



Syrian Studies Association Bulletin

The Bulletin is the regular publication of the Syrian Studies Association, an international association created to promote research on and scholarly understanding of Syria.

Edith Szanto, Editor; Sherwan Hindreen Ali, Book Review Editor

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Letter from the Editor

By Edith Szanto

Alabama. She was formerly an Associate Professor in the Department of Social Sciences at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani.

Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure that I may announce the first issue of volume 25.

This volume has two feature articles and one essay remembering days past. It also features four book reviews. The 2021 Book and Article Prize winners are announced.

This year we're welcoming a number of new board members and we're thanking a few for the service. Foremost, we thank Elyse Semerdjian for her tenure as President. We also thank Andrea Stanton, our Webmaster, for our new website:
<https://www.syrianstudiesassociation.org/>

As the outgoing editor, I would like to extend my gratitude to the authors, and especially to the book review editor, Sherwan H. Ali, who has just finished his MA in Islamic Studies at McGill University. Thank you, you've made all this possible!

Lastly, I would like to welcome on board Joel Veldkamp as the new editor of the Syrian Studies Association Bulletin. As for me, it's been a pleasure serving as the editor.

Best wishes,
Edith Szanto

Edith Szanto has been the Editor of the Syrian Studies Association Bulletin. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of

Syrian Studies Association News

Winners of the 2021 Syrian Studies Association Book & Article Prizes

Prize Committee: Dawn Chatty (Oxford), James Reilly (Toronto), and Michael Provence (UCSD)

The Syrian Studies Association awarded its 2021 book and article prizes for the best works in Syrian studies during the annual Middle East Studies Association meeting, held on Zoom. Awarded annually for over fifteen years, the awards recognize scholars whose recent work has made a particularly distinguished contribution to the field of Syrian Studies. Recipients receive a financial prize and a mention in the Syrian Studies Association's Bulletin.

Best Book Prize 2021

Anneka Lenssen, *Beautiful Agitation: Modern Painting and Politics in Syria*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

This is a truly remarkable work: original, creative, and deeply contextualized into the modern political history of Greater Syria. It is a work of particular significance as it endeavours successfully to bring natural Syria, *Bilad al Sham*, into our frame of reference through the work of three main artists: the Arab Romantic Khalil Gibran, the political spiritualist and revivalist, Adham Ismail, and the 'excavationist' of people and history, and Fateh al Moudarres, with his unholy images. It is much more than a book about art production. In its early chapters, it skilfully describes and analyses, Syria's interface with the late Ottoman period of and the counter-orientalising which was

occurring at that time. The Interwar Mandate period is particularly well researched and articulated in drawing Syrian plastic arts into view, as France and other European diplomats, philosophers, and anthropologists' (here she identifies the extraordinary significance of Henri Bergson, Levy-Bruhl, Marcel Mauss) influence upon individual Syrian artists, poets, and philosophers either during their sojourns in Europe or at home in Syria. Her analysis of the way in which the mystical- Islamization of form and representation promoted by Louis Massignon, a French scholar of comparative mysticism, had a direct role in planning the French Institute's mission in Syria as well as critiquing the efforts of Eustache de Lorey in setting up the French Institute of Archaeology and Islamic Art is particularly astute. The story of de Lorey's uncovering of the astonishing 8th century mosaics on the western portico walls of the Great Mosque of Damascus is typical of her authoritative and sympathetic telling. In his effort to draw France and Syria closer together during this period of mandatory authority, Massignon promoted the expanse of the mosaics to the scale of an oil painting thereby framing the nested roofs of the Umayyad dream structure as analogies of a modernist village scene. *Beautiful Agitation* is an enchanting read, scholarly and lively, making sense for the first time of important Syrian artists' lives in the context of an era which saw dramatic political, social, and economic change over a period of fifty years in the 20th century.

Honourable Mention 2021

Khatchig Mourdian *The Resistance Network: The Armenian Genocide and Humanitarianism in Ottoman Syria, 1915-*

1918. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2021.

This book offers us an unusual approach to the history of the Armenian Genocide. Turning away from the images of the helpless and passive victims of genocide, Mouradian promises us an opportunity to see the resistance and agency of Armenians in the years between 1915-1918. And true to his endeavour, we do get a picture of the activism of the Armenian Church in Aleppo as well as the long-time Armenian residents of the city from the two brothers who owned and ran the Baron Hotel, as well as the charity and resistance of the well-off Armenians who came out to set up orphanages for those on the dearth marches, who hid them or in other ways employed Armenians to provide them with shelter in the city. The local connections with Jamal Pasha and his willingness to 'bend' the orders from the CUP at least for a while provide a more nuanced picture of what happened during those awful months. This is a book long awaited, it provides details of what took place in Aleppo and between Aleppo, Raqqqa and finally Deir ez-Zor, the graveyard of thousands of Armenians. Somewhere along the way we lost sight of the Armenian resistance network. This book is one great step in recovering that past.

Best Article Prize 2021

Ann-Christin Zuntz, "Refugees' Transnational Livelihoods and Remittances: Syrian Mobilities in the Middle East Before and After 2011." *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol 34 (2): 1400–1422.

This well-crafted article, based on ethnographic fieldwork, explores how

Syrians' pre-war kinship-based ties and economic networks largely framed the livelihood strategies of displaced Syrians in Jordan after the conflict induced displacement of 2011 and beyond. Zuntz argues persuasively that the seasonal migration of the rural poor in Syria to Jordan prior to 2011 continued to be a major source of networking in order to access jobs in agriculture and the humanitarian sector post 2011; and to distribute income through these same kinship based cross border networks. For those who are familiar with the ties across the borders imposed upon Bilad al-Sham post WWI these findings come as no surprise. Yet the clarity, empathy, and academic rigour with which Zuntz presents her arguments make this an exceptional article indeed

Honourable Mention 2021

Pieter Coppens' "A Silent *uṣūl* Revolution? Al-Qāsimī, iğtihād, and the Fundamentals of *tafsīr*," *MIDÉO* no. 36 (2021): 21-61.

The article is a deeply researched investigation into a furious late nineteenth century debate among Damascene religious scholars. The article is both a well-written and gripping account of late Ottoman intellectual life, and a learned exploration of a now-forgotten scholarly debates. Coppens manages an article that is exciting to read, impressive in its research, and charmingly understated in its presentation. It is a deeply rooted yet innovative masterpiece of intellectual history.

Feature Article

Germany's Syrian Refugee Integration Experiment

By Lily Hindy

In 2015 and 2016, millions of refugees from Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia poured into Europe, stoking xenophobic fears in many countries, and even provoking some countries to try to close their borders.¹ Meanwhile Germany—an economic powerhouse with a falling birth rate and a historic image to shed—threw open its doors to Syrians fleeing a brutal civil war that had left them unable to go to school, work, or lead any kind of normal life. Chancellor Angela Merkel removed a legal EU barrier requiring Syrian refugees to claim asylum in their first country of arrival, famously intoning, “we can do this!” in a message to her citizens she has since stood by despite strong opposition.² Despite multiple changes to EU law, from 2015 until time of writing more than 1.8 million people have applied for asylum in Germany.³ The majority are Syrian.

¹ “Asylum and migration in the EU: facts and figures,” European Parliament Press Service, June 30, 2017, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20170629STO78630/eu-migrant-crisis-facts-and-figures>.

² “‘Wir schaffen das’: Merkel and the 2015 migrant crisis,” Deutsche Welle, August 31, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/wir-schaffen-das-merkel-and-the-2015-migrant-crisis/av-54766842>.

³ “Demografie von Asylsuchenden in Deutschland” (in German, translated into English using Google Translate), Federal

Within a matter of years, Syrians have become the second-largest group of non-citizens living in Germany, behind Turks. Today, nearly 800,000 Syrians are dispersed among Germany's 83 million inhabitants.⁴ They are still a tiny minority, but the population has grown significantly—all but approximately 30,000 migrated after the Syrian uprisings began in 2011. The German government developed a series of systems to integrate its new refugee population, and beginning in 2015 a momentous effort got underway by all parties involved: federal, state, city, and local governments, civil society, and of course the refugees themselves. Germany's world-renowned vocational school system is working to integrate refugees into the country's workforce, a necessity due to a nationwide labor shortage.⁵ And numerous volunteer and nonprofit organizations started new initiatives beginning in 2015 to help the integration process.

Agency for Civic Education, June 18, 2021, <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/flucht/zahlen-zu-asyl/265710/demografie>.

⁴ “Population: Germany, reference date, sex, age groups, citizenship,” Federal Statistical Office, <https://www-genesis.destatis.de/genesis//online?operation=table&code=12411-0009&bypass=true&levelindex=0&levelid=1627506567516#abreadcrumb> (accessed July 28, 2021).

⁵ Michael Nienaber, “Labor shortages may undermine German economic boom: DIHK survey,” Reuters, March 13, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-economy-labour/labor-shortages-may-undermine-german-economic-boom-dihk-survey-idUSKCN1GP109>.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has not yet provoked significant changes to these initiatives, it has disproportionately affected refugees in Germany given their often-precarious pre-pandemic employment situations, a slowdown in bureaucratic functions like family reunification application processing, and a general lack of socializing with people outside the home. And Merkel's welcoming policies on immigration continue to face significant opposition. The backlash was clearly evidenced by her difficulty forming a coalition after the 2017 election, and the rise of the far-right, anti-immigration party, Alternative for Germany (AfD). In January 2021, the Interior Ministry lifted a moratorium on deportations of Syrian refugees which had been in place since 2012, a move considered a victory for the far-right even if it is unlikely that any deportations will occur.⁶

On top of the bureaucratic and logistical obstacles, the challenges of societal integration facing the Syrian community are clear. For many Germans, integration means assimilation, while many Syrians are hoping to maintain their strong traditions from home. As in other European countries, the Muslim veil for women is a flashpoint, with Germans and Syrians alike conceding that women who refuse to stop wearing the veil are often seen by Germans as unwilling to embrace their new home, and will be considerably limited in their employment

⁶ "Germany: Ban on Syria deportations will be allowed to expire," Deutsche Welle, December 11, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-ban-on-syria-deportations-will-be-allowed-to-expire/a-55901604>.

opportunities.⁷ Some Syrians feel frustrated at what they consider the patronizing attitudes of Germans who assume they have nothing to learn from the newcomers, but plenty to teach them (one interviewee called it a "one-way conversation"). And, of course, there is the question of who will return to Syria and when.⁸

This report is an exploration of Germany's effort to systematically integrate its refugee population, with a particular focus on the Syrian community. The report is not meant to provide a comprehensive overview of the services being offered, or to generalize on the widely varied experiences of refugees. Instead, it offers a peek into the experiences of some of the people and institutions currently involved in these early stages of Syrian refugee integration in Germany, particularly regarding employment, but also other aspects and expectations of societal integration. It is based on site visits in the spring of 2018 to

⁷ In July 2021, in response to a case brought by two women in Germany who were suspended from their jobs for wearing the headscarf, the supreme court of the European Union ruled that employers may prohibit employees from wearing the veil under certain conditions if that action is "justified by the employer's desire to pursue a policy of political, philosophical and religious neutrality with regard to its customers or users." Read the full ruling at <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2021-07/cp210128en.pdf>.

⁸ Linah Alsaafin, "'Blatant theft': Syrians denounce Absentee Property Law," Al Jazeera, May 9, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/theft-syrians-denounce-absentee-property-law-180509140930804.html>.

integration classes, vocational schools, places of employment, refugee housing, private homes, and nonprofit organizations hosting programs for refugees in Berlin, the German capital and largest city, as well as the Bavarian city of Würzburg and town of Kaufbeuren.

The report focuses on employment because one of the most common fears voiced by critics of Merkel's open-door policy for refugees has been that supporting them will be a drag on the German economy, and that they will not be able to integrate into the workforce. But with tens of thousands of refugees already enrolled in integration classes at the country's reputable vocational schools, it is clear that government authorities are purposefully laying out a path to employment for the new members of their society. Indeed, annual survey data collected by the German government on the refugee population that arrived between 2013 and 2016 shows that almost half found steady employment within five years after arrival.⁹ The number of refugees entering tradecraft apprenticeships increased 140 percent in 2018, though the COVID-19 crisis may prevent some companies from hiring their

apprentices full-time, which could affect their residency status.¹⁰

After a brief look at Germany's earlier experiences with large influxes of immigrants, the report examines several aspects of Syrian integration into the German economy and society, particularly workforce integration via Germany's robust network of vocational schools and integration classes, with a focus on the case of Bavaria; other routes to employment, such as through low-skill jobs, higher education, and program efforts by civil society and volunteer organizations; and societal integration, with a special look at some of the common threads in conversations with Germans and Syrians about how they are learning to live together. Taken together, the report offers an account of what a determined government can accomplish if it commits to a policy of welcoming a massive influx of refugees. While Germany's experience so far is checkered, on the most important counts, it has been a success. Fears that refugees would spur an increase in terrorism proved unwarranted. So did worries that the refugee influx would derail Germany's economy. Despite the tensions and setbacks detailed in this report, Germany has managed to reap national benefits from a welcoming policy, implemented despite major political, economic, and social risks.

⁹ Herbert Brücker & Yuliya Kosyakova, "What do we know about the employment of refugees in Germany? Answers to some frequently asked questions," IAB-FORUM, Institute for Employment Research (IAB), June 18, 2020, <https://www.iab-forum.de/en/what-do-we-know-about-the-employment-of-refugees-in-germany-answers-to-some-frequently-asked-questions/>

¹⁰ "Refugee unemployment in Germany drops sharply," *Financial Times*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/bea8507e-64cb-11e8-90c2-9563a0613e56>; Joe Miller, "Refugee apprentices fear for their future in Germany," *Financial Times*, June 13, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/30ca8446-5525-4302-9723-15d08835224b>.

Learning from Past Mistakes

Germany has experienced large influxes of immigrants before, but it has never made such a concerted effort at integrating them into the population. Merkel has said that the country should learn from mistakes made in the past, largely referring to its experience with Turkish immigration.¹¹ In 1961, facing a labor shortage, Germany signed a contract with Turkey to bring in hundreds of thousands of “guest workers,” but offered no German language courses or vocational training to help improve their skills. German officials mistakenly assumed that the workers would return home after their contracts finished, but instead many brought their families and stayed even as Germany entered an economic recession in the 1970s. Turks wound up clustering in certain neighborhoods (Kreuzberg and Neukölln in Berlin are two of the most well-known), and the roughly 2.5 million people with Turkish background in Germany were deemed by a study in 2009 to be the “least integrated” minority in the country due to higher levels of unemployment and lower educational attainment than other populations.¹²

¹¹ “Merkel says Germany must learn from its ‘guest worker’ mistakes for refugee crisis,” Reuters, September 9, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-germany-merkel/merkel-says-germany-must-learn-from-its-guest-worker-mistakes-for-refugee-crisis-idUSKCN0R90S520150909>.

¹² Klaudia Prevezanos, “Turkish guest workers transformed German society,” Deutsche Welle, October 30, 2011, <http://www.dw.com/en/turkish-guest-workers-transformed-german-society/a->

The Turkish population has faced discrimination by Germans for their so-called “migration background” even though many were born in Germany and have never lived outside of the country. The bias has been reflected in studies showing that employers will select a German over a Turkish or Arabic name between two equally qualified job applications, and that teachers tend to give a lower grade to equivalent papers written by non-Germans than those by students with German names.¹³ Journalist Ferda Ataman, one of many first-generation Germans whose parents immigrated from Turkey, recently published the book “Ich bin von hier. Hörst auf zu fragen!” (“I’m From Here. Stop Asking!”).¹⁴

15489210; “Study Shows Turkish Immigrants Least Integrated in Germany,” Deutsche Welle, January 26, 2009, <https://www.dw.com/en/study-shows-turkish-immigrants-least-integrated-in-germany/a-3975683>.

¹³ Meike Bonefeld & Oliver Dickhäuser, “(Biased) Grading of Students’ Performance: Students’ Names, Performance Level, and Implicit Attitudes,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018), <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00481>; Andreas Neuhaus, “Explainer: Migrants in Germany,” April 14, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/explainer-migrants-in-germany/av-51207877>.

¹⁴ Esme Nicholson, “Germany Grapples with Racism after Threats Derail Refugee’s Candidacy for Parliament,” NPR, April 21, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/21/988816485/germany-grapples-with-racism-after-threats-derail-refugees-candidacy-for-parliam>.

The experience of Turks in Germany looms large for today's Syrians and their efforts to assimilate. During a community language exchange session in the town of Kaufbeuren, a Syrian resident explained, "I think the government doesn't want the Turkish style, they want us decentralized... the government wants the Syrians everywhere. Not one million in one city, and no Syrians in another city." A German resident chimed in: "We don't want the danger of parallel societies" (a phrase commonly used by Germans in reference to the integration process).¹⁵

So with the recent influx, the German government developed a series of new systems to better integrate the refugee population – though as time passes it is evident that some of these policies need to be tweaked. For example, no matter which border they cross to enter the country, federal authorities "fairly distribute" all refugees throughout Germany's sixteen states using a calculation of the states' tax revenue and population.¹⁶ Refugees are then prohibited from freely choosing to move from their placement for at least three years (with some variation depending on the asylum seeker's country of origin

¹⁵ Author interview with residents of Kaufbeuren during bi-monthly Deutsch Stammtisch, or "German table," at Generationenhaus, Kaufbeuren, Germany, March 21, 2018.

¹⁶ "Freedom of Movement: Germany," Asylum Information Database, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany/reception-conditions/access-and-forms-reception-conditions/freedom-movement/> (accessed November 30, 2020).

and status, and on state and federal authorities).¹⁷ A number of the refugees interviewed for this report had moved from their assigned place of residence due to unwelcoming neighbors and/or inability to find a job or adequate housing. A 2020 report by the Institute of Labor Economics (IZA) analyzing data from an annual German government survey of refugees recommends a change. It found that the current policy comes "at a significant cost for subsequent integration outcomes for those refugees placed in worse [economically] performing and less welcoming regions."¹⁸ Other systems seem to be beneficial for all involved. All Syrian children with asylum status are eligible for government-provided schooling.¹⁹ Many teenage and adult refugees are currently enrolled in government-run "integration courses" which focus mainly on German language instruction but also include modules on the country's history, law, and cultural norms. There is a plethora of public

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Cevat Giray Aksoy, Panu Poutvaara & Felicitas Schikora, "First Time Around: Local Conditions and Multi-Dimensional Integration of Refugees," Discussion Paper No. 13914, IZA Institute of Labor Economics, November 2020, <https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/13914/first-time-around-local-conditions-and-multi-dimensional-integration-of-refugees>.

¹⁹ Sarah Dryden-Peterson, Elizabeth Adelman, and Martina Nieswandt, "Inside Syrian refugee schools: Syrian children in Germany," Brookings Institution, May 23, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2016/05/23/inside-syrian-refugee-schools-syrian-children-in-germany/>.

information for refugees to help them navigate the German bureaucracy.

It is still too early to say how much these government programs will cost the German government in the long run, and whether the economic boost of the new refugee labor force will outweigh the cost of integration. Aydan Özoğuz, Germany's commissioner for migration, refugees, and integration, predicted that most refugees would take around ten years before entering the job market.²⁰ German government figures put the amount spent in 2016 on refugees at about €20 billion, and that number increased to about €23 billion in 2018 and 2019 (representing around 6-7 percent of the total federal budget each year).²¹ More than a third of that money was earmarked for combating the causes of refugee arrival, with the rest going toward procedural costs of admitting refugees, so-called "integration benefits," and assistance to federal states hosting the refugees.²² The International Monetary Fund predicted in 2016 that Germany

²⁰ Guy Chazan, "Most refugees to be jobless for years, German minister warns," *Financial Times*, June 22, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/022de0a4-54f4-11e7-9fed-c19e2700005f>.

²¹ "Germany spent 20 billion euros on refugees in 2016," *Deutsche Welle*, May 24, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/germany-spent-20-billion-euros-on-refugees-in-2016/a-38963299>.

²² "Asylum-related costs and expenses," (in German, translated into English using Google Translate), Federal Agency for Civic Education, December 11, 2020, <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/flucht/zahlen-zu-asyl/265776/kosten-und-ausgaben>.

would spend no more than 0.35 percent of GDP on asylum seekers.²³

Experiences vary between states and localities depending on politics and the local population. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees known by its German acronym BAMF) is the first point of official contact for all refugees, processing asylum applications and administering asylum, welfare, and unemployment benefits.²⁴ State and local governments are responsible for maintaining initial reception centers and administering health care, education, and housing needs.²⁵ Volunteers and civil society often fill the gaps to make sure these more quotidian needs are being met, but that varies widely across the country. The former East Germany, where per capita GDP lags behind the West by 27 percent and anti-immigrant sentiment seems to be strongest (based on AfD support), hosts fewer refugees than the former West Germany and Berlin (which is

²³ Shekhar Aiyar et al, "The Refugee Surge in Europe: Economic Challenges," *International Monetary Fund*, January 19, 2016, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Staff-Discussion-Notes/Issues/2016/12/31/The-Refugee-Surge-in-Europe-Economic-Challenges-43609>.

²⁴ Graeme Wood, "The Refugee Detectives," *The Atlantic*, April 2018 issue, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/04/the-refugee-detectives/554090/>.

²⁵ Bruce Katz, Luise Noring, and Nantke Garrelts, "Cities and refugees: The German experience," *Brookings*, September 18, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/cities-and-refugees-the-german-experience/>.

located in the east).²⁶ In parts of Berlin and some of the former West German states, support for refugees by civil society and volunteers is more robust and organized.

Workforce Integration through Vocational Training

Germany's world-renowned vocational training system is often touted as the engine of the country's economic success. It is also a centerpiece of the country's first national integration law and is seen as key to bringing refugees into the German workforce.²⁷ However, for many Syrian refugees, who have only been in the country for five or six years, time is still needed to overcome the language barrier before securing the coveted apprenticeship—one of the best ways to secure permanent employment. New policies and programs have been

implemented to help smooth the transition process.

Also known as the dual system, because it combines three to four days of on-the-job skills training with one or two days of theoretical classroom-based learning each week, students enter vocational training as a route into employment in trades including gastronomy, watchmaking, geriatric care, and auto mechanics. The vocational school administrators interviewed for this report said that the popularity of vocational education has decreased among German youth as more importance is placed on going to university. They hope refugees will soon begin to fill the void, and statistics show that they already are—in 2017, more than one in ten apprentices in the non-trade sector in Bavaria was a refugee.²⁸

The integration law, which entered into force in August 2016, stipulates that those refugees who find a firm to employ them may not be deported during the three-year vocational training period. If the trainee is offered a permanent position after the training period, he or she will be granted a two-year residence permit. The law also eliminated the age limit of twenty-one because refugees tended to be older. The so-called "3+2 rule" and lack of age restriction makes the apprenticeship a prized opportunity for the increased numbers of refugees, and many interviewed for this report spoke of it as a goal after improving their language skills.

²⁶ "Lagging economy in Germany's former east risks stoking radicalism," Reuters, September 6, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-unity/lagging-economy-in-germanys-former-east-risks-stoking-radicalism-idUSKCN1BH1SE>; Philip Oltermann, "'Revenge of the East'? How anger in the former GDR helped the AfD," The Guardian, September 28, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/28/is-germanys-election-result-the-revenge-of-the-east>.

²⁷ Jenny Gesley, "Germany: Act to Integrate Refugees Enters Into Force," Global Legal Monitor, Law Library, Library of Congress, August 15, 2016, <http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/germany-act-to-integrate-refugees-enters-into-force/>.

²⁸ Kai Dambach, "Migrants filling apprenticeship gaps," InfoMigrants, March 14, 2018, <http://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/7940/migrants-filling-apprenticeship-gaps>.

However, that will take time. As evidenced by an intergovernmental survey of German employers, language skills among refugees generally were not yet at the desired level in 2018.²⁹ Most had been in the country for just two or three years, so it is no surprise that more language training was needed. An English teacher at a vocational school in Würzburg said in an interview in 2018 the companies “desperately need people, but most of those refugees or asylum seekers are not really ready—language is still a problem and also they do not have the skills.”³⁰ So vocational schools were being tasked with offering vocational language training to speed up the labor integration process.

²⁹ A 2017 survey of German employers by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs showed that “at least good” German language skills were required for about half of all low-skilled jobs, and that increases to more than 90 percent for medium-skilled jobs. Language was the number one difficulty mentioned by employers hiring asylum-seekers, followed by a lack of vocational skills, different work habits, and uncertainty about the asylum-seeker’s length of stay in Germany. “Finding their Way: Labour Market Integration of Refugees in Germany,” Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, March 2017, <https://www.oecd.org/els/mig/Finding-their-Way-Germany.pdf>.

³⁰ Author interview with English teacher Meinke, who preferred not to give her last name, at Franz Oberthür Professional School, Würzburg, Germany, March 21, 2018.

Another piece of the national integration law was to increase the number of mandatory, cost-free “integration courses” being offered. Since 2005, German immigration law has required all immigrants from non-European Union countries to participate. The courses include 600 hours of German language instruction and a sixty-hour “orientation course” including information on German law, history, culture, and values. In 2010, demand for integration courses was already outstripping supply, and there were only 140,000 students.³¹ By 2016, that number had almost doubled to 246,125, just under half of whom were Syrian.³²

At Hörgeräte Baur, a hearing aid center in the historic district of the Bavarian town of Kaufbeuren, twenty-one-year-old Wael Kojo from Aleppo was one of the lucky few refugees in the country to have already landed an apprenticeship in 2018. Kojo enrolled in integration classes at the state vocational school in Kaufbeuren in 2016 and went on to work full time at Hörgeräte Baur. Founder Steven Baur said Kojo’s German language was far above most other non-native candidates.³³

³¹ “Migrants on the Waiting List,” *Der Spiegel*, October 25, 2010, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/integration-courses-migrants-on-the-waiting-list-a-725118.html>.

³² “Germany’s Ongoing Project to Welcome Its Refugees,” *Der Spiegel*, May 12, 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/integrating-refugees-in-germany-an-update-a-1147053.html>.

³³ Author interview with Wael Kojo and Steven Baur, Hörgeräte Baur, Kaufbeuren, March 22, 2018.

Challenges Faced by Bavarian Vocational Schools

The experience of vocational schools in the southern state of Bavaria is one example of how much time and energy has been invested by state and local governments to integrate the refugee population. Bavaria was the main migrant point of entry into Germany during the influx and has received the second-largest population of refugees since.³⁴ Bavarian vocational schools began to organize a version of integration courses in 2010–11, when there were only about 100 qualifying students. By 2015, the numbers had risen such that all vocational schools in the state were required to host the integration classes. By school year 2016–17 there were 22,000 refugee students at vocational schools in Bavaria.³⁵ Bavaria has the second-largest economy in the country and one of the largest in Europe, so for refugees it is seen as a region of opportunity. BMW is headquartered there, as are Siemens, Audi, Adidas, and Allianz. The two vocational schools visited for this

³⁴ “First Time Around,” 37; “Freedom of Movement.”

³⁵ Presentation given to author at Kaufbeuren state vocational school, using statistics from the Bavarian State Ministry of Education and Culture (Original, in German: Dr. Robert Geiger, “Qualitätsmanagement in den Berufsintegrationsklassen in Bayern,” Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Bildung und Kultus, Wissenschaft und Kunst, page 7, http://www.qmbs-bayern.de/userfiles/Weiterentwicklung_QmbS-Runde1/01_Auftaktveranstaltung/03_Berufsintegrationsklassen.pdf).

report were in Bavaria, in the city of Würzburg (pop. 124,000), which made international news in July 2016 when a teenage Afghan refugee armed with an axe and a knife injured four people on a train nearby, and the town of Kaufbeuren (pop. ~45,000), about an hour by train from the state capital, Munich.

The Franz Oberthür Professional School in Würzburg reflects Bavarian wealth, with auto mechanics students practicing on the latest models of BMW and Mercedes Benz, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) apprentices using new robotic equipment, and a graphic design department that recently acquired state-of-the-art printers. The school started accepting refugees in 2014, and in 2018 there were 160 refugee students from forty-one countries enrolled in integration classes at the school, though most are from Afghanistan and Syria.³⁶

Franz Oberthür’s headmaster, Uwe Tutschku, said that the school’s first year with refugee students was extremely difficult. The biggest problem was finding teachers that were capable of teaching German as a second language and finding teaching materials for students from such different backgrounds. Many students came without any documentation at all about their age and former schooling, some came with little or no formal education, some came with technical skills already, and some left without a word after only a few weeks of classes. Funding was a problem, because “the government was not organized for so many students, and who pays it, and how

³⁶ Author interview with administrators at Franz Oberthür Professional School, Würzburg, Germany, March 21, 2018.

does everything work... so you had to get started and nobody knew where the money was coming from.”³⁷

The state vocational school in Kaufbeuren (Staatliche Berufsschule Kaufbeuren) has also struggled to accommodate its refugee student population. They did not have enough space to accommodate the 160 students they initially took in, so they had to erect temporary classrooms in shipping containers next to the school. They also increased to two teaching shifts. School administration official Markus Schiele, who took in a fifteen-year-old Afghan boy as a foster child in 2015 and housed him until he turned eighteen, recounted stories of the constant deportation threat faced by the Afghan population at the school. After news spread that the federal government was preparing a deportation flight to Kabul, a student asked Schiele if he could stay overnight at the school.

“They are in a state of insecurity and that is of course very strenuous, very hard for them, and also then hinders the learning process,” said Schiele. “If you don’t know whether you will be here next week, why should you learn German?”³⁸

Both Tutschku and Schiele said it has gotten easier each year, but there were still

challenges. Some students had trouble finding a place to live. Some struggled with disease or trauma. Both schools maintain half-time social workers, which administrators agreed was not enough. For the students who were not used to going to school, it was a challenge for them to adapt to the daily schedule and the homework expectations. The national integration law says government benefits will be curtailed for those students who refuse to attend integration classes without good cause, and Schiele said that they had arranged with the social welfare agencies for a dock in students’ monthly allowance or food vouchers if they missed too many days of school. Both administrators complained that some of the male students, particularly from Syria, resist treating female teachers as authority figures. At Franz Oberthür, the cafeteria tries to offer vegetarian options to accommodate their refugees, but as vice principal Ralf Geisler said, “Integration means come together—not to change our system for the refugees.”³⁹

Tutschku said that it was too early to say whether their students have been successful at entering the workforce, but he believed that the effort has been earnest. “We have the first refugees in the dual system but we don’t know how successfully they can complete it,” he said.

Low-Skill Labor in Berlin

Germany’s creative capital, Berlin (sometimes referred to by Germans as “poor but sexy”), has attracted refugees whose interests or skills don’t fit neatly into

³⁷ Author interview with administrators at Franz Oberthür Professional School, Würzburg, Germany, March 21, 2018. All future quotations from Tutschku are sourced from this interview.

³⁸ Author interview with Markus Schiele at Staatliche Berufsschule Kaufbeuren, Germany, March 23, 2018. All future quotations from Schiele are sourced from this interview.

³⁹ Author interview with administrators at Franz Oberthür Professional School, Würzburg, Germany, March 21, 2018.

the structured vocational training system. Berlin's administration was widely criticized for being disorganized and inefficient during the initial influx of refugees in 2015–2016, and a plethora of volunteers and civil society organizations stepped in to help out.⁴⁰ Many in Berlin's strong network of arts organizations, as well as in international startup companies, especially in the tech industry, offer programs specifically for refugees. Very few have been accepted into university programs in Berlin. In addition, many Syrians have found job opportunities in Berlin's well-established Arab and Turkish neighborhoods through family and community connections. Pop into any of the Arab restaurants, cafes, and pastry shops dotting the famous Sonnenallee street in Neuköln and you are likely to find at least one Syrian refugee among the employees, if not even among the owners.

Not too far up the road, a refugee-run Syrian restaurant called Kreuzberger Himmel ('Kreuzberg Sky') opened in early 2018 thanks to the help of the "Be an Angel" refugee support organization that was founded in 2015 by a group of German journalists, marketing specialists, and artists. The so-called "gastronomic integration project" serves up authentic Syrian specialties in a simply decorated space with photos of Aleppo lining the walls. It offers apprenticeships and internships to refugees looking for work with goals that are, as outlined on their website, "very pragmatic:

⁴⁰ Ben Knight, "Sorrow, anger at Berlin's LaGeSo refugee center after Syrian's apparent death," Deutsche Welle, January 27, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/sorrow-anger-at-berlins-lageso-refugee-center-after-syrians-apparent-death/a-19007370>.

We do not want a parallel society. We do not want paying taxes for people who want to and can work. We are looking for the enrichment that every single person who arrives and integrates here has to offer."⁴¹

Kreuzberger Himmel bartender Yazan Albaour left Damascus in 2012 and spent time in Turkey and Lebanon before finally finding a smuggler who agreed to bring him to Greece even though he was broke. His form of payment: Driving the boat.

"It was fun to drive something for the first time," said Albaour, twenty-four, showing me a selfie he took on his cell phone from his position at the helm of a crowded nine-meter inflatable boat. "All the passengers in the boat wanted to pay me for getting them there safely, so they paid for my train rides all the way to Germany."⁴²

Higher Education

Refugees from Syria are relatively well-educated, with estimates by the German Agency for Labor in early 2016 showing that more than 50 percent of them had at least secondary schooling, and 27 percent had more, if not necessarily a degree.⁴³ Fewer

⁴¹ Be an Angel website (in German, translated into English using Google Translate): <https://beanangel.direct/about-us/>.

⁴² Author interview with staff at Kreuzberger Himmel restaurant, Berlin, March 18, 2018.

⁴³ Anna Katharina-Rich, "BAMF Brief Analysis," Edition 3 | 2016, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, <http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Publikationen/Kurzanalysen/kurzanalys>

than 3 percent had no formal schooling. However, largely due to the language barrier but also to other factors, enrollment in German universities has been low, with only 1,140 refugees enrolled in the 2016 winter semester, the majority of whom were Syrian.⁴⁴ That number had increased to 3,800 by 2018.⁴⁵ The government has dedicated €100 million through 2019 to help increase refugee enrollment by providing preparatory courses and free applications, and by increasing funding for assessment programs to determine eligibility.⁴⁶

Albaour's friend Mohamed Alhalabi, a twenty-seven-year-old dancer from Damascus, said that Germany has allowed him to fulfill his dream of going to university, something he had previously considered impossible given that he had dropped out of school at age twelve. Alhalabi, who goes

e3_sozial-komponenten.pdf?__blob=publicationFile.

⁴⁴ Stefan Trines, "Lessons From Germany's Refugee Crisis: Integration Costs, and Benefits," World Education News + Reviews, World Education Service, May 2, 2017, <https://wenr.wes.org/2017/05/lessons-germanys-refugee-crisis-integration-costs-benefits>.

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<https://www.hrk.de/presse/pressemitteilung/pressemitteilung/meldung/7-hrk-befragung-der-hochschulen-zahl-der-neu-immatrikulierten-gefluechteten-steigt-weiter-deutlich/>

⁴⁶ Ibid; press release on €100 million investment, from Federal Ministry of Education and Research, in German: <https://www.bmbf.de/de/fluechtlingen-den-zugang-zum-studium-ermoeglichen-1980.html>.

by the stage name "Wolf" and speaks near impeccable English, was accepted this year into an intensive three-year bachelor's program at Berlin's University of the Arts (Universität der Künste, or UdK). The teachers at his audition told him he was "an exception as a talented artist," so the school waived the documentation requirements. He had performed for years across the Middle East as a professional dancer with a Beirut-based company before coming to Germany. For Alhalabi, the German system and approach toward immigrants is clear.

"Here in Germany, work or education are the main things. Either you work, or you study. There is no third option," said Alhalabi.⁴⁷

Moutasem Alkhnaifes, twenty-eight, arrived in Germany in 2014 and went on to complete a master's degree in urban management in Berlin thanks to a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). But he realized that his case was unique. "I'm one of the lucky few who were able to go into university [in Germany] in the first place.... I was able to apply because I was able to get my papers from the university in Syria. I did leave in a rush, but I was able to get those papers with me, and other people were not able to do that. I mean, if your house is being bombed, you would not be able to go to university and ask them for a duration of

⁴⁷ Author interview with Mohamed Alhalabi, Tareq Assad, Odah Bashi, and Yazan Albaour at University of the Arts Berlin, March 19, 2018. All future quotations from these people are sourced from this interview.

your grades for the last couple of years,” he told me.⁴⁸

Alkhnaifes said that it was near impossible to live in Berlin on the €700 monthly student stipend. He paid €400 per month for a “tiny room” (one of the biggest problems in Berlin, and across the country, is affordable housing), plus €100 in health insurance, which goes up to €200 when he turns thirty. That leaves only €100–200 each month to spend on groceries and other necessities.

What Does “Integration” Mean to Germans and Syrians?

Just as language acquisition, labor force integration, and housing adequacy are going to take time, the process of Germans and Syrians getting accustomed to each other as compatriots will be lengthy. Some flashpoints became clear in conversations during this research trip. For one, members of both communities complained about the paternalistic attitudes of the German government and many citizens toward the newcomers. All the Syrians interviewed said they were grateful for the safety, financial support, education, and job opportunities provided by Germany, and many recognized that the government was making a more concerted effort to be systematic about integration than it did in the past. They also acknowledged that their cases are given more attention than other categories of refugees, like Afghans and those from the African continent, whose legal status is not as clear. However, many voiced resentment

that Germans were trying to shape them as entirely new individuals, instead of recognizing their pre-existing skills and welcoming what they bring to German society.

Moutasem Alkhnaifes, the Syrian who completed his master’s in urban planning in Berlin, said he felt that the overall approach by Germans was to have a “one-way conversation” with the refugees. “You just tell them what to do and what to be. You have to speak German, you have to go to the school, you have to do this and this and this and this to be able to succeed here. But I have never seen a person who is using his abilities that he already has.”

Alkhnaifes said that Europeans throughout history treated immigrants as “either evil people coming here with crimes, or people who are completely helpless.” That history, in his opinion, was repeating itself now with the Syrians in Germany. “Here it feels also the same,” he said, “like there are a lot of refugee places here, refugee housing, where people are not even allowed to cook for themselves because food is delivered every day. It’s like a free hotel service. You get free food, your bed sheets are washed. You just live and you don’t do anything. Because everybody is doing everything else for you. And then on the other hand you have people who are just feeling threatened by those refugees.”

Barbara Meyer, a member of the advocacy group Refugee Council Berlin who directs a nonprofit organization dedicated to youth arts education with many refugees currently participating, lamented the fact that refugees were blocked from contributing their own skills and talents in Germany. In the elaborate federal system of

⁴⁸ Author interview with Moutasem Alkhnaifes via Skype, March 29, 2018. All future quotations from Alkhnaifes are sourced from this interview.

social support, as soon as someone applies for asylum, “you get some money, you get a bed, you have hundreds of dates with the administration, but you are completely cut away from any system of giving. You are not allowed to give because this is too dangerous. So it grows a very perverse situation. German society is angry about these people because they get everything, they come, they take everything, but... they also forbid them to give. They forbid them to work, to care for themselves, to develop step by step, ‘what can I do for myself, for my family.’”⁴⁹

Alhalabi, the dancer at Berlin’s University of the Arts, said that he had been misrepresented by Germans who think they know what refugees need without even asking. “They say, oh refugees want this, refugees want that. And sometimes when I meet them, I’m one of the refugees, I say, ‘guys, it’s not like that.’”

Another problem faced by the Syrians is the pervasive fear—fanned by politicians, the media, and several attacks—that there are extremists among the refugees who are plotting attacks on the German population. Abdulrahman Alzghaer, a Syrian refugee from Deir ez-Zour living in the small Bavarian town of Kaufbeuren with his wife Noura and their two-year-old son Abdullah, joked during a meeting of the Deutsch Stammtisch, or “German table,” that “the people here think we are all cousins of Osama bin Laden.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Author interview with Barbara Meyer at S27, Berlin, March 15, 2018.

⁵⁰ Author interview with residents of Kaufbeuren during bi-monthly Deutsch Stammtisch, or “German table” meetings,

In fact, Jürgen Konrad, who volunteers with the Kaufbeuren refugee volunteer network “Arbeitskreis Asyl,” said that the first time Alzghaer showed up at a town hall and spoke up about issues in the refugee community, people in the audience whispered worriedly that he might be an extremist. “Amongst the German people in Kaufbeuren or anywhere, there’s a phobia of like, ‘oh god there might be an Islamic extremist or something,’” said Konrad.⁵¹

Wafaa Farok, who came from the besieged al-Qadam district of Damascus with her handicapped husband and their two toddlers, was living in dedicated refugee housing in Kaufbeuren and struggling in 2018 to find an independent place to live because of these prejudices. Farok and her family were sharing a two-bedroom apartment with another Syrian couple in a large apartment building on the outskirts of the city.

“The problem here is the apartments. They’re expensive, and there are people who don’t want to rent to refugees. They’re afraid. They hear something bad about one person and it gives them a bad idea,” said Farok.⁵²

The Alzghaers were fortunate enough to find a spacious, modern apartment in a quiet neighborhood in Kaufbeuren, which

at Generationenhaus, Kaufbeuren, Germany, March 21, 2018.

⁵¹ Ibid. All future quotations from Konrad are sourced from this interview.

⁵² Author interview with Wafaa Farok in refugee housing, Kaufbeuren, Germany, March 23, 2018.

they rent from a Turkish landlord. But they had a very difficult time finding it.

“For Syrians, it’s impossible,” said Noura. “We went to see many flats and when the owner knows that we are Syrian he says no.”⁵³

“There are so many reasons to say no,” added Abdulrahman. “We are on the welfare of the government, we are foreigners, we are Syrians. The spotlight is on the Syrian people — [people think] maybe they bring with them problems.”

Religion is very important to the Alzghaers, and Konrad said that there was an impression among the community in Kaufbeuren that Abdulrahman had become more conservative and influenced his friends in that direction. He was a leader in the refugee community, and with so much influence, some in the community were concerned that he did not shake hands with women, instead placing his hand over his heart—a common practice among Muslims—and his friends had begun to do the same. He also helped two other Syrians to open Kaufbeuren’s first halal market. Abdulrahman chalked up their fear to a conflation of religion and culture.

“I can follow the laws here,” said Abdulrahman. “But when the German people think about the man who hits his wife—it’s not Islam, it’s culture. They think all Muslims do the same. And hijab, it’s not

culture, it’s religion. Not every Muslim woman wears a hijab.”

Alkhnaifes said he has witnessed a number of his fellow Syrians become more conservative since moving to Germany. “I’ve seen this kind of situation several times. It comes from this feeling that they are threatened culturally,” said Asem. “They feel they have to be a certain kind of person to be integrated into the community here—they feel that their culture is being taken away from them. And this is kind of a reflex because they feel like, okay, my religion is my culture. So I need to behave this way to maintain this characteristic that I already have. It’s not because they have better belief in God, it’s because they believe that those actions and those beliefs and that belief system will help them sustain themselves in this country. By being different.”

Abdulrahman’s wife Noura said that she had been told by multiple people, including her German teacher, that she should remove her hijab. “I think it’s difficult to have a job with a hijab. In Berlin especially. My teacher, she said, ‘Noura, you are beautiful, but without hijab. That is better.’”

The Alzghaers were taking the long view of their life in Germany. Abdulrahman was a protest organizer in 2011 and is wanted by the Assad regime’s security apparatus, which detained his brother accidentally while looking for him. The family hasn’t seen him since and assumes he was killed. So no matter how much Noura misses her family in Lattakia and wants to return, she knows that it is not realistic to go back to Syria with Assad in power. She was two months pregnant with their second child when we met in Kaufbeuren, and they

⁵³ Author interview with Abdulrahman and Noura Alzghaer at their apartment in Kaufbeuren, Germany, March 22, 2018. All future quotations from Abdulrahman and Noura are sourced from this interview.

spoke of a future in which their children never set foot in Syria. She said she liked the idea of her children growing up in Germany, as long as she can maintain her culture and religion from back home.

“Germany has many positive things,” said Noura. “On the other hand, for me it has—something I don’t like: it’s not in my religion, in my culture. I should have a balance between them for my children.”

The Road Ahead

Just a few years into this experiment of workforce and societal integration, it is still too early to draw many conclusions. What’s clear, though, at this point, is that millions of people have invested in this project, hoping that it will withstand the nationalistic forces working against it. These efforts should be lauded. It is impressive to see what has been done so far, even if the particular systematic methods embraced by the German government are frustrating for the newcomers navigating their way through them. The flow of refugees of all nationalities to Germany decreased dramatically in 2017 and has continued to decrease since, so, barring a reopening of large-scale conflict in Syria, there should be some less chaotic years ahead in which the communities will more easily be able to settle.⁵⁴

Jürgen Konrad, from Kaufbeuren’s refugee volunteer network, is entirely invested in

⁵⁴ “Asylum and migration in the EU: facts and figures,” European Parliament Press Service, June 30, 2017, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20170629STO78630/eu-migrant-crisis-facts-and-figures>.

making this process work. He sees it as a historic opportunity for Germany as a nation. He was “proud and happy” that when he visited the United States in 2015, “for the first time people didn’t ask about Adolf Hitler but said, ‘oh wow, it’s great what you’re doing.’”

Tareq Assad, who is readying his application for the University of the Arts in Berlin this fall, said that problems remain, and he still has a hard time making German friends, but he’s optimistic about the future of the Syrian community in Germany. “Germany presents for us a lot of opportunities in life. Of course, it’s home for us. The place where you feel safe, and you eat. Arabs say when you eat with people for forty days, you become one of them.”

Abdulrahman Alzghaer, who has absolutely no hope of returning to Syria under Assad, said, “we will not be a problem. If they help us, we will help to build this civilization. So I want to be a part of this civilization if I can. I will educate myself, I will educate my wife... this culture *with* our traditions, not separate. If I get my chances, I will live happy in Germany.”

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Remembering Syria: Taxi Trouble

By Arsheen Devjee

*"Nahnu Tullaab, a'janib! Huwa yurid alfoy
lira li ashara daqa'iq! Haraam! Istighlaal!"*

"We are students, foreigners, and he wants 2000 *lira* for taking us for 10 minutes! This is wrong! This is exploitation!"

I was furious. My voice was strong and loud, and the *mudir* (person in charge) of the border station could see that I meant what I said. I was speaking in 7th century classical Arabic, and using big words like "exploitation", not commonly used in today. I was the plaintiff and the defendant. Our taxi driver, was a large gruffy man with black and grey hair, slicked back above his head, wisps falling to the side of his stubbled face. It was late September, and we were heading back home to Damascus from a short weekend getaway to Lebanon. My husband and I had moved from Canada where we had lived our whole lives to Damascus, Syria six months prior. We were teaching English, learning Arabic and travelling. Our tourist visas required us to leave the country and thought it would be nice to check out Lebanon.

We were stuck at the Syrian border crossing. Our American friend and travel companion was refused a visa back into Syria, causing unforeseen delays to our journey. The taxi driver wanted out of the deal to take us back to Damascus. We were fine with canceling our deal, or modifying it, except he wanted full payment for the 120-minute trip, when he had only driven us ten minutes at best across the "no man's land" between the Lebanese and Syrian borders. I

took my complaint to the *mudir* of the Syrian border, and from then, an impromptu court case ensued. The "court case" was an out of body experience. It was as if all the Arabic I had learnt in six months was coming out of my subconscious, and instead of spilling out onto the floor in a grammatically jumbled mess, it was lining up in eloquent harmony.

"It is wrong for him to demand 2000 *lira* for driving us for ten minutes! It is not our fault that our friend is stuck at the border," I repeated in Arabic to the *mudir*.

"Okay, so just let the taxi driver go. What's the problem?" asked the *mudir*, questioning our very presence in his office.

"My bag is in his trunk, and he won't let me have it until we pay him 2000 *lira*!"

"Haraam! Tu'tiha shantaha, ma'alesh..."

"That's wrong of you, give her the bag, it's okay, let it be." the *mudir* said, looking at the taxi driver with a disappointed expression, as if he should know better. The driver took a step forward and bent down towards the *mudir* who was sitting at his desk. "Brother, I would if it was that simple. I paid 1000 *lira* to get them as customers. I cannot have a loss," he retorted in defense.

It was a small office at the back of a long empty border station that was lined on one side with booths where customs officials would meet travelers, and on the other with spaces in front of each booth for a line to form. The set up was kind of ironic seeing as how lines in general never really did form in Syria. The *mudir's* office was cloudy with lingering cigarette smoke trapped in the thick air. The *mudir* sat at the back of his office, behind a large dark brown desk, files

piled high, pushed to the side and a lit cigarette balancing in the ashtray. When I walked in a ripple of cold fear ran through me. I quickly fought off the traumatic memory and got a hold of myself; this time it was different, I was in the right, and I knew how to say it.

“That is separate. It is not on them that you did that. I am sorry for the loss, but you should give her the bag and be gone.” The *mudir* was talking sense and the situation was swaying in my favor.

With that, the *mudir* bid us leave. He had no time for these small squabbles, it was not a “People’s Court” after all. I smiled, but not too much. I understood that he ruled in my favor, and I had won the case, but I still needed my bag. Why was I so foolish to put it into the trunk in the first place I don’t know. It was a borrowed bag from the French girl who lived a couple of buildings down the road from us. She was very clear that I must ensure I brought it back and in the same condition I had borrowed it. I found her request odd and should have read the omen more accurately and not surrendered it to the trunk of the taxi. Hindsight is always 20/20.

I filed out of the *mudir*’s office and in my mind, it was as if I had won the Stanley Cup. My sense of victory was overwhelming. But on the outside, I was trying to act like winning the case was no big deal. I looked right and left as we passed the few people in the border station, looking for someone to high five or a pat my back in congratulations. I saw Firdows, our travel companion from the corner of my eye. I turned towards her and gave her a wink, a cheeky smile and thumbs up. She smiled back, confused, but I passed by without

saying anything further. I was on my victory strut, and I didn’t want to end it. Firdows didn’t know the extent of the drawn-out disagreement we were having with the taxi driver because of *her* visa delay. She had been sitting at the border office by herself, waiting to be called in, questioned further or perhaps even taken away to a holding cell.

We had agreed to let Firdows come back to Syria with us before we left for Lebanon from Damascus. It was a favor. Firdows and her husband, Umar, were expat friends from America, students of Abu Nur, the large Islamic *madrassa* our neighborhood, *Rukn Ad-Din*, was known for. Firdows and Umar, had been living in Damascus as students for years. Umar was from California and had roots in Pakistan; Firdows was a Muslim convert from Arizona. Firdows wore full, black, Saudi-style *niqab*. Her pale hands and skin around her bright blue eyes stood out from the otherwise austere attire. She presented the “stereotypical” Muslim housewife story to the border officials with the intention of avoiding hassles and suspicion of staying in Syria for years on a tourist visa. Firdows would tell the border official that her husband was studying in Damascus and that she was a housewife. She would claim ignorance to any further details, and her dress lent “stereotypical authenticity” to her answers. I was awestruck at how she was dealing with the situation, transforming from a quick, talkative American woman, full of expression to a timid, ignorant housewife - not that housewives are ignorant - but she was playing the part well. In hindsight, however, her strategy may have backfired as we were still waiting for her visa, now for more than 90 minutes and counting.

The driver followed me outside, the sunlight blinding us both as we stepped out into the open sky. I continued down the stairway to his car while the driver took an immediate right and lit a cigarette, joining another man who was also smoking beside the doors. When I noticed him talking by the doors of the building and not following me to his car, I turned around, and walked back to him. "The *mudir* said to give me the bag." He lifted his chin in the air, his face puckered into a pout. Lifting one's chin in the air with a pouting face is the universal Syrian sign for "NO". It is a subtle raising of the chin, that I did not truly notice the first time I encountered it, but every time I did run into it, it was like running into a brick wall: "No I won't" it signaled. No matter the context, every time I encountered 'the raising of the chin', it would sting like a slap, leaving me speechless. I always felt the gesture was laden with crass attitude and audacity. "The *mudir* said you should give me the bag," I repeated, not knowing what else to say. The driver lifted his chin to the air again eloquently shutting me up. My mouth opened from shock. I felt as if I was falling. My face was getting hot. The *mudir* just told him to give me my stuff. How can he just ignore that! Thoughts were racing in my mind of the injustice of the situation, and how mean the driver was being, but my tongue was tied. I felt crushed, wincing at the insult. What recourse could I take? Going back to the *mudir*? Feeling like a small, powerless child in the face of a big school yard bully, I stepped around the taxi driver and went back to 'tell the teacher' the bully was not listening.

The *mudir's* door was closed. I knocked and waited. No answer came. I tried turning the doorknob; it was locked. Now what? Was

that it? I looked around for someone to help me. Men in uniform were moving about the building, but who do I talk to? Stranded and desperate for help, I went back to tell the taxi driver to open his trunk and give me my bag. The man he was talking to looked at me puzzled. I began to explain my case to him, but the taxi driver's louder and more eloquent voice entered his ears before mine. The man nodded and looked at me. "I just want my bag back, then he can go." To my surprise, the man turned to the driver and tried to convince him, "Just give her the bag."

"I will have lost 1000 *lira* because of her. I am not going to give her the bag until she pays 2000 *lira*!" the driver responded, raising his voice a notch. This attracted another man to join the huddle and try his luck to convince the driver to give back the bag. Cigarettes were being lit one after another as the matter was discussed amongst the men. The growing crowd of people weighing in on the issue was making the driver more anxious. He was defending his position to every new addition to the crowd. I saw Sajid and Irfaan from afar and waived at them to come. "Are you okay?" Sajid asked out of breath from running. I was so glad to see him. I felt so out of place arguing and was beyond relieved when both Sajid and Irfaan came to take over. "Yeah, I'm okay. But this stupid driver is not opening his trunk for us. We talked to the *mudir* inside. It was like a real court case. I said my complaint, he defended, and then the *mudir* told him to give me my stuff back. It was awesome, and it was all in Arabic!" My energy returned as I recounted the victorious court case to Sajid. "What's happening with all these people?"

"The *mudir* told the driver to give us our stuff back but the driver doesn't want to listen, so he won't open the trunk. All these people are telling him to open his trunk too. I went back to the *mudir's* office, but it was closed."

My tongue was moving a mile a minute. So much had happened in the past thirty minutes, and there was so much to update Sajid about. After telling Sajid what was going on, I excused myself and went back into the border office to find Firdows. I was desperate to get out of the cloud of cigarette smoke and away from these men.

I sat with Firdows in the border office. We were sitting on the bottom section of the brown window frame turned into a baseboard. It was raised about ten inches from the ground, and made a good stool, our backs leaning against the windows. The sun was shining through, warming my back. The room was warm, and the sun rays revealed swirling dust circles in the air. My stomach growled. I laughed at the whole situation we were in. Resting my elbows on my folded knees, my head in my hands. I drifted to sleep.

I awoke a few hours later to Sajid sitting beside me. I was wet from having sweated and felt dehydrated. I groggily lifted my head from my knees to see Sajid holding my backpack. "You got the bag!" I said with a smile. Am I dreaming? "How did you get into the trunk? What happened?" I was confused, trying to fully wake up as I brushed the drool that had dripped down the side of my mouth. "What happened? How did you get the backpack?" I asked again as Sajid looked at me chuckling at my deliria. "Irfaan and I paid the man."

"What! 2000 *lira*?" I yelled out in panic. "I fought so hard so that we didn't have to pay him. How are we going to get home now?"

Sajid handed me a warm banana and a water bottle from the backpack. We had packed a few snacks in my bag. I was very grateful for the burst of sugar and flavor from the warm banana that had baked in the trunk the whole afternoon. After the snack and drink, I was awake and ready to listen to what Sajid had to say:

"After you left that crowd of people telling the driver to give the bag back, he started getting really upset. He marched to his car and told everyone he was leaving. He got into his car and started it. Irfaan and I stood defiantly in front of the car so he wouldn't be able to move."

"Ha, you'd think so" Irfaan interjected, all of us listening intently.

"Yea, that's what you'd think in Canada, but here, the driver didn't care. He revved his engine and moved forward, forcing Irfaan to jump out of the way!"

"When that happened, I knew we would have to do something different. So, we told him we'd pay him 500 *lira*. He exploded at this, reminding us that he paid someone 1000 for our business, and would only accept 2000." Irfaan continued. "Tell me you didn't pay him the full 2000?" I cried out, crossing my fingers, hoping they hadn't paid that much.

"No of course not, wait to hear what happened... He got back into the car and started moving towards Irfaan and me again! The crowd of men that were

watching what was happening were telling us to let him go.”

“So then? I know you didn’t do that because you’re holding the bag. How did you get the bag then?”

“I offered him 1200 *lira*, he countered with 1500, and we settled. I took out the cash and he popped open his trunk. It was a straight exchange, and he sped off.”

“Good riddance!” I exclaimed. “1500 is a lot! How are we going to get home now?”

“Well, let’s hope Firdows gets her visa.” Sajid looked at his Nokia, “wow, 6pm! That means we’ve been here for 6 hours!”

The sun was starting to set. The border office was becoming dim as the light coming from the windows lessened. The *adhan* (call to prayer) faintly sounded in the distance and we prayed, one by one, in the corner of the large empty room. I sat there, on the thin prayer mat on the hard tile floor uncomfortably, feeling my ankles pressed down by my body weight. After finishing my prayer, I buried my head in my lap as I so often do in times of real distress and prayed.

I sat back down on the window baseboard, and as Sajid joined me, I whispered to him in earnest concern and worry, “How are we going to get home? We have about 700 *lira* left and there’s no such thing as debit or credit cards here if we need it. What will happen if Firdows doesn’t get a visa and how much longer are we going to sit here with her and wait?” Sajid let out a long sigh, resting his head on my shoulder. We sat in silence, feeling overwhelmed.

“Firdows!” an officer called behind the desk at the far end of the room. Firdows got up and slowly walked up to meet him.

Back at the window ledge, we held our breath, watching in anticipation as the officer gave Firdows her passport back. “Did she get the visa?” I whispered to Sajid. “I don’t know,” he answered.

We watched Firdows with wide eyes, hanging off the edge of our already narrow seats, waiting for a sign, some sort of signal that revealed her fate, a smile, a sigh of relief. What seemed like ten minutes later, Firdows took her passport and turned her face so we could see her eyes. Making eye contact, she subtly motioned for us to come outside. Firdows then picked up her bags and headed out the door. All three of us jumped out of our seats, grabbed our bags, and hurried outside into the dark and empty parking lot. The visa officers had relented and issued a renewal on her tourist visa.

The visa office was closing, and it was dark and deserted outside. Sajid headed back into the border station to find out how we could get a taxi. Sajid received instructions to walk to a tiny security post where the ‘no-man’s land’ between the two borders ends and the official Syrian border is. The officer wished Sajid the customary prayer often said when someone is in a needy situation: “May Allah open up the doors for you,” and left.

The tiny security post was a good thirty minutes’ walk away. With the sun gone, the weather had turned cold, and I could feel my fingers and toes go numb as we trudged ahead, luggage in tow. As always happens, right when I feel like I cannot

carry my luggage any longer, our destination begins to take shape in the distance. Finally, we arrived, huffing and puffing. At the post, we were graciously let into the cramped space by two officers. They were sitting in the little hut watching a Bollywood film and drinking tea.

When we entered, the two officers looked at Sajid and Irfaan, and recognizing our South Asian heritage, immediately shouted out “Amitabh Bacchhaan!” (the name of a famous Bollywood actor). They were very excited to be visited by real “Indians”. It was hard to tell whose smiles were wider, ours or theirs; but our entrance and their welcome filled our tiring hearts with joy. The customary question period began: “Where are you from? What are you doing here? Why are you traveling at such a late time?” Seeing as how they were fans of Amitabh Bachaan, we naturally told them we were from India, even related to Mr. Bachaan. They readily found us seats in their cozy space, offered us tea, and helped us talk to passing cars to get us a ride home. After filling them in on our story at the border station, we watched the rest of the Indian film together, drinking tea, and warming our hands on their small *soby*a (gas heater).

Sure enough, about thirty minutes later, the film ended, and a taxi came by. We asked the driver how much to Damascus and he said 300 *lira*. I was grateful.

The ride back was great. We talked about our triumphant border troubles and Firdows’ visa dilemma. We laughed and listened to some good music. What was supposed to be a 2000 *lira* trip home ended up costing us 1800 *lira* and a hell of a day between Lebanon and Syria.

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Gender Equality or Legal Pluralism? An Ostensible Puzzle in Syrian Rojava's Legal System

By Davide Grasso

The current Autonomous Administration of the Syrian North-East (AANES) came as a result of the confederal revolution in the Syrian civil war. It developed at first in the Kurdish areas of Syria (Rojava), advocating the national liberation of the Kurdish people and promoting a parallel process of reform.⁵⁵

The Movement for a Democratic Society (Tev Dem) was founded by the predominantly Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in 2011. In July 2012 it took control of several Syrian cities, largely populated by Kurdish-speaking residents. The People's and Women's Protection Units (YPG-YPJ), the armed wings of the PYD, drove out government forces almost completely from the area, though most of administrative institutions of the state were kept intact ever since. Deprived of political authority, they were flanked by new decision-making bodies, bearing the function of political leadership in the subsequent reforming process.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Thomas Schmidinger, *Rojava: Revolution, War, and the Future of Syria's Kurds* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 149-154.

⁵⁶ Anja Flach, Ercan Ayboğa, and Michael Knapp, *Revolution in Rojava: Frauenbefreiung und Kommunalismus zwischen Krieg und Embargo: eine Veröffentlichung der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung in Kooperation mit der Kampagne TATORT Kurdistan*, 3. aktualisierte Auflage (Hamburg: VSA: Verlag, 2016), 104-109.

These bodies were initially the People's Councils promoted by the PYP during the 2011 popular uprising. A complex system of representation emerged from their structure, branching out from assemblies, neighborhood commissions, village communes and city, district and cantonal councils made up of delegates. The Tev Dem was the result of the union of such representatives with the political parties adhering to this process. It instituted a parallel governing structure in 2013 aimed at outlining, with declared diplomatic purposes, a de facto regional institution. This structure consists of legislative, executive, and judicial councils forming what was declared in 2014 as the Autonomous Administration of Rojava. The declaration was accompanied with the publication of a sort of fundamental law called the Social Contract of the Autonomous Regions (SCAR).⁵⁷

The liberation of Arab-majority territories from the presence of the Islamic State (IS) in 2015 led to the creation of an assembly (the Syrian Democratic Congress or SDC) to better represent the linguistic identities of northern Syria. In 2016 the SDC declared the autonomy of a larger Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) by

⁵⁷ Unsigned Document, *Peymanameya Hevpeymana Civakî*, 2014; e.t., *The Social Contract of Rojava Cantons in Syria*, (SCAR), 2014; URL: <https://bit.ly/2WsOZ13>; accessed July 29, 2021; Martina Bianchi, *Sulla soggettività internazionale: il caso Rojava. Spazi grigi per la regione a maggioranza curda nel nord della Siria*, (Ph.D. Thesis, Università degli studi di Pisa, 2016).

publishing a second Social Contract.⁵⁸ Following the liberation of more territories from IS, the broader Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) was established in 2018. A Document of Understanding signed by the newly appointed General Council followed in 2019, and a third Social Contract has been announced for the end of 2021.⁵⁹

The aim of this article is to investigate how the notion of pluralism is understood by the autonomous institutions of the AANES. To this end we will illustrate some aspects of the confederal legal system and its legislative production, focusing on the

⁵⁸ Meclisa Damezrîner a Federaliya Demokratîk a Rojava-Bakurê Sûriyê, *Reşnivîsa Hevpeymanî Civakî ya Federaliya Demokratîk a Bakurê Sûriyeyê*, 2016; The Constituent Assembly of the Democratic Federalism of Northern Syria, *Social Contract of the Democratic Federalism of Northern Syria*, (SCDF), 2016; URL: <https://bit.ly/3BUSwFC>; accessed July 29, 2021; Stefano Marinelli, “The 2016 Rojava Social Contract: a Democratic Experiment of Civil and Social Rights in Northern Syria”, *International Law Blog*, October 24th, 2016. <https://internationallaw.blog/2016/10/24/the-2016-rojava-social-contract-a-democratic-experiment-of-civil-and-social-rights-in-northern-syria/>

⁵⁹ Rojava Information Center (RIC), “The AANES has announced that NES-wide elections will be held after the renewal of the social contract”, *Twitter*, June 14, 2021; <https://bit.ly/3xaPSrL>; accessed July 30, 2021; Ammar Abdullatif, “The new social contract will shape the administration: Syria’s AANES”, *North Press Agency*, July 14, 2021, accessed July 30, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3icCNTe>;

relevant realm of Family Law. The sources for this study are legal documents obtained online or by AANES authorities, primary and secondary scientific literature, journalistic sources and interviews collected in situ and online by the author between 2016 and 2021. For the sake of brevity, the autonomous institutions will be named Autonomous Regions (AR) independently of their historical denominations at different times.

Uniformity and Pluralism: The Syrian state

The principles contained in the laws enacted by the AR portray a will to influence, at least partially, the spirit of a possible new Syrian constitution.⁶⁰ This new constitution will be written through a dialogue initiated (unlikely at the moment) with the government.⁶¹ The AR’s goal is thus not unilateral independence, but the integration of the new institutional system into a new national legal framework transformed by domestic and international developments into a more federalist and democratic form. The future relationship of the AANES’s armed forces with this future republic was left deliberately undetermined, and defining their role was postponed to a hypothetical future agreement with a post-war Syrian state.⁶²

Despite the political will to reach a peaceful compromise with the regime, the content

⁶⁰ SCAR, Title I, Art. 9

⁶¹ Jared Szuba, “Alliance between SDF and Syrian regime is ‘very far away’, senior Kurdish official Salih Muslim says”, *The Defence Post*, February 18, 2019; accessed July 30, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3xbH70M>

⁶² SCAR, Title II, Art. 15; see more broadly SCDF, Title IV, Art. 71

and the political orientation of AANES' provisions are different from those embodied in the Syrian system. An insistence on liberal principles, on the idea of the rule of law, and on linguistic freedom is striking, with emphasis on political rights of women and youth. The Contracts provide for unrestricted adoption of all international human rights conventions. In comparison, the Syrian state has ratified these selectively and with reservations.⁶³

The formal legal differences between the Syrian state system and the AR may not prove exhaustive for a thorough juristic comparison. Both retain a revolutionary conception of the role of a vanguard party, albeit differently (the Ba'ath for the state, the PYP for the AR). This by itself may produce distinct institutional arrangements and opaque pluralities of juridical sources (beside the ongoing condition of war). In any case, the differences between the AANES and the Ba'athist systems can be considerable, and there is empirical evidence of a significant correspondence between the legal formulations of the AR and many of its socially implemented procedures and rules.⁶⁴

⁶³ SCAR, Title II, Art. 20; Title III, Art. 21; SCDF, Preamble; see also Rania Maktabi, "Gender, family law and citizenship in Syria", *Citizenship Studies*, 14:5, 557-572, 2010; Rania Maktabi, "Female Citizenship in the Middle East: Comparing family law reform in Morocco, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon", *Middle East Law and Governance* 5, pp. 280-307, 2013.

⁶⁴ Porter Goodman (U.S. YPG fighter), *Interview*, Qamishlo, April 2016; Heval Cudi (U.S. YPG Fighter), *Interview*, Qamishlo, April 2016; Can Cemgil and Clemens Hoffmann, "The 'Rojava Revolution' in

As far as the idea of pluralism is concerned, the legislative production of the AR displays a conception diametrically opposed to that of the Syrian state. The Ba'athist system holds – even in the very name of the republic and states it yet in the Preamble of the Constitution – a notion of national community as a segment of a transcendent Arab nation. In terms of sources of law, a somewhat crucial position is assigned to divine revelation, especially as interpreted by the Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence or *fiqh*.⁶⁵ The Syrian nation is thus defined politically by an attempt at ideological standardization of the country's

Syrian Kurdistan: A Model of Development for the Middle East?", *IDS Bulletin*, 47(3) 53-76, 2016; John Clark, "Imaginare Aude! Lessons of the Rojava Revolution", *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 27:3, 2016, pp. 108-110; Bruno Daniel-Laurent, "Rojava: une révolution communaliste au Kurdistan Syrien?", *Revue des deux mondes*, September 2016, pp. 133-135; Grasso, Davide, *Il fiore del deserto. La rivoluzione delle donne e delle comuni tra l'Iraq e la Siria del nord* (Milano: Agenzia X, 2018).

⁶⁵ Syrian Arab Republic, *Constitution*, Title I, Art. 3, 2012, accessed July 28th, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3i52H2x>; Syrian Arab Republic, *Qanun al-ahwal al-shakhsiyya* (Law of Personal Status), No. 59, 1953, Art. 305, accessed July 31, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3xIRUFO>; Maurits S. Berger, "The Legal System of Family Law in Syria", *Bulletin d'études orientales, Institut Français du Proche-Orient*, T. 49, 1997, pp. 116-119; Razi A. Diab Esq, "Religion and the Law in Syria", Arab Center for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Education, 2010; accessed July 29th, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3iRURIE>.

de facto linguistic and religious plurality: two predominant demographic with their cultural connotations - the Arabic language and Sunni Islam - are superimposed on the identities of the entire population.⁶⁶

On the other hand, the Syrian legal system allows for a partial recognition of Syria's cultural plurality. Such a balance between uniformity and pluralism is formulated according to the criterion of a contrast between 'public' and 'private' spheres of life. The private sphere is not to be understood as individual, but rather more linked to kinship structures.⁶⁷ In the contemporary Syrian Arab Republic, legal uniformity is affirmed in the public sphere (Constitution, Civil Code, Criminal Code) but juxtaposed with legal pluralism as far as Family Law is concerned.⁶⁸

The most recent codification of Family law is the Law of Personal Status (LPS) promulgated in 1953 and amended in 1975, 2003, 2006, and 2010.⁶⁹ The text regulates

both family law and succession, crucial matters in relation to the rapports between genders and generations. The code's legal solutions are drawn from Islamic (Sunni) schools of *fiqh*, with the predominance of the Hanafi school.⁷⁰ A specific section circumscribes areas of legislative and judicial autonomy for three specific (religious) communities: Druze, Christians, and Jews.⁷¹

Uniformity and pluralism: the Autonomous Regions

The changes introduced by the confederal movement are inspired by an inverted conception of the relationship between plurality and standardization. Quotas for political representation have been established at the political-institutional level for the different linguistic communities residing in the region.⁷² Previously excluded minority languages (Kurdish and Syriac) have gradually become part of the teaching curriculum alongside Arabic.⁷³ Reforms like this are inspired by a

⁶⁶ Mirella Galletti, *Storia della Siria contemporanea* (Milano: Bompiani, 2006), 83.

⁶⁷ Maktabi, "Female Citizenship in the Middle East", 559-560.

⁶⁸ Annika Rabo, "Family Law in Multicultural and Multireligious Syria", in Collste, Göran, ed., *Possibilities of Religious Pluralism* (Linköping University Electronic Press, 2005) pp. 71-87.

⁶⁹ J. N. D. Anderson, "The Syrian Law of Personal Status", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Cambridge University Press on behalf of School of Oriental and African Studies, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1955, pp. 34-49; Berger, "The Legal System of Family Law in Syria"; Esther van Eijk, *Family Law in Syria*:

A Plurality of Laws, Norms and Legal Practices (Ph.D. Thesis, Leiden University Repository, 2013).

⁷⁰ LPS, Art. 1-305

⁷¹ LPS Art. 306-308.

⁷² Iylmaz Orkan (Chair of Ufficio d'Informazione del Kurdistan in Italia – Uiki Onlus), *Interview*, Online, May 2021; Nilufer Koç (Co-Chair of the Kongreya Neteweyî ya Kurdistanê – KNK), *Interview*, Online, June 2021.

⁷³ Heval Raperin (Member of the Coordination Committee for Education, DFNS, Cizire Canton), *Interview*, Qamishlo, April 2016; Daniel Stefani, "La pédagogie linguistique du vivre ensemble dans les écoles kurdes à Rojava: Un nouveau model

specific conception of the ‘democratic nation’ that is theorized by PKK leader and Kurdish essayist Abdullah Öcalan, who conceives each national community as culturally non-uniform and enriched when its component communities are valued instead of being denied.⁷⁴ These reforms assert thus a pluralist logic in general political terms and at the highest level, breaking explicitly with the statist superimposition of Syrian national identity and Arab, Sunni or even Muslim identity. This linguistic, pedagogical, and religious pluralism ought not to be confused, however, with the notion of legal pluralism. The constitutive laws of the AR enshrine and formally protect the right of different communities to actively participate in politics, but do not mention statutory legislative autonomies based on religious or linguistic affiliation, especially not in family matters.

The distinction between the private and public spheres found in the Syria constitution is conceived differently in the constitution laws of the AR. The statist distinction was challenged early by the theoretical elaboration of Kongra Star, the revolutionary movement of the women’s

d’éducation sous la menace de la guerre”, en collaboration avec le Rojava Information Center (*Revue Periferias*, 20 décembre 2019); Pinar Dinc, “The content of school textbooks in (nation) states and ‘stateless autonomies’: A comparison of Turkey and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (Rojava)”, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2020.

⁷⁴ Abdullah Öcalan, *Democratic Nation* (International Initiative Edition and Mesopotamian Publishers, Neuss-Cologne, 2016).

organizations and communes.⁷⁵ Kongra Star conceives of the family as a “small state” capable of determining the political supremacy of adult men over women and young people.⁷⁶ This conception left its mark on the legal formulation of democratic autonomy in the AR, insofar as we find in the SCAR a distinction between ethnic-linguistic or religious identities on one side (under the concept of ‘communities’ or ‘components’) and generational or gender groups on the other (falling under the notion of ‘social segments’).⁷⁷

The social segments are named “youth” and “women.” Women and youth acquire at their turn, in the SCAR, the right to quotas of institutional representation, the creation of autonomous institutions and the protection of their political, social, and economic rights, including those established by international conventions. These rights are not necessarily compatible with existing state, religious or customary laws regulating family life and inheritance in Syria.⁷⁸ That is

⁷⁵ Pinar Tank, “Kurdish Women in Rojava: From Resistance to Reconstruction”, *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 57, No. 3, pp. 404-428, 2017; Arianne Shahvisi, “Beyond orientalism: exploring the distinctive feminism of democratic confederalism in Rojava”, *Geopolitics*, 2018; Kongra Star, Charter Preparation Committee, *Kongra Star Charter*, August 25th, 2020; accessed July 28th, 2021; <https://bit.ly/3rRuZ45>

⁷⁶ Heval Zilan (Member of Kongra Star, DFNS), *Interview*, Qamishlo, November 2017.

⁷⁷ For example, SCAR, Art. 3, 6, 9, 14, 32, 17, 27, 28, 47, 95.

⁷⁸ Maktabi, “Gender, family law and citizenship in Syria”, 2010; Esther van Eijk, “Pluralistic

why the confederal institutions, albeit animated by continuous reference to cultural pluralism and administrative self-regulation, came to abolish the constrained pluralistic provisions guaranteed in Family Law by the Syrian Republic and by the whole Islamic tradition.

The Confederal Reform of Family Law

One of the key steps in Family Law reform was the promulgation of the Fundamental Provisions and General Principles Regarding Women (GPW), published on October 22, 2014, during the battle of Kobane between the YPG-YPJ and IS.⁷⁹

The GPW entail a series of significant breaches with the forms of Family Law imposed both by Syrian regime and the Salafi armed groups participating in the civil war. Among the new principles are: equal distribution of inheritance between male and female children;⁸⁰ the ban of

polygamy;⁸¹ the abolition of *mahr* (the financial contribution offered by the Muslim groom to the bride on the stipulation of the marriage contract) and dowry (the Christian analogue in reverse);⁸² the equal right to terminate the marriage contract for both sexes (state's and Islamist regulations make it easier for men to divorce, in compliance with orthodox interpretations of Islamic law).⁸³ The GPW also extend the mother's right to custody over her children and equate the value of a woman's testimony in court with that of a man (the LPS and Islamist regulations make the value of a woman's testimony half than that of a man).⁸⁴ Lastly, they also abolish the extenuating circumstances granted by the Syrian Penal Code to those who commit femicide under the pretext of "honor killing."⁸⁵

Although AANES institutions often struggle to implement these provisions, they apply without distinction to all residents of the AR, regardless of their religious or communal

Family Law in Syria: Blane or Blessing?", Electronic Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law, Vol. 2, 2014.

⁷⁹ Anf News, "Die Frauengesetze der Autonomieverwaltung von Nord- und Ostsyrien", Anf Deutsch, June 19, 2021; accessed July 29, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3f5ydM8>;

⁸⁰ Rêveberiya Xwesriya Demoqratîk Li kantona Cizîrê Rojava – sûrî, Encûmena Cîbicîker – Desteya Jin, 2014, *Rêgezên bingehîn û ferweriyên (hukmên) giştî yên Taybet bi jinê ve*, Jimar 9, 22 / 10 / 2014; Minister of Women Body, Administration of the Democratic Autonomy, *Basic Principles and General Provisions for Women*, (GPW), 9, Art. 15, October 22nd, 2014; accessed July 29, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3BQZXxJ>.

⁸¹ GPW, Art. 13

⁸² GPW, Art. 11

⁸³ GPW, Art. 14. For more the inequality between genders in matters of marriage and divorce in Islamic law, see also Gihane Tabet, "Women in Personal Status Laws: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria", SHS Papers in Women's Studies/ Gender Research, No. 4, July 2005; Juelda Lamce, "Marriage Requirements in the Classic Doctrine of the Islamic Sunni Schools", *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, March 2014; Roberta Aluffi Beck Peccoz, "Islamic Law. Marriage", in *Routledge Handbook of Religious Laws* (London, Routledge, 2019), 256-260.

⁸⁴ GPW, Art. 25, 9,

⁸⁵ GPW, Art. 17.

identities.⁸⁶ Such a standardization overcomes the only reserve of legal pluralism allowed by the Syrian state and the Islamic legal tradition entitling Christians, Druze and Jews (though not other communities) partially autonomy in Family Law and its related spheres.

The universalistic understanding of family regulation by the GPW differs from that of the LPS also in another aspect. The GPW rejects the religious connotation of the General Section of the state's law and make no reference to religious sources for laws. Although promising equality for all citizens, the general section of LPS is a blatant expression of the aforementioned superimposition of Sunni Muslim religious law on the whole of Syria's societal and cultural fabric. Moreover, whereas the religious pluralism formalized by the state occurs through autonomous religious courts, each following its own legislation, the GPW entrust the judicial competencies in matters of personal status to the Committees of Justice of the Communes, depriving the religious courts of any formal residual power under the autonomous jurisdiction.⁸⁷

The general and declamatory nature of the GPW, in addition to resistance encountered

⁸⁶ Ramazan Mendanlioglu, "Geschichte und Gegenwart der 'Frauenrevolution' in Rojava", *Work in Progress. Work on Progress. Doktorand*innen-Jahrbuch 2020 der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung* (Herausgegeben von Marcus Hawel, 2020), 280-283; Omer Horo and Hîvda Hêbun, "Cihan Xidro: Das Frauengesetz Muss Umgesetzt Werden", *Anha News*, July 14, 2021; accessed July 29, 2021, <https://bit.ly/37ejYQt>

⁸⁷ GPW, Art. 27.

among parts of the mostly conservative population, made their application difficult.⁸⁸ To date, the AR institutions report to be still working towards a consensual, peaceful application of the measures through raising awareness and education campaigns.⁸⁹ Interestingly, they also report a greater success in urban Kurdish communities and greater difficulties among rural Arab ones.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, Kongra Star has also equipped itself with repressive instruments to overcome overt resistance to the implementation of the GPW. The Syrian civil and penal codes continue to be the referent for cantonal judicial authorities unless amended by the confederal bodies.⁹¹ In 2016, articles of the Penal Code related in various ways to family and gender issues were amended.⁹² Confederal authorities promulgated in 2016 a 'Crimes against Family and Public Morality' (PC-A) amendment section to the Penal Code, in which twenty-four articles provide for

⁸⁸ Andrea Benario, "Zum Verhältnis von Recht und Moral: Die Dialektik der Frauengesetze in Rojava", *Kurdistan Report*, 2017; accessed July 29, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3jgrqAz>

⁸⁹ Zilan, *Interview*, 2017.

⁹⁰ Aynur Pasha (Member of the Justice Council of the Cizire Region, AANES), *Interview*, Online, June 2021.

⁹¹ SCAR, Title IX, Art. 88; except for restorative and conciliatory judicial practices enacted by the Communes, which have no links with state legislation, see Yasin Duman, "Peacebuilding in a Conflict Setting", *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, Sage Publications, Inc., Vol. 12, No. 1, April 2017. pp. 86-87.

⁹² Pasha, *Interview*, 2021.

prison sentences and fines for those breaking bans on polygamy, child abduction, violence against women, incest, body mutilations, adultery by men, and forced marriages.⁹³

Conclusion

The examination of the confederal Family Law reform highlights a tension internal not only to Syria, but to the notion of pluralism itself. Promoting a plurality of views, interests and values involves the necessary decision on where and how to trace the decisive lines differentiating them. The juridical interests of 'communities' - be they defined in religious, linguistic, or customary terms - are not necessarily identical to those of 'social segments' like women or youth, which can push for critical assessments of traditional, communitarian understandings of social relations. When the confederal movement affirms its pluralist orientation in the protection of linguistic diversity and religious minorities, it does not seem to extend this to forms of legal pluralism. The equal participation of communities in a plural political process establishing uniform rules in the constitutional, criminal, and personal status realms is considered adequate for the task of balancing communitarian, generational and gender rights. Although sensitive to the protection of national and cultural differences, such a conception appears to be equally aimed at strengthening interests stemming from conditions of subalternity transversal to communities and sects.

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⁹³ Unsigned Document, *Chapter III. In Crimes Against the Family and Public Morals*, (PC-A), Art. 158, 175, 165, 167, 170, 172-74, 164, 178, 162, 159-160.

Book Reviews

Lisa Wedeen, *Authoritarian Apprehensions: Ideology, Judgement, and Mourning in Syria*. University of Chicago Press, 2019. pp 257.

Reviewed by Sumaira Nawaz

Political scientists and theorists have been trying to analyze the rise of populist leaders in developing countries with much interest and concern. Public support for authoritarian rule among ordinary citizens is not a regionally isolated phenomenon, and nor is it strictly premised on violent coercion, material patronage, or distinct ideological commitments. Embedded within this support is the question of social transformation—How are everyday desires and moments of dissent regimented to ensure regime survival? Is the state able to cultivate the same depth of emotional attachment and loyalty among its citizens? How do we understand the status of the “silent majority” in these contexts, those who do not acquiesce to authoritarian rule but hesitate to oppose its conventional order?

Lisa Wedeen in her latest contribution *Authoritarian Apprehensions* centers the case of Bashar al-Assad’s rule in Syria to investigate the simultaneous existence of fervent loyalty, deep ambivalence, and outright opposition to the Ba’th regime. Wedeen’s research question is straightforward: “what inclined people—and not simply the narrow group deriving obvious material benefit from the status quo—to stick to the kleptocracy they knew when the opportunity arose to (at least) entertain the idea of change” (3). The

answer for her lies in ideology and how it intertwines with affect, “to produce an atmosphere in which for many the exercise of creative political judgement becomes all but impossible” (4). According to Wedeen, the first decade of Bashar al-Assad’s rule “ushered in an avowedly upbeat, modern, internet-savvy authoritarianism” that relied on “regime-organized market-inflected civil society organisation” (x). This created a class of professional managerial elite whose styles of comportment and commercialized living were modelled to be aspirational by the regime (10). Drawing on Althusser, *Authoritarian Ambivalence* repurposes the concept of ideology for the present in order to underscore the collusion between the regime and market in Syria, rejecting the “sharp dichotomy between materialist and ideational approaches” (5). The text initiates new scholarly conversations around inducements to compliance, shedding light on the “psychic and embodied processes that trigger mimetic identifications with persons and fetishised objects,” like glossy magazines, flashy fast cars, and most importantly the Syrian first family (16).

Wedeen begins by capturing the Assad regime’s turn to neoliberal autocracy and social market economy in the 1990s, which ushered a “kinder, gentler version” of autocracy (38). She lucidly describes how desires for market freedom, upward mobility, and consumer pleasure became tethered to citizen obedience and coercive regulation (20). The regime sanctioned and expounded a version of the “good life,” that made national sovereignty and multi-sectarian accommodation synonymous with modernity, and its own power, over “good governance” (27). One of the central themes of this section is suspension of

political judgement wherein people simultaneously acknowledge and dismiss realities of oppression; a condition that French scholar Octave Manzoni has described as ideological disavowal — “I know very well, yet nevertheless...” (40-1). That is, despite being aware of the limits of their market-oriented social freedoms, people could not imagine alternatives to the regime’s secular vision of prosperity and security (39).

The second chapter discusses a range of Syrian television comedies and the way humor brings forth the absurdity of putting together the money-making values of neoliberalism and autocracy’s coercive control (74). Pre-uprising Syrian television was avowedly national, and put the responsibility of fear, corporal excess and corruption on both the ruler and the ruled (61). However, dark humor parodies that emerged later, like the puppet show *Top Goon: Diaries of a Little Dictator* outrightly called for the regime’s ouster. The latter could not sustain long-term popularity, and Wedeen ascribes its diminished punch to revolutionary rigidity and pedantry, which are at odds with the intrinsic quality of comedy “to hold together a variety of manifestly clashing or ambitious affects” (67). Comedies in their irreverence struggle to put forward any “uniform offering of a redemptive politics,” but can indeed provide “testing grounds for broader collaborative disruptions” or even “a mode of detachment” from daily forms of commercialized living (75).

The third chapter gives an account of influx of information or “fake news,” and how it induces people towards generalized uncertainty and avoiding commitment to political judgement entirely (79-80). No

evidence becomes credible enough for loyalists, and more or better information fails to allay the ambivalence of those in the “grey area” (82). The regime thus dampens political excitement by deliberately over-saturating citizens with sensationalist information that raised doubts about the veracity of oppositional narratives. Boundaries of belief and disbelief are blurred as people begin to inhabit a space of reticence where they know things, yet do not know them at the same time. In such a situation, “citizen journalists bore the onus of offering a discursive corrective to autocratic dissembling,” knowing well that too much criticism would instill the same confusion they wished to assuage (84). A key example Wedeen explores is that of the Syrian collective, Abounaddara, and its “emergency cinema” that expanded the scope of political judgment by allowing “ambiguity, contingency, and competing views to thrive” instead of sending out an information overload (82). As Wedeen argues, a cacophony of facts and images would only turn people into “siloe publics,” deriving pleasure in “encountering views that confirm their own” (79).

Chapter four explores state-sponsored melodramatic television shows that enacted a “national community” which was avowedly multi-sectarian but brooked no scope for political difference or dissent (112-3). These films licensed spectators to submit to intense sentimentality but only within a “decidedly militarised national fantasy of sacrifice and order” streamlining the “ambiguities of collective experience” (118). Wedeen contrasts the regime’s morally didactic cinema with the works of Syrian artists like Khalid ‘Abd al-Wahid, Ziad Kalthum, Ossama Mohammed, that acted as “training spaces for political

otherwiseness [sic]" without denying ambivalence among viewers (139). Wedeen builds on Arendt to chart the way Kalthum and Mohammed's films raise possibilities for "representative thinking," in which an "enlarged mentality is open to radical differences" (138). The final section of the book studies anticipatory fears and rumors of impending massacres by "Sunni goons" in the early years of the Syrian Uprising. The regime managed to displace fears of its own brutality onto a fantasy Other, such as external intervention by the West, sectarian violence by the Sunni majority or even radical Islamist insurgencies stemming from the Gulf (153, 160). The intention is not to say fear made minorities unanimously celebrate the regime, but rather examine how even imaginary threats of victimization prevented them from forging solidarities in the face of "shared complicities" (161-2).

Authoritarian Apprehension steers readers towards a better understanding of ideology and its ability to "specify the terms of collective membership and the standards for judgement" (6). It skillfully uses political ethnography to place cultural consumption, artistic practices, and ordinary bodily habitus of Syrians of varying political affiliations, at the core of its theorizations. Particularly noteworthy is Wedeen's examination of the ambivalence and disavowal nurtured by Bashar al-Assad's neoliberal autocracy, demonstrating how discourses of marketization, cosmopolitan living and multicultural secularism, sustained belief in the regime even among those who were witness to its brutalities. The text will prove beneficial for students of culture studies, political science, anthropology, and even activists living in autocracies, trying to make their appeals more persuasive and compelling for people

who are toggling between attachments to seductions of order and desires for political reform.

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**Aaron Tugendhaft, *The Idols of ISIS*.
University of Chicago Press, 2020. 136 pp.**

Reviewed by Kyle Bradley Ashley

Among their many crimes, The Islamic State (IS/ISIS) shocked the world with videos of deliberate, almost jubilant, destruction of ancient artifacts and heritage sites in the areas they controlled in Iraq and Syria. This destruction is a curious phenomenon, as none of the other rebel groups in the protracted conflicts in these two countries have engaged in similar activities, or if they did, not usually as thorough and publicized. In his book, *the Idols of ISIS*, Aaron Tugendhaft sheds light on the Islamic State's campaign against Syrian and Iraqi heritage by interrogating the presumptions underlining IS's acts of destruction. He asks the following questions: "What does this video reveal about the role images play in politics? Why destroy images? Can we find better ways to live together in their midst?" (Introduction) For most of the book, Tugendhaft attempts to offer the readers informative answers for these questions.

The monograph is divided into three tight chapters, each elaborating on a distinct aspect of the Islamic State's iconoclastic campaign. In the introduction, Tugendhaft recounts the incident which instigated this project: his viewing of a 2015 video published by IS that captures the shattering of Assyrian relics in the Mosul Museum in Iraq. This video, in Tugendhaft's reading, marks an uncanny resemblance to an Assyrian carving which depicts three men smashing the sculpture of a deposed king. The comparison sparks the questions which inspire the contents of the book. What drives the destruction of images? And what drives the production of images depicting

the destruction of images? Tugendhaft argues that the public spaces in which democratic politics operate within are mediated by images which inform our desires and shape our perception of the world. As a result, ISIS's iconoclasm can be seen as an effort to build a society without politics — the image of the destruction of images operating as a symbol to impose unity.

The first chapter demonstrates how iconoclasm is not merely a destructive act, but a process in which new symbols are generated through the destruction of other ones. This is achieved through comparing the destruction of Assyrian relics in the Mosul Museum to the destruction of Babylonian idols by Abraham as narrated by the Qur'an. Drawing on the writings of Medieval philosopher Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Tugendhaft notes the paradox that lies within the heart of iconoclasm, that the commitment to an imageless regime can only be cultivated through the usage of images.

The second chapter of the book explains how ancient relics of Assyria and Mesopotamia have been appropriated by various social actors in the context of legitimizing larger political projects. Tugendhaft details the process by which images of Mesopotamia were appropriated in order to construct a universal cultural heritage during the area of European imperialism. European archaeologists working before and during the First World War used images of Assyrian and Babylonian relics to connect contemporary Western culture to ancient Mesopotamia, which was believed to be the first world civilization. Tugendhaft also notes the subsequent appropriation of these images

in the construction of an Iraqi national identity throughout the 20th century, detailing how Saddam Hussein utilized Assyrian and Mesopotamian relics to imagine Iraq (and himself by extension) as the destined leader of the Arab world. Drawing on theorizations of avant-garde art, Tugendhaft argues that through the smashing of these ancient relics, ISIS again transforms how these images of ancient Mesopotamian past are perceived in today's world, not unlike how Western humanists and Iraqi Ba'athists have transformed our relationship to these images before.

The last chapter approaches the Islamic State's digital productions and its resemblance and connection to American war propaganda. Tugendhaft illustrates this connection through tracing the images and videos produced by the media arm of IS, the Al Hayat Media Center, to visuals produced by the popular video game franchise, *Call of Duty*, which Tugendhaft argues are reproductions of news coverage of American military operations. The chapter concludes with a passage critiquing social media conglomerates in their construction and management of digital forums. Though outwardly posed as a democratic medium, Tugendhaft argues that profiteering usually governs online discourses, which is especially apparent when tech giants commodify political images and campaigns that occur within their platforms. He argues that this brings about a new iconoclasm, wherein images are not destroyed through their smashing by a hammer, but through the draining of their meaning by digitization and commodification.

Ultimately the driving argument of *The Idols of ISIS* can be summarized succinctly by

invoking the opening line of chapter 3, "Iconoclasm does not remove images so much as generate new ones." Tugendhaft's convincingly illustrates this point through examining the spectacle of the Mosul Museum. In this, *The Idols of ISIS* marks a solid scholarly contribution to the field of Middle Eastern studies, specifically by demonstrating the function of images, and the function of their destruction, in the construction of political spaces. The brevity and legibility of Tugendhaft's prose makes the book ideal for usage in higher-level undergraduate courses, or as a companion text in graduate seminars. It should be noted that the accessibility of the text does not detract from the quality of the analysis set forth by Tugendhaft; and for scholars interested in the politics of signification, or the politics of insurrection in the Middle East, *Idols of ISIS* is a book that is worth visiting.

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Dara Conduit, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*. Cambridge University Press, 2019. 268 pp.

Reviewed by Gabriel Larivière

The Syrian branch of the Muslim brotherhood is one of the oldest and most controversial political parties in modern Syria. It's controversial nature, that is whether it's a legitimate political party invested in a democratic future for Syria or an Islamist fundamentalist conspiring to impose its own authoritarian rule on the country, came to the fore in the spring of 2011. Regime officials quickly blamed the Brotherhood for the popular protests emerging across the country. At the same time demonstrators held signs and chanted slogans stressing their independence from established political organizations. Behind the scenes laid layers of contested histories. Discourses alluding to the Muslim Brotherhood reflected conflicting memories of "the events" of 1982 in Hama. The Brotherhood represented a violent Islamist group orchestrating a sectarian uprising for some, or the symbol of the Ba'th regime's brutal oppression for others. Amidst such diverging narratives, it became increasingly difficult to understand the Brotherhood's trajectory at the height of the Syrian Revolution. Conduit's book, *The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood*, precisely tackles this challenge. Her work is an ambitious and novel attempt at disentangling the group's multi-faceted history to better understand its role during the Syrian Revolution.

To do so, the author sets to uncover the Brotherhood's history as seen through the eyes of its members. This approach can help better understand how the organization conceived of its past and projected itself in

the future at the early days of the Syrian Revolution. Conduit's account builds on several primary sources, including memoirs and political documents, as well as interviews with members of the Brotherhood (8-11). The central idea of the book is that the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood should be seen as a political organization whose trajectory was shaped by the authoritarian context in which it evolved (14-15). The organization was further influenced by three distinct organizational trends that began developing in its founding years: pragmatism, individualism, and ideological flexibility. By focusing on these, Conduit aims to shift broader discussions of Islamist movements away from their ideology, which she maintains often, "takes a back seat to [their] rational pursuit of survival and relevance" (15).

Conduit makes her case by narrating the development of the Brotherhood's ideology and, in parallel, the evolution of its political practice. The first chapter lays down the book's arguments, while chapter two combines sociological and intellectual history to give a broad outline of the organization's founding ideas. In the tradition of Hanna Batatu's works, the chapter emphasizes the upper-class nature of the Brotherhood, whose leadership tended to come from merchant, propertied, or professional classes (41-44). This social basis partly explains the organization's commitment to property rights and economic freedoms. But Conduit is careful not to infer ideology from social class, and she points out the intellectual diversity within the Brotherhood. For example, Conduit argues that this social analysis might describe the Damascene and Aleppine branches of the Brotherhood, it does not apply easily to the Hamawi one,

which was historically centered around the personage of shaykh Muhammad al-Hamid. His most well-known student, Sa'id Hawwa, grew up in a notoriously poor family. As Conduit notes, Hawwa's famous *Jund Allah* (Soldiers of God) series of books, which emphasized the fight against perceived apostasy from Islam and the need to revive the Caliphate, stood in great contrast with the Brotherhood's traditional calls for parliamentary democracy (54-55). Indeed, Hawwa's idiosyncratic views did not make their ways into the organization's official program. Thus, Conduit argues is that despite the diverse ideas espoused by Brotherhood members, the group officially remained committed to its founding ideals of democracy, economic freedom, and pluralism. Even as Hawwa's popularity as a more radical author was reaching its zenith in the 1970-1980s, he still co-authored the relatively moderate and inclusive Declaration and Program of the Islamic Revolution (55).

Chapter three outlines the Brotherhood's long history of involvement in Syrian politics. The Brotherhood successfully ran some of its most influential leaders in electoral coalitions, the 1947 League of Ulama and the 1949 Islamic Socialist Front, and even managing to win several seats in the 1961 elections. Muhammad al-Mubarak and Maruf al-Dawalibi, two influential members, furthermore, served as ministers between 1949 and 1951. Indeed, formal politics was a central preoccupation of the organization's leadership until at least 1963. Conduit then argues that one can better explain the Muslim Brotherhood's resort to violence once its political history is rightly understood. She holds that the Brotherhood's violent episodes represent not a core belief of the organization, but "a

result of circumstance and tactic ... [which] reflected the extreme end of the countrywide popular response to the significant social changes that the Ba'th regime had imposed on Syria" (92).

The subsequent chapters extend this idea to the years leading up to the Hama Massacre by building on two insights previously discussed in the literature on the Brotherhood: that Ba'thist economic policies alienated social classes typically drawn to Islamist politics; and that the rise of the Hama branch of the Brotherhood pushed the organization towards violent revolt. Conduit adds that these two dynamics were amplified by the authoritarian context at the time, which excluded moderate voices and reinforced radical forces. After the Aleppo Artillery School massacre and the regime's subsequent repression, the Brotherhood officially joined the fight against the Ba'th initiated by the Fighting Vanguard (the armed faction for artillery school massacre). For Conduit, the Brotherhood's rushed and disorganized military performance is further evidence that this episode was the result of a pragmatic decision taken in a challenging authoritarian environment rather than a systematic commitment to armed struggle (115).

Building on this account of the Brotherhood's history, the second part of the book covers the organization's trajectory since 2011. It also relies on several interviews the author conducted with members of the Brotherhood. In the next three chapters, Conduit argues that the Brotherhood was at a relatively weak position at the early days of the Syrian Uprising; the group's exile after 1982 caused a striking imbalance between its lack

of connections to local coordination committees and its central role in opposition-led institutions abroad, limiting its organizational strength in Syria itself. We further learn that the organization's hesitancy to initially embrace the protests stemmed from its political experience, as it was wary of the regime's potential repression and of how Syrian officials would rely on memories of Hama to discredit the popular uprising (157-159). Conduit continues illustrating the Brotherhood's pragmatism in her discussion of the organization's participation in rebel politics after 2011. As was the case historically, the Brotherhood's members had diverse political views that influenced their preferred visions of what a post-Assad state would look like. Although in general they promised commitment to a "civil modern state," the Brotherhood's official communications only offered vague ideas of what they mean by "civil" and "modern." For the most part, the organization was content to focus on gaining support and making alliances within the diverse revolutionary groups and factions that appeared in Syrian at the start of the uprising. All this was done so as to position itself at the heart of rebel institutions, which was a largely failing endeavor due to the organization's checkered reputation causing most to distrust it (160-169).

The book ends by looking at how the Brotherhood took part in the militarization of the Syrian Revolution and in the subsequent civil war, which was relatively limited. The lessons learnt from its involvement in armed operations preceding the Hama Massacre made it once again reluctant to support emerging armed opposition groups. Moreover, unlike in the 1980s, the Brotherhood was now removed

from training camps and military operations, which made it difficult to directly take part in the armed conflict. Nonetheless, the organization's great resources and numerous contacts outside Syria made it an important player in financing armed groups such as *Liwa al-Tawhid* in Aleppo and in funneling humanitarian aid inside the country (205-207).

Conduit's book is a welcomed contribution to the growing literature on Islam and politics in modern Syria, on par with the prominent works by Khatib, Lefèvre, and Diaz. It invites researchers to seriously consider the political history of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, both as a set of experiences that shaped the organization and as defining feature of it. In addition, the book is important because it illustrates the value of using memoirs and interviews to explore the history of political organization in contexts where authoritarianism makes traditional research method unfeasible. That being said, Conduit's exploration of the brotherhood would have benefitted from a more sustained engagement with the subjectivities expressed in the memoirs and personal stories she utilized. At points, there seems to be a contradiction between what Conduit herself argues and with what the memoirs and interviews themselves say. A good example of this is found in the case of the aforementioned Sa'id Hawwa, whose deeply personal memoir paints the portrait of a Brotherhood member different in important ways from the picture of the Muslim Brotherhood Conduit paints. Moreover, it's important to note that Conduit missed an important work that could have enriched her narrative at times and strengthened some of her arguments. Adnan Sa'd al-Din's five-volume memoirs contain an inexhaustible amount of

information and details because of his crucial role as leader of the organization, and the book would have been enriched by its inclusion as a source. Lastly, and as a minor note, while scholars have already noted that the memoirs of Fighting Vanguard Brotherhood members like Ayman al-Shurbaji, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, and Adnan Uqla are highly valuable primary sources in themselves; lesser known is the fact that they also contain unique information about the Brotherhood's armed operations in Syria during the 1970s-1980, a topic typically avoided by Brotherhood members themselves. A brief, more detailed degression into this essential area of Brotherhood history would have facilitated the reader's understanding of the organization, its goals, and history.

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Christopher Phillips, *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, Revised and Updated Edition. Yale University Press, 2020. 384 pp.

Reviewed by Gibson Gray

Christopher Phillips' revised and updated work, *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, is a detailed account on the Syrian conflict since its origins leading up to 2011. Phillips begins by dedicating his book "to the people of Syria, on all sides," a non-partisan opening gesture that is seemingly never betrayed throughout this work. Phillips prefaces that this work is not intended to be historical in nature but is instead meant as a study from an international relations point of view, geared towards developing a better understanding of the conflict's origins and unfortunate persistence. With his analytical lens established, Phillips attributes six state actors as having played a dominant role in the ongoing conflict: the United States (US), Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar. Similarly, he lists Hezbollah, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and ISIS as the most influential non-state foreign actors in the war. Phillips maintains that understanding these actors, their relationships with each other, and the influences they exert is integral if one is to accurately map out the complex and ever-fluctuating Syrian war theater and its varying narratives.

The book is very well structured, being separated into thirteen chapters by what Phillips describes as "loosely chronological" and thematically based upon the level of involvement each state actor has employed in Syria throughout the war (8).

Chapter 1 offers a necessary historical context of the conflict since Bashar al-

Assad's assumption of the presidency in July 2000 after his father's death earlier that year. It contextualizes the shift in the balance of power and the rise of sectarian, jihadist, and nationalistic groups in Syria and the region by tying it to the 2003 Iraq war—a shift that has, as Phillips points out, only increased as the Syrian civil war came onto the scene (18-22). Phillips also details the position of the six state actors involved in the Middle East at the onset of the Syrian civil war, describing separately the variation in foreign policies each state had as a result of their own domestic viewpoint of the region prior to the war (26-39).

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 describe the early months of the Syrian crisis that quickly turned into a civil war. Chapter 2 describes the Arab Spring's entry into Syria where unrest against Assad's regime for economic, political, and social concerns led to violent government repression. The government's harsh response, as Phillips notes, not only failed to contain the nascent Syrian uprising, but also engendered condemnation of Assad from the West -- contributing to the quick slide towards a civil war (53-57). Chapter 3 assesses the responses of the international community to the initial crisis, highlighting the shifting nature of the position of Syria's neighbors towards the war, their priorities, and desirable long-term outcomes. Chapter 4 then discusses the transformation of the protest movement-cum-uprising into a full-fledged civil war. In this chapter Phillips also offers an analysis of the response of international institutions to Assad's brutal methods, such as the use of "smart" sanctions to target Assad's ability to fund further repression (86-88). As Phillips writes, however, these sanctions had little effect in the end, as Assad and those close to him who were intended to suffer, instead benefited from support and money from

state actors that took his side, like Iran and Russia (91, 94-97).

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 consider the reasons behind the main six actors' decisions to back various groups once the civil war was underway and how these same decisions led to the prolonging and stagnation of the war over time. Chapter 5 specifically concentrates on the anti-Assad political opposition and the role Saudi Arabia played in supporting them. Chapter 6 examines the anti-Assad armed opposition groups that Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar supported, and how this was facilitated by private donors from the gulf and a relatively timid American administration under President Obama. However, as Phillips notes, the massive support to various groups led to a massive increase in the number of rebel groups in the region overall, which fueled sectarianism and violence amongst rebel groups (142-146). Chapter 7 highlights the allies of the Assad regime, notably Iran, Hizballah, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp, with the latter being run by Qasem Soleimani. The role these related actors played early in the conflict and throughout, Phillips argues, increased Syria's dependence on Tehran and further contributed to the rise of sectarianism within Syria (165-167).

Chapters 8 through 13 focus on the degree of direct foreign intervention made throughout the conflict. Chapter 8 looks particularly at the reasons behind the US' lack of enforcement behind its "red-line" policy under the Obama administration in 2013 following Assad's chemical weapons attack on civilians in Ghouta, and how this US inaction changed the course of the war in Syria. Chapter 9 discusses the rise of ISIS within Syria in 2014 and the impact the group's presence exerted in the war. The chapter also discusses the regional and

international response to ISIS, most notably the Obama administration's decision to intervene against it militarily, and the Obama administration's eventual loss of power and influence in the region. Chapter 10 focuses on the direct and increased involvement by Russia within Syria, which came shortly after the anti-Assad rebels achieved significant victories in the country. Chapter 11 then moves into 2016, discussing the environment that the out-going Obama administration left behind and that the Trump administration inherited. Phillips provides analysis on the Trump administration's strategy in Syria, or lack thereof, concluding that despite the Trump administration's claim to be an opposite of the Obama administration, the overarching foreign policy and the trend of decreasing US influence in Syria stayed relatively the same. Chapter 12 looks at the fall of ISIS and of the anti-Assad rebels, while also closely examining Turkey's 2018 invasion into the majority Kurdish city of Afrin. Additionally, Phillips also discusses Israel's perceived need to get involved in order to counter any potential gains that Iran and Hizballah could make within southern Syria. Chapter 13 ponders the possibility of a post-war reconstruction phase within Syria, discussing the dilemmas of the international community in the face of a well-postured Assad, and how the fate of regions outside of Assad's direct control are in the hands of the US, Turkey, and Russia. Phillips also notes the potential roles the European Union and China could play moving forward in Syria. Finally, in a short conclusion, Phillips sums up the book's main points and gives a brief, gloomy, diagnosis of Syria's present condition.

Any student interested in the foreign affairs taking place within the Middle East, especially undergraduate and graduate students with some prior background of the

region, will find this book very useful. With that said, it may prove difficult to understand the various complexities and relationships between actors having no background in the study of international relations within the Middle East. However, even an interested outsider curious about the current environment in present-day Syria and the Middle East region can still find much to learn from this work. Moreover, those interested in a career in foreign affairs may find the book's description of the intricate international intervention in the Syria crisis informative. With the many different alliances, considerations, and policies covered and analyzed in it, this book is an excellent springboard into the broader field of international relations and Middle East studies. From grand strategy and foreign policy to international security and the Levantine politics, the lessons offered in this book also apply to almost all sub-fields of international studies. While the book is intended to provide a better understanding on the Syrian civil war, the many actors involved in this particular case study are also involved in many regions far beyond Syria. For this reason, the underlying implications of this work by Phillips also extends far beyond Syria; the broader field of international relations owes him many thanks.

Finally, it should be noted that book could have used some readjustments to make reading it simpler. For example, the many locations referenced throughout the work do challenge one's geography of Syria, and Phillips could have alleviated that with a better use of the maps offered at the beginning of the work by selectively placing them where relevant.

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