these and other Lebanese scholars' ideas in building the theoretical framework upon which its key intervention of "resistant ecologies" rests.

I highly recommend *A Landscape of War* and have no doubt that it will be useful to scholars of the region, as well as more broadly to those interested in these questions of life under conditions of accumulated crises. As it is accessibly written, I plan to teach it in undergraduate classes on the Middle East, as well as in a class on borderlands. In the decade plus between when Khayyat began her fieldwork and this book's publication, Lebanese politics have twisted and the layers of catastrophe piled up. Economic conditions are certainly worse as I write this review than they were when Khayyat sent the book to press. The staying power of this book is how it models a way to think outside accumulated disasters as discrete events, how to use ethnography to render life under a constant state of precarity and violence. Khayyat's approach, ethnographic sensitivity, and relentless focus on "living with" rather than "living despite" scale up and apply broadly to accumulated crisis in both other locales and on a planetary scale, because people do continue to live and work and raise families and hold celebrations, even when those looking in from the outside cannot quite imagine how they do so.

doi:10.1017/S0020743823000922

Assyrians in Modern Iraq: Negotiating Political and Cultural Space

Alda Benjamen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022). Pp. 258. $99.99 hardback. ISBN: 9781088838795

Reviewed by Sara Farhan, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, BC, Canada (farhan@unbc.ca)

Assyrians in Modern Iraq examines the methods and approaches Assyrians employed in their efforts to cultivate varying political and cultural spaces in the second half of the 20th century. In engaging with local and diasporic networks, Assyrians levied their political and cultural positionings to create and reinforce relationships with leftist, oppositional, and centrist movements. To Benjamen, this maneuverability allowed Assyrians to advance their concerns, preserve their culture, and cultivate alliances with diverse political organizations. Rather than presenting Iraq's minorities as either socio-politically tenacious, docile, or agents of imperial powers, Benjamen confronts monolithic perspectives on Iraq's minorities. Benjamen's building blocks consist mainly of complex and diverse sources accumulated from the Iraq's National Library and Archives in Baghdad, as well as libraries and collections held in Mosul, Erbil, and Duhok.

Following a tantalizing preface that situates the book within a larger canon on identity and pluralism in the Middle East with periodical gestures toward prevalent theoretical framings on minoritization and anti-sectarianism, a concise introduction unfurls lengthy cultural, environmental, sociopolitical, and transnational histories of Iraq's "ancient Christian community" (p. 1). The first chapter highlights how employment in Kirkuk's oil industry yielded broad socioeconomic mobility for some, and politicization and labor organization for others. Benjamen centers Assyrians in the formation and transformation of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) pinpointing patterns and ruptures that led to their urbanization, politicization, and disenchantments in leftist and oppositional politics. Discussing various

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743823000971 Published online by Cambridge University Press

experiences of Assyrian activists, she shows how some members were prosecuted for their real or alleged involvement in the bloody suppression of the Shawaf uprising in Mosul and the ethno-sectarian tensions in Kirkuk.

The book then shifts to an exploration of how the Assyrians were significant actors in the 1961–75 Kurdish uprising. The chapter explores the Assyrian-Kurdish alliance in Iraq, which drew in regional actors, such as Iran, as well as the US and the USSR. Benjamen opens the chapter with "Come, oh great Maggie, behold your destroyed village. Your Assyrian Nation became homeless today," in reference to the celebrated warrior Margaret George, who became a symbol of resistance for both Assyrians and the Kurdish Peshmerga. But as Benjamen stresses, "Margaret George has no voice of her own" (p. 83) as she did not produce memoirs and her correspondence letters were destroyed. George entered the parlance and folklore of Assyrian and Kurdish movements as both the "Second Shamiram," and the "Joan of Arc of Kurdistan" (p. 82). As Assyrians negotiated with larger regional groups , some with problematic leadership and troubled relationships with Baghdad, they also hoped to "acquire full citizenship and equality in a liberated north" (p. 112). These negotiations yielded competition between Baghdad, Mulla Mustafa Barazani and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and the ICP, who all hoped to forge an alliance with the Assyrian community.

Chapters 3–5 focus on the complex relationship between urbanized Assyrians and a strengthened Iraqi state under the Baʿth Party. Benjamen examines the ways in which the Baʿth subdued its significant opponents, the KDP and the ICP. Chapter 3 complicates the Baʿthification process by showing how through appeasements and amalgamations, the Assyrian community became alienated from important affiliates. While this centrifuge separated diverse communities who shared similar struggles, it equally empowered Assyrian intellectuals to advance their cultural and political positioning as they contributed to "cross-cultural hybridization between Iraqis of various backgrounds" (p. 115). Baʿthist policies toward urbanized Assyrians shifted from co-optation to conciliation, a process that yielded some cultural acknowledgments, privileges, and even rights. Rural Assyrians, however, continued to suffer from the destruction of their villages as border clearings destroyed revered cultural sites, farms, and churches and forced their translocation. And as Assyrians cultivated alliances via interdenominational collaborations, the Baʿth surveilled their cultural institutions for this closeness was viewed with suspicion.

Chapter 4 explores the Assyrian press and popular culture offering a fascinating insight into the intellectual milieu that, on the one hand, engaged the Baʿth directly, while, on the other, challenged their sponsored interpretation of the past. Even with Baʿth surveillance and censorship, Assyrian cultural productions continued to emphasize multilingualism and pluralism, and in doing so, offered a counterculture to state literary initiatives. Pointedly, *Mordinna Atouraya* (The Literate Assyrian) acted as a sounding board for the community's concerns as multilingualism, pluralism, and socialism continued to proliferate its pages despite state regulation and gradual censorship. However, Assyrian influence and involvement in oppositional movements became diluted following 1975, with the Algiers Agreement, as print culture transformed to placate the Baʿth or face closures. These efforts contributed to the politicization of urban Assyrian intellectuals, as chapter 5 points out. Once again, Baʿthist policies acted as a centrifugal force that, on the one hand, alienated Assyrians, but, on the other, yielded increased politicalization via the formation of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM). On a platform that fused Assyrian rights, identity, culture, and nationalism, with Iraqi patriotism, the ADM offered an active political space for Assyrians, especially those who were affiliated with leftist and oppositional movements. Nonetheless, the Baʿth imprisoned, executed, or forcefully disappeared some of the ADM's members. But as Benjamen asserts, the Baʿth were weary of alienating the Assyrians for they understood the importance of the community's transnational networks and the negative publicity that could hinder Western support for Iraq during its protracted war with neighboring Iran.

In the book's conclusion, themes of identity, cultural heritage, multilingualism, pluralism, rural-urban migration, as well as political negotiations are carried well into the nearly thirteen years of sanctions, the American invasion, the conflict between Kurdish nationalist

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743823000971 Published online by Cambridge University Press

movements and the central government, and the ISIS encroachment, all the while stressing the continuity and intensification of mass exile, immigration, and internal displacement that contributed to the dilution of Assyrian cultural traditions. However, Benjamen is careful not to make victims of her protagonists, ensuring that she positions the devastating conclusion alongside recent sectarianist policies that have "swept away" the "wonderful mosaic of Iraq's pluralistic society" (p. 232). The Assyrians' continuous efforts to negotiate with leftist and oppositional parties, intellectual movements, interdenominational communities, and the various powers that governed Iraq sheds new light on the cultural and political history of modern Iraq. Pertinently, the social movements explored in *Assyrians in Modern Iraq* contribute to the understanding of oppositional politics in the Middle East with its nuances of center-periphery dynamics. This important intervention enriches Iraq's provincial history by offering multileveled approaches that esteem not only rural-urban migration but also urban-rural mobilities and regionalism, and in doing so, Benjamen reorients the history of ethnoreligious communities beyond marginalization. The emphasis on the earlier republican period, a lacuna in Iraq's historiography, undergirds the genesis of minoritization under the Baʿth, when Assyrians' efforts to negotiate, compromise, and placate with concessions were the impetus to and consequence of their political and cultural maneuverability.

doi:10.1017/S0020743823000971

States of Subsistence: The Politics of Bread in Contemporary Jordan

José Ciro Martínez (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022). Pp. 368. $30.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781503631328

Reviewed by Sean Yom Department of Political Science, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, USA (seanyom@temple.edu)

This splendid ethnographic study addresses one of political science's most glaring lacunae. Few things weigh more heavily than food upon both citizens and governments alike. Yet few other concepts are as understudied as this one, particularly by political scientists working on the Middle East. When analyzing authoritarian countries like Jordan, scholars tend to see political life through institutional forces, such as constrained elections, controlled repression, patronage networks, and Western support—or large-scale episodes of protest and revolt, as in the Arab uprisings. Food is relevant only as either a material precursor to crisis, such as when rising prices instigate riots, or an indicator of public welfare. When rulers can no longer provide cheap calories to the masses through basic consumables like wheat or rice, then the authoritarian state is failing.

José Ciro Martínez offers a radically different take in Jordan. He deploys the optic of food to dissect how political institutions, authoritarian order, and social life intersect in the unassuming form of bread (*khubz ʿarabī*). Among a population stalked by unemployment and poverty, bread is the great equalizer, a universally available item that satisfies mass nutritional needs. Politics enters the picture because bread and the Jordanian state have been intertwined since 1974, when the government began subsidizing this staple to meet popular demand. Although those subsidies have phased out in recent years, they enmeshed generations of Jordanians across a half-century with an appetizing promise: the Hashemite

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743823000971 Published online by Cambridge University Press