resources* including food, water etc. and living in a *habitable setting* (Huntington 2001).

In Syria, the gradual degradation of ecological and economic well-being gave birth to increasing competitions in the face of dwindling resources including water, crops and fertile lands to obtain supremacy between the rival communities (Harari 2011:77). Alongside with physical struggles, changing weather patterns and scarcity of resources forced long established communities to leave their homelands but also to turn against one another and against their government. This pattern has been studied in the other communities as well (Parker 2013). The case of Huns could be given as an example: The climate change and struggles with the Chinese Empire forced Huns to migrate from their motherland Asia into the heart of Europe. (Bury 2000). Short after their migration, Huns combated with the European nomadic clans.

This situation spawned the Barbarian Invasions of the ancient world which undermined the hegemony of the once mighty Roman Empire (Craughwell 2008). For many scholars, this ground-breaking event constitutes an ideal template for the prototypical climate-based quarrels and conflicts among human groups. But this is not an unanimously held view. Others have argued that climate change is an irrelevant variable and it did not factor into the outbreak of the Barbarian Invasions. The power appropriation and conflict thesis proponents have given power obsession and stark competition among the nomadic clans as the primary elements these intergroup conflicts:

Intergroup resource conflict no longer solely concerned access to the utilization of natural resources, even though arable and pasture land, water and raw materials, ...it also concerned the direct acquisition of resources produced by others, through looting and tribute, and sometimes the acquisition of the others themselves as slaves, who would produce the resources under their owners' direct control. (Gat 2006: 227).

By splitting up The Roman Empire into two pieces Barbarian Invasions not only unearthed new settlements but also initiated a brand-new age through reshaping the map of the ancient world. The impact of the climate change was an important factor for it knocked the bottom out the strongest empire of the world, indicating that social and political interaction mediates, but not diminish the impact of climate change in large scale social change (Harper 2017). Similar to the Barbarian Invasions, climatic episodes of El Nino also gave rise to periodic global climate change, environmental complications and conflicts. In particular, those climatic incidents vanished Indus Valley's ancient Harappan Civilization (McMichael 2017: 135).

In the Ottoman case, *Celali Rebellions* of the late 16th century and mid 17th century also caused by climatic incidents and environmental degradation. In the early modern Ottoman Empire, those long-lasting peasant revolts brought economic instability and climatic shifts during the Little Ice Age gave birth to heavy droughts and famines (White 2011). Celali Rebellions had also disrupted the unity of the Ottoman imperial system. Throughout the history of civilizations famines and floods have been the major environmental troubles which are posing threat to our living spaces (Braudel 1993). Those climatic episodes could also be described as the natural anomalies which were beyond human control. Today, climatic catastrophes are mostly caused by anthropogenic, or human made reasons. According to the Marxist analysis of history, the capitalist property relations that creates these catastrophes and hinders individuals from maintaining an organic relationship with the nature.

The primary objective of the modern market economy under capitalism is to impound, control and increase capital while externalizing costs to the greatest degree possible, which often translates to disregarding ecological issues. Those realities often cast capitalists and environmentalists as archenemies of each other. (Magdoff & Foster 2011: 37-39). In a more democratically managed society, accessibility and allocation of resources might be based on social utility and stability more than on pure profit motivations (Harvey 2005). Climate change also arises indirectly from capitalism through industrial activity increases in greenhouse gas emission, economic output, increased food supply and increase population, the only salvation to obliterate the risks of climate change and environmental depletion is to act in an environment friendly manner. (Kallis & March 2015). To do this, the authors have coined the idea of *degrowth* by targeting the limitless expansionist ideals of the capitalist actors:

The intriguing idea behind degrowth is that we do not need to 'develop' to get enough, because we already have, and in a sense always had, enough. What we need is to struggle for the institutions that will allow us to live with enough. (Kallis & March 2015: 366-367).

The authors have also projected the industrial development will lead humanity one step forward and in the long run it will pull us two steps back. In case the current capitalist system continues to exist, there will be extremely serious ecological troubles. As the former civilizations of the ancient world had vanished, what makes the contemporary one (ours) as holy or perpetual (Giddens 2009). For the scientific world, the long-awaited ecological revolution is compulsory to cope with the current environmental troubles. It could be done through applying unconventional methods:

Since most of history's giant trees have already been cut down, a new Ark will have to be constructed out of the materials that a desperate humanity finds at hand in insurgent communities, pirate technologies, bootlegged media, rebel science, and forgotten utopias. (Davis 2018: 202).

Climate change in the age of Anthropocene is also considered a puzzle which should be examined in detailed. In ideal terms the fundamental objective of the social sciences should be labouring for finding concrete solutions to materialize the ecological revolution and impose the doctrines for the long-awaited humanism. Unfortunately, many neo-liberal social scientists prefer to legitimize the anti-ecological actions of the capitalist actors by serving for the benefit of the hegemonic powers. They also tend to disguise the other ecological realities by prioritizing economic development.

Throughout their entire corpus, Foster and Saito (2017) strictly criticized those social scientists for their callousness about the environmental affairs as they are discounting the actual value of the nature. The authors have also argued that the Marxist Ecology as the only answer to mother earth's ecological problems. Throughout his entire life, Karl Marx endeavoured to underpin the importance of nature for human being. He elucidated that living with the nature in a harmonious manner is a necessity for individuals in order to sustain their lives and to carry on our metabolic relations with their nature.

Unfortunately, under the capitalist system, there is no room for individuals to sustain the metabolic conditions with the nature (Marx 1858). Due to, it constitutes an inorganic relationship between human existence and their natural environments. Under capitalism there is "a separation between unity of living and a separation which is completely posited only in relation of wage labour and capital" (Marx 1867: 489). As it is stated before, there is an invisible boundary between humans and the nature named *the social metabolism* that produces the life itself (Foster 2000: 5). If humans continue to mistreat the nature in a malignant manner this metabolism will be terminated. On the other hand, Harvey (2003) gathers up all above-mentioned arguments under the title of *New Imperialism*.

By referring to *The Accumulation of Capital* thesis (Luxemburg (1968) [1913]), Harvey attempted to draw the anatomy of expansionist nature of capitalism, its continuous destruction of the nature and its 'hostile' dialogue with the *proletariat*. Due to their disposition an imperialist actor will destroy the forest in which he cannot sell its shade (Harvey 2013). If we adapt this situation into the macro level and if every individual enacts this termination action in a synchronized way then it will result in the annihilation of the ecological metabolism. As it is mentioned above, rather than focusing on actual environmental troubles many social scientists advocate *Anthropogenic growth* and prefer to propagate human centrist doctrines over ecological realities (Foster 2000). While explicating the current ecological debates, the author mostly targeted Fukuyama's (1992) seminal thesis on modern liberalism which promotes the superiority of neo-liberalism over human wellbeing. For the author, Fukuyama's arguments are no different than Kissinger (2015)'s *The New World Order* and Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993) doctrines. Foster (2010) has also endeavoured to unearth the hidden environmental realities which were successfully veiled by the communist states. Therefore, the authors objectivity is also unquestionable as he severely criticized the anti-ecological strategies of the USSR and China which were also known as *leap forward*.

Under the communist rule, the mismanagement of natural resources and depredation of nature created profound rifts which had suspended the continuous dialogue between the men and the nature in the USSR. Rather than focusing on expansionist desires and become obsessed with the sustainable development, mankind needs to maintain an everlasting dialogue with nature (Foster 2017). Otherwise, there will be catastrophes such as *Chernobyl and Fukushima Disasters*. Apart from the above-mentioned theoretical debates, the United Nations gatherings could be denominated as the one and only conventional solution for those problems. Apparently, environment friendly nations play a decisive role on labouring to obliterate the existing ecological threats. Since 1972 the participants of the gatherings contemplating on providing some possible practical solutions against the planet's environmental problems:

Roughly forty years ago, a small group of scientists and policy makers began to realize that humanity was on a dramatic collision course, as the rapidly growing world economy and population threatened to collide with the planets finite resources and fragile ecosystems. (Sachs 2015: 393).

The main idea behind the United Nations gatherings is to bring sustainable development and implement eco-friendly environmental policies and to raise public awareness for obliterating the ecological losses of our planet. In today's world, the participants of the UN gatherings finally deduced that renewable energy was the infinite answer to our finite problems on our planet's future. If humans do not react in an ecology friendly way against the climate change reality and continue to produce greenhouse emissions we will intentionally diminish our current civilization via the *Anthropogenic* devices and by means of greedy capitalist instruments (Clark 2015). Overall, the relationship between human induced climate change and conflict is an indirect one and the environmental issues constitute a bigger threat than the violent conflicts (Darwall 2013: 757-760).

As there are numerous variables that exacerbate climate induced conflicts, above all, long-term climate change, luxuriance of the crops, political climate and scarcity of the substantial resources are the most prevalent variables (Lee 2009: 4). On the other hand, there are many other contributory factors that are also known as *the intervening variables*. These variables are mostly comprised of societal grievances, political fragmentations and economic inequalities (Lee 2009). As Lee's book was written prior to Syrian Civil War, it indicated that the agrarian societies are more prone to get involved into violent combats. Various case studies were chosen as similar examples to describe the climate induced civil wars.

Other researches similarly suggested that out of 38 case studies, nearly two thirds of surveyed countries were directly subjected to climate change induced conflicts (Reuveny 2007). Parameters such as *overpopulation, land degradation, food scarcity, etc.* are the other major contributory elements for the act of displacements and climate-based quarrels. Out of 38 case studies, the most prominent ones were the Rwandan and Bangladeshi cases:

Since climate change is still not fully manifested, one can gain empirical insights by surveying problems involving arable land, freshwater, forests, and weather-related natural disasters. These four forces are chosen because they are important for likely cause problems in them (Reuveny 2007: 660).

In its true essence, the actual dynamics of the Syrian Conflict were slightly different than the above-mentioned case studies. Apart from resource scarcity variable, anthropogenic climate change, irrational agricultural policies and migration were the unique determinants of the Syrian Case (Fröchlich 2016). Geopolitics and natural resources were also decisive determinants on the fate of political entities as they have reshaped the Syrian terrain. Comparatively speaking, Kenyan case could be given as a remarkable example for carrying compatible patterns with the Syrian Conflict. In both cases, anthropogenic climate change, mass migrations are all interdependent determinants and were the underlying reasons of resource scarcity, competition on resource sharing and climate induced violent conflicts (CDC & IISD 2009: 9-10):

In Kenya, migration adds extra pressure on resources in destination areas-urban as well as rural- and increases the number of conflict actors, potentially complicating conflict and stressing otherwise effective micro-level natural resource mechanisms. When migration leads to cross state borders, state security forces may be drawn into conflicts. (CDC & IISD 2009: 11).

Despite the climatic episodes, overpopulation was another important determinant which gave rise to crop failures and ecological turmoil. The Kenyan and Syrian governments were unsuccessful for implementing adequate welfare provision. To put it another way, they have failed to secure the very basic needs of their citizens. This situation caused, massive migrations and left many arable lands forsaken. Correspondingly, ecology, demography and climate are the interdependent ingredients for the establishment of a habitable setting (Seitz 2016). In order to be perpetual, the main obligation of a power holder is to make their domain prosperous (Jackson & Sørensen 2013). Along with the Syrian conflict environmental struggles are also prevalent in other parts of the Middle Eastern region (Selby 2003). Especially, the Israeli-Palestinian war is an ideal template for climatic and hydraulic skirmishes.

For decades there has been a violent rivalry going on between Palestinians and Israelis which is based on natural resource sharing (Zeitoun 2008). *Prima facie*, the establishment of the Separation Wall was a valid excuse for Israeli self-protection due to the Hamas assaults. In the actual context Israeli government masterminded several strategies to obtain the hydraulic supremacy against its rivals. They have confiscated most of the fertile lands by enclosing strategic aqueducts and important water resources of the country. Therefore, the appropriation of natural resources and establishing a hydro-hegemony in the region are the indispensable causes of the prolonging Palestinian war. Those self-protection measures of Israel were also described as a fabricated excuse to accomplish their annihilation project of the Palestinian agriculture. On the other hand, Israeli side has the technological advantage over Palestinians: "The Israeli side, through technology and decree, already has complete control over Palestinian abstractions of the Western Aquifer." (Zeitoun 2009: 96). By looking to this Israeli case, individuals should take a lesson by perceiving it as an important warning. As the planet warms, the continuum of this situation will spawn more violent conflicts which are based on appropriation of water and this situation will soon become contagious all around the globe (Chellaney 2013). In short, water has always been the one and only element for the survival of our species and for the maintenance of biodiversity.

In the earlier centuries, the changing patterns of climate and the fluxional availability of water resources made the freshwater as a precious sacred resource for the continuity of human civilizations (Fagan 2011). Thanks to the technological developments, human beings have taken the control of the nature and water by navigating them to enrich the agriculture. With the help of the aqueducts, individuals have successfully transformed deserts into arid lands (Clark 1987). The emergence of overpopulation and climate change have also created some environmental insecurities. In the near future, water will become as the new oil for being a valuable natural resource. On the contrary, reversing the negative effects of Anthropogenic climate change into a positive circumstance is still achievable through making several investments to our planets *ecological capital* and by living in an ecology friendly manner (Adams 2009). In the 21st century, planet earth could not cope with the increasing anomalies as billions of people impair and contaminate the natural cycle through consuming earth's very valuable resources. Carbon dioxide and coal gas emissions by human activities are actually exacerbating the Green House effect which is a product of solar radiation encapsulated in the atmosphere and is not reflected towards space.

In addition to these vexatious events, temperature is rising and ice starts to meltdown then big water streams which function as air conditioner will not be able to travel around the world. Consequently, temperature will rise, the sea level will also follow the same trend and afterwards abnormal weather conditions will start to hit big cities around the world. This situation will materialize massive resource conflicts (Gore 2004). Furthermore, this research will elucidate the substantial documentaries that carry capital importance about human-induced climate change, greedy capitalism and the Syrian Civil War. Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2004), *An Inconvenient Truth Sequel* (2017), *Before the Flood* (2015) and *Years of Living Dangerously Project* (2014-2018) were the mainstream media's inputs about the subject. Above all Al Gore preferred to disregard the political economic aspects of the civil war by degrading the only reason of the Syrian War as the climate change:

The dictator there is a bad guy. It is a multi-sided civil war, and all of the rest. But this drought is the worst in at least 900 years. As far back the records go. It is unprecedented! And of course, since then the country has been plunged into horrific civil war. The next generation, if they live in a world of floods and storms, rising seas, droughts and refugees by the millions escaping unliveable conditions, destabilizing countries around the world... Couldn't you hear what the scientists were saying? (Gore 2017).

Syrian Arab Republic is of course having water scarcity and human security connected troubles but climate change sometimes could be a positive instrument for peace making among the populous. Although, anthropogenic climate change and devastating consequences of consecutive droughts have destroyed the fertile geography of Syria, climate change has some positive connotations: "Climate change is also likely to undermine the capacity of states to provide the opportunities and services that help people to sustain direct their livelihoods, and which help to maintain and build peace." (Barnett & Adger 2007: 651).

In this case, climatic and political issues correlate although they may seem divergent and disregarding political factors will be an erroneous strategy to follow. Furthermore, oversimplified paradigms such as Gore's can add momentum to fallacies and result in misunderstandings. While analysing the Syrian Case, this research will utilize from geopolitics and the history of Modern Syria. In order to decrypt the complexity of the Syrian Conflict, I will mention the totalitarian practices of the Baath Regime, Syria's former affiliations with the imperial powers by elucidating country's geopolitics. Finally, to illuminate these uncharted aspects, next chapter will cover the political dimensions of the Syrian conflict and elaborate the geopolitics of Syrian Arab Republic.

CHAPTER II

Chapter II will analyse the geopolitics of Syria, Syria's democracy adventure and history of Arab Israeli Wars by providing with the codes of the Baath Regime and will refer to its role to the outbreak of the Syrian War. For centuries, Syria has hosted hundreds of civilizations from different races and belief systems with a rich and dynamic balance of agrarian and mercantile activities (Ball 1998). For, its uniqueness and distinctive geopolitical location, the Syrian terrain used to be called as *Bilad al-Sham (the land of Sham)* by its former rulers. During the heyday of the Ottoman Empire (*Pax Ottomana*), *Bilad al-Sham* region encapsulated the modern Syria, Lebanon, former Antioch, Palestine, Cyprus and Jordan (Ortaylı 2018). In addition to these statements, being located in the Mesopotamia, Syria has been an important attraction centre for human groups from different geographies. In terms of agriculture, it is a significant place for civilizations where you can find fertile and prosperous lands. (Batatu 1999).

2.1 Geopolitics of Syria

Geographically speaking, Syria is composed of the fusion of different geographical ingredients that has fragmented the country's geopolitical integrity:

Geography has shaped Syria's historical fate. Its location at a strategic land bridge between three continents and amidst desert and steppe exposed the country to movements of diverse peoples and periodic nomadic invasions which left behind an extraordinary sociocultural heterogeneity. (Hinnebusch 2001: 14).

Although geography brings various advantages, it also unearths some problems as well. Since the earliest days of the humanity, individuals have been competing over domination of its valuable resources. In other words, *Bilad al-Sham* is always an attractive property for neighboring powers and, its geopolitical location is frequently a mixed blessing for Syria's inhabitants. (Mikhail 2017). For centuries, imperial powers have transformed this region into Western dependent nation states to appropriate petroleum and other valuable resources. Therefore, the country does not have a long or stable history of self-sovereignty. At the zenith of the Roman Empire, Syria used to be a center for commerce, culture and agriculture. Moreover, when the country is fed by adequate irrigation and being securitized by a strong sovereign, Syria has always remained as a stronghold in the region: "Syria's agricultural based economy prospered only when a strong state provided security and irrigation." (Hamide 1959: 398). On the contrary, for the lack of a unifying river system and an exposed position, making Syria the prize of rival empires, obstructed emergence of a durable state.

Aside from its powerhouse position for centuries, the country had been ruled by military empires, including the once powerful Ottoman Empire. Speaking in economical terms, under the Ottoman rule, all land was personally possessed by the Sultan. Therefore, it was impossible for Syrian citizens to establish an autonomous ruling class. Neither the ruling elite nor the aristocracy were eligible to stake out a claim on the ownership of the Syrian soil (İnalçık 2018). Thus, there was no room left for strong pluralist tradition. (Emrence 2011). Immediately after the decline of the Ottoman Empire, Syrian economy subjugated to the French rule (McHugo 2014).

In general, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire reshaped the destiny of the modern Syria by transforming it into a French dominion. The fall of the Ottomans has also ended *the age of empires* (1876-1914) and opened a new period called as *the age of extremes*. (1914-1991) (Hobsbawm, 1989). This new era began when the imperialist countries started to denominate the Arabian Peninsula as the Middle East. Therefore, the term Middle East is a manufactured word or an artificial linguistic instrument, invented by the post-imperialist nations in order to control this prosperous region according to their own interests:

The middle of what? East of where? The region's very name is based on a European view of the world, and it is a European view of the region that shaped it. The Europeans used ink to draw lines on maps: they were lines that did not exist in reality and created some of the most artificial borders the world has seen. An attempt is now being made to redraw them in blood. (Marshall 2015: 144).

By defeating the Ottoman Empire along with the Axis powers, allied powers such as Britain, France and Russia commenced to excogitate on sharing the Arabian lands and resources among themselves (Barr 2011). From the imperialist gaze, Syria, Iraq, and Jerusalem were perceived as substantial peripheries for their geopolitical importance. For this reason, they have signed the *Sykes-Picot Treaty* in 1916 in order to exploit these lands and to accomplish their objectives. (Rogan 2015). Thanks to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Russians withdrew themselves from the agreement. This action upset the power balances between the British and French. As a consequence, *Bilad al Sham* was given into the hands of the French Empire. Right before the conclusion of the WWI, Westerners promised tribal leaders' stability and autonomy over local matters in the Syrian soil. However, they have betrayed their promises and converted the area into a French dominion. Under the hegemony of the French imperial system, the income gap between the poor and the rich had increased (Sahner, 2014). This situation gave birth to dependent capitalism and composed massive inequalities between oligarchy and Syrian people.

As a result of these events, Syrian people began to feel betrayed by their Western allies. This disappointment turned into an outrage when Iraq and Jordan were received their independence (Barr 2011). However, the post imperialist formula was crystal clear: British and French imperialists attempted to form artificial nation states on a land which hosts highly fragmented human groups. The target of this formation was to exacerbate the conflicts among different sects. In the long run, this destabilization process catalysed the capitalist activities of these imperialist actors. The establishment of the nation states has also facilitated the spread of Arab Nationalism against the imperialism and intensified antagonism towards the Western nations. To recapitulate, Western nations have been masterminding various strategies in order to exploit the Middle Eastern resources by implementing *the divide and rule (or conquer)* strategy for decades (Berdine 2018).

Nowadays, in order to confiscate and usurp the valuable resources of the region, these actors are maintaining their act of exploitation indirectly under the pretext of *War on Terror* (Fisk, 2005). Therefore, the current situation in Syria could be best identified as the resurrection of the same imperialist formula: “a long history of colonialism, state formation and dynamic geopolitical relations from the cold war to the Arab-Israeli conflict, have shaped the contemporary regional order and political forms taking shape within it” (Hoffmann 2018: 46). The fertile oil and gas reserves of Syria and the intersecting interests among the Western actors have also spawned the current unrest in the Syrian Arab Republic. Because of that, most of the Western combatants in the War in Syria are gas exporting nations trying to establish an energy corridor between Middle East and Europe through investing in pipeline projects (Orenstein & Romer 2015). On the other hand, as an important oil and gas exporter country, none of the local Syrians have profited from the country’s rich resources:

Assad government uses it as a weapon to kill opposing Syrians namely as fuel for military equipment... IS uses it to finance its terrorist operations... Kurdish force use oil to establish their authority and military operations...The opposition groups do not have any oil resources through they buy it from the Islamic State and the Assad regime, for both military and civilian purposes. (Almohamad & Dittmann, 2016: 1-2)

Apparently, local people became the major victims of this stack and plundering which are enacted by the different combatants of the Syrian conflict. At a macro level, each actor is trying to receive its share from Syria’s resources. Under the umbrella of capitalism, there is no way to preserve the ecological wellbeing and establish stability in the Syrian Arab Republic. In the past, Syrian Arab Republic tried to cope with the above-mentioned actors. The next section will recapitulate Syria’s recent history and its struggles with the imperialism.

2.2 The Quest for Independence and the Idea of Nationalism in Syria

Thanks to the ideas of the French Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment, the seeds of democracy and the egalitarian doctrines were planted into individuals' minds, regardless of time and geography (Wood 2012). The French Revolution did not only undermine the age of tyranny but also presented the idea of equal citizenship into the field of political thought. Primarily, it has initiated a brand-new age with the idealism of Montesquieu, Rousseau and Voltaire. Although the revolution awarded countless of benefits to the mankind since the 19th century and with the outbreak of the WWI, the nationalist doctrines, brought by the French Revolutionaries were transformed into a propaganda tool against the dissidents of the status quo. During that time, the *status quo* was the Ottoman Empire, and the dissidents were the subjects of the prospected nation states.

But the concept of nationalism transformed into a gruesome monster in the 20th century. *The Holocaust* and the *Bosnian Genocide* are just two of the seminal atrocities which were enacted under the name of nationalism. While nationalism can be a powerful productive force for a nation, it can just as easily devolve into "excessive, narrow, or jingoist patriotism; chauvinism." (Guralnik et al 1977). By looking into the near history of Syria, one can easily depict that Syrian nationalism could be differentiated from the above-mentioned nationalisms in terms of being a liberation instrument (Gelvin 1998). As, Syrians preferred to use nationalist doctrines as a nation building device or a liberation instrument against the Ottoman Rule and the French Mandate.

Before the outbreak of the WWI, the Syrians were generally delighted to be regarded as Ottomans and were enjoying to carry the Ottoman citizenship as their primary identity (Baktiaya 2017). However, this situation didn't last for a long time. During the last years of the Ottoman Empire, hostility towards the Arab and non-Muslim subjects including *the Greeks*, *Serbs* and *the Armenians* accelerated due to the rapid loss of the Balkan lands and Russian lands for the everlasting rebellions conducted by the separationist subjects of the empire (McMeekin 2015). As a response to these rebellions, the idea of Turkism and foundations of Turkish nationalism was established by a *Committee of Union and Progress* officer named Ziya Gökalp. The initial endeavour of *Turkism* was to purify Turkish culture, language from the Arabic, Persian and the Ottoman borrowings (Ahmad 2014). At the beginning, Ottomans adopted the idea of Turkism as a salvation method, but their patriotic actions had gradually reduced the strong devotion of non-Turkish loyalists of the empire.

For the non-Turkish subjects, Turkism was perceived as a social engineering project which was only accessible for the Ottoman Turks and there was no room left for the Christians and Arabs in this newly established ideology. As a response to Turkism, Arab people started to create their own nationalism by imitating Turkish nationalist doctrines (Masters 2013). The foundations of the Syrian nationalism were also laid in this period:

Arab nationalism (*al-Qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya*) called for the creation of a pan-Arab identity grounded in the cultural and intellectual achievements of Arabic speakers. It owed its inspiration to a group of nineteenth-century writers in Tunisia, Egypt and the Levant, which harnessed the power of the printing press to disseminate novel ideas about citizenship, religion, technology and progress. (Sahner 2014: 97).

Alongside the absurdities of the Ottoman Nationalism, the inception of Arab Nationalism has also brought its endemic problems. At the beginning, Syrian power holders and opinion makers such as Michel Aflaq used nationalist doctrines as a nation building device against the imperial powers. Unfortunately, Arab Nationalist ideals transformed into radical Islamism and xenophobia in modern times. For decades, Syria has also received its share by becoming a victim of militarism. To put it in another way, Syrians are grievously paying the price of their former mistakes which were enacted by their former rulers. Depending on this situation, we can clearly deduce that, rather than being a nationalist, it is important to follow the path of the rationality, knowledge and humanism. Next section will describe the politics of modern Syria.

2.3 The Politics of Modern Syria

During 26 years of French rule, the people of Syria gradually replaced their Ottoman with new and European habits. While making several socio-economic investments, the main ambition of colonialists was to exploit Syria's valuable resources. Therefore, living under an imperialist rule could be considered as a bilateral concept. Although it brought advantages, there were also many disadvantages. Accepting the social contract of imperialists could be best described as signing a *Faustian* bargain (Taştekin 2015).

At the beginning, Syrians enjoyed to adapt themselves into Western traditions, and institutionalize in manner of their patrons. Many Syrian opinion makers perceived cultural learnings of the French as an important opportunity to materialize their long-awaited *Syrian Renaissance*. Unfortunately, only the non-Muslim minorities, members of the oligarchy and the privileged were eligible to have access the means of production and selected to receive a Western education.

Throughout the entire imperial history of France, French imperialists attempted to vindicate their colonization acts (1890-1945) all around the globe by framing their exploitation acts as a humanitarian aid to their 'underdeveloped counterparts' (Rosenblum 1988). In order to disguise their operations, they named those atrocious actions as *the civilizing mission*. The civilizing mission could be defined as follows:

the French believed that civilization required that they improve their subjects' standard of living through the rational development, or what the French called those assimilation actions as '*mise en valeur*' of these colonies' natural and human resources. (Conklin 1997: 6).

They had improved the quality of life in the region by introducing Western mode of education to the privileged, implemented land reforms, made infrastructural improvements and initiated modern agricultural policies. The main features of the French imperialist success over oriental counterparts was as follows: "French empire was uniquely connected to the French national identity, its brilliance, civilizational energy, special geographical, social and historical development" (Said 1994: 171). In brief, the most dramatic transformation occurred in the country's economic life. As the Syrian soil was in a state chaos, French imperialists immediately declared themselves as the saviours of the Syrian country. French imperialists have also rewarded the Syrian country with many cultural breakthroughs ranging from architecture to agriculture within their 26 years of rule.

France saw every complication as an opportunity to pursue their capitalist goals. With its pros and cons, French accomplished their so called '*civilising mission*' in the Syrian soil. Therefore, considerable amount of people is still thankful to the French for their socio-cultural and economic contributions (Neep 2012). The main ingredients of the French imperialism were also composed of nepotism towards the oligarchy and hostility towards the peasantry, and there was a stiff antagonism against the Sunni majority as well (Thompson 2000: 73). In the long run, this unequal treatment spawned a new kind of class conflict. It has also exacerbated the hostility towards the Western colonialists. Within a short period of time, tensions grew higher and Syrians have overthrown their Western patrons. The most notable figures among these revolutionaries were Michel Aflaq and Salah Bitar (Van Dam 2011). These revolutionaries had even received their education in French institutions including Sorbonne. On the contrary, since the medieval times, the country has been ruled by non-Syrian states and foreign empires. Thus, the culture of sovereignty and independence had never been established (Seale 1965). Thanks to the advancements in the printed press, the idea of sovereignty and solidarity burgeoned among Syrian citizens.

In the aftermath of the WWII, France lost its former strength and Syrian revolutionaries took this opportunity to receive their independence from their Western patrons. However, it often takes time to relieve the social scars of the post-imperial traumas. Every post imperial nation has to deal with their own contextual problems (Young 2016). The domestic problems of Syria were comprised of dealing with the requirements of the age of modernity. At the initial phases of Syrian independence, this new born republic was very optimistic about the future. However, they were unprepared for the 20th century. Decades of French subjugation pushed Syria into backwardness. As a newly established sovereign state, it suffered from instability and political turbulences. For this reason, Syrian politicians were also unaware of the new kinds of perils that were awaiting their country. Since 1950's Syria has been endeavouring to attune themselves into the requirements of the modern age. Short after concluding their everlasting struggle with imperialism, the Syrian Arab Republic had finally acquired a voice in the international arena.

2.4 The Arab-Israeli War

Since the earliest days of recorded history conflicts in the Middle Eastern region are a constant (Shlaim 1995). In the 20th century this situation was further complicated with the establishment of the Israel state. (Halliday 2005). Among many Arab countries, The Syrian Arab Republic was one of the many objectors for the establishment of a Jewish state. Due to Syrians perceived the invention of state of Israel as an artificial neo-imperialist Western project. The installation of a Western backed neighbour in this fragile region posed a great threat for them and the future of their country (Ma'oz 1995). Right after its foundation in 1948, Arab states immediately established an alliance and declared war against Israel. After combating with each other for a very long time they were clearly defeated by their archenemy. From a comparative perspective, one can easily establish an analogy between *Arab-Israeli Wars* and *The Crusades* of the Mediaeval Age.

For centuries rulers from different regions have been staking out a claim to dominate the same holy land in different timeframes. Over years, this perpetual struggle has also devastated the region by constituting, ethno-religious fragmentations, and political instability. In the midst of the war, US and the USSR have also showed their presence against the Muslim pact by wrecking their unity. As a result, the Middle East transformed into a stage of bloodshed. In the 20th century, Syria became as one of the most ill fortunated victims of Arab-Israeli conflict.

The clear defeat in 1948 deeply impaired its democracy journey by reinstating the age of chaos and disorder (Herzog 1982). In other words, Syrian democracy received a collateral damage by entering a period of political stagnation. From the year 1949 onwards, the Syrian Arab Republic continued to decline by losing its parliamentary system and political integrity. This situation also facilitated new complications and resurrected the pro-nationalist values and they have lost their democracy principles by entering into an age of military coups. Militarism also deteriorated the national economy and political life and established a culture of fear. Militarism can be defined as “the subordination of civil society to military values and the subordination of civilian control of the military for military control of the civilian.” (Evans & Newnham 1998: 325). In military regimes there is no room for civil rights and *vox populi*. Overall, Baath officials were completely aware of the negative consequences of their aggressive action. The legacy of this absolutist army rule was one of the many ingredients that contributed to the outbreak of *Syrian Civil War* in 2011.

In other words, Syrian generals had deliberately undertaken a risky business by performing the military coup of March 1949. Since then, Syria has begun to be labelled as an undemocratic state and stereotyped as an aggressive regime by the IR actors. Years after the Baathist coup, Syrian officers made substantial modifications in their political life by assembling with Gamal Abdel Nasser’s *United Arab Republic*. Apparently, Egypt’s Nasser was then perceived as an idealist revolutionary whose ideas sprawled across the Middle East Region very quickly (Jankowski 2002). Similar to Hafez Assad, Nasser was also a fierce supporter of *Pan Arabism* and *anti-Imperialism*. However, the lack of institutionalization of the Nasserist regime caused a discrepancy between Syria and United Arab Republic. After conflicting with Israel in the *6 Days War*, Syria had lost their famous Golan Heights in 1967. The dramatic loss of this stronghold, pushed Baath regime to become much more aggressive towards Israel and USA.

Moreover, Hafez Assad was a man for all seasons; he was also well-known for being a student of Machiavellian doctrine and an expert manipulator of his constituency. He used anti-Israeli feelings of constituency as a weapon and established a Populist Authoritarian (PA) regime. By knitting his followers into important position, he has established a secular *Alawite-Nusayri* stronghold in a Sunni majority terrain. In order to grasp the true essence of the Assadist dictatorship elucidating the codes of the regime is mandatory. To do that, next section will decipher the codes of Baath Regime and discuss its post authoritarian formula in a detailed way.

2.5 Codes of The Baath Regime & The Rise of Hafez Assad

Briefly, Baathist revolution was an aggressive response against imperialism and the oligarchy. Before transforming into a militarist political entity, The Baath Party used to be a democratic party founded by a Syrian Christian scholar named Michel Aflaq and a Sunni politician named Salah Bitar in 1947. The founding ideals of the party were comprised of, *Pan-Arabism, Secularism and Socialism* (Van Dam 2011). After the failure of parliamentary practices in the early 1940s, The Baath Party received a tremendous support from the military wing. During the era of the military coups, the party assembled with the *Socialist Party* and changed its name into *Arab Socialist Baath Party*. In 1963, the Baath party seized the power and witnessed endless disputes among its founders. In addition, there is a strong similarity between Baathist military officers of 1963 and *The Committee of Union and Progress* revolutionaries of 1913 in terms of having the mutual mindset. Both of them have witnessed same inner conflicts in different time slots.

Eventually, the endless quarrels among government officials polarized the country by throwing the Syrian nation into turmoil. It also splintered the population into two extreme ideological camps as the *nationalists* and *progressivists* (Seale 1988). In the year 1970 a Baathist military officer named General Hafez al-Assad took an opportunity to depose the other power-holder fellows by making a counter coup against them and took over the leadership. As a non-Sunni ruler in a Sunni majority country, Assad consolidated his sovereignty and received the support of the masses by distributing substantial political concessions and socio-economic privileges to Sunnis. He also placed well-educated Sunnis into important positions in the ruling party. Nevertheless, the most privileged classes were still the Alawites and Christians.

In addition to this, the series of internal and external conflicts such as *Yom Kippur War* of 1973 and *Hama Massacre* of 1982 strengthened Assad's hand in order to materialize his absolutist regime project. The Assadist domination could also be described as the transformation from Ba'athism to Assadism (Taştekin 2015). In the actual context, Hafez Assad created a *Bonapartist State* which is composed of surveillance, heavy bureaucracy, clientelist relations and the military (Hinnebusch 2015). Over his lengthy rule, he enhanced the regime institutions, bureaucracy and established an authoritarian regime under the umbrella of the Assad family (Perthes 1995). He also formed a well-equipped intelligence service named *Mukhabarat*. With the establishment of the *Mukhabarat*, Assad upgraded his indigenous authoritarianism into a totalitarian model which was similar to Stalin's USSR. While seizing power, he brought Orwellian literature into the real context.

Whatever ideology you support and wherever you come from, being a ruler in a cosmopolitan country like Syria is a challenging task. Similar with the infamous character named Big Brother (Orwell 1993 [1949]), Assad was a successful demagogue in using linguistic instruments as a manipulation weapon. For instance, at the initial phases of his coup, he denominated his act of aggression as '*The Correction Movement*' then, he received the public consent by exhibiting his absurdities as vital societal arrangements. With the *Correction Movement*, Hafez Assad burgeoned his unquestionable power by destroying any obstacle that came into his way. He was also very successful in curbing the political desires of the minorities through satisfying their need for political representation.

Baath Party has also received a tremendous support from the agrarian class for its benevolence towards the Syrian peasantry. In the long run, Assad entrenched his powerful position by becoming the *Big Brother* of The Syrian Arab Republic. In parallel with these ideas, there is a direct consequence of basing the structural differences in belief systems, any kind of opposing group in the status quo overall gave rise to civil war (Baudrillard 2013). For this reason, whence Assad captured the armed forces and the surveillance instruments, Sunni groups immediately declared Assad as their major enemy (Pierret 2013). In contrast, for the Alawites, Assad regime represented the rise of the Alawite power and the guardian of secular values against the Salafi ideology (Goldsmith 2015). The rise of Hafez Assad also represented their one and only secular achievement over radical Islam. In the long run, these ideological discrepancies became one of the most influential reason for the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War.

For this reason, despite the climatic factors, the political side of the Syrian Civil War equation was the forerunner of insurgencies of the regime and the radical Sunni organisations (Pargeter 2013). These entities could be best defined as transnational, global terrorist organisations such as al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood. In order to damage the Baath Regime, these die-hard followers of the radical Islam were involved in horrendous atrocities including mass killings of Christians and innocent Alawites (Lefevre 2013). The logic behind those atrocities was no different than the *Inquisitions* and *the witchcrafts* of the Medieval Age. Moreover, those actions could be best labelled as *the horrors and absurdities of the religion*. (Schopenhauer (1970) [1851]). For the Muslim Brotherhood, the only way to obliterate the Assad Regime was to depose Hafez Assad by creating an Islamic Leviathan Monster (Nasr 2001). In order to seek attention, they exacerbated the hidden Salafi emotions of the radical Sunnis through making propagandas against the Baath Regime.

The last straw that exceeded the regime's temper was the failed assassination attempt of Hafez Assad. This event played a dramatic role, in shifting the Syrian political life into a different direction. After that failed assassination attempt, Baath regime labelled *Muslim Brotherhood* organisation as terrorists. In February 1982, Assad sent 12.000 soldiers to Hama which used to be the headquarter of the *Muslim Brotherhood*. As a result, government officials massacred more than 30.000 people in the area. Unfortunately, thousands of civilians including children were also slaughtered by the Assad Regime. It was the first time that Assad regime showed its iron fist towards their opponents (Lefevre 2013). This massacre has also opened deep chasms in the Syrian social contract. Overall, Hama Massacre was an ideal excuse for Assad to transform his socialist movement into a totalitarian nightmare. After 1982, Assad immediately reiterated his power by converting his public friendly regime into an empire of fear. In the global arena, he started to be labelled as a stereotypical Middle Eastern dictator by the major IR actors. Most importantly, it was the first time in postcolonial Syria's history that the buttresses of the regime began to be shaken by ethno-religious factors. (Sahner 2014).

As the ethnic disparities polarize individuals from different sects, they begin to collide with each other for appropriating the wealth and socio-political privileges in the long run: "group conflicts are rational in the sense that groups have incompatible goals and compete for scarce resource." (Hewstone & Greenland 2000: 138). Despite the inner quarrels, imperial policies of the Western countries were also addressed as the embedded reason of the turmoil which is happening in the Arab World (Marshall 2016). Therefore, the Arab Spring and its relationship with Syria could easily be defined as the Syrian Winter (Glass 2015: 36).

Throughout the history of upheavals, enacting a revolution against the *status quo* has had either positive or negative connotations. As the revolts could either flourish a nation by rejuvenating the society or it could exterminate a country into societal stagnation or despair. Therefore, establishing stability after a successful revolution is a compelling and a progressive task (Doyle 1989). By transforming into a totalitarian regime, The Baath Revolution shares similar patterns with the French Revolution in terms of derailing from its founding ideals. After 2000, under Bashar Assad administration Syria has been transformed into a modern authoritarian regime. Apart from political factors, climatic shifts, recurrent droughts in the region and human induced environmental destruction have extinguished the agricultural wealth of the country. The next chapter will elucidate the ecological aspects of Syrian War by examining the impact of climate change and agricultural losses on the emergence of the conflict.

CHAPTER III

Since his ascension to power, Bashar Assad's major ambition was to modernize Syria's traditional national economy to make it more competitive in the global market economy. To accomplish these goals, he reversed long-standing agrarian policies, cutting subsidies and other supports, which had the unfortunate result of intensifying the income gap between middle class and the working class. This rapid change in the traditional social fabric ignited hostility not only to his regime but also within the society. In accordance with these statements, this chapter will discuss the political ecology of Syria and climatic aspects of Syrian War.

3.1 Climate, Subsistence and Their Contribution to the Making of Syrian War

During the time of his reign, Hafez Assad upgraded the Syrian agriculture by bringing on substantial land reforms. As a person who comes from a rural background, he obliterated the rule of oligarchy through the nationalization of the economy and the improvement of the quality of life (Ziadeh 2010). In this process, he also distributed subsidiaries and bestowed welfare to the peasants. Compared to his successor Bashar, Hafez Assad's policies may seem more egalitarian (Taştekin, 2015). However, the Baath regime under Bashar Assad preferred to ignore agricultural development for the sake of neoliberal advancement. His expansionist policies have impaired the country's ecological capital and consumed its energy resources in a rapacious manner.

Furthermore, prior to the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, the governmental change in policies combined with the climate change led to the destruction of the agrarian class and accelerated urbanization: "From 2006 up to the start of the protests in 2011, an estimated 1.5 million residents migrated to cities, mostly to Damascus, Daraa, Homs and Aleppo." (Akhmedkhodjaeva: 5). Without the provision of any public assistance, people who were forced to abandon their lands also faced very high obstacles as they tried to construct new livelihoods in urban areas. The outlying areas in most large cities in Syria became shanty towns with large numbers of rural refugees in overcrowded and substandard housing. The government in general ignored these new communities and abandon them to their own needs, their own sustenance and control. The time the war started, the nation building ideals and efforts on agrarian development remained an incomplete project and had yet to produce the positive results hoped for. Overall, Assad rejuvenated the oligarchic mind-set of brutal repression as the automatic response to any attempt toward an egalitarian input into the national discussion.

As an avid neo-liberal and an autocratic leader, he attempted to resurrect the Industrial Revolution's values in contemporary Syria. In the age of Anthropocene, his antipathy toward ecological concerns placed him as a powerful threat to the well-being of the Syria's ecology. Apart from human induced troubles, the profound impact of the climate change on the Syrian agriculture is undeniable. Right before the civil war, the Syrian land was comprised of 20% arid, 32% fertile, 3% forests with the remaining parts desert (Akhmedkhodjaeva 2015: 2). After facing several climatic hardships, the portion of arable lands available to traditional farmers was sharply reduced. By utilizing from the *CIA Factbook* and *UNDP*, the Drought in Syria (2015) text referred to the proportion of the Gross Domestic Product of the country was 16.4% from the agriculture, 22.7%, from the other services accounting for more than half of GDP. Years before the conflict, Syria's energy sales did not account for any significant portion of its GDP. Unfortunately, almost two thirds of the arable lands available in 2010 had become unusable as of 2015. Moreover, it was the interplay of political, economic, agricultural and climatic events that have engendered the Syrian conflict:

The crisis... was caused less by short-term meteorological contingencies than by the interplay of three longer-terms structural factors: extreme water resource degradation, deepening rural poverty, underpinning these, specific features of Syria's politics and political economy. (Selby 2018: 2).

In brief, the combined effect of the Bashar Assad's legacy was to rupture completely the ecological, social and political landscapes. As a result, he broke the back of any hope for national unity and reconciliation. By valuing capitalism and the promise of increased development over ecological policy, Assad prioritized free market measures and private investment along with promoting tourism and service industry (Fröhlich 2016: 41). Sharply differing from Hafez Assad's agrarian-friendly policies, Bashar Assad's administration turned the economic life of Syria toward a very different set of values. (Butter 2015). However, it was not a new thing. Since the earlier days of the Industrial Revolution, the actions of capitalist actors have damaged landscapes and the nature. Poverty and ecological rifts were also in their wake (Clark 2015). Our era is characterized by the human domination over the nature. The main ambition of Bashar Assad, the bourgeoisie creed and the industrial renaissance could be best described as the destruction of the specific boundaries between natural environment and societal well-being. In order to grasp the essence of "*Climate Change and The Syrian Conflict*" question, next section will discuss the political ecology and the multidimensional aspects of the Syrian Conflict.

3.2 Political Ecology of Syria and the Multidimensional Aspects of Syrian Conflict

The actual cause of the Syrian Conflict is a matter of contention among experts. For example, in the Al Jazeera narrative, the sole cause of the phenomenon is chiefly attributed to political discontents, energy relations among the IR actors and domestic ethnic skirmishes (Al Jazeera 2017). In contrast, political ecologists tend to stress ecological determinants giving political factors a lesser position. As there are multitude of narratives about the chronology and causes of the conflict, this section will attempt to recapitulate the ecological root causes and the multidimensional aspects of Syrian Conflict by compiling them under three subtitles.

3.2.1 Transformation of the Nature and the Reproduction of Power

As it is stated before, transition of the nature through anthropogenic actions in Syria and act of dispossession are the main troubles which ignite societal discontents and facilitate ecological rifts. The ecological rift theory could also be best defined as the destruction of the social metabolism:

Ecological Rift: The rift between humanity and nature. The world is really one indivisible whole. The rift that threatens today to tear apart and destroy that whole is a product of artificial divisions within humanity, alienating us from the material-natural conditions of our existence and from succeeding generations. (Foster 2010: 3).

By delving into the Syrian case, one can easily deduce that the efforts to create a neo-liberal Syrian state resulted in environmental depletion, caused ecological rifts and created inequalities between bourgeoisie and the rural class. On the contrary, from the perspective of a capitalist actor, Bashar Assad's neo-liberal policies may seem modernist and revisionist. As a Western educated man, Bashar Assad favoured the adaptation of the regime by following a western neoliberal agenda and denominated his reforms as *Damascus Spring*. Decades ago, he presented himself as a freedom fighter who must give an end to Baath's populist and bureaucratic authoritarianism and terminate its harsh security apparatus through using soft power. In that era, there was a decisive turn towards the modern market economy led by the private and foreign investors. Currently, this sharp transition to neoliberalism is deciphered as a showcase project as it was imposed to the public by coercion. By transforming his father's totalitarian nightmare into a modern authoritarian regime, Bashar Assad consolidated his sovereignty through silencing dissident voices and eliminating the old guards of the regime. The next section will discuss the property relations, changes in agriculture and Assad's capitalist policies in depth.

3.2.2 Property Relations and Radical Changes in Agriculture under Bashar Assad

The Syrian government has also failed to implement adequate welfare provision services. In a nutshell, Assad's market-oriented reforms were intended to put the Regime's finances on a sustainable foundation through cutting subsidies, dispossessing the Kurdish and Sunni peasants by enabling an environment for private enterprise. All of these exclusionist policies benefitted some small elite at the top. On the contrary, large number of people who are living especially in the ethnically contested villages were completely abandoned (Matar, 2016). Bashar Assad has also redistributed wealth through reinforcing Sunni artisans and knitting potential middle-class enemies to his regime in order to receive their support. By doing this, he cultivated popular legitimacy and consent. In the meantime, his accumulation of capital strategies has exacerbated interreligious quarrels and clientelism. It has also crippled the national economy and terminated the Syrian social contract by paralyzing the concept of democracy. This great transformation from socialism to crony capitalism not only lavished countries important resources but also ignited hostility towards the Baath Regime.

In 2011, previous years of mistreatment forced regime dissidents to unite against the status quo and encouraged them to take their prolonged revenge. For this reason, Syrian subsistence farmers cannot be labelled as rebels or terrorists. It was the deranged political economic regulations, perfunctory agrarian development strategies and the emergence of heavy capitalism that impoverished the society and gave birth to Syrian Civil War. This maltreatment also gave rise to massive migrations and catalysed the alienation process of labour. In total, Bashar Assad could not even manage to secure the very basic needs of his citizens. Over decades, his social engineering project left many arable lands forsaken and majority of the Syrian peasants have become landless. Correspondingly, denominating the Syrian War as an agrarian conflict would be fallacious:

Pressure on access to land and water can certainly cause local skirmishes, but a genuine war requires that hostile forces be organised and armed and that depends more on the influence of bad governments, closed economies, and militant ideologies than on the sheer availability of land and water." (Pinker 2012: 453-454).

In brief, the political economy and property relations of Syria are being controlled and shaped by the decisions of the capitalist IR actors and their conflict of interests among each other (Çakmak & Ustaoglu 2015). By inquiring into the whole literature, we can easily deduce that people who are in charge are the radical Islamists, populist politicians such as Trump, Putin and others who intend to bring instability to the Middle Eastern region.

3.2.3 Environmental Implications and Current Ecological Challenges

The impact on the Syrian ecology of years of conflict is hard to quantify, and no statistical analysis can accurately convey the scale of the environmental devastation that the war has caused. According to Chatham House's (2015) report, the Syrian economy has been destroyed by conflict to an extent that confronts comprehensible numerical assessment. The conflict has also averted all aspects of ecological development. For example, the agriculture has assumed a dominant position in overall production as other sectors have been devastated, but farm output has also been severely affected. In addition, most of the agricultural crops and tradable products such as cotton and olive were produced in the contested borderlands and northern governates of Hasakah, Raqqah and Aleppo. Under years of dispossession and climate change the production of these goods has plummeted: "displacement and climate change could rise competition over resources, solidify ethnic fragmentations, augment distrust and could impoverish individuals by collapsing their economies" (Reuveny 2007: 659). The text also stated that those factors have a potential to ignite agricultural complications such as livestock diseases, food shortages and societal fragmentations. Apart from these, oil drilling has also been a substantial problem which poses a threat to the ecological welfare.

Most of Syria's agricultural land and the water resources were also exposed to heavy contamination by the industrial waste and the environmental degradation associates with oil and gas extraction, none of the Syrian officials gave priority to take any preventive measures. In particular, oil drilling and primitive fuel transportation without concerning the ecological health have seriously damaged the environmental wellbeing of the country. In addition to this, airstrikes against the IS controlled oil refineries have also boosted the level of pollution. Today, it still continues to pose a threat towards the social metabolism:

These refineries emit smoke and fumes into the air, leading to further pollution and causing the formation of a black cloud over the Eastern region of Syria, which will have disastrous results for the areas residents, water resources, and agricultural land, leading to their inevitable desertion. One alarming concern is the high concentration of oil, heavy metals, benzene in the waters of River Euphrates. (Almohamad & Dittmann 2016: 13).

In the past, the revenues received from the fossil fuel extraction were covertly transferred into the pockets of the Assad Regime under the pretext of allocating budget for the military operations. During the reign of Hafez Assad, governmental front articulated that, the revenues come from the oil extraction were being used as donations for purchasing military supply to compete with Israel. Today, it is downgrading the ecological capital of the country.

3.3 Academic Debates over Climate Change & the Syrian Civil War

Through the agency of the mass media instruments, the Syrian conflict has become one of the most prominent and controversial subjects in the global agenda due to its intricate structure. In the last few years, just as artistic and popular representations of climate change and associated problems, academic debates over it have also gained traction. In order to reach concrete findings, this section will analyse the current academic debates on climate change and Syrian Civil War, and the mass media misconceptions over the subject.

3.3.1 Mass Mediated Misconceptions and the Syrian Climate-Conflict Story

Since the inception of the Syrian conflict, the scientific analysis tended to focus solely on ecological factors and ignore political determinants. Rather than contemplating on the authentic causes about the issue, even the most credible environmentalist such as Al Gore and Ban Ki Moon have preferred to rely on the climate change induced civil war assumption in order to raise attention (Selby 2018). As the subject drew some interest, international political figures including Barack Obama, Prince Charles, John Kerry and various Middle Eastern leaders have also reinforced these perceptions by reiterating the dominance of the ecological causes as the dominant factor in the conflict (Selby *et al.* 2017: 232). This narrative, however has given way to more humanitarian and moral narrative after the assumption of Assad's chemical weapons use. Thus, many other climatologists also avoided to face off with the political realities by oversimplifying the Syrian Case as a "Climate War" (Welzer 2012).

This proposition has also rapidly applauded by many other opinion makers, tabloid newspapers and the international philanthropic organisations. To a certain extent, there is a distant analogy between the diffusion process of the moral panics and the dissemination process of the Syria-climate conflict story for they both spread rapidly and well interfused. Consequently, these analyses tended to attribute the conflict entirely to ecological causes (Femia & Werrell 2012: 1-2). However, while setting the agenda, they unintentionally concealed the multithreaded political and economic aspects of the Syrian conflict. In a nutshell, the empirical findings about the selected study are rather controversial and there is no general agreement about the climatic causes of the Syrian Conflict. The previously mentioned narratives have also missed the political ecological aspects and conflict of interests between the IR actors. To illuminate these misunderstandings, the next section will provide with scientific evidence by addressing the grand narratives about the subject.

3.3.2 Scientific Standpoints on Climate Change and the Syrian Case Equation

The first concrete scientific work about the issue was the above-mentioned briefer which was published by Femia and Werrell in 2012. The briefer serviced the climate change variable as a dystopian reality and appointed it as a humongous obstacle to overcome for the continuity of Syria. It has also suggested Syrian policy-makers to embellish their country through constructing the building blocks of a resilient free and conflict-proof state:

Stopping the violence and enhancing the likelihood of legitimate government will require an intelligent assessment of the needs and demands of the opposition movement, including those involving access to and management of vital natural resources, such as food, water and arable land... will be critical for ensuring a resilient free and conflict-proof nation (Femia & Werrell 2012: 3).

This idea was instantly applauded by many scholars and indicated as a reliable standpoint. In the subsequent years the authors published another report which encapsulated up to date evidence about the Syrian crisis. To reify their former thesis on Syrian climate change, alongside with the Syrian case other Arab Spring case studies including Egypt were also analysed under the title of *state fragility and climate vulnerability* (Werrell *et al.* 2015: 38). The report endeavoured to add climatic representations and political speculations into the same basket. However, this abstract application was erroneous for missing out the substantial realities. Both works of Femia and Werrell were criticized for being rudimentary as they occasionally lack the scientific evidence (Selby *et al.* 2017).

Despite the climate vulnerability and conflict issues, the impact of the anthropogenic climate change was often bypassed. For Selby (2018), anthropogenic climate change was one of the major triggering elements of the Syrian conflict. He mostly indicated the rapid urbanization, corrupted institutions and expansionist liberal policies as the building blocks of his anthropogenic climate change thesis. In addition to this, plantation of illegal drills, bribery, nepotism, crony capitalism and over usage of the water resources for cotton production and dam construction have also destroyed the wellbeing of the agrarian class by depleting the countries' natural capital just before the emergence of the conflict (De Châtel 2014: 9-10). It was neither the instant climate change, nor the consecutive droughts of the 2000's which gave a ground for the warfare. Academic evidence also suggested that Syrian war was caused by multiple factors including, droughts, extreme water resource degradation, deepening rural poverty, the nationwide collapse of Syria's agriculturally-oriented rentier model of state building and development combined with Hasakah's distinctive character as an ethnically contested borderland-frontier zone.

To recapitulate, prior to the 2006/2008 and 2008/2009 droughts, Syrian agricultural production was plummeted due to atrocious political economic arrangements and anti-agrarian reforms of the Bashar Assad administration. Over the course of these consecutive droughts in the Fertile Crescent, Syria's neighbours were confronted with the same problems. (Kelley et al 2015). Grotesquely, out of many neighbouring countries, Syria was the only nation which has witnessed a violent conflict. It could be easily deduced that Syria's environmental troubles were mainly caused by anthropogenic actions (Selby 2018). Furthermore, the abolishment of governmental subsidies and the rising oil prices were shown as the other significant examples which terminated the societal contract between agrarian class and the Assad government.

The results of the semi-structured interviews which were conducted with the Syrian peasants have also showed that the price crisis in these areas remarkably downgraded life standards: "An economy that had been based on rents from the oil sector started to give way to demographic pressures, a decrease in oil production, depletion of oil reserves and economic stagnation" (Fröhlich 2016: 42). Long before the civil war, the constant increase in the fuel costs has also skyrocketed the food and water prices. In the long run, they have all together triggered massive migrations to the urban areas. The deepening of rural poverty, rising of agricultural unemployment rates in the non-drought years and falling of trends in the agrarian rentier development were the other crucial factors behind this act of dispossession (Selby 2018: 4-9).

Actually, the migration numbers rose dramatically and more than half of the Syrians became the victims of unemployment and unequal treatment. Millions of people are seeking to receive their independence and welfare by migrating to different parts of the world (Chatty 2018). According to Chatty (2018), the country was transformed into a *refugee state*. If this unbridled humanitarian crisis continues and the migration numbers will escalate, it will have catastrophic consequences for the future of global security. Last but not least, the international charity organisations fell short with their goals on solving Syria's problems. Further assistance by the IR actors is needed to solve the Syrian refugee predicament. On the contrary, over the course of these debates, the governmental front responded to climate change and conflict allegations by publishing official reports about the current challenges of the Syrian agriculture. The next section will mention the showcase reports which were being distributed by the Syrian Ministry of Agriculture.

3.3.3 Showcase Reports of the Syrian Government

Overall, rather than focusing on human induced climatic problems, Syrian Ministry of Agriculture preferred to portray Bashar Assad as an avid environmentalist by intentionally skipping to mention erroneous practices of the Syrian government. The reports have emphasized Assad's adherence to the Millennium Development Goals by presenting his administrations very few ecology friendly practices as important breakthroughs. Grotesquely, they have willingly overlooked Baath Party's every anti-ecological atrocity. The usage of ecological friendly transportation vehicles and green fuels were often given as major examples for hindering Bashar Assad's act of ecological impairment:

Syria jumped a huge step in path towards sustainable development. A plan to improve air quality is being implemented, starting with importing gas-powered busses, encouraging the use of clean and environmental-friendly public transportation, improving the fuel quality and encouraging the use of green diesel. (MSEA 2012: 3).

In addition to these arguments, the crisis in the global food and the energy market were presented as the senior obstacles for Syria's green development. Secondly, the American intervention in Iraq and the condition of Golan Heights were given as the other root causes of political instability and ecological deterioration in the region. The report also excoriated Israel for occupying the Golan Heights and extinguishing their very valuable resources. Besides, the costly prices of the advanced technological instruments and Western embargos to means of sustainable energy were provided as another substantial issue that needs be overcome. (MSEA 2012: 7). The language of the report was amicable towards the UNDP and the United Nations.

However, the speech tone becomes inhospitable while mentioning the names of US and Israel. The fundamental reason of this situation derives from the bellicose approach of the Westerners towards the Assad rule. Syrian officials mostly overreacted to this approach by condemning US' partisan methods and Israel's exploitative practices through indicating them as a threat for the peacemaking process in the Middle East (MSEA 2012: 5). The evidence from the study also suggests that the difficulties of the Syria could be diminished by receiving an economic aid from the international actors. In short, Assad Government circuitously disregarded the actual variables such as *domestic political grievances, economic, social and religious dynamics*. That is why this dissertation diagnosed the underlying reasons of the Syrian conflict as a multi-dimensional one. To explicate these multiplexed aspects, the next chapter will provide with the findings of this research by mediating the arguments over the Syrian Case.

3.4 Concluding Remarks & Findings

This dissertation is not the first to address the climatic dimensions of the Syrian Civil War. However, the authorities who are investigating the Syrian case are strictly polarized. When individuals take a look into the entire corpus on the Syrian Case there is a conspicuous discrepancy. Rather than relying upon evidence coming from scientific fields, individuals generally become circumscribed by semi-academic or unscientific references such as accrediting the tabloid newspaper articles and governmental reports of the Assad Administration. In order to solve the Syrian question accurately, this chapter will discuss the concluding remarks and the findings of the research by attempting to mediate them.

In a nutshell, Syria as a cultural melting pot which has hosted numerous civilizations and empires including Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman. When the country is fed with adequate irrigation and securitized by a strong sovereign, it becomes a stronghold in the Middle Eastern Region. On the contrary, the fluxional availability of the water resources in Syria made the freshwater as a precious resource to compete for. This situation makes Syria vulnerable against the inauspicious climatic shifts. Speaking in mercantile terms, under the protection of strong military empires including Mamelukes and Ottoman it was impossible for Syrian artisans to establish an autonomous economy. For centuries there has been no room left for a strong pluralist tradition. (İnalçık 2017). After completing their struggles against imperialism Syria received its independence. Thereafter, power of the Baath Regime shifted to the hands of the Assad family. For the prosperity of his domain, Hafez Assad enriched his country by upgrading Syrian peasantry. For decades, he clinched his autonomy through making an agricultural revolution.

However, since 2000 and onwards Bashar Assad decided to subordinate the peasantry and agriculture through promoting neo-liberal development. This situation made agrarian class defenceless against the changing weather events. The rapid expansion of neoliberalism has also ignited economic inequality and intensified hostility among the social strata. As it is mentioned before, Assad's anti-ecological policies vandalised Syria's ecological capital and invalidated the Syrian social contract. These imprudent socio-economic regulations and socio engineering policies have also splintered agrarian Syria's already fragmented societal mosaic. Moreover, the interrelation between climate change, drought and civil war are complicated. It does seem that drought combined with multiple determinants to exacerbate social unrest have started years before the conflict began.

For years, Syria is gradually drying up and will only get drier. This will have a substantial impact on the trajectory of the conflict and the way in which the country might eventually recover. Syrian Arab Republic has also become the victim of continuous food insecurity without an adequate and expensive overall of agriculture and water management. The other major factors that ignited the outbreak of the civil war was the dispossession of the Kurdish and Sunni peasants from their lands, mismanagement of resources and oppression of the Assad Regime towards the dissidents:

The sources of Syria's conflict are myriad and complex: institutional and economic decay under Assad family rule, deep religious and ethnic fissures, inequality and discrimination as well as the wider dynamics in the Middle East. Many of these factors have been heightened by the drought and accompanying migrations as social tensions in cities boiled over. (AP 2015: 9)

Correspondingly, the underlying reason behind the Syrian Civil War was the combination of ecological destruction, energy relations among the foreign states and the accumulation of domestic political dissatisfactions (Hoffmann 2018). The emergence of the conflict has brought instability and carnage into the Middle East. In parallel with Bashar Assad's capitalist policies, most of the ecological perils and havoc are derived from the endless desire of people toward capital accumulation and capitalism itself. Moreover, this situation is also described as '*the accumulation of catastrophe*' (Foster 2011). The great transition to capitalism also engendered enormous changes in the social metabolism:

The value of 'man', the modern subject, as autonomous agent acting consciously on his history and settling social conflicts by dominating nature. We shall see how this break between nature and society... how this forceful, even violent, return of the history of the Earth into world history creates a new human condition and requires us to reintegrate nature and the Earth system at the heart of our understanding of history, our conception of freedom and our practice of democracy. (Bonneui & Fresco 2017: 19-20)

In the Syrian case, the human activity attendant to the industrial revolution doctrines and the advent of neoliberalism began to wreak havoc on the ecological infrastructure through the rapid depletion of resources, creation of large-scale pollution, along with the commoditization of labour and the accumulation of massive wealth in private hands created a massive economic inequality along with rapid degradation of the physical ecology (Boggs 2012). In order to augment material wealth and obtain power, capitalist actors have been exploiting mutual living spaces of each other and destroying the very limited resources of our planet. The position of the capitalist is always precarious so bourgeoisie must continuously compete with each other to preserve their position. In laissez-faire capitalism, money is the only measure of success.

To make profit and consolidate his sovereignty, Assad annihilated the social metabolism of Syria. As it was stated before, the notion of social metabolism is strictly interlinked with the conflicts, struggles, organic and material relations which are also denominated as metabolic relations between humans and material conditions they live in (Foster 2000). Besides the climate change, the air pollution and soil exhaustion are the other contributory elements that lead to the termination process of a political entity (Montgomery 2007). Therefore, the everlasting conflict and humanitarian crisis in Syria are strongly entangled with the age of Anthropocene and conflict of interests among the capitalist actors.

After discussing the importance of political ecology and climate change, environmental health is a prominent determinant which should be kept in mind while contemplating about political affairs (Kelley *et al.*: 2017). To be able to build a civilization, human kind benefits from an anomaly which is a relatively stable temperature and climate. However, human induced climate change and environmental manipulation in order to exploit natural resources have created the above-mentioned ecological disasters. Today, people are willingly breaching '*the redlines of the ecology*' through usurping their natural environments (Gorz 2016). Individuals are also expected to be passive spectators to our unfolding history, while our unrepresentative leaders and capitalist actors are destroying our planet's resources. The culmination of environmental fears and anxieties on the climatic issues led authorities to consider more about this subject:

Humans were always far better at inventing tools than using them wisely. It is easier to manipulate a river by building a dam across it than to predict all the complex consequences this will have for the wider ecological system.... In the past, we have gained the power to manipulate the world around us and to reshape the entire planet, but because we didn't understand the complexity of the global ecology, the changes we made inadvertently disrupted the entire ecological system and now we face an ecological collapse (Harari 2018: 7).

Nevertheless, switching the negative effects of Anthropogenic climate change into a positive condition is still possible. It could be done through enacting a socialist ecological revolution by ending up humanity's dependency on fossil fuels and making contributions to humanitarian well-being (Davis 2018). In egalitarian societies accessibility to and sharing mutual resources is much easier than the capitalist ones. Before passing to the conclusion part, the main finding of this research is that the recent literature on the topic could be considered as more comprehensive and essence capturing than the former works.

CONCLUSION

After evaluating our case study which is the Syrian Case, we can clearly state that climatic and political issues partially correlate, although they seem to be disparate. This resides in the fact that human civilization constituting a kind of convention, highly depends of the possibilities given by nature. That is why a clear distinction between social and natural issues might be considered as impossible because nature gives us the soil for developing our civilisation and if it stops functioning, we cannot survive. The human induced environmental deterioration is another major determinant which directly impairs the bilateral relationship between man and nature. In order to comprehend the relationship between the climate change and The Syrian Civil War, we should consider the importance of geopolitics, anthropogenic actions and political decisions.

By placing the anthropogenic climate change and the Marxist Ecology at the core of my research, I have sought to construct a correlation between the climate change and the Syrian Civil War. As it was mentioned in the introduction part, the secondary objective of this research was to find out whether the climate change has also an impact on the emergence of conflicts among different ethnic groups or tensions between governments and citizens in general. As a result, I have concluded that the Syrian case must be taken as a lesson for the nations located in fragile geographies. Syrian politicians and policy makers did not take the necessary precautions that would have prevented the country's suffering from climatic disasters and external political threats. In that perspective, the continuous depletion of nature and the lavishing of natural resources have caused the above-mentioned ecologic rifts.

However, the current calamitous condition of ecology is not a new development. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the world has witnessed a grand transformation of man's relationship with nature. Although the capitalism has brought many benefits for human development, it has also brought disastrous consequences to the social and ecological fabric of the communities. As capitalism promotes perpetual expansion, most of the 'civilized' industrial nations received their prosperity upon exploiting the earth's resources (Ophuls 2011). As we move from agriculture to industrialism, we have also been alienated from nature. The current ecological impairment in Syria has shown that the capitalism has become a force needs to be balanced. To limit the irreversible consequences or the ecological rifts, Western nations should assist the developing countries to make a sensible transition to sustainable energy (Bridge *et al* 2018). It is a mandatory mission for them to compensate their former mistakes.

Individuals should always keep in mind that the welfare of individuals and the sustainability of the international state system highly depends on nature; including a habitable climate for the citizens of the planet (Penna 2015). Today Syria has been brought to brink of oblivion by the confluence of unwise policies, intransigent leaders, climate change and the unhelpful meddling of foreign actors. Unfortunately, the capitalist system still perceives the nature as an inexhaustible reservoir of resources. Rather than pursuing a friendly relationship with the nature, our species have been destroying it for centuries.

Capitalist actors such as multinational corporations have been trying to camouflage their self-servicing acts and representing themselves as environment friendly in the mainstream media for decades. By making small but well-publicized investments into sustainable development projects in order to receive the consent of the masses for their atrocious actions. Likewise, through publishing showcase reports and disguising its intention the Syrian Ministry of Agriculture has also applied these same techniques. Concisely, under capitalist system individuals are destined to be dehumanized and nature detained to be exploited past its limits to the point of its collapse. As the operative *raison d'état* is to accumulate money by manipulating the natural environments, public opinion and externalising costs. It is the time for humanity to take a moral action for saving the future of our planet. Under an uncontrolled economy and under the capitalist system individuals are being dehumanized and the nature will be plasticized.

To prevent ecological issues and alleviate the aftermath of the environmental catastrophes, living in a harmonious manner with the ecology is vital. During the reign of Hafez Assad, the national economy and the Syrian agriculture were sustained by the governmental subsidiaries. Since the sprout of the heavy capitalism, the fate of the Syrian ecology was pushed into the hands of ambiguity. In order to legitimize his failures and raise awareness, Bashar Assad tried to embed his administration's ecological destruction through publishing governmental reports. From an external perspective, the discourse of these pseudo-scientific reports could appear environment friendly. As they advocated the sustainable growth, usage of clean energy through eco-friendly public transportation by endorsing the positive implications of using green diesel over coal. The UN Syria Drought Assessment Reports also prefer to reduce the complexities of the conflict through promoting oversimplified climate and environmental security conflict scenarios. Accordingly, it is important to mention that, people who believe in absurdities will commit atrocities.

What has been said so far might be associated with the fact that both sides have been involved in the same hypocrisy for decades. In the Syrian case, dismissing administrative failures of Baath Regime will strengthen Bashar Assad's hand to embed his every political mistake. It will also give a ground for him to exculpate his former mistakes: "Assad regime seizes every opportunity to blame external factors for its own failings and inability to reform" (De Châtel 2014: 12). Therefore, relying on these climate conflict fallacies could deceive our perception by hiding the actual realities of the Syrian Civil War. In this regard, environmental and political determinants are all interconnected. Apart from the environmental factors, political dissatisfactions and conflict of interests among the multitude of actors have boosted disturbances in the Syrian soil.

Therefore, Syrian Civil War is generally perceived as a multidimensional war. Unlike the quibbles of the Syrian governmental reports, the depletion of the nature and squandering the countries valuable resources for cotton production and many other services generated the alienation process of the proletariat and opened ecological rifts. To maintain prosperity and reinforce the living standards of their subjects, policy makers should guarantee the socio-economic wellbeing and pursue an amicable interaction with the ecology through making agricultural investments. In this regard, the Syrian Civil War mainly emerged from political tensions, economic failures and atrocities of the Baath Regime. Overall, the correlation between the climate change and social conflicts is an indirect one. Many research should be driven about this problematic and the actual causes of the Syrian case still remain controversial.

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