



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; Jessica Radin, Book Review Editor

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Letter from the Editor

Dr. Edith Szanto is an Assistant Professor in the Social Sciences at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani.

Edith Szanto

09 March 2018

It is with great pleasure that I may announce the first issue of volume 23. This volume has three feature articles on three very different topics: Syrian refugees in the United States, Yezidis in Syria, and a reflection on a project on the role of art and culture in the Arab-American community.

With regard to the Syrian Studies Association, we are pleased to welcome Andrea Stanton as President, Ted Falk as Member-at-Large, **Dayna Rajha** as Grad Student Officer, **Jessica Radin** as Book Review Editor, and **Hala Auji** as the Lebanon Liaison. We are concerned about the unfilled treasurer position, as this is a crucial role for the SSA administration, but we appreciate our current slate of officers and their willingness to serve. We'd also like to thank the SSA officers who have completed their tenure, for their service and their efforts to support the organization.

We are also looking forward to sponsoring panels for MESA 2018. In the meantime, we will deliberate over the future and direction of the organization. We hope to continue this critical conversation at our next board meeting at the next MESA meeting in November 2018. We look forward to seeing you all there!

Best wishes,
Edith Szanto
Editor, SSA Bulletin

Syrian Studies Association News

Winners 2017 SSA article and book prizes Malissa Taylor

Article:

Benjamin Thomas White, "Refugees and the Definition of Syria, 1920-1939"

Published in *Past and Present*, March 2017.

Examining the influx of refugees into the Syrian Mandate during the interwar period, Benjamin Thomas White convincingly argues that modern state formation in Syria was largely shaped by its response to the presence of these refugees and the attendant controversies over their place in the nascent Syria. Combining Arabic newspapers with French colonial archival documents, White demonstrates that the flow of refugees brought state authority into many rural areas for the first time, while intensifying it in the cities. Refugee flows also brought geographical borders into sharper definition and profoundly influenced the crafting of nationality laws. White's innovative and informative article sheds light on the complex interactions among various Syrian and foreign actors in shaping a national and territorial Syria. This article greatly contributes not only to our knowledge of Syrian history but also to the present crisis in Syria and its repercussions in Europe and the Mediterranean.

Book:

Mattia Guidetti, *In the Shadow of the Church: the Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria* (Brill: Leiden, 2016).

Mattia Guidetti's *In the Shadow of the Church: the Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria* is an extremely important contribution to the history of medieval Syria and addresses a key, long-recognized lacuna in Islamic art history: the integration of the narrative of Islamic art with that of the art of Late Antiquity. It argues against a paradigm of "rupture" with the coming of Islam by successfully demonstrating that Early Syrian mosques were deeply influenced by Late Antique Church forms, and that the development of the mosque should thus be viewed as arising out of Church development in the period immediately prior to the rise of Islam. While a handful of historians have successfully integrated the history of early Islam into the world of Late Antiquity of which it was clearly a part, this is one of the first, and to date the most sustained, attempts to do so within the field of Art History. The committee was particularly impressed by Guidetti's exploration of the premodern mechanisms of coexistence among religious communities in medieval Syria. Likewise, Guidetti's contribution to the study of cultural transference of ideas and objects via his examination of spolia—architectural elements reused from earlier Roman and Christian-era monuments—was outstanding. Guidetti's rich and deeply researched book opens a new chapter in the field of the Art History of Syria and promises to remain influential for years.

Feature Article

Understanding Trauma Faced by Syrian Refugees: Challenges and Community Solutions

By Meira M. Yasin

When considering vulnerable populations, many groups of people are considered to be at higher risk for adverse outcomes due to their situation, including refugees. The UNHCR defines a refugee as “someone who is outside of his or her country of origin and has a well-founded fear of persecution due to his or her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, and/or political opinion, and is unable or unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution.”¹ For Syrian refugees who have experienced trauma, many challenges arise in various phases of their journey as they attempt to flee to neighboring countries of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. According to the American Psychological Association, trauma is defined as an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, violence, or natural disaster in which the extreme stress overwhelms the ability to cope.² This includes trauma experiences and exposure to risk pre-flight, during their flight, and

¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Protecting refugees: a field guide for NGOs,” May 1999 (accessed 20 October 2017)

<<http://www.unhcr.org/3bb9794e4.pdf>>.

² American Psychological Association, “Trauma and Shock” (accessed 20 October 2017)

<<http://www.apa.org/topics/trauma/>>.

upon arrival to the country in which they resettle. The aim of this article is to address these risks for Syrian refugees and how they can be better supported upon resettlement.

Pre-flight

For those living in Syria during the war, pre-flight trauma exposure includes air bombardments, shooting, shelling, harassment by militia, death of loved ones, and loss of home.³ Experiencing torture is a significant risk for developing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The World Medical Association’s Tokyo Declaration defines torture as “the deliberate, systematic or wanton infliction of physical or mental suffering by one or more persons acting alone or on the orders of any authority, to force another person to yield information, to make a confession, or for any other reason.”⁴ In a study examining the association of PTSD symptoms with torture and other traumatic events among Syrian Kurdish refugees living in Kurdistan Region, Iraq, it was shown that the estimated level of PTSD was between 35-38%, with significant positive correlations between PTSD symptoms with traumatic events and torture.⁵ Torture can lead not

³ Maria Hawilo, “The consequences of untreated trauma: Syrian children in Lebanon,” *Public Health Review* 4 no. 1 (2017): 5-10.

⁴ World Medical Association, “WMA declaration of Tokyo – Guidelines for physicians concerning torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in relation to detention and imprisonment,” in *Proceedings of the 29th World Medical Assembly* (Tokyo: World Medical Association, 1975).

⁵ Hawkar Ibrahim and Chiya Q. Hassan, “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms Resulting from Torture and Other Traumatic Events among Syrian Kurdish Refugees in Kurdistan

only to PTSD, but also to generalized anxiety disorder, clinical depression, somatic disorders, and other psychosocial problems such as loneliness, isolation, and difficulty falling or staying asleep.

For children living in Syria since the war started six years ago, the impact of the war has been devastating on myriad levels. According to estimates by Save the Children, approximately three million children are predicted to be living in areas with high exposure to explosive weapons, two-thirds of the children living in Syria have lost a loved one or had their house bombed or suffered injuries that were war-related.⁶ This leads to children living in a state of toxic stress, with detrimental effects including increases in bedwetting, aggressive or withdrawn behavior, suicide attempts, and increasing number of adolescents in Syria turning to drugs or alcohol.⁷ For families, this leads to increasing challenges as children and adults alike are traumatized without sufficient psychosocial support and mental health services available to treat the large numbers of people suffering from the psychological effects of trauma.

Flight

After leaving the zones of conflict in which they lived in Syria, refugees are then at risk for trauma on their routes to seek safety

Region, Iraq," *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017): 241.

⁶ Save the Children, "Invisible wounds: the impact of six years of war on Syria's children," March 2017 (accessed 29 October 2017) <<https://i.stci.uk/sites/default/files/Invisible%20Wounds%20March%202017.pdf>>.

⁷ Ibid.

from the areas of danger in their home country. According to the Refugee Technical Assistance Center, during flight, refugees are "frequently separated from family members, robbed, forced to inflict pain or kill, witness torture or killing, lose close family members or friends, and/or endure extremely harsh environmental conditions."⁸ This process can take a few days up to several weeks or even months in order to reach areas of safety, during which time refugees may stay in several different refugee camps in several different areas. Children and adolescents who travel with family have any extra layer of safety. However there are children and adolescents who travel unaccompanied and are thus at much higher risk of dehydration, robbery, kidnapping, rape, extortion, human trafficking, sexual assault, and other forms of violence.⁹ Without the protection of family, close friends, or humanitarian agencies, these children who are unaccompanied minors are also at risk for being forced into manual labor or being taken into detention, further adding to the trauma they have already experienced pre-flight in their home country.

Arrival

⁸ Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center, "Traumatic experiences of refugees" (accessed 20 October 2017)

<<http://refugeehealthta.org/physical-mental-health/mental-health/adult-mental-health/traumatic-experiences-of-refugees/>>.

⁹ United National Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Danger every step of the way: a harrowing journey to Europe for refugee and migrant children" (accessed 20 October 2017) <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/childrenonthemove/files/Child_Alert_Final_PDF.pdf>.

Once refugees arrive to the country in which they will be resettling, many challenges arise.

Arrival to the host country consists of risks due to “unsafe or otherwise problematic living conditions, non-access to schooling, years of insecurity with uncertain status, multiple moves, parental illness and unemployment, social exclusion, and in the medium- and long-term maladaptation with respect to the cultural norms of the hosting country.” Some refugees may be exposed to violence or threats from people who are local to the host country.¹⁰ It can be challenging for refugees to attempt to learn a new language, adapt to being in a new country, re-establish their sense of identity and how they integrate into the host community, while balancing their day to day activities of daily living. Post-migration stress influences the overall physical and emotional well-being of refugees, thus it is important for the refugees to be supported and feel welcome in their new environment in order to help heal from the trauma they have been through.

Support Efforts

The communities in which refugees resettle play a large role in their success, how they find meaning in life in their new home, and how they reintegrate into society after the trauma they have faced. When people are present in the community, it creates a sense of welcome, and the refugees feel like they are part of a larger network rather than remaining isolated. It is essential for

¹⁰ Hebebrand, J., Anagnostopoulos, D., Eliez, S. et al, “A first assessment of the needs of young refugees arriving in Europe: what mental health professionals need to know,” *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 25, no 1 (2016): 1-6.

communities hosting refugees to learn what the needs are instead of making assumptions. One such opportunity for integration of refugees is through community gardens, which have been shown to build community and community connections.¹¹ In addition to resettlement agencies helping refugees upon arrival, the larger community can play a role in supporting the refugees in learning the new language, providing transportation and employment opportunities, and creating communities which foster co-existence. An example of this can be seen in the community of Clarkston, Georgia, home to refugees from all around the world. Refuge Coffee Company is a solution to integrating refugees in the community through creation of employment and job-training opportunities to resettled refugees, to create a unique, welcoming gathering place in Clarkston, and to tell a more beautiful refugee story to Atlanta.¹² This is a way for refugees to not only have the opportunity to integrate into the society, but for the local community to help the refugees feel more supported and welcome in their new home.

One of the greatest ways to support refugees resettling in a new country is through organizations, school, and community support systems that are trauma-informed. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health

¹¹ Harris, N., Rowe Minniss, F., and Somerset, S., “Refugees Connecting with a New Country through Community Food Gardening,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 11 no. 9 (2014): 9202–9216.

¹² Refuge Coffee Company, “About Us” (accessed 29 October 2017) <<http://refugecoffeeco.com/about/>>.

Services Administration, a program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed 1) Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; 2) Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; 3) Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and 4) Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.¹³ Schools in which Syrian refugee children are enrolled should be trauma-informed in order to understand that challenges that these children face and how they can be better supported. Organizations working with children and their families can learn to recognize the signs that indicate children have been through trauma, in order to help provide better care and refer the refugee children to appropriate mental health community resources.

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¹³ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Trauma-Informed Care and Trauma-Specific Interventions," 14 August 2015 (accessed 29 October 2017) <<https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions>>.

East Tennessee State University College of Nursing and has clinical practice as a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. She is passionate about working with people who have been through trauma and vulnerable populations, providing the highest quality, trauma-informed care.

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punishment in relation to detention and imprisonment." In *Proceedings of the 29th World Medical Assembly*. Tokyo: World Medical Association, 1975.

Between Rights, Political Participation and Opposition: the Case of Yezidis in Syrian Kurdistan (Rojāvā)

By Majid Hassan Ali and Seyedeh Behnaz Hosseini

Abstract

After the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the Kurdish Protection Units, Yakīnayyīn Pārāstnā Gal (YPG) and Yakīnayyīn Pārāstnā Jin (YPJ), took control of northeastern Syria where they formed the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) in the three districts of al-Jazīra, Kūbāni, and 'Afrīn. The DFNS was established as a self-governing project with a special political and administrative system that emphasizes the rights and political participation of all ethnic groups and religious minorities in those provinces.

The Yezidi, as a religious minority, are scattered throughout these provinces and are engaged in some local administrative institutions on a certain scale. They also form their own civil society institutions. Concurrently, there is a Yezidi political organization that is opposed to the policies of self-government and that accuses Rojāvā's Kurdish authorities of marginalizing the political participation of the Yezidi and other religious minorities. In this paper, we will discuss the Yezidis' political participation and representation within these areas, their autonomous institutions, and their political opposition.

Keywords: Yezidi, political identity, Kurds, Syria, political participation.

Introduction

Yezidis are dispersed throughout Syria. Their places of residence are mainly concentrated in the governorates of Aleppo and Ḥasakah in northern Syria. In Aleppo, they are mainly reside in the city of 'Afrīn and some its outlying villages such as Qībārī, Qaşal-Jandū, Faqīra and Jandīrīs. Also in some other towns such as Shaykh-Maqşūd, Bīstān-Pāshā, Sryān-Qadīm, Sryān Jadīd and Saīf al-Dawla. In the province of Ḥasakah, the Yezidi lived among the Arab and Kurdish tribes, in towns such as al-Jārrāḥ, located in east of Qāmishlū city, Darbāsīyya, 'Amūda, Tirba-Spīyya (al-Qaḥṭāniyya), and Sari-Kānyyi (Rās al-'Aīn) and other villages and towns with Yezidis residents.

The Syrian Yezidi population is not known, as they do not appear in the official statistics. Some estimate their number at between 30,000 and 67,000 (Khūrī 2006). Yezidi political groups estimate that their number exceeds 150,000 (SYC 2012). Both estimates date back to before the civil war, and the increasing migration due to political developments has led to a significant decrease in the number of Yezidis living in Syria.

The Yezidi community in Syria was a predominantly peasant society with a high rate of illiteracy until the 1970s. As an unrecognized religion in the midst of Muslim communities, they feared to go to schools in areas far from their villages. According to one Yezidi:

It is very difficult for a Yezidi student to live in a city of non-Yezidis, especially if anyone knows that this student is Yezidi. That student will not be left in peace. The student will have to leave his studies. This

happened to me when I was in high school and I was taking exams in Qāmishlū with Kurdish Muslim students. They attacked my religion all the time and said that I was a kāfir and that I must become Muslim. I had to leave the dormitory of the High School in Qāmishlū and stay in a hotel so that no one would know me, and yet they did not leave me alone until one of them beat me severely. Even when I studied in Damascus and Aleppo, I could not be able to show my religion and hide fear of them. (Gharībū 2013).

Mot every Yezidi is beaten up, of course. Nevertheless, such cases of social discrimination exist. In order to address this problem, Yezidis created semi-stable social relations between themselves and their Arab, Kurdish or other ethnic/religious neighbors via the custom of the association of a brethren relationship, also known as Krīv or Krīvātī (which means brethren).¹⁴ This custom serves to forge a link between the weaker minority to the stronger majority.¹⁵

The lack of systematic social discrimination is mainly due to the semi-secular nature of Syrian society, the influence of left-wing currents, and even the Ba'ath Party, which tried to create a liberal secular society. However, there was some discrimination at the official level. For example, Yezidis were

¹⁴ When a Muslim is invited to a circumcision party, it establishes social ties between Yezidis and Muslims. It makes them into blood-brothers. A blood-brotherhood is defined as the relationship when two men pledge mutual loyalty through the ceremonial use of each other's blood. This obliges the person who became a Krīv for Yezidi to defend him.

¹⁵ Dilgash Ṭssā, interview by Majid H. Ali, 24 Oct. 2017, Göttingen, Germany.

not allowed to hold important positions in the military, the judicial system.¹⁶

This paper draws on news articles, online analysis of political data, and personal interviews with individuals concerned about the political participation of Yezidis in Syrian Kurdistan, or Rojāvā. The interviews show the reasoning behind the Yezidis' political positions.

The Syrian Civil War and Kurdish Self-Governance in Northern Syria (Rojāvā)

When the Syrian conflict shifted from protests to a civil war, the Syrian opposition forces split into several political and military currents, including domestic and foreign Islamic groups. Some took control of wide geographic areas such as al-Nuṣra Front (now: Hay'at Taḥrīr al-Shām), the Islamic State (ISIS), 'Aḥrār al-Shām, and some others that are active under the name of National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (NCSROF). The Democratic Union Party (Partiyyā Yakitīyyā Damokrātīk or PYD) and other Kurdish and ethnic political groups formed a bloc called the Movement for a Democratic Society (Tavgarā Civākā Damokrātīk, TEV-DEM), (cf: Ekurd Daily 2015). In the areas that have come under their control, military units were formed called the People's Protection Units (Yakīnayyīn Pārāstnā Gal or YPG). These have taken control of northeastern Syria and aimed at self-governing under the name of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) in three districts: al-Jazīra, Kūbani, and 'Afrīn. They established a political and administrative system that intends to incorporate rights and political

¹⁶ Ibrāhīm Khidhr Smū, interview by Majid H. Ali, 9 Nov. 2017, Bielefeld, Germany.

participation of all ethnic groups and religious minorities in those provinces.

Some of the other Kurdish political parties and groups formed a political block opposed to TEV-DEM. This opposition operates under the name of the Kurdish National Council (Enjūmanā Nishtīmānī yā Kurdī li Sūrīyyā or ENKS), (see: Carnegie Middle East Center 2012) and it joined other Syrian opposition factions and officially opposes those in power in Rojāvā.

There is little information about the Yezidis' participation in the revolution in Syria after 2011. It seems that they initially did not support the rebels mainly because they are a small minority religious group and later, they did not want to side with the armed groups and later with the Islamic opposition. Regardless, many of their villages were attacked during the fighting. For example, they were attacked by al-Nuṣra Front and ISIS, who described the Yezidis as infidels. These groups attacked Yezidi villages, such as Qaşal-Jandū in 'Afrīn province. Al-Nuṣra Front attacked villages in Sari-Kānyyi on 17 April 2014, which resulted in several dead and wounded.¹⁷ These attacks led to the displacement and migration of Yezidis.

The Legal, Constitutional, and Political Rights of Yezidis in Syria

Yezidis lacked legal, constitutional or political rights in Syria before 2011. From a religious point of view, the Yezidi religion was unrecognized. One of the reasons for this could be their small numbers and the

¹⁷ Nūrī Ramū, interview by Majid H. Ali, 9 Nov. 2017, Bielefeld, Germany; Sarhān Īssā, interview by Majid H. Ali, November 8, 2017, Bielefeld, Germany.

fact that they are scattered throughout Syria. Notably, the Syrian central government treated Yezidis as generic Muslims (as were other minorities, such as the 'Alawis, the Isma'ilis/Nusayris, and the Druze). Yezidi children had to take Islamic studies classes and in Syrian courts, they had to swear upon the Qur'an, which they do not believe in (Khūrī 2006). Yezidis were also subject to Islamic Shari'a courts in matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance, although the Syrian Constitutional Law of 1973 and its amendments, article no. 35 states (Constitution of the Syrian Republic and its amendments 2007):

1. Freedom of belief is safeguarded and the State respects all religions.
2. The State shall guarantee the freedom to perform all religious rites on condition without prejudice to public order.

In the era of President Bashar al-Assad, a modified constitution was prepared for 2012. Article 3 states (jadaliyya.com 2012):

1. The State shall respect all religions and shall ensure the free exercise of all their rites, on the condition that they do not contradict public order.
2. The personal status of religious communities is safeguarded and cared for.

The government did not recognize Yezidis as a separate entity or offer them a cultural and political role in Syria until the outbreak of civil war in 2011. In this context, Yezidis emigrated and fled not only because of the war.

As for their political rights, many were denied Syrian citizenship, because the government considered them immigrants or foreigners. In this, their treatment was similar to that of the stateless Muslim Kurds

living. The Syrian government deprived Kurds and Yezidis of Syrian nationality because they had come to Syria from Turkey in the wake of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the 1920s (Human Rights Watch 1996). Stateless Yezidis were deprived of many opportunities such as the holding of any official jobs and other activities in the state.¹⁸

In the past, Yezidis had no political organization within the official Syrian state, despite their participating in the growing communist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which supported minorities as equal citizens in the Syrian state on principle. Marxist ideology was popular in all the secret Kurdish parties in Syria, yet Yezidis did not reach any leadership positions in these leftist parties with only a few exceptions. There were a couple of Yezidis involved with the PKK after the 1980s. The fact that the Syrian Yezidi community was a non-political society at that time, helps explain the lack of established Yezidi political organizations until recently.¹⁹

When the TEV-DEM established the three provinces under a system of joint leadership and self-government that aimed to represent the region's ethnic diversity, many Yezidis joined them and became members of the YPG and YPJ. Rojāvā has further allowed ethnic and religious minorities to establish their own cultural and social associations in all three provinces.

Since 2011, Yezidis have formed civil society associations and organizations within

¹⁸ Nūrī Ramū, interview by Majid H. Ali, 9 Nov. 2017, Bielefeld, Germany.

¹⁹ Ibrāhīm Khidhr Smū, interview by Majid H. Ali, 9 Nov. 2017, Bielefeld, Germany.

Rojāvā, especially in Ḥasakah and 'Afrīn. On 18 December 2014, the Education Authority of 'Afrīn Province announced that in coordination with a Yezidi association, the Yezidi religion would officially be included in the curriculum at schools in the province. Indeed, a group of young Yezidi men and women have been trained to teach Yezidism in some of the schools in Yezidi villages (Zamanalwsl.net 2014).

In Germany, the Yezidi diaspora established a political organization on March 10, 2012, in the city of Bielefeld, called the Syrian Yezidi Council (SYC). This is the first political organization that has declared itself to be the political representative of Syrian Yezidis.²⁰ Mizgīn Yūsif was chosen to head the party, and she is the first Yezidi woman to become head of a political party in Syria. The SYC has stressed in its political program that it seeks to defend the cultural, social, and political rights of Syrian Yezidis within the framework of the Syrian state. The SYC demands the official recognition of Yezidism as a religion in Syria and the recognition of all their religious festivals and rituals. It also demands the allocation of quota seats and official representation in all state institutions along the lines of the quota system for minorities in Iraq. It also wishes that Yezidism be considered a state religion.

It should be noted that in the second article of its rules of procedure, the SYC has declared the Yezidis to be Kurds (SYC, 2012). Moreover, it considers Yezidis in Syria as part of Kurdish movement. However, given the political loyalties of the large Kurdish parties in Rojāvā, the SYC subsequently split into two separate groups. One is called the

²⁰ Sarhān 'Īssā, interview by Majid H. Ali, 8 Nov. 2017, Bielefeld, Germany.

Syrian Yezidi Rally (SYR) and it has announced its support of self-government in Rojāvā. The SYR has become part of the TEV-DEM. The other faction kept the original name of SYC and joined the ENKS.

The conflict in Syria placed two options before the SYC. They could either side with the central government or with the opposition. They decided to stand with the opposition and have begun to hold meetings with various political groups and have made proposals on Yezidi demands. As a result, the SYC became a member of ENKS and the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces NCSROF.²¹ Although the SYC joined ENKS in 2014, they withdrew from it in 2016 and accused it of marginalizing Yezidis as a political partner in the ENKS' political decisions.²² However, they are still in contact.

There are several reasons why the SYC party is opposed to self-governance, including the accusation of Rojāvā's deliberate marginalization of Yezidi political participation there, as well as an objection to PYD ideology's attempt to impose a theory and a special philosophy to their interpretation of the Yezidi religion. (The PYD considers them as an extension of the Zoroastrian religion and erected a statue of Zoroaster in the headquarters of one of the

²¹ Sarhān Īssā, the official spokesman of the Yezidi Council of Syria, interview by Maksîm Īssā, *Orient Onair*, 28 May 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FACxXKTB1E>>.

²² Sarhān Īssā, "ENKS, the reasons for the withdrawal of the SYC from NCSROF and the", interview by Ali Isso, *Orient News*, 16 Sept. 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lu5il5q_05U&app=desktop>.

Yezidi associations in 'Afrîn, which led to much resentment from the SYC that wishes Yezidis be seen as an independent religion).²³ This is a controversial difference between the SYC and the PYD.

Conclusion

The Kurdish political parties regard the Yezidis as part of them. This, however, has deprived Yezidis of many political rights. Despite the establishment of an effective administrative entity in large areas of northern Syria, the Yezidis remain marginalized because they are simply considered a subset of the Kurdish community, rather than a separate community with special needs.

After numerous interviews with Syrian Yezidi elites, it became clear to the authors that pre-2011, Yezidis were little exposed to significant social discrimination from surrounding Muslim communities. Rather, they faced problems and difficulties on an official level related to, for example, the study of the Islamic religion, and the absence of specific personal status laws pertaining to Yezidis.

One of the most important conclusions is that there has been no political Syrian Yezidi identity crisis. Unlike in neighboring countries, Yezidi political organizations have clearly said that they consider themselves to be Kurds. Yet, political differences continue to exist between the Kurdish parties and Yezidi organizations because of their marginalization and lack of involvement in political decisions.

²³ Sarhān Īssā, interview by Majid H. Ali, 8 Nov. 2017, Bielefeld, Germany.

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Identity and Art: A Reflection on “The Arabs: An American Story”

By Autumn Cockrell-Abdullah

We had been talking a bit when Ghada, a mid-50 year-old Syrian-American woman asked me “What are you?” I smiled. This was not the first time during my research with the Syrian-Lebanese community in Atlanta, Georgia that someone had inquired about my own ethnic heritage. I learned early on that “American” was not a sufficient answer to satisfy most and usually the person would inquire further. I explained to Ghada, as I had explained to numerous others before her, that I identified as “Italian” and that it was my mother’s family that had “come over”. She nodded her head slowly but still didn’t quite seem completely satisfied with my answer. She asked more specifically about where in Italy my family was from. I replied that they had come from Sicily, Palermo to be exact. At this, her face warmed, “Ah!” She smiled, “You know, the Arabs have a long history in the Mediterranean, you may even have an Arab in your history!” She had found our tenuous connection. This bit of information seemed to mean a great deal more to Ghada than to myself. It was like she knew something that I did not. What was even more interesting though, is that most of time I encountered a situation like the one with my friend Ghada, the other person seemed to identify and approve of my ethnic heritage. It was a small but important thread that connected me, an outsider to a community that was actively in the process of preserving and promoting their ethnic heritage.

“The Arabs: An American Story”,²⁴ symposium and exhibit, was a project born out of work done investigating constructions of identity, particularly constructions of Arab-American identity, utilizing arts-based perspectives. The project was supported by the Applied Cultural Research Project in the Department of Anthropology and Geography and the Middle East Center for Peace, Culture and Development (now the Middle East Institute) at Georgia State University, the Georgia Humanities Council and the Atlanta International Museum. Presented over a six-month period from April 2001 until September 2001, the project was founded on the belief that there is conflict amongst representations of Arabs and Arabic identity in mainstream American society. The goal of this project was twofold: first, to offer an opportunity to those identifying as “Arab-American” to present their culture and community in a manner directed from within the community itself and second, in presenting this cultural project, to strengthen the ethical and civic ties between Arab-Americans and mainstream American culture by encouraging dialogue. In this way, the public was engaged in learning and discussion about people of Arabic heritage by highlighting the history and culture of Arab-Americans through a symposium and museum exhibition created by Arab-Americans. The symposium featured several speakers, discussions and demonstrations focusing on the history and popular culture of the Arab American community in Atlanta, Georgia. Lecture and demonstration topics, along with speakers, were provided by the local community. The

²⁴ Cockrell, Autumn. 2002. “The Arabs: An American Story”, Master’s Thesis, Georgia State University.

second part of this project, the exhibit, was unique in that the items for display as well as the subject matter covered in the exhibit were chosen by members of the community. “Heritage items” such as clothing, crafts and photos were donated and on loan from the local Arab American community. Both the symposium and exhibit successfully met their goals of highlighting the rich cultural heritage of the Arab-American community. Appearing in numerous local publications including the Atlanta Journal and Constitution, Atlanta Now Magazine, Creative Loafing, Where Atlanta Magazine and Museums and Galleries Atlanta to include Saudi ARAMCO World Magazine, the events also heightened audience awareness and engaged the public in discussion about social and political issues surrounding this community. Sixteen years later, in 2017, this may not seem like a new or novel project, particularly post-9/11 and in light of current conversations about the influx of Syrian refugees to the United State and the efforts of humanitarian organizations to inform and encourage the acculturation of these “new Americans”. However, the unique feature of this project was the direct involvement of members of the Arab-American community in Atlanta, Georgia, USA utilizing arts-based perspectives. The scholarly literature on art, conflict resolution and peace-building invite us to delve deeper into the artistic products found within any given culture as they can help us understand negotiated identities as they manifest themselves in shared consciousness and as collective action (Brubaker & Cooper 2000: 7).²⁵ The

²⁵ Brubaker, Rogers & Cooper, Fredrick. (2000). Beyond “Identity” in *Theory and Society*, 29: 1-47.

literature demonstrates that art is a unique place to gain insight into the emotions, ideas and histories that inform and influence. “The interpretation of history, art and culture is different,” notes Anne D’Alleva, “they express such a wide range of human ideas and experiences that there is no one result to seek. Each person, each generation, each culture reinterprets artworks, finding in them new significance... But when we’re talking about interpreting the past, or interpreting cultural practice, it’s not a question of right and wrong but of looking for insight” (D’Alleva 2012: 11).²⁶ With the direct involvement from the community, the project hoped to create space for education as well as exchange, but in a manner directed by the Arab-American community itself. More interestingly, this project revealed a definition of Arab-American that presents some interesting places to consider the role of culture within conflict and designations of ethnic identity. The project began with a very inclusive definition of “Arab-American” that simply designated any migrant who was now living and working in the United States with the intention of setting up permanent residence as well as those who self-identified as “Arab-American”. Drawing also from a shared linguistic and cultural basis, “Arab American” broadly referred to those from an Arabic speaking homeland as well as American-born descendants of such a person. Predominantly of Syrian and Lebanese heritage, the community included local groups who participated in the project like the Alif Institute, the Arab American Women’s Society of Georgia, Arab American Fund of Georgia, and the Georgia

²⁶ D’Alleva, Anne. (2012). *Methods and Theories of Art History* (2nd ed.). London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd.

Chapter of the Arab Anti Discrimination Committee.

Anthropologist, Kevin Avruch's work on culture, ethnic conflict, and identity further advises that any work should take time to clearly distinguish differences between the concepts of culture and ethnicity, insofar as they both socially constructed categories (Avruch 2008: 172).²⁷ Avruch points out, "The key point here is that social categories such as ethnicity, race, or nationality have a peculiar relationship to culture. They are culture 'objectified', projected publicly, and resourcefully deployed by actors for political purposes" (Avruch 2008: 172). Understanding this, "The Arabs: An American Story" was founded on the supposition that meaning making on the part of the actors within any given conflict scenario, in this case, the negotiation of an ethnic, sub-culture identity, is the site for those socially and situationally formulated set of interpretive frameworks to intersect and to, potentially, conflict. The museum setting and pieces of material culture presented there, then, became a way of tapping in to and revealing the unconscious "stuff" of culture. In this manner, this community of Arab-Americans were able to utilize the museum setting for the promotion of a particular definition of "Arab-American" and exert some control over how that representation was formed. In 2001, this project found that a select group of predominately educated, middle to upper middle class Syrian and Lebanese immigrants from predominately Christian backgrounds and who had immigrated to the United States in the mid-to later portion of the twentieth century. They were

²⁷ Avruch, Kevin. (2008). Culture. In Cheldelin, Sandra, Daniel Duckman and Larissa Fast (Eds.) *Conflict*. New York Continuum.

uniquely situated within their groups to direct and mold a particular image of Arab-Americanness. This image reflected their own demographic, placed special importance on the role of women, and highlighted the relative affluence of the overall group. At the time, that representation often underrepresented refugees, Muslims, and lower socio-economic groups. It also seemed to speak directly to the proliferation of negative stereotypes of the Arab Middle East and the perception by "Americans" about Arabs. Identity politics or the stuff of culture? "Understanding the concept of *culture* is a crucial prerequisite for effective conflict analysis and resolution", states Kevin Avruch (2008: 167). Of course, immediately following a discussion on the place of museums and material culture in "The Arabs: An American Story", one might suspect that a discussion of the place of culture in the analysis of identity and conflict may be a conversation about, as Raymond Williams put it, "culcha" or "high" art, superior knowledge refinement, or "taste" (1983: 92).²⁸ Indeed not. However, "culture" as a concept is rather complex. For this discussion, we will define "culture" in the way that cultural anthropologists have defined the concept, as "a system of knowledge, beliefs and patterns of behaviors that are created, learned, and shared by a group of people" (Guest 2014: 35-36).²⁹ Culture then includes shared norms, values, and symbols, as well as mental maps of reality and structures of power. Our understanding of the world is

²⁸ Williams, Raymond. (1983). *Keywords*. New York: Oxford University Press.

²⁹ Guest, Kenneth J. (2014). *Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age*. New York: Norton.

shaped, reinforced, and challenged through culture (Guest 2014). In utilizing such a definition of “culture”, it must be pointed out that this research views “culture” as being both socially learned and inherited. However, as Avruch further points out, “definitions of culture tend to proliferate and contend with one another” (2008: 168). Avruch finds that definitions of “culture” such as the anthropologically derived one that is being used for this research does not address notions of cultural homogeneity (culture as all one thing), cultural stability (culture is timeless) or cultural singularity (culture is characterized by a single trait) (2008: 168-169). Our definition of “culture” must then, be supplemented to include four other important observations, namely that: culture is plural and an individual may possess several “cultures” at any given point in their lives; individuals in societies are distributed across many sorts of social groupings and any complex society is very likely “multicultural”; culture is psychologically distributed within individuals across a population and members of the same social grouping do not internalize cultural representations equally; culture is derivative and is to some extent always situational, flexible and responsive to the demands of the worlds that individuals confront (Avruch 2008: 168-169). In short, “culture” is socially learned and shared, plural, distributed across social groupings and derivative. How then, does the utilization of an arts-based perspective, such as a museum exhibition help us to understand identity and those intersections of race, gender and class that create the potential for conflict? Because of their elicitive nature, arts-based perspectives allow for the sharing of cultural knowledge that both describes and aids the understanding of the process of

conflict. Much of the literature demonstrates the effectiveness of arts-based perspectives for the mediation and understanding of conflict in a manner that is elicitive and also culturally appropriate. Though the arts do indeed offer unique tools for understanding conflict, arts-based perspectives remain underutilized in peace-building. The question remains, why bring art to the study of identity and conflict? Considering the literature on art and conflict, it seems that there is an implicit understanding among these authors that it is critical to the peace-building process for peace-builders to work within the culture, thereby eliciting cultural knowledge from participants that will impact and shape the peace-building work to come. However, what is less articulated is the fact that peace-builders working with arts-based perspectives regularly trade in the currency of culture itself. While this may seem to be self-evident, it is an important fact that is not often made explicit. Art is both created and received (Guest 2014:659). Art, as an expressive cultural outlet, is both created and perceived within a system of power relationships that intersect at points of race, class, sexuality and economics. Herein lies the unique value of arts-based perspectives for understanding conflict. Art is a dynamic engagement with the very building blocks of culture, making that which is unconscious, conscious (Guest 2014: 675). Arts-based perspectives deal in those particular aspects of a culture where human beings express themselves creatively and interact meaningfully through the visual, written, movement and aural arts (Guest 2014: 658). Put differently, peace-builders working in and with the arts understand the importance of meaning making within a culture and how that meaning translates into ideas and behaviors, and how all of

those things combine to, potentially, produce moments of conflict such as misrepresentations of identity.

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Book Reviews

Michael M Gunter, *Out of Nowhere: The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War*, Hurst & Company: London, 2014, 159 p.

Reviewed by Christopher Flaherty

Michael Gunter has much experience writing about the Kurds, and his breadth of knowledge is on display in *Out of Nowhere* - a brief but comprehensive description and analysis of the Kurds of Syria (along with their fellow-nationals in Turkey, Iraq and Iran), and the Kurdish involvement in Syrian politics, from the creation of the modern state to the present (or at least up to 2014, when the book was published). The book is divided into ten chapters: the narrative begins with a summary of the decolonization process in Syria, with special reference to the role of the Kurds, with a number of important Kurdish nationalist figures described. We then move on to an analysis of the anti-Kurd policies of the Syrian Arab government, including the demographic division of once-contiguous Kurdish populations by the so-called Arab Belt (al-Hizam al-Arabi) between Syria and its neighbours, Turkey and Iraq. The divided (and therefore ineffective) Kurdish opposition to this process is also described, as is the influence of foreign powers - or more correctly, 'transnational actors', especially given the prominent role of the Kurdish PKK in Syrian Kurdish politics.

Here, the alternative inspirations provided to Syrian Kurds by the examples of the 'radical' PKK and the 'moderate' KRG (i.e., Iraq's Kurdish Regional Government) are also described, as is the influence of the United States' somewhat mutable (to say

the least) foreign policy, both towards the Kurds in general and those in Syria in particular. It is in this section (particularly in regard to the proposed US intervention, after Assad's alleged use of chemical weapons in 2013) that Gunter allows some personal feelings to show through - "Similarly [to arguments supporting intervention in Syria] in the run-up to the war that toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003, a war whose slaughter and repercussions are still being felt a decade later, the United States falsely claimed that it had incontrovertible intelligence... It turned out that US intelligence was wrong again or had simply lied to justify going to war..." (p.86). Such sentiments may be justified (and they are in any case relatively mildly-worded) but they do not fit well with the rest of the book, which (though often sympathetic to the Kurds) is generally objective in tone. One could compare that passage to another on anti-Kurdish moves by the Turkish government, for instance: "Understandably, Ankara saw the DTK and KCK [the Democratic Society Congress, and the Kurdistan Communities Union] as an attempt to establish an alternative Kurdish government on Turkish soil and continued its wholesale arrests of members of these organisations for terrorism..." (p.126).

After providing himself with a solid foundation in his detailed regional history (in a condensed form, which exposes the reader to a sometimes-bewildering selection of historical events, political personalities and three-letter acronyms), Gunter moves on to build his narrative on contemporary events - though given the massive developments which have occurred since the book was written, perhaps it is already better to say near-contemporary. The unprecedented autonomy thrust upon

the Syrian Kurds (to use Gunter's expression - p.5) by the collapse of central government control of Kurdish regions in July 2012, and the influence of the ongoing civil war, is considered the 'Prelude' (as this chapter is called) to greater things - in the book's final chapter, 'The Future', Gunter speculates as to what these "greater things" might be, examining the political prospects of Syria's Kurds. In short, these prospects are bad, if a total victory is gained by Assad or by his opposition, or more promising, if a stalemate between those combatants becomes the new 'normal' (p.119-121). The future viability of the much-heralded project of 'democratic autonomy' is also considered. On this issue, Gunter appears sceptical, pondering what such a state might look like in practice - and more importantly, whether a strong, centralised PYD/PKK would ever allow local councils to assume genuine independence of action: "Despite its rhetoric, the PYD in action has exuded a strong will to rule and be obeyed..." (p.127).

A significant undertaking in a short format, *Out of Nowhere* fits a great deal of information into a comparatively small space, and readers will soon find themselves familiar with the alphabet soup of the myriad Kurdish parties - not only household names like the PKK, YPG, PDK, but also rarities to delight the connoisseur, such as the KGK, KNAS, KNK etc. In short, this is an excellent and highly-detailed introduction to the Kurds of Syria and also to their co-nationals in its neighboring countries, and contains much information of use to both newcomers and seasoned Mid-East scholars.

Paradoxically, the biggest selling point of the book (its relevance to contemporary

developments in Syria and the wider Middle East) may be its biggest weakness - events have fast overtaken Gunter's earlier descriptions. In just the most obvious instance, in the years since publication of this text in 2014, ISIS has gone from being just one of a number of competing Islamist groups to a de facto state with control of one of Syria's largest cities - the Kurds of Syria notably engaging them in fierce fighting over the city of Kobane, in an epic of Kurdish resistance which has proved an inspiration to Kurdish nationalism in Syria and abroad. Indeed, at the time of writing ISIS is practically finished as a force in Syria, and a Kurdish referendum on independence (in Iraq) has taken place - what a difference a few years makes! Related matters, such as Turkey's ambivalent behavior to the Kurds engaging in the fight against ISIS, are areas which Gunter would obviously have included in his book given the chance - indeed, he had the bad luck to publish his book just before a singularly important period in Kurdish history, with ongoing political strife in the KRG being precipitated by its historic (but possibly hubristic) independence referendum. Obviously, one cannot fault the Gunter of 2014 for his inability to prophesy the ascendance and approaching demise of ISIS or other seismic events in Kurdish politics, and a second edition would clearly be welcome to rectify this alone. It might also prove an opportunity to conduct a little copy-editing: the sometimes-inelegant prose of the book can be jarring, often not doing justice to its detailed content, and chapters tend to conclude rather abruptly - Gunter seemingly eager to move on and consume the next topic - whereas a new reader, less familiar with the material than its veteran author, might benefit from a digest of the

various themes covered in the chapter's preceding pages.

However, the sheer conciseness of Gunter's book has much to recommend it, and even given its partial obsolescence it remains a hugely useful introductory work to those with an interest in the Kurds of Syria, and also to those interested in the political history of the Kurds in its neighboring countries – Turkey in particular, given the profound influence of the PKK on Syrian Kurdish politics. Those seeking to learn about the centralized control structures of the YPG and its PKK backers will find much of interest here, and the book will be of use to anyone who wishes to look behind the surface of the often uncritically-examined 'democratic autonomy' project; Gunter's historical examination of the political and historical context of this movement will be a useful complement to studies which focus more on the 'disembodied' ideology of Bookchin and Ocalan.

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Heather Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 380 p.

Reviewed by Anais Massot

In the past two decades, scholars of the Ottoman Empire have brought to light the importance of material culture and consumption patterns in understanding the fabric of Ottoman societies. Yet, cultural history, the use of anthropology to examine the social history of collective representations in a specific culture, is still underrepresented in textbooks and general literature on the Ottoman Empire. Heather Sharkey's book, "*A History of Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Middle East*," manages to fill this gap in the scholarship by offering a wider narrative of the transformation of religious communities in the Middle East through the prism of cultural history.

Although Sharkey explores interconfessional relations in the Middle East beginning from the seventh century, the bulk of her book focuses on the Ottoman Empire from the 1700s to the 1920s; the so-called "age of modernity." She presents case studies from various Ottoman provinces thereby bringing into perspective transformations in various regions of the empire. She analyses how Ottoman societies shifted from being characterised by religious diversity, albeit in hierarchical form, to areas distinguished by emigration, and violence between religious groups, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Three major interrelated questions tie the book together: What did religion mean in the everyday life of Ottoman subjects? When did it matter more than other factors as an

explanatory and motivational framework? In which contexts did Christians, Jews, and Muslims converge and when did they diverge? (p.18)

Sharkey does not offer a definitive answer to these questions, but rather identifies spaces and times of convergence and divergence, thereby pointing to the importance of imperial, international, and local contexts in shaping the importance of religion. (p.244) While religion can explain numerous societal dynamics, she argues that its explanatory power is limited as it is often invoked to justify behaviour motivated by socioeconomic factors, resentment, and fears. (p. 17)

In chapter one, Sharkey proposes a new way of looking at interconfessional relations by moving away from a sensationalist emphasis on conflict and violence towards an analysis of everyday encounters between Christian, Jewish, and Muslim individuals in Ottoman cities. Sharkey presents an archaeology of interconfessional relations by laying out a vast array of sources, including memoirs, music, cookbooks, relics, as well as material objects of everyday life such as clothing, silverware, and food. She argues that an exploration of the unsensational and mundane is more revealing of the way in which members of religious communities saw themselves and interacted with others. (p. 4) In one sense, this book is Sharkey's attempt at an archaeology of religious identity and interconfessional relations, analysing how objects, as symbolic markers, are relevant in defining social hierarchies and behaviours. She reconstitutes the "emotional landscapes" of Christians, Muslims and Jews, encompassing senses such as smell, touch, sounds and taste to

present an unsensational but sense-rich picture of Ottoman plural societies. (p.9)

In chapter two the author follows the development of the concept of the *dhimma* in early Islamic empires. This legal status for non-Muslims allowed other religious groups to be incorporated into the system of rule, albeit with subordinate status and often subjected to restrictions regarding movement and worship. It was developed as a mean to create and reinforce social hierarchies between religious communities, borrowing from Byzantine and Sassanian policies. Incrementally, both law and social practices, such as clothing restrictions, reinforced distinctions between religious groups. Yet, through the analysis of cookbooks and music among others, Sharkey demonstrates that popular culture offered a space of influence and interdependence between Christians, Jews and Muslims. (p.51) Sharkey argues that Islamic societies were also shaped by the influence of non-Muslims into their realm. (p.53)

In chapter three, Sharkey explores the Ottoman Empire until the end of the eighteenth century. In a period defined by crisis and adaptation, Sharkey looks at how successful the Ottoman Empire was in “managing diversity” through the analysis of the uses and production of everyday objects. (p.64) She presents the Ottoman policies towards non-Muslims in its realm as a continuation of former Islamic states’ policies, while at the same time pointing out the specificities of governmentality in a modern empire in line with neighbouring empires. (p.64-69) Sharkey examines how various social hierarchies, based on religion but also on profession, class and language, were reinforced or challenged through

social and legal practices. She argues that longevity was ensured through the existence of a framework that could accommodate and adapt to change. As such, the *dhimma* offered a certain stability to interconfessional relations. (p.104) However, a turning point occurred during the eighteenth century when the framework of continuity with the past was challenged, transforming the “social landscape between and within communities”. (p.65)

Chapter four deals with the age of the *Tanzimat* (1808-1876) and the historical roots of Ottoman reform. Sharkey defines modernity as the rise of individualistic economic, political, and social behaviours, which challenged existing social contracts and political hierarchies. (p.71) The Ottoman state reacted in conflicting ways to these changes of the nineteenth century by emphasising equality yet reifying non-Muslim communities as political entities. (p.165) Sharkey addresses interconfessional violence in this period as a consequence of a number of factors including the assertion of external state power, the demise of the feudal order, the rise of a new commercial elite, and the development of sectarianism as process of politicization of religious identities. (p.147-149) The social change and economic disparity between religious communities that arose out of these changes gave rise to resentments which forms the backdrop of inter-confessional violence of the period, including the attack against Christians in Aleppo in 1850 and in Damascus in 1860. (p.147)

Chapter five deals with the era of Abdulhamid II (r.1876-1909). As Sultan he used pan-Islamic and religious discourse to legitimize his absolutist rule among Muslim

subjects in a time of increasing military defeats and threats of secessions or rebellion. Then, as a result of state policy and missionary influence, religion was increasingly conceived as a matter of belief rather than only public identification. (p.227) Sharkey looks at what this meant for everyday life of Ottoman subjects. The main question here is whether Abdhamid II's pan-Islamic discourse and policies reinforced the importance of religion – Sharkey identifies two contradictory outcomes. In places such as eastern Anatolia, where social inequalities between Christians and Muslims aggravated and ethno-nationalist ideas developed, religion gained in importance, while in urban centres such as Damascus and Cairo, its importance was weakened by the creation of secular social spaces. (p.182-183)

Sharkey ends her book with an analysis of paths of convergence and divergence at the end of the Ottoman empire. She addresses the paradox of increased equality of status and the development of secular spaces with the simultaneous calcification of religious identities and interconfessional violence. (p. 243-245) She emphasises the endurance of religion as a mode of social classification that was capable of translating itself into new secular spaces of sociability, that could end up providing a forum for religious agendas, challenging the convention dichotomous perception of a struggle between conservatives and reformists. (p.245) By the end of the nineteenth century, a large part of the Muslim population felt beleaguered by socioeconomic transformations and their resentment contributed, among others, to large-scale massacres of Armenians in Anatolia at the end of the nineteenth century. (p. 247, 270) A framework of

legitimation provided by state discourse enabled such catastrophes to occur. (p. 269)

This book is well crafted and provides a fresh way to introduce students to the historiography of the Ottoman Empire. Sharkey presents the major debates within the field of Ottoman history while at the same time proposing a novel way of addressing the history of religious communities, making the book thought-provoking for specialists as well. She successfully tackles the puzzling question of religion's role in the Ottoman Empire by emphasising change and variability as a defining aspect of the everyday practices of religion, yet at the same time pointing to long-term transformations of the meanings of religion over the centuries of Ottoman rule. (p 17)

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