The Invisible Community: A Socio-Cultural and Legal Profile of the Dom (Qurbet/Nawar) in Aleppo and Afrin Before 2010

Introduction: Situating Syria's Dom on the Eve of Conflict

On the eve of the Syrian uprising in March 2011, the Dom people stood as one of the nation's most marginalized, under-documented, and socially invisible minorities. This report seeks to construct a detailed ethnographic, social, and legal baseline of the Dom communities in the northern Syrian governorate of Aleppo, with a specific focus on the urban center of Aleppo city and the predominantly Kurdish district of Afrin, during the period immediately preceding the conflict. Establishing this pre-2010 portrait is essential for understanding the subsequent trajectory of a community that would become, in the words of one observer, Syria's "invisible refugees". While the Syrian state under both Hafez and Bashar al-Assad cultivated a narrative of being a protector of minorities, this protection was selective and did not extend to deeply stigmatized groups like the Dom, who remained on the lowest rungs of the social and economic ladder.[2] Their existence was characterized by a profound precarity, born from centuries of social ostracism, economic exclusion, and a fragile legal status that often bordered on statelessness.

Researching a historically non-literate community with a strong oral tradition and a deep-seated, well-founded mistrust of outsiders and state authorities presents significant methodological challenges.[4] The historical record is sparse, and official state documents, including censuses, are either silent on their existence or unreliable. The literature is further complicated by the pervasive use of exonyms—names given by outsiders—which are often pejorative and applied imprecisely to various peripatetic groups. Compounding this is the community's own highly developed survival strategy of "invisibility," a practice of concealing their Dom identity to navigate a hostile social environment. This report, therefore, relies on a critical synthesis of the available ethnographic and linguistic fieldwork, particularly from the late 2000s, alongside a broader analysis of Syrian social history and legal frameworks.

This report is structured in four parts. Part I establishes the identity, demographics, and social organization of the Dom, deconstructing the complex terminology used to describe them and

examining their settlement patterns in Aleppo and the enigmatic question of their presence in Afrin. Part II details their economic life and social status, exploring the link between their traditional occupations and their profound marginalization. Part III analyzes their unique linguistic and cultural heritage, with a particular focus on the Domari language as spoken in Aleppo. Finally, Part IV investigates their precarious legal standing within the Syrian state, analyzing the mechanisms that perpetuated their exclusion and risk of statelessness. The central argument of this report is that the Dom of northern Syria entered the tumultuous post-2010 era from a position of extreme structural vulnerability. The Syrian conflict did not create their plight but rather catastrophically amplified a state of marginalization that had defined their existence for generations.

Part I: Identity, Demographics, and Social Organization

Understanding the Dom people of northern Syria before 2010 requires a foundational clarification of their identity, a careful assessment of their demographic footprint, and an examination of their internal social structures. This process is complicated by a confusing array of names, a lack of official data, and the community's own strategies of concealment. While Aleppo city was a major, visible center of Dom life, their presence in the nearby district of Afrin remains a puzzle that speaks volumes about their place in the wider society.

Deconstructing Terminology: Dom, Qurbāṭ, and Nawar

The nomenclature surrounding the Dom is a complex web of self-appellations (endonyms) and external labels (exonyms), the latter often carrying heavy pejorative weight. Disambiguating these terms is the first critical step in identifying the community accurately. The community's own name for itself is **Dom**.[1] This endonym is cognate with the Indian caste name
Ḍom and is believed to derive from an Indo-Aryan word for "man".[1] This linguistic link firmly places their origins in the Indian subcontinent, from which they are thought to have migrated in waves beginning as early as the 3rd century. Although frequently confused with the Romani people of Europe, and often labeled with the generic and pejorative term "Gypsies," the Dom are a distinct ethnic and linguistic group. Linguistic and historical evidence suggests that the Dom and Rom departed from India at different times and via different routes, and their respective languages, Domari and Romani, are not mutually intelligible descendants of the same immediate ancestor, though both belong to the Central Indo-Aryan language group.[6] Throughout the Levant, the most common exonym for the Dom is **Nawar** (Arabic: نور).[8] This term is widely considered derogatory and is often used to evoke stereotypes of a "contemptible and immoral lifestyle," associating the community with begging, itinerancy, and

theft. Over time, "Nawar" has evolved into a pejorative connoting someone who is uneducated and uncivilized. One proposed etymology suggests the word may derive from the Arabic for "fire" (
nār), a reference to their traditional occupation as blacksmiths.
In northern Syria, and particularly in Aleppo, the specific exonym used for the Dom is **Qurbāṭ** (Arabic: قرباط), with the local Aleppine pronunciation being *ʾərbāṭ*.[8] In other northern areas, the term
Qarač is also used. Like Nawar, these terms are often applied imprecisely by the majority population as blanket labels for various groups that share a peripatetic heritage or a similar socio-economic profile, regardless of their actual ethnic identity.
It is crucial to distinguish the Dom (*Qurbāṭ*) from another group, the **Ghorbati** (Persian: غربت). Despite the phonetic similarity of the names, which has led to frequent confusion, the Ghorbati are an entirely separate ethnic group of Persian and Afghan origin. They have their own distinct culture and a secret argot with a Persian base, known as Magadi or Qazulagi, which is unrelated to the Indo-Aryan Domari language. The Ghorbati are not of Indian origin and have no historical connection to the Dom, making the distinction vital for accurate ethnographic analysis.

Term	Type	Language of Origin	Region of Use in Syria	Connotation
Dom	Endonym	Domari	Community-wide	Neutral self-identifier
Nawar	Exonym	Arabic	Levant-wide	Highly pejorative; implies immorality, uncivilized
Qurbāṭ (*ʾərbāṭ*)	Exonym	Arabic	Northern Syria, Aleppo	Pejorative; often used as a general insult
Qarač	Exonym	Unknown	Northern Syria	Descriptive/Pejorative
Ghorbati	N/A (Distinct Group)	Persian	N/A (Iran/Afghanistan)	Often confused with Qurbāṭ but refers to a separate group

Population and Settlement Patterns

Estimating the Dom population in Syria before 2010 is fraught with uncertainty, yet all available sources agree that the country was a major demographic center for the community in the Middle East.
Prior to the conflict, Syria was home to more Dom than any other nation in the region.

Population estimates varied widely, from 100,000 to as high as 300,000 people. A 2010 report in the Syrian newspaper *Kassioun* cited a more conservative figure of around 74,000, or double the 37,000 Domari speakers estimated by SIL International's *Ethnologue*. The true figure was likely much higher. The primary obstacle to an accurate count was the community's own survival strategy of "invisibility," wherein many Dom would publicly identify as members of the surrounding majority—be it Arab, Kurd, or Turkmen—to avoid the pervasive stigma and discrimination associated with their Dom identity. By this period, the vast majority of the Dom population in Syria was sedentary, having abandoned a fully nomadic lifestyle, though some semi-nomadic groups persisted.

Aleppo city was the most significant hub of the Dom community in Syria, likely hosting its largest single population. While precise numbers are unavailable, ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the city between 2009 and 2010 suggested that their population could plausibly exceed "a couple of thousand" individuals. The Dom of Aleppo were known to have settled in specific neighborhoods, often in areas with other marginalized or minority groups. One such area was the ʿAšrafiyye (Ashrafieh) neighborhood, which they shared with a large Kurdish population.[10] It is also highly probable that they resided in other "popular" or lower-class districts on the periphery of the old city, such as Bab al-Nairab. Though not explicitly named in connection with the Dom, Bab al-Nairab was known as a destination for rural migrants and was ethnically diverse, hosting Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen, making it a likely area for Dom settlement.

In stark contrast to the documented presence in Aleppo, the demographic record for the nearby Afrin district before 2011 is marked by a conspicuous silence regarding the Dom. Overwhelmingly, sources from the period describe Afrin as "homogeneously Kurdish".[17] Pre-war estimates consistently place the Kurdish population at 97% or higher, with the small remaining minority identified almost exclusively as Arab and Turkmen residents concentrated in a few specific villages. The Dom, Qurbāṭ, or Nawar are simply absent from these ethnic breakdowns.

This absence of evidence, however, should not be mistaken for evidence of absence. Given Aleppo's status as a major Dom center and Afrin's geographic proximity, it is improbable that the community was entirely non-existent in the district. A more plausible explanation lies in the successful application of their "invisibility" strategy within a region defined by a strong, singular ethnic identity. The Dom are known to be multilingual, and those living in Kurdish-majority areas learn to speak Kurdish. It is therefore highly likely that Dom families and small communities did live in Afrin, either settled in villages or providing itinerant services, but were subsumed into the Kurdish majority for all practical purposes. By adopting Kurdish identity and language, they would have become analytically invisible to census takers, researchers, and local leaders whose focus was primarily on Kurdish identity politics and demographics. This erasure from the record is not merely a statistical anomaly; it is a profound indicator of their extreme marginalization, where survival necessitated the complete effacement of their distinct ethnic identity.

Social Structure and Kinship

The Dom community, particularly in urban centers like Aleppo, maintained a distinct internal social organization based on kinship and communal ties, which served as both a framework for social life and a buffer against the hostility of the outside world.

The fundamental unit of social organization in the Aleppo Dom community was the clan or extended family group, referred to in the local Domari dialect as a *ḥāyire* (plural: *ḥāyāyir*). Fieldwork from 2009-2010 documented several of these clan names, including the Nāṣirllārīn, Barčīllārīn, Qādirllārīn, Malḥamīn, and Zaytqayyīn. The Zaytqayyīn clan was also known by its Arabic equivalent, *Akkālīn Zayt*, meaning "oil eaters," suggesting a possible link to a specific trade or characteristic. This clan structure formed the primary basis of an individual's identity, governing social obligations, marriage patterns, and mutual support networks within the wider Dom community.

This clan-based system operated within a broader culture of communalism that characterizes Dom society across the Middle East.[7] It was common for groups of 5 to 15 families, often from the same clan, to live in close proximity, sharing resources and living a communal life under the authority of a recognized leader or elder. This social arrangement, which has parallels with Bedouin tribal organization, served a crucial defensive function. It helped maintain community boundaries and protect members from the dangers and prejudices of the external, non-Dom world, which they refer to as the "Gadjo".

Underpinning this social structure are deep-rooted cultural values related to purity and impurity, a legacy of their Indian caste origins. These concepts reinforce a strong preference for endogamy (marriage within the group), which preserves the perceived "purity" of the community and strengthens internal cohesion. This self-imposed social distance is both a cherished cultural value and a pragmatic response to centuries of being treated as dishonorable and unclean by surrounding societies.[1]

Part II: Economic Life and Social Status

The economic life of the Dom in northern Syria before 2010 was inextricably linked to their social status. They occupied specific, often marginalized, economic niches that simultaneously provided them with a livelihood and reinforced the negative stereotypes held by the majority population. This created a cycle of economic specialization and social exclusion that defined their existence.

Traditional Crafts and Services

The Dom were traditionally a service-providing peripatetic community, and their economy was built on a diverse portfolio of skilled crafts, entertainment services, and other specialized

trades that were often shunned by the settled population.

A foundational and historically significant occupation was **metalworking and smithery**. This craft is so central to their identity that it may be the origin of the exonym "Nawar," derived from the Arabic word for "fire" (*nār*). In Aleppo and the neighboring governorate of Idlib, the *Qurbat* were particularly known as blacksmiths, forging agricultural tools, household utensils like knives and sieves, and other metal goods.[1]

One of their most visible and specialized trades was **rudimentary dentistry**. Dom practitioners, often itinerant, were a common sight in rural areas, where they performed extractions and, most notably, fitted patients with gold or silver prosthetic teeth.[1] Syrian Dom dentists were known to travel throughout the Middle East to practice their trade, which, while uncertified by modern standards, filled a crucial gap in healthcare provision in underserved areas.

Other important crafts included **sieve-making**, which was identified as a primary occupation for the Dom of Aleppo, as well as woodwork and leatherwork. They produced a variety of handmade goods, including baskets, coffee mortars, and musical instruments like drums (*tabl*) and reed pipes (*zurna*).[9]

Perhaps their most culturally prominent economic role was in **entertainment**. The Dom were the primary providers of music and dance for weddings, festivals, and other celebrations across Syria.[1] Typically, men played instruments while women were renowned for their singing and dancing.[9] In some urban centers like Damascus, Dom women known as *Hajiyat* performed in nightclubs. While this could be a lucrative profession, the public performance of women in a conservative society was viewed as dishonorable, reinforcing the group's low social status despite the demand for their services.

Occupation	Primary Practitioners	Geographic Association	Social Perception
Blacksmithing/Metal working	Men	Northern Syria (Aleppo, Idlib)	Skilled Craft
Rudimentary Dentistry	Men	Syria-wide (practiced across the region)	Marginalized Service
Sieve-Making	Men	Aleppo-specific	Skilled Craft
Woodwork/Basketry	Men	Syria-wide	Skilled Craft
Musician (Drum, Zurna, etc.)	Men	Syria-wide	Entertainment Service
Dancer/Singer	Women	Syria-wide	Low-status/Immoral Entertainment
Fortune-telling/Tattooing	Women	Syria-wide	Marginalized/Superstitious Service
Begging/Peddling	Women/Both	Syria-wide	Lowest Status

The Economics of Marginalization

The economic landscape for the Dom was not static. The period before 2010 was marked by significant pressures that eroded their traditional livelihoods, pushing them further to the economic and social periphery.

In many Dom households, women were the primary or essential breadwinners. They engaged in a range of subsistence activities, including fortune-telling, applying traditional tattoos (*wasm*), selling small household goods door-to-door, and, when necessary, begging (*kadiya*).[1] The economic necessity of women working in public spaces, often interacting directly with non-Dom men, ran contrary to the prevailing conservative gender norms of Syrian society. This divergence was a significant source of the stigma attached to the community, who were often stereotyped as having lax morals.

Simultaneously, the viability of their traditional crafts was in steep decline. The rise of industrialization and the availability of cheap, mass-produced goods undercut the market for their handmade metalwork, sieves, and other items.[21] This economic displacement forced many Dom to adapt by seeking new, often more precarious, forms of labor. Some transitioned into seasonal agricultural work, while others turned to sorting garbage and collecting refuse for recycling—occupations at the very bottom of the economic ladder.[21]

This process of economic adaptation proved to be a double-edged sword. The Dom have historically occupied specific niches built on skilled crafts and services. As modernization eroded the value of these crafts, they were forced to shift their economic strategies toward more marginal activities. This included a greater reliance on begging, refuse collection, or entertainment roles in venues like nightclubs. While these shifts were necessary for survival, the new or intensified economic activities—especially those involving women in public roles—aligned perfectly with the negative stereotypes of immorality, uncleanliness, and itinerancy already held by the majority population. In this way, the very act of economic survival paradoxically reinforced the social stigma that marginalized them. This created a vicious cycle where their economic precarity and their social exclusion became mutually reinforcing.

A Community on the Margins: Social Status and Discrimination

The Dom's economic position was a direct reflection of their social status as one of Syria's most denigrated communities. Sources from the period consistently describe them in harsh terms, with one account labeling them "the most despised people in the Middle East". They were almost universally viewed by the wider Syrian society as outsiders, intruders, and a dishonorable people, regarded with a mixture of suspicion, contempt, and outright loathing.[1] The very names used to describe them, "Nawar" and "Qurbāṭ," were frequently employed as common insults, synonymous with being uncivilized or base.[8]

This social ostracism was fueled by a host of negative stereotypes and accusations. Popular

narratives, often repeated without any factual basis, accused them of being thieves, child abductors, and prostitutes. Their nomadic heritage, a core part of their historical identity, was a source of deep suspicion for settled agricultural and urban societies, who saw their mobility as a sign of untrustworthiness.

As a direct and rational response to this pervasive discrimination, the Dom developed and honed the survival skill they termed "invisibility". This was the conscious practice of concealing their ethnic background and strategically assimilating into the dominant local identity. In Arab areas, they presented as Arabs; in Turkmen areas, as Turkmen; and in Kurdish areas, as Kurds. This social camouflage allowed them to access services, find work, and simply navigate daily life without inviting the prejudice that their true identity would attract. This deeply ingrained practice is the primary reason for the immense difficulty in obtaining accurate population counts and explains their demographic "disappearance" in regions like Afrin, where blending in with the Kurdish majority was the most viable path to social survival.

Part III: Language and Cultural Expression

Despite immense pressure to assimilate, the Dom of northern Syria maintained a distinct cultural identity before 2010, centered on their unique language, Domari, and a rich oral tradition that preserved their history and worldview. These cultural markers served as vital sources of internal cohesion in the face of external hostility.

The Domari Language of Aleppo: A Linguistic Snapshot

The Domari language is a critical pillar of Dom identity and the most definitive link to their Indo-Aryan origins. It is an endangered language, spoken in scattered communities across the Middle East and North Africa. Though related to other Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi and its distant cousin, Romani, Domari is a separate language that has been profoundly shaped by centuries of contact with Middle Eastern languages, absorbing significant lexical and grammatical influences from Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish.[8] It has always been a purely oral language, with no standardized written form, making its documentation reliant on linguistic fieldwork.[11]

Fortunately, fieldwork conducted in Aleppo in 2009 and 2010 provides a rare and valuable snapshot of the local dialect just before the war. The Dom of Aleppo referred to their language as *dōmārrū žib* ("the Dom language"). This dialect is part of the "Northern Domari" group, a classification that also includes the varieties spoken in Lebanon and southern Turkey. This northern branch is linguistically distinct from the "Southern Domari" group spoken in Palestine and Jordan.

The Aleppo dialect exhibits several key linguistic features that distinguish it from other varieties. The most striking of these is the complete **loss of grammatical gender**. Unlike Southern Domari, which maintains a two-way distinction between masculine and feminine

nouns, pronouns, and verb endings, the Aleppo dialect has neutralized this category.[10] This fundamental grammatical divergence points to a significant and likely ancient split between the northern and southern dialectal areas, making mutual intelligibility between them very limited.

Despite being an endangered language globally, the Aleppo dialect appeared to be in relatively "good shape" in the years just before 2010. Researchers observed clear evidence of intergenerational transmission, with mothers speaking Domari to their young children, who seemed to be acquiring full competence in the language. This situation contrasted sharply with that of other Dom communities, such as the one in Jerusalem, where by the same period the language was moribund and spoken fluently only by the elderly.[11] As a matter of course, all Dom in Aleppo were bilingual, speaking the local Arabic dialect fluently. Many also had significant contact with Kurdish, a result of living in mixed neighborhoods like ʿAšrafiyye, where Kurds were their neighbors.

Linguistic Feature	Southern Domari (e.g., Palestinian)	Northern Domari (Aleppo)	Example/Note
Grammatical Gender	Maintained (masculine/feminine)	Lost (neutralized)	This is the main isogloss separating the two dialect groups.
3rd Person Singular Perfective Verb	Gendered forms: *gara* (he went), *garī* (she went)	Single, generalized form: *garrā* (s/he went)	Demonstrates the grammatical consequence of gender loss.
Layer I Case Marking	Separate markers for masculine accusative (*-as*) and feminine oblique (*-a*)	System restructured: masculine *-as* becomes general accusative, feminine *-a* becomes general oblique	Shows how the loss of gender forced a reorganization of the case system.

Oral Culture, Religion, and Performance

Without a written tradition, Dom culture has been preserved and transmitted across generations through oral means. Music, dance, poetry, and storytelling are not merely forms of entertainment or economic activity; they are the living archives of the community's history, values, and identity.[4] Their origin narratives are varied and often legendary, reflecting a fluid and adaptive oral history. One popular tradition among some Syrian Dom, for example, claims descent from the pre-Islamic Arab folk hero al-Zir Salem, a narrative that may serve to create a sense of belonging within the broader Arab cultural sphere.

In terms of religion, the Dom of Syria are predominantly Sunni Muslims, having adopted the

majority faith of the surrounding population.[7] This is a common pattern for Dom communities throughout the Middle East, who tend to align with the local religious context. However, sources suggest that religion does not function as a central or rigid organizing principle of their daily life and identity in the same way it does for many other Syrian communities. Their practice is often syncretic, blending Islamic beliefs with their own customs and traditions.
Music and dance remain the most vibrant and visible cornerstones of Dom culture. The lively performances at weddings and festivals, featuring the distinctive sounds of the *zurna* (reed pipe) and *tabl* (drum), are vital spaces for community celebration and cultural continuity.[1] While these performances served an important economic function, they were also fundamental expressions of a collective identity that persisted despite overwhelming pressures to assimilate.

Part IV: Legal Status and the State

The Dom people's relationship with the Syrian state before 2010 was characterized by ambiguity, neglect, and systemic exclusion. Their legal status was fractured, leaving many in a precarious position that often amounted to de facto statelessness. This vulnerability was not accidental but was a direct consequence of the intersection of their historical lifestyle with the rigid, patrilineal structure of Syrian nationality law.

A Fractured Legal Identity: Citizens and the Unregistered

Prior to 2010, the Dom community in Syria was not monolithic in its legal standing. It was broadly divided into two main categories: those who were officially registered as Syrian citizens and those who were not.
A significant portion of the Dom population, particularly those who had transitioned to a fully sedentary lifestyle over the preceding decades, were documented Syrian citizens.[20] These individuals and their families held national identity cards and were, in principle, subject to the same rights and duties as other citizens. This status allowed their children to access state services like primary education. However, another substantial part of the community remained *maktoumi al-qid* (unregistered).[20] These individuals lacked the essential civil documentation—birth certificates, family books, and identity cards—that are the bedrock of legal identity in Syria. Beyond these two groups, a minority of Dom, whose families had historically traveled across the porous borders of the Levant, had never acquired Syrian nationality at all and existed in a state of complete legal limbo.
The reasons for this widespread non-registration were both practical and historical. For many Dom men, a primary motivation for avoiding the state's civil registries was to evade compulsory military service, which was lengthy and seen as an alien obligation.[21] More fundamentally, their identity as a historically peripatetic people, for whom movement across the region was a way of life for centuries, meant that the modern concepts of fixed national

borders and the bureaucratic demands of state registration were foreign and often irrelevant to their social reality.[7] The state, for its part, largely neglected these communities, making little effort to enforce registration upon them.

This detachment was also political. The Dom were conspicuously absent from Syria's political and civil society landscape. They formed no associations, parties, or organizations to advocate for their rights or articulate their collective grievances, a stark contrast to the political activism of other minorities in Syria or even Dom communities in neighboring Turkey. Their posture was one of political neutrality and non-interference in the affairs of the state and the "Gadjo" world, a stance rooted in a long history of survival through social and political invisibility.

The Syrian Nationality Law and the Specter of Statelessness

The precarious legal existence of many Dom was codified and perpetuated by the very structure of Syrian law. The Syrian Arab Nationality Law, enacted as Legislative Decree 276 in 1969, created a legal framework that was particularly perilous for a community with a history of mobility and inconsistent documentation.[29]

The law is founded almost exclusively on the principle of patrilineal *jus sanguinis*: nationality is passed from a Syrian father to his child.[31] A child is considered a Syrian Arab citizen if their father is a Syrian Arab citizen, regardless of where the child is born. The law is starkly discriminatory in its treatment of women. A Syrian mother cannot automatically confer her nationality to her children on an equal basis with a father. She can only do so in very limited circumstances, such as if the child is born inside Syria and the child's paternity is not legally established—a condition that itself carries significant social stigma and is not always implemented in practice.[29]

This legal structure created a trap for communities like the Dom. Their history of nomadism and their deliberate avoidance of state bureaucracy meant that many Dom men lacked the official documents—such as birth certificates or identity cards—required to legally prove their own Syrian nationality. Under the 1969 law, a child's citizenship is almost entirely dependent on the father's *documented* nationality. Consequently, if a Dom father was unregistered (*maktoum*) or could not produce the necessary papers to prove his Syrian status, his children would be born stateless. This remained true even if the child's mother was a fully registered Syrian citizen and the child was born on Syrian soil. This mechanism created a pathway for intergenerational statelessness that was uniquely hazardous for the Dom, whose historical lifestyle and relationship with the state made the documentation of paternal lineage inherently fragile. Their social and economic marginalization was thus mirrored and locked in place by a legal system that made their very belonging to the nation contingent on a bureaucratic record they often did not possess.

Conclusion: A Portrait of Precarity Before the Storm

The Dom people of Aleppo and, by inference, Afrin in the years before 2010 were a community defined by a profound paradox. They were a long-standing and integral part of northern Syria's socio-economic landscape, providing essential crafts, services, and cultural expressions, yet they remained almost entirely invisible in social, political, and legal terms. Their story is one of resilience in the face of deep-seated structural marginalization.

In Aleppo, they constituted a significant and vibrant community, with a complex internal clan structure, a unique linguistic heritage in their Domari dialect, and a diverse economic portfolio. They were a visible, if stigmatized, part of the city's human tapestry. In Afrin, their presence was likely erased—a casualty of their own survival strategy of "invisibility" and the region's dominant ethno-political narratives that emphasized a homogeneous Kurdish identity. This demographic silence is perhaps the most telling evidence of their precarious position, where recognition was a liability and erasure was a shield.

Ultimately, the pre-war existence of the Dom was one of chronic precarity. Their social ostracism was pervasive, their economic foundations were eroding under the pressures of modernization, and their legal status was fractured and tenuous, leaving a significant portion of the community vulnerable to intergenerational statelessness. These were not new problems that emerged with the conflict in 2011; they were deep-seated, structural conditions that had shaped Dom life for centuries. The war that followed did not create the vulnerability of the Dom people; it found a community already on the edge and pushed it into the abyss, transforming their chronic precarity into an acute crisis of displacement and survival.

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