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COMING IN JANUARY

Global Trends

AS THE WORLD REELS from inflation, the effects of the war in Ukraine, and the ongoing pandemic, some have declared the age of globalization to be over. Has a new era of deglobalization begun, or is globalization taking new forms? China's growing influence is reshaping global arrangements such as sovereign debt restructuring, at a time when many developing countries are at risk of default. And the United States remains an unpredictable force, as with the Supreme Court's ruling against abortion rights, which runs against a global shift toward treating reproductive rights as human rights. The January issue of *Current History* will cover these trends and more across the globe. Topics scheduled to appear include:

- **Globalization Beset by Nationalism**
T. V. Paul, McGill University
- **New Sovereign Debt Dilemmas**
Layna Mosley, Princeton University
B. Peter Rosendorff, New York University
- **Post-Roe Global Abortion Movements**
Lynn M. Morgan, Mount Holyoke College
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Pawel Popiel, University of Pennsylvania
- **Music and Politics in the Streaming Age**
M. I. Franklin, Goldsmiths, University of London
- **Taboos of International Security**
Michelle Bentley, Royal Holloway, University of London
- **Vigilante NGOs?**
Sarah Stroup, Middlebury College

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“Iraq is formally a sovereign, federal, parliamentary, constitutional democracy, yet in practice it is none of these.”

Turbulent Times for the ‘New Iraq’

FANAR HADDAD

Much has changed in Iraq since the now-distant times when the country still captured the attention of Western audiences and policymakers. Iraqis, like many people across the world, have something of a Middle Kingdom syndrome and continue to believe that theirs is a country at the heart of global strategy, super-power competition, and the diabolical conspiracies of the mighty. Yet the truth is that for many Western policymakers, and certainly for Western public opinion, Iraq barely registers as anything more than yet another chronically turbulent Third World country. What this conveniently elides, of course, is the inordinate and immediate responsibility of Western nations for creating this particular case of turbulence.

As we approach the twentieth anniversary of the birth of the “new Iraq,” very few Iraqis will feel they have much to celebrate. As for the architects of the new Iraq, those Americans, Britons, and Iraqis who championed the destruction of the country in 2003 with whatever motives—idealistic, self-serving, ideological, cynical, or just downright delusional—the fact that two decades later Iraq has yet to be reconstructed in a manner remotely befitting its people and their aspirations should be an occasion for deep contrition. But I doubt that we will hear many statements to that effect from the prophets of regime change who, two decades ago, imposed their will not just on Iraq’s bloodstained, megalomaniacal dictator, but on its people, whose lives were thrown into yet more turmoil.

Two themes have dominated the writings that have customarily accompanied every anniversary

of the 2003 invasion: condemnations (well earned) of regime change and its proponents, and the question of whether Iraq is “better off” today than it was under Saddam Hussein. Neither theme is particularly useful, and both are inherently prone to partisan point-scoring. More importantly, reflecting on 2003 is one thing; being anchored in 2003 is quite another. Fixating on the “original sin” of regime change or on the facile and impossible question of whether Iraqis were better off in a fundamentally incomparable context two decades ago reduces actual Iraqi people to abstractions and ignores their lived experience in the years since 2003.

Noting my own condemnation of the calamitous decision to invade Iraq, I will try to outline the road that Iraq has traversed since then, with an eye to better understanding where it is today and what its prospects for the future might be.

NEITHER DEMOCRATIC NOR SOVEREIGN

In whatever field one looks at, the new Iraq at twenty is a far cry from what was envisaged by the architects of the 2003 invasion or those Iraqis who hoped for a positive change after decades of stifling and oppressive dictatorial rule. Even in areas that saw progress after 2003, it was only progress in relation to the exceptionally grim standards of the authoritarian Ba’th Party era, not by the global standards to which Iraqis have every right to feel entitled.

Freedom of expression is a good example: its improvement since 2003 can scarcely be exaggerated when compared with the Orwellian restrictions of the Saddam era. Measured globally, however, Iraq remains a problematic case. Journalists, critics, and activists have been harassed, intimidated, and in more than a few cases murdered for challenging the status quo. Moreover, the

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stabilization of the state after years of civil war has led to a rise in state-enforced censorship. For instance, Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council recently has developed a habit of routinely issuing arrest warrants against its critics, using Ba'ath-era legislation protecting state institutions from criticism.

Iraq is formally a sovereign, federal, parliamentary, constitutional democracy, yet in practice it is none of these. Its democracy is, at best, flawed. Iraq has electoral politics but is not democratic. Elections matter, but primarily in the way they influence, rather than determine, the bargaining positions of the respective members of the ruling oligarchy. Other factors come into this bargaining process as well, not least the possession of coercive capital.

The same oligarchy has embedded itself in every institution of state, rendering concepts such as the political independence of supervisory bodies or the separation of powers a farce. As for the constitution, it was rushed in its conception, taking less than six months to draft, and contains many points of ambiguity. Moreover, it is not only a problematic document, but observed in the breach. It is flouted as a matter of course and resorted to and upheld by Iraq's political elites when convenient for their interests, when needed in service of their internecine squabbles, or when they confront a challenge to the status quo.

Iraq's parliament has never had a formal opposition, and parliamentary work is generally governed by the relations of power among the kleptocratic oligarchy that dominates Iraqi political life. Iraqi federalism is similarly disfigured. Relations between the federal government and the sole federal region, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, are governed by a combination of rivalry, collusion, and extralegal measures. Attempts at forming additional federal regions have been unconstitutionally blocked by the federal government.

As with much else relating to the state, the destruction of Iraqi sovereignty in 2003 has yet to be fully reversed. Today, Iraq's sovereignty is severely compromised both domestically and internationally. Domestic sovereignty, conventionally understood as the absolute and exclusive authority of the state within its borders, is weakened by the fact that the Iraqi state is not a unitary actor. There is no state in the conventional sense of the term; no central authority. Rather, multiple

power centers and power brokers of varying strength and influence combine to form what passes for the state, even if contradictions, antagonisms, and outright enmity abound between some of them. As such, the state is a brittle concept in today's Iraq, particularly since the various contradictory nodes of power that make up the state are in turn linked to a collection of foreign powers and patrons that are equally likely to work at cross-purposes.

This reality has taken shape at the direct expense of Iraq's domestic and international sovereignty. Domestically, neither the rule of law nor the writ of the state can be sufficiently upheld in such a context, nor can fundamental reform and institution-building take place, given the multiple vested interests and the lack of a centralized, adequately empowered decision-making apparatus. The role of coercive capital in the form of elite-linked armed groups, militias, and the political penetration of formal security forces perpetuates the status quo and stands as a powerful barrier to the functioning of the state and attempted course

corrections. This places the ruling oligarchy and those connected with it above and beyond the law.

As for Iraq's international sovereignty—its exclusive authority to rule within its own borders, independent of other states—the deficiencies are just as glaring. Regional and international actors have an outsized role in domestic Iraqi politics. Iran may be the most egregious case, but it is far from the only one. Many Iraqi political actors are accustomed to looking to other foreign patrons, such as Turkey and some of the Gulf states, for support. Iraq's borders are routinely violated by Turkey, Iran, and (to a lesser extent these days) the United States. Given the abundance of Iranian assets in Iraq, it is not inconceivable that Israel might join the list, should it decide to accelerate its low-level war against Iran.

Despite improvements in Iraq's international relations in recent years, the country remains a site of proxy politics and regional competition. As with many of Iraq's problems, this is perpetuated by both Iraqi and non-Iraqi actors. Domestically, there is no shortage of Iraqi actors who are willing to act as proxies for foreign powers; internationally, Iraq's sovereignty deficit works to the benefit of all except Iraq.

*There is no state in the
conventional sense of the term.*

The destruction of the Iraqi state in 2003 created an opening for power projection and competition. Regional and international powers continue to profit from this situation. They may seek a larger geostrategic market share in Iraq at the expense of their rivals, but it is highly doubtful that any would welcome the emergence of a sovereign Iraq capable of restricting their influence and the pursuit of their interests within the country. The status quo—a relatively stable but not entirely sovereign Iraq—opens horizons for all concerned. Iran is *primus inter pares* when it comes to foreign interference, but it is not alone.

With hindsight, a supreme irony is clear. Far from creating a Western-leaning beacon of democracy in the Middle East, regime change granted Iran a level of influence in Iraq that even the most ambitious Iranian strategists would not have dreamed of prior to 2003.

The resulting political order is incoherent and opaque, yet highly resilient and resistant to change. Paradoxically, the incoherence and opaqueness have not been a source of vulnerability, but rather the contrary: they have proved to be a source of strength when confronted by protest and demands for change. In August 2022, Finance Minister Ali Allawi provided an apt summation of the state of Iraq in his 10-page resignation letter:

All the calls for reform are stymied by the political framework of this country. . . . It has allowed for the state's capture by outside interest groups. Unlike human beings, states do not die in a definitive way. They could linger on as zombie states. . . . the machinery of government continues, it is true, and the trappings of state power persist, but there is no substance to the form.

PROTEST CULTURE

A laundry list of Iraq's woes and the consequences of 2003 could go on for several more pages, covering well-trodden terrain: ethno-sectarian politics, corruption, the rise of militant movements, an unsustainable economic model, and so forth. Finding solutions for these issues remains a perennial problem. The mountains of policy prescriptions written over the years have repeatedly clashed with the realities of Iraq's political economy. Yet Iraqis have persisted in exploring ways of resisting the status quo and demanding a change for the better.

Protest has become a permanent feature of the political landscape since 2011—and even more so

since 2015. Protest culture has become so pervasive that even the political elites have adopted it, mobilizing their supporters and using rent-a-mobs to undermine their rivals. Instrumentalizing protest in this way is also a response to genuine grassroots anti-systemic protests that rocked Iraq in 2015, 2018, and most momentously in 2019–20.

Crucially, these protests have been primarily located in Shia majority areas, including the capital. This precludes the Shia political classes' ability to neutralize them by playing the sectarian card, as happened with the mass protests that took place in Sunni provinces in 2012–13. The more sect-centric elements of the Shia political classes have nevertheless tried to employ the vocabulary of sectarian solidarity—defense of “Shia rule” and the like—in the face of recent protests. But for many Iraqis this rings absurd, given that the anger the Shia political classes face is emanating from the very people they claim to represent and empower.

Though they did not change the fundamentals of the political economy of Iraq, the 2019–20 protests are particularly important in that they embodied several long-running transformations (generational turnover being an obvious one) and triggered a chain reaction that is today testing the very limits of the political system's staying power. The drivers of these and previous protests are fairly well known: anger at the looting of the state by the political classes; at economic and political disenfranchisement; at the impoverishment of what on paper should be a rich country; at the impunity with which political actors and those affiliated with them operate; at the humiliations Iraqis endure as a result of the country's broken systems of governance and its lack of sovereignty. And so the list continues.

Yet what emerged in October 2019 proved different from previous protests. First was their scale: they were quite possibly the largest protests in Iraq's modern history, and they lasted for six months or so. Second was their diversity: they crossed ideological lines and transcended boundaries of class, age, and gender. The bulk of the protesters were young working-class Shia men—but the average Iraqi (particularly in the cities and provinces that witnessed the protests) is young, poor, and Shia. In that sense, the preponderance of this particular demographic does not negate the fact that the protests captured a cross section of the broader society.

The third factor that set these protests apart was the political discourse that they employed and

generated: an explicit rejection of the system in its entirety, and specifically of identity politics and foreign (especially Iranian) interference. Rather than the rhetoric of religion, identity, or sectarian victimhood, the 2019 protests employed the language of civic rights, civic nationalism, and demands for a civic state.

Finally, the violence deployed against the 2019 protests was unprecedented in Iraq's recent protest history. Between 600 and 700 protesters were killed by Iraqi security forces and affiliated paramilitary groups. A targeted campaign of intimidation, kidnappings, and assassinations followed.

Despite this violent repression, the 2019 protests scored some important victories. They forced the resignation of then–Prime Minister Adel Abd al-Mahdi's government, as well as the drafting of a new election law—a law that later helped diminish the electoral fortunes of many established political actors, particularly the Iran-affiliated wing of the Shia political establishment. The new law also provided some modest electoral openings in the October 2021 elections for first-time candidates, including some affiliated with the protest movement. Overall, the protests created a new political climate—one that could not be ignored by the political classes.

*Sovereignty is severely
compromised both domestically
and internationally.*

THE DECLINING RELEVANCE OF SECT

The events of 2019–20 were also important as an expression of some of the transformations, several years in the making, that were underway in Iraqi politics and society. Iraq today differs in several profound ways from when it last dominated Western headlines.

High birth rates and an exceptionally young population (some 50 percent of Iraqis are under the age of 20) have resulted in a stark generational turnover—which has not been matched in elite politics. This has increased the already yawning chasm separating elites from the vast majority of the Iraqi people. In addition to their unrepresentativeness, their unresponsiveness, their venality, and their dismal performance, the political elites are increasingly disconnected from the formative experiences and lived realities of a critical mass of Iraq's youthful population.

A defensive Kurdish nationalism, a yearning for “Shia rule,” fear of the Ba'ath, and Ba'ath-era traumas simply do not resonate today as they did for an

older generation in the early post-2003 years. This is particularly the case given that the champions of these causes and issues have now accumulated a substantial, and very poor, track record in government.

Another major transformation, linked to the above trends, is the decline of sectarian entrenchment and the diminished relevance of sectarian identity to political contestation. Some have labeled this “desectarianization,” a term that, intentionally or otherwise, gives the mistaken impression that it is a result of deliberate policy. In reality, however, this shift away from the politics of sect is the result of organic social and political changes over the years.

The sect-centric political elites reached a consensus, based on the results of two grinding cycles of civil war, as to the relative political weight of sectarian and ethnic categories. In other words, an agreement was reached (however begrudgingly by junior partners) between sect-centric actors over the split that underpins the identity-based political system. This split gave each “community” a share

that left its supposed representatives to compete over how that share was to be split among themselves, thereby accelerating intra-sect/ethnic competition as inter-sect/ethnic contestation diminished.

Meanwhile, a regional consensus emerged that recognized the “new Iraq” as a permanent feature of the geostrategic landscape. As a result, concerns about encirclement and foreign plots subsided in Iraq among the forces of the status quo. At the same time, potential Iraqi spoilers were now at a loss for foreign patrons, given the increased regional subscription to what had become a relatively stabilized post-2003 order. The stabilization and normalization of the “new Iraq” naturally meant a weakening of existential fear—particularly of the sect/ethnocoded variety. In turn, this reduced the perceived need for sect/ethnic solidarities and cooled the drivers of sectarian entrenchment.

Free from existential fears and civil war, issue politics—focusing on good governance and the like—took center stage at the expense of identity politics. For the identity entrepreneurs of the post-2003 era, fear of the other was their primary political benefactor. In earlier years, one would hear Iraqis describing political actors and militants from their own sect with something to the effect

of, “I know they are [insert any number of expletives], but they are our [expletive].” For some years now, thanks to improved security and relative stability, that sentiment has been far less pronounced.

This is reflected in the shifting parameters of political populism: whereas the language of populism was once rooted in identity politics and sectarian entrenchment, today the more resonant themes are those of reform and change. Generational turnover and the persistent failure of the political classes further corroded the credibility of the founding principles of post-2003 Iraq—ethno-sectarian politics chief among them.

The shift from inter- to intra-sect/ethnic political contestation points to another long-term trend that is highly relevant to understanding Iraq today: elite fragmentation. In 2005, Iraqi politics were dominated by three blocs, respectively representing Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds; between them, they garnered 87 percent of the vote in that year’s elections. These coalitions of convenience, rooted in the politics of the Ba’th era and the extraordinary circumstances that followed regime change in 2003, proved brittle. Their fragmentation was evident in every subsequent election: whereas the top performer in the January 2005 elections, the (Shia-dominated) United Iraqi Alliance, received 47 percent of the vote, the top performer in the elections of 2021, the Sadrists, received a mere 10 percent of the vote.

At the time of writing, the fallout from the 2021 elections and the intensity of elite fragmentation, particularly in the form of intra-Shia competition, have pushed the political compact to the breaking point. The political system has clearly been unable to keep up with the transformations described here.

A NEW DAWN?

The protests of 2019–20 ushered in a government headed by Mustafa al-Kadhimi, a former journalist who was head of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service before becoming prime minister. (Disclaimer: I served for a year in al-Kadhimi’s administration as senior adviser on foreign affairs.) There was a fair bit of optimism regarding the change; many hoped that it marked an inflection point toward a better political model. Some observers and supporters of the new government took these hopes to wildly unrealistic heights with talk of an end to the power of the political elites, and of prosecutions of the more egregious actors

among them—particularly those found to have been responsible for the bloodbath that was initiated against the protesters of 2019–20.

Of course, the reality was that Kadhimi’s government, whatever its flaws and merits, was not operating in a vacuum and could not act independent of the relations of power that govern Iraqi political life. This structural constraint, present with any government, was made all the worse by the fact that the Kadhimi government did not have an electoral mandate—it was appointed by the very forces that people hoped Kadhimi would target. Nor did the government have the luxury of a full term; one of its primary tasks was to organize early elections. Finally, the prime minister lacked a parliamentary base of support or a political party through which to push his agenda. Those hoping for a “revolution” were in for disappointment.

The Kadhimi government was a product, and an accelerant, of some of the trends and transformations discussed above. Nowhere has this been more obvious than in elite fragmentation and intra-sect/ethnic political competition. The primary line of contestation has long been between populist cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and his rivals in Shia politics. The latter include former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the Iran-leaning factions of Iraq’s political and security establishments. The two sides differ on their vision for Iraq, but at its heart this is a contest for power—and particularly for primacy within Shia politics, and hence in Iraqi politics more generally.

The October 2021 election resulted in heavy losses for some of Sadr’s rivals. The Sadrists came in first with 73 seats in parliament. Fatah, the parliamentary coalition representing many of the Iran-leaning factions, suffered a 31-seat loss, leaving it with only 17 seats. Maliki’s State of Law Coalition did well, gaining 8 seats and bringing its total to 33.

In his electoral campaign, Sadr had called for a “majority government” as opposed to the “consensus governments” that had plagued Iraq since 2005, in which everyone is given a seat at the table. With the elections having gone in his favor, Sadr now promised to use his parliamentary plurality to form such a majority government with his Sunni and Kurdish partners. In effect, this would have meant a reduced “consensus government” that excluded some of his rivals. His Shia opponents responded by coalescing into the Coordination Framework (CF). Neither the Sadrists and their allies nor the CF managed to form

a government; each side was able to block the other for months on end.

In June 2022, Sadr surprised everyone by calling for a mass resignation of his 73 members of parliament. This signaled a turn to his unrivaled street power, by means of which he sought to paralyze Iraqi politics and prevent the formation of a CF-led government. The stalemate continued with an ever-present risk of violent escalation.

In late August 2022, Baghdad's Green Zone, the seat of government, was the scene of fighting between Sadrist and CF-aligned militias, resulting in some 50 deaths. The fighting ended the following day, after Sadr expressed his displeasure at the outbreak of violence, reaffirmed his recently announced (and highly unlikely) "retirement" from politics, and called on his followers to leave the Green Zone. At the time of writing, the escalation seems to have been contained, but the stalemate continues, and further, more prolonged escalations, possibly spiraling out of control, can never be entirely ruled out.

Sadr has framed his position as a revolutionary one. He promises the overturning of the political system and an end to business-as-usual, to the ethno-sectarian division of political office, to the corruption that so defines Iraqi political life, to foreign interference, and so on. While it is difficult to see a return to the status quo ante, it is equally hard to see how such a comprehensive overhaul can be achieved. Many predict that after 20 unhappy years, the demise of the post-2003 order is now imminent, but this begs the question of what will take its place.

Sadr's talk of revolution has been music to the ears of some Iraqi and other observers. Indeed, some are positively giddy at the thought that Iran and its Iraqi friends will be sidelined from Iraqi politics. Yet this mirrors the enthusiasm of pro-war Iraqis in 2003, those who saw Saddam Hussein as the root of all evil, neglecting to take into account the complex and multilayered problems that bedeviled Iraq beyond simply the person of Saddam.

Clipping the CF's wings and reducing Iranian influence in Iraq would certainly be a positive development, but it would not, in and of itself, guarantee fundamental changes to Iraq's political economy. It may present opportunities, but it offers no ready-made answers to Iraq's structural problems—from corruption, the absence of the rule of law, and paramilitary violence to the

unsustainability of the economic model, to name but a few examples.

Moreover, relying on the Sadrists to enact change could end up being something of a Faustian bargain. The Sadrists are not just complicit in the political system, they are one of its primary pillars. They are as culpable as anyone else in the structural ills of the Iraqi state that they now claim to be rebelling against. All of which leads one to suspect that "the revolution" is a Sadrist power play for primacy in Shia politics and, by extension, in the Iraqi state.

The framing and vocabulary of Sadr's power play neatly illustrate the shifts in Iraqi politics and society. After all, his archrival, Maliki, tried something similar during his tenure in office from 2006 to 2014. The different framings underpinning the two attempts are telling. Maliki sought to establish his supremacy as a hard-nosed law-and-order leader with a not-so-subtle Shia sect-centricity. Sadr's power play, while also seeking to reconfigure the system to his advantage, does so using what in 2022 is a more resonant populist message: revolution and change.

This is not to say that Sadr's is a purely instrumentalist approach. The differences between Sadr and Maliki in terms of character, outlook, social background, support base, and tools lead them

toward their respective strategies and positions. Most interesting is which messages have resonated, and with how large a demographic, at various times in Iraq's turbulent recent political history.

MAFIA STATE

Sadr may be less beholden to Iran than his rivals are, and he may indeed want to uphold Iraqi sovereignty and sideline some of the more problematic actors in Iraqi politics. But it seems highly unlikely that he can, or even wants to, fundamentally alter the political economy of Iraq. Rather, he is likely aiming at centralizing it under his control. Like the other major political actors, the Sadrists hold an ample share of the Iraqi state. Pilfering is systematized through political control of state institutions and the almost complete absence of the rule of law.

It is commonly said by Iraqis that theirs is a mafia state. Political actors, armed groups, tribal interests, organized crime, and foreign powers collude in the capture of the state, for a variety of

Iraqis have persisted in exploring ways of resisting the status quo.

often conflicting ends. If Sadr's attempt to secure his primacy and exclude some of his rivals succeeds, opponents of the system will undoubtedly rejoice. But they should be wary of Sadrist designs that are unlikely to accord with the sentiments of the civic protests of 2019–20, beyond the cathartic joy of seeing the downfall of certain pillars of the political system.

Non-Sadrist opponents of the system, the countless Iraqis dreaming of a better Iraq—of finally turning the page on the failed model of the “new Iraq”—should be mindful that even if a Sadrist success may create opportunities, it will also

mean that another struggle would immediately surface on the horizon: containing Sadrist domination. A Sadrist-dominated system is likely to resemble the current state of affairs, only with fewer players and greater centralization.

Put differently, in the mafia state of Iraq, Sadr's “revolution” against the corrupt political classes is less Eliot Ness going after Al Capone, and more Michael Corleone moving against rival families. Whether in 2003 or in 2022, Iraqis' desperation for a remedy to their country's ills need not be expressed in credulous acceptance of self-proclaimed saviors. ■

“[T]he narrative of a weak state has been used to embed and preserve a regional security order and to serve international geopolitical interests.”

The Ghostly Politics Haunting Yemen

KAMILIA AL-ERIANI

On April 7, 2022, Yemeni President Abdrabu Hadi declared that he would cede power to a newly formed Presidential Council headed by former Interior Minister Rashad al-Alimi. Hadi stressed that his decision stemmed from a collective “commitment to Yemen’s unity, sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity” and to “our people’s aspirations to build a new Yemen, preserving national bonds, healing wounds, stopping bloodshed, and ensuring citizens’ security.” Hadi’s resignation was part of the recent cease-fire agreement and peace negotiations sponsored by the United Nations Security Council and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) after seven years of unyielding war.

Yemenis’ response to Hadi’s declaration was mixed. While some felt it was a positive change, others speculated about the identity of his speech’s ghostwriter. Since 2012, Hadi had alluded to being a figurehead during his extended term; he lacked both charismatic leadership and decision-making capacity.

Speculation about a ghostwriter not only implies the existence of invisible powers deciding Yemen’s political future, but also gestures to the presence of ghostly forces that govern the failed Yemeni state behind the scenes—as well as their uncanny desire to resuscitate the state, to bring it back from the dead. Yemenis seem unable to agree on the identity of the forces that have been writing and rewriting their past, present, and future. Are they Ansar Allah (the Houthis), the late President Ali Abdullah Saleh (who enabled the Houthis to seize power), the Hadi government, the Southern Transitional Council, Saudi Arabia,

the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iran, the United States, or all of the above?

There may not be a consensual answer. Nevertheless, Yemenis mostly agree that whoever is responsible for authoring their history has created conditions that make life unlivable for ordinary citizens. All aspects of existence seem desolate and turned upside down in an inexhaustible state of turmoil that might have been created by *jinn*, imperceptible spirit beings composed of vapors or flames, with vindictive influence. Indeed, Yemenis describe their daily toils as life metamorphosed by *jinn* (*‘ayshat jinn*). This is an analogy for the country’s state of havoc, dehumanization, political repression, forced disappearance, haunted social relations, and economic ruin.

Yemenis portray their condition in this way to denounce those who have forced them to live the life of the living dead since the Saudi-led war began in March 2015. Yet the ambiguity of the invisible and ghostly perpetrators makes them unaccountable. The views of Yemenis nonetheless intersect on the reason for their lives being turned upside down: the absence of the state (*daulah*).

WHOSE FAILED STATE?

In Yemenis’ political imagination, to dream of having a functioning *daulah* is to aspire to the unity, peace, prosperity, citizenship rights, and security that should be granted by the state. The *daulah* has attained sacred virtues and fetishized qualities in Yemen. The dream of a *daulah* that will end the perpetual “security crisis” did not emerge out of the void. As Yemenis have incessantly been told by government officials, policymakers, experts, and regional and international powers, the prolonged security, political, and economic crises devastating their lives are due to the state’s weakness and now its collapse. As a 2018 UN Panel of Experts report concluded, “Yemen, as a state, has all but ceased to exist.”

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Such descriptions of a weak or failed state have been criticized for their inadequacy to explain how the state roots its power through the rhetoric of its absence. To emphasize the weakness of a state conceals the ways in which, even in the absence of unified institutions, sovereignty inhabits various affective and invisible modes of governance, embedding its presence within citizens' perceptions and emotions. This raises the question: Who needs this narrative of a weak or failed state, and why?

Security crises ascribed to a weak or failed state have long been built into Yemen's political landscape. This narrative has been produced, sustained, and mobilized by Saudi Arabia, the United States, and successive Yemeni governments that have capitalized on it. But whose security is at stake? Certainly not that of Yemenis.

To continually describe the Yemeni state as weak, failed, or dead is to allow the belligerent parties to insist on the state's sovereign right to exert violence as a necessity for its resurrection. The more it exerts violence, the more its sacralized civil presence evaporates; the state's criminality is masked by the language of its absence. The state morphs into a ghostly form. Yet its sovereignty can still be traced in its people's attachments, desires, and aspirations for a new and stronger Yemen.

The discourse of the failed state is now marshaled by the various warring groups and parties that are seduced by the desire to capture state power. Excess violence occurs not as a result of the state's absence, but due to an excess of state practices in pursuit of self-reinvention. But this sovereign desire for self-reinvention is hardly meant to serve Yemenis' aspirations for the state they imagine. Rather, the narrative of a weak state has been used to embed and preserve a regional security order and to serve international geopolitical interests. Since the 1960s, it has been mobilized and made subservient to regional and international sovereignties and their security strategies. It has allowed unceasing external interventions that have compromised the country's sovereignty and nearly abolished political life in Yemen.

It is precisely under such conditions of domination that ghostly politics is enacted and normalized. By ghostly politics, I mean a mode of governing without politics, whereby people's

involvement in the political process and their political rights are sidelined in the name of rescuing the state.

The new Presidential Council proclaims its intention to rehabilitate the collapsed state and create one that will unite Yemenis in a new, peaceful, and prosperous nation. This is neither a departure from the ghostly politics that has long governed Yemen through Saudi Arabia and the United States (later joined by the United Arab Emirates) nor a redemption from their incarnated phantoms of insecurity. Instead, it is a reconfiguration of politics that mobilizes the state's absence to legitimize new interventions. Therefore, peace seems unlikely despite the promise of a new governing arrangement for a peaceful future. Yemen's post-World War II history bears witness to this reality.

PHANTOMS OF INSECURITY

The first republic in North Yemen, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), was formed in 1962. Ever since, political scientists as well as security and foreign policy experts have argued that the Yemeni state is an aberration. It did not fall within the Weberian state paradigm, which stipulates that a state must hold a monopoly of legitimate physical force. The Yemeni state's monopoly of physical violence was viewed as lacking because of its segmented tribal social structure.

Some scholars, including anthropologists, have critiqued Max Weber's conception of the state and its application for understanding Yemeni politics. The state, as an assemblage of ideas and institutions, cannot be reduced to such a narrow definition. One must keep in mind the founding principle espoused by modern state sovereignty: the state's incontestable right to exist and endure.

French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu extended Weber's definition of the state to include the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence, beyond mere physical violence. The presence of the state is strongly felt through its various effects in the form of desires, anxieties, seductions, and persuasions directed at obtaining recognition from citizens or the international community. The state may not have a unified institutional structure, yet it exists everywhere through these effects that make its power almost imperceptible. The state's desire to establish and secure itself takes embodied form in

*Who needs this narrative of
a weak or failed state, and why?*

many quarters, including among politicians and other political actors.

In Yemen, particularly in the north, imperceptible and affective state power was not merely a metaphor. Notions of politics being governed by invisible forces that inhabit unseen worlds, such as demons, *jinn*, and ghosts, are dominant beliefs in Yemen's religious, popular, and political cultures. Though *jinn* differ from ghosts and have a stronger presence in Yemeni culture, they share the features of intangibility, invisibility, and malevolence (though Yemenis as well as Muslims elsewhere believe that some *jinn* are also benevolent). In the pre-republican era, the last imam of the Mutawakkili Imamate, Ahmad Hamid al-Din (who held that position from 1948 to 1962), claimed that he possessed supernatural powers to control the unseen *jinn* and use them to unveil conspiracies against his rule. Accordingly, he was recognized as Ahmad ya Jinnah, or Ahmad the Terrifying.

In many accounts, Imam Ahmad's reign was one of terror, during which many who protested his tyranny were brutally suppressed. However, the end of his reign by the politics of *jinn*, and the simultaneous birth in North Yemen of the only republic in Arabia, in the midst of six monarchies, brought to life the phantoms of Saudi insecurities (and those of US geopolitical interests). These events provoked a permanent sense of apprehension over the possibility of republican politics cascading into the Arabian Gulf.

To drive away the phantoms of insecurity, the Saudis and the Americans needed the Yemeni state to hover in between—that is, to remain weak, dependent, docile, and open to interventions from without. By tracing these insecurities, one can make sense of why the discourse of the weak or failed state is perpetuated, and to what end.

A STATE IN BETWEEN

In 1962, the arrival of Egyptian troops in Yemen to support the anti-Imamate revolution and install a new republic brought the specter of Arab nationalism and communism to Arabia. Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser advocated for revolutionary states, including one in Saudi Arabia. Alarmed by Nasser's popularity and his championing of Arab nationalism, Saudi Arabia, led by King Faisal, joined the United States and Britain to combat the Soviet-backed spread of socialism in the region.

A civil war between republicans and royalists erupted in Yemen in 1962. It mutated into an

eight-year proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, in the shadows of the Cold War. Nasser's withdrawal from Yemen in 1967 meant that the new republic had to adopt the Saudi-US vision in order to survive: it had to be governed by liberal and secularized Islamic principles. But Nasser's specter remained despite his forces' departure.

After independence from British colonial rule, South Yemen morphed into one of the most radical communist regimes in the region, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). The fear of communism spilling into Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states intensified with a north-south border dispute in the late 1970s. In 1978, the young and politically inexperienced army officer Ali Saleh rose to power in the YAR.

The need for a weak Yemeni state first emerged during Saleh's rule, animated by the "security crisis" language that underpinned US and Saudi foreign policies in Yemen and continues to do so today. In official cables exchanged between Saudi officials and the Carter administration in 1978, they agreed to provide the YAR with enough support so that it would become strong enough to deter the southern communist threat, but remain weak enough never to pose a security threat to Saudi or US interests.

In this peculiar condition of in-betweenness, the state is neither present nor absent. In a state made in between, the interval of the "security crisis" was perpetuated, forming the condition on which Yemeni state sovereignty rested. It was a sovereignty dominated by Saudi and US apprehensions over regional security. The Yemeni state mastered the art of inventing and reinventing its ghostly form through the rhetoric of crisis. As a poor, newborn state it capitalized on this in-betweenness to secure regional and international recognition as well as military support to quell lawful internal political demands that might spill outside its borders.

Ghostly politics is often sacrificial. It insists on the protection and security of the state as the imperative against which all others collapse. After Nasser's departure, and Saudi-US sponsorship of the YAR, the northern revolutionary left had to be ejected or secretly consumed by the emerging security apparatus. The republic devoured and sacrificed its own children to secure itself as a liberal state, in line with Saudi-US exigencies.

In the 1970s and 1980s, when the National Democratic Front, backed by the PDRY, was active

in the YAR, many of its members were defamed, tortured, killed, or disappeared. Saleh's state employed forced disappearance against the left to intimidate, terrorize, silence, and obliterate political dissent in the name of the weak state and regional security. This was also true in the PDRY, which utilized forced disappearance when tensions between the hardline leftist Fattah and the pragmatic Nasir Mohammad erupted into a two-week civil war in 1986.

The 1990 unification of North and South Yemen birthed a new republic. Unification allowed a short-lived period of democratic opening. But the southern elites called for secession, accusing their northern rivals of assassinating southern leaders in a bid to dominate the new state. In 1994, a civil war broke out between the two parties, ending the same year. Saleh's northern government emerged as the victor.

With this victory, forced disappearances resumed in the name of securing the unified state. From 2004 to 2009, Saleh's state waged six wars on the Zaydi group Believing Youth, founded by religious and political leader Husayn Badr al-Din al-Houthi, in the northwest province of Sadah on the Saudi border. To discredit the group's political demands, Saleh invoked a security crisis and played on Saudi and US fears of Iran's expanding influence in Arabia. The six wars in Sadah brought more kidnappings, assassinations, and forced disappearances. Many of those abducted were released after several months.

In 2007, the Army Association of southern veterans organized peaceful protests known as the Hirak, demanding reintegration into the military after being forced to retire following the 1994 civil war. The state sought to erase their grievances by means of forced kidnapping. The number of political leaders, activists, journalists, and soldiers who were forcibly disappeared during Saleh's 32-year reign remains unknown.

SALEH'S SNAKE DANCE

Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar, the longtime speaker of Yemen's House of Representatives, head of the Hashid tribal federation, and one of the founders of the Islamic party al-Islah, used the expression "better the *jinni* that you know" to justify Saleh's reelection as president in 2006. Saleh himself proclaimed that ruling Yemen was akin to

dancing on the heads of snakes—a Yemeni colloquialism that implies uncanny ability and astuteness, associated with those who embody the *jinn*. These qualities were cultivated over decades in which Saleh learned to play the game of ghostly politics. He rejuvenated Saudi-US phantoms of insecurity, evoking the weakness of the Yemeni state to obtain foreign recognition and military support in order to contain security crises and suppress domestic demands for political rights.

Saleh's state sovereignty was malleable and adaptable to any form of "security crisis" perceived by regional and international powers. The US War on Terror reignited the discourse of the weak state. Saleh used it as a ploy to discredit the Islamists of al-Islah, his former long-term ally, which had broken from him and called for fair and democratic politics well before 2011. According to many accounts, during the 2011 uprising known as the Youth Revolution, Saleh's state orchestrated terrorism plots to persuade the Americans and the Saudis, as well as Yemenis, that the unrest posed a security threat.

This ploy was critical to Saleh's efforts to retain power in a post-revolution government, as well as winning renewed support from Washington and Riyadh, both of which viewed the

Arab uprisings as destabilizing the Arabian Gulf and the Middle East. During the yearlong Youth Revolution, kidnapping, torture, maiming, and forced disappearance were again utilized as modes of intimidating, terrorizing, and erasing voices of dissent. The state's sacrificial politics no longer remained a secret.

Ultimately, the GCC, the UN Security Council, and the "Friends of Yemen" group of donor nations silenced the youth's democratic aspirations because they were perceived as provoking a security crisis that further weakened the Yemeni state and had to be contained. But in order to pacify the Youth Revolution, it was agreed that Saleh had to go. Hadi, Saleh's vice president, was deemed the safest choice to lead the postrevolutionary state. He was installed as the new president by consensus of Saleh's party and the Joint Meeting Parties (al-Islah and the Yemen Socialist Party) in early 2012.

After his removal, Saleh colluded with Ansar Allah to overthrow the transitional government in September 2014. In response, Hadi's state

The state mastered the art of reinventing its ghostly form.

utilized the language with which it was well acquainted, though its use of that rhetoric was less savvy and more violent than Saleh's had been. Hadi called on the GCC to intervene and save the failing Yemeni state from the security crisis generated by Saleh and the Iranian proxy Ansar Allah.

A VISION OF FRAGMENTS

After more than seven years, the 2015 GCC intervention has bred more parties claiming to represent state power and aspiring to bring it back from its presumed death. Those who are portraying themselves as victims of centralizing state repression in the past (Ansar Allah and the Southern Transitional Council) have adopted the same narrative that Saleh mobilized to justify their repression. The various parties serve as vessels through which the state and its sovereign desire and right to exist become visible by means of prevalent practices of dehumanization, debasement, and silencing—detention, torture, forced disappearance, economic devastation, and defaced political and social bonds. Secret prisons proliferate in both the north and the south of the country, overseen by multiple local and regional sovereignties, sometimes at odds with one another.

The war in the name of bringing the state back turned to a new solution to the long-standing specter of security crisis that Yemen has embodied. The coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE has abandoned the project of saving one weak Yemeni state in favor of multiple sovereignties that are likely to conform to the ghostly quality of the original.

During the National Dialogue Conference held in 2013–14, the GCC, the UN special envoy, and the Friends of Yemen introduced a new narrative of state and nation building. They proposed a federation that seemingly responded to diverse political grievances, including those of Ansar Allah and the Southern Transitional Council. The federal structure masked the regional and international powers' desire to fragment a small territory inhabited by a population with shared histories, language, culture, and ethnicity. In 2014, however, this project was aborted when Ansar Allah seized the capital, Sanaa, as well as government institutions in the north.

The April 2022 cease-fire agreement is poised to further divide Yemen. The new arrangement promises multiple ghostly states. Hadi was forcibly removed, and a new Presidential Council was formed under the auspices of Saudi Arabia and

the UAE. They handpicked the council's members, representing different regions. But these members remain hostile to one another. Their antagonism to Ansar Allah is the only thing that unites them, aside from their loyalty to their Gulf sponsors. The absence of neutral politicians who would advocate reconciliation between different parties, including Ansar Allah, forecloses the possibility of peace.

The new arrangement reflects Saudi Arabia and the UAE's decision to no longer sustain an in-between state. The vision of a peaceful future that these regional powers have proposed for Yemen entails the creation of fragmented statelets.

Three months after the formation of the Presidential Council, a conflict erupted in the southern province of Shabwah. An independent southern state, led by the Southern Transitional Council and supported by the UAE, is fighting for its right to exist—and for control of the island of Socotra and the port of Aden. Thus the fragmented visions and promises of the council amount to an uninterrupted continuation of security crises, normalizing the erasure of political liberties and democratic rights.

Washington's involvement in the war in Yemen has been disguised by its official neutrality. The United States has been providing intelligence support and selling weapons worth billions of dollars to the intervening states. President Joe Biden's July 2022 visit to Riyadh provided reassurances that Saudi security will remain a priority for Washington, whereas the Yemen question was not addressed.

THE FACES ON THE WALLS

Also in July 2022, Yemeni activist and artist Murad Subay launched "Upside-Down," an online campaign urging Yemenis inside and outside the country as well as friends across the world to turn their social media profile photos upside down. The three-day campaign sought to symbolically represent a life dispossessed of normalcy and beset with starvation, the deaths of children and other vulnerable members of the population due to hunger or disease, job losses, withheld salaries, skyrocketing rents, intensified division between the few rich and the many below the poverty line, and rising prices for food and fuel.

Other activists extended the campaign to highlight the erasure of political liberties as well as the detention, torture, kidnapping, forced disappearance, and killing of activists, journalists, politicians, and anyone who protests against the

prolonged war and the warring parties. They drew attention to the absence of safe passage through military checkpoints, where Yemenis are subjected to harassment, arrest, kidnapping, and blackmail.

Put simply, the campaign sought to visualize a life, as one of the activists put it, that is experienced by many Yemenis as having been turned upside down. Another activist lamented, “In Yemen, we are drowning in an ocean of sharks eating us one by one, with no savior to be seen on the horizon.”

The campaign protested a state of being that the living can neither tolerate nor leave, scarred by daily trauma. In this carceral state, the entire population is dehumanized and debased, but temporarily made visible through a gesture like “Upside-Down” that aspires to bring politics back to a country devoid of politics. Yet the real perpetrators running amok remain invisible.

Attributing excess violence to certain figures among the warring parties conceals how discourses on weak and failed states have normalized this depoliticized reality. Such a political gesture overlooks how the narrative of the weak and failed state revitalizes state sovereignty (and other sovereignties). Meddling with the unfinished business of the state’s resurrection imposes atrocious traumas on innocent people who hold a fetishized image of the *daulah* that disguises its sinister nature.

As long as this predicament of the state continues haunting Yemen, is it possible to hold the perpetrators accountable? In 2013, Subay and his friends utilized the graffiti subculture to initiate a protest campaign designed to remind Yemenis about those who were subjected to forced disappearance during the 1970s. More than a hundred faces were spray-painted on the walls of Sana’a streets. The intention was to show that if history had forgotten these people, “the walls still remember them.”

The ghostly faces painted on the walls emerged from the past, arresting the eyes of the living. Those who viewed the painted faces became witnesses to a refusal to remain hidden or presumed dead. Yet the painted faces themselves are witnesses to the sacrificial politics to which they were subjected.

Soon after the campaign, the eyes of some of these faces were surreptitiously crossed out by unknown hands. It appears that the painted gazes had looked into the eyes of the perpetrators, past and present, and unsettled them. The act of crossing out the eyes on the walls attests to the ghostly politics that put them on the walls in the first place and refuses to make itself visible and accountable. Yet even if the living cannot recognize the real perpetrators, the ghosts from the past can reveal the ghosts inhabiting the present, raising questions about their accountability that are otherwise overlooked. ■

“[T]he case of Hatay requires rethinking the predicaments of Syrian displacement at the juncture of border politics, migration policies, and citizenship ideologies.”

The Contradictory Syrian Presence in Turkey's Southern Borderlands

SEÇİL DAĞTAŞ AND ŞULE CAN

More than a decade after the outbreak of the Syrian war, displaced Syrians in Turkey, numbering some 3.7 million and still under temporary protection status, have become de facto permanent residents of that country. Although about 200,000 members of this population have been naturalized through an opaque process that bypasses asylum, most Syrians are not recognized as full members of society with the legal rights and opportunities of Turkish citizens. They do not qualify for refugee status, since Turkey's partial commitment to the United Nations' 1951 Refugee Convention extends legal protection only to asylum seekers coming from the member states of the Council of Europe.

Syrians have been subject to anti-migrant prejudice, anti-Arab racism, institutional and social discrimination, and various forms of exploitation since the early days of their arrival. Examples range from misinformation about Syrians having privileged access to citizenship, public services, and employment to more extreme cases of public harassment and mob violence that target Syrian lives and properties. The dominant popular attitude toward Syrians in Turkey is epitomized in the hashtag *ülkemde mülteci istemiyorum* (“I don't want refugees in my country”), which gained many followers in a social media campaign by Turkish nationalists in July 2021.

The persistent, and lately escalating, anti-refugee animosity among the public appears to contradict the welcoming rhetoric adopted by Turkish authorities in the early years of the Syrian war. To legitimize their response to Syrian

displacement, political leaders often invoked the moral values of hospitality and religious fraternity. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan frequently reminded supporters of his Justice and Development Party (AKP) that the people of Medina had hosted the Prophet Muhammad and his followers when they fled persecution in Mecca in 622. The failure of such messages to shape public opinion has been associated with the anti-Arab roots of Turkish nationalism, as well as the tendency of many citizens to attribute their hardships in the country's ongoing economic crisis to the Syrian presence in labor and housing markets.

Looking at the contradictions of Syrian displacement in Turkey's southern borderlands complicates this picture. Despite having the highest density of Syrian refugees, the border provinces of Kilis, Hatay, and Şanlıurfa have not seen incidents comparable to the racist attacks that have occurred over the past few years in larger metropolitan centers. A sizable number of Arabophone citizens resided in the region prior to the Syrian displacement, and many locals refrain from framing their problems with Syrians in racial terms, even when they adopt anti-refugee rhetoric. This is especially so in Hatay, on the southernmost part of Turkey's border with Syria, where we have conducted individual and joint fieldwork since 2010. Yet the shared language and ethno-religious affiliation (and in some cases, histories of cross-border connections) have not necessarily resulted in more amicable relations between refugees and citizens, nor have they created sustained solidarity with Syrians.

Ambivalence about displaced Syrians in southern Turkey casts light on the complex entanglements of border politics, migration policies, and citizenship regimes, as well as their failures. Such entanglements have roots in the global ordering of

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nation-states that tends to define citizenship as based on a connection between ethnic affiliation and bordered geographies, excluding many minorities who do not fit such categorizations. This antagonism between rooted citizen and uprooted minority—potential or former refugees—was endemic to the formation of nation-states in the Middle East, including Turkey, over the twentieth century. It continues to underlie the political dilemmas facing the region's diverse peoples. The current unprecedented displacement from conflict-ridden Middle Eastern countries heightens these dilemmas.

We need an analytic distinction between border, citizenship, and migration regimes so that we can account for their historically contingent and shifting entanglements. The term “border regimes” denotes the management of state borders, from their initial creation via bilateral and/or internationally sanctioned agreements to the mechanisms for controlling the flow of people, goods, and capital across them. In this context, the term “border politics” encompasses the power-laden relationships among states, citizens, and non-citizens—including their interactions at, movements through, and encroachments on the territorial limits of nation-states. Border politics overlaps with migration regimes, for instance with respect to national and international measures taken to ratify, stop, or reverse the cross-border mobility of noncitizens.

As has been the case for many Syrians in Turkey, the legal rights and status of noncitizen migrants in a given country are not always dependent on the conditions or methods of their entry. What seems to matter more in determining the legal—and, by extension, social—treatment of migrants in such situations is where they stand with respect to the host country's citizenship ideologies. Often predicated on the hierarchies of difference (regarding class, gender, religion, and race), citizenship ideologies have historically shaped forms of discrimination against minority groups in the Middle East. Such ideologies are visible in the current politicization of migration in Turkey.

THE VIEW FROM HATAY

The interplay between Turkey's migration, citizenship, and border regimes crystallizes in Hatay, the country's southernmost province, where

Syrians now constitute roughly one-fourth of the population. This is due in part to the province's unique history and the ambiguous ties of its people to both Syria and Turkey. After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the province came under French rule as the Sanjak of Alexandretta, and was not part of the territory of the Turkish Republic when it was founded in 1923. Whereas Turkey resorted to national homogenization to dissociate itself from the empire's multireligious legacy, France emphasized the ethnoreligious diversity of the Sanjak's residents to gain the upper hand in regulating them.

When Turkish irredentist efforts led to the Sanjak's annexation through an agreement between France and Turkey in 1939—a transfer still contested by Syria—it was home to Arabs, Turks, Armenians, and Circassians with diverse religious affiliations and overlapping identities and languages. Some left shortly after the annexation, but those who stayed maintained their cross-border networks, inhabiting the margins of Turkish citizenship due to their ethnoreligious differences.

Before the post-2011 Syrian displacement, the Arabophone citizens of Hatay largely comprised Alawis (roughly one-third of the province's population), Sunni residents of the border towns (more than 100,000), and Orthodox Christians (several thousand), as well as a few Jewish families. They had been subject to various forms of discrimination and demographic politics at the hands of state institutions throughout the history of modern Turkey, including bans on the public use of Arabic in the 1940s, limited access to institutions and professions in the public sector, and settlement projects designed to Turkify and Sunnify the region.

In the Cold War era, with Turkey a member of NATO and Syria a Soviet ally, border disputes added to the political and economic instability of these groups. Nonetheless, many citizens of Hatay kept ties with their extended kin across the border through marriage, educational and seasonal labor migration, religious pilgrimages, and trade networks. Political and economic liberalization during the first decade of AKP rule (2002–13) formalized these ties, leading to a rapprochement between Turkey and Syria. In 2011, just before the Syrian uprisings, local businesses were benefiting from the increased presence of Syrian tourists at marketplaces and excursion sites. Cheap Syrian

Hatay's people have ambiguous ties to both Syria and Turkey.

coffee and cigarettes were available at the smugglers' bazaar in Antakya, the administrative capital, and Turkish and Syrian private taxis offered day trips to Aleppo and Latakia.

The Syrian war marked a sea change in Turkey's foreign and domestic policies, producing ripple effects in Hatay. In the early days of the conflict, the Turkish state openly sided with the opposition to the Syrian regime and adopted an open-door policy for Syrian refugees. This move contradicted the AKP's earlier foreign policy of "zero problems with neighbors," which had led to the mutual cancellation of entry-visa requirements by Turkey and Syria in 2009. Yet it was in line with the AKP's neo-Ottoman vision of asserting Turkey's role as a regional power in the Muslim Middle East, combining a paternalistic state tradition rooted in Islamic conceptions with Turkish nationalist ideals. As Erdoğan publicly criticized Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's handling of the uprisings and threw Turkey's weight behind Syrian opposition forces, thousands of Syrians sought refuge in Turkey's southern borderlands, where they were officially welcomed as "temporary guests" rather than refugees or asylum seekers.

Hatay received the first groups of Syrians because of its geographical proximity, existing cross-border networks, and Arabophone demographic. It has the third-largest Syrian population among Turkish provinces, hosting over 400,000 in its towns and villages. Many Syrians relied on social connections to rebuild their lives upon arrival.

Christian Syrians, for instance, settled in Hatay rather than elsewhere in Turkey due to the presence of a sizable Arab Christian community. They received support from the Orthodox, Catholic, and evangelical churches in the area, and drew on existing migratory networks of Turkish Christians in Europe and the Americas to continue their journeys. Other groups received humanitarian aid, employment, housing, and access to limited resources through the support of family friends, business associates, or new neighbors. In our interviews, some made the case that "Hatay is no different from Syria," or even, in reference to its history, that it *was* Syria.

Such proximity also meant that Hatay's inhabitants had a greater investment in Syria's domestic politics than people elsewhere in

Turkey. When Erdoğan emphasized Assad's Alawi identity as an explanation for the Syrian regime's strong response to Islamist rebels, Hatay's Alawi residents turned more hostile toward Sunni Arabs fleeing the Assad regime; some expressed affinity with the regime on ideological (socialist, secular) or sectarian (Alawi) grounds. Rather than resorting to stereotypical distinctions between Turks and Arabs that are prevalent in many other parts of Turkey, our Alawi interlocutors highlighted sectarian or ideological differences in their tensions with Syrians whom they cast as religiously conservative or having ties to Islamist fighters.

Concerns about security and fears of civil conflict spreading to Hatay also affected local attitudes toward Syrians. Turkey's overt and covert support for opposition groups in Syria and its involvement in the war as a regional power stirred worries about the transformation of this border province into a transportation hub for fighters and weapons. Such concerns intensified and resulted in sectarian tensions after two car bombings in May

2013 in the town of Reyhanli, five kilometers from the Syrian border, killed 53 people. Two Alawi men were groundlessly arrested immediately after Erdoğan stressed the Sunni identity of the victims. During nationwide protests

in the summer of 2013 that began in Istanbul's Gezi Park, Antakya's Alawi neighborhoods saw clashes with police that resulted in the deaths of young protesters, continuing the unrest unleashed by the Reyhanli bombing.

In the following years, as increasing numbers of Syrians arrived on a weekly basis from areas controlled by the Islamic State and the Free Syrian Army, mistrust and ambivalence permeated the accounts of many residents of Hatay's border towns and villages. People often contrasted "bad Syrians"—jihadists who disguised themselves as refugees to seek hospital care (or other resources across the border), while actively participating in the armed conflict—with "good Syrians": innocent victims who had lost homes and family members. In some cases, the same people who expressed anxiety over "bad Syrians" also worked for humanitarian groups and other civil society organizations attending to refugee populations in the area. Contradictions arising from historically configured forms of insecurity, marginalization, and

*The porosity of the borderlands
has reinforced ethnoreligious
boundaries.*

ambivalence increased amid variation in the border's porosity and the failure of state institutions to provide adequate support for citizens and noncitizens facing new challenges.

THE POLITICIZATION OF REFUGEE

The entangled dynamics of border politics, sectarianization, and refugee resettlement are not only fraught with contradictions at Turkey's national margins. They are also changeable in response to transforming alliances at the local, national, and global levels.

As the conflict persisted in Syria and became a proxy war with the involvement of transnational actors, the number of Syrians in Turkey rose from the thousands to the millions. In 2013, the Turkish government formalized the ad hoc temporary protection regime by founding its first directorate of migration management, and in 2014 it adopted the Temporary Protection Regulation, which afforded Syrian nationals in Turkey legal access to health, education, and the right to apply for work permits. Instead of creating more stability for Syrians, however, these new regulations have allowed the Turkish state to consolidate its control over them. Following global trends in border control and migration management, Turkey's ostensibly supportive and flexible migration policies soon turned violent.

In 2015, after the Syrian displacement became a major part of Europe's "refugee crisis," Turkey closed its southern borders, stopped registering new arrivals from Syria, and began building a territorial barrier to prevent irregular crossings from Syria. In 2016, the government signed an agreement with the European Union to hold Syrian refugees in Turkey and accept mass returns of migrants from Greece, in exchange for financial aid. But these developments by no means stopped cross-border mobility; instead, they encouraged migrant smuggling and clandestine movements.

Witnessing such journeys and related casualties more closely than others in the country, some Turkish citizens in Hatay began to sympathize more with their Syrian neighbors. Others became involved in the increasingly profitable smuggling business, extending their existing social and economic networks to Syrians on both sides of the border. Overall, rendering the border less porous eased sectarian divides and opened new grounds for citizen-migrant relations. Yet the conditions of these ties have remained hierarchical, exploitative, and unpredictable.

Meanwhile, Turkey's authoritarian turn subjected Syrians to increased instrumentalization in electoral politics as well as foreign policy negotiations. Their presence was used to forestall critiques of the government's human rights violations against Kurdish citizens, other minority populations, and opposition voices. After the attempted military coup in Turkey in July 2016, civil society groups working with migrants faced increased policing and unlawful closures through emergency decrees. Faith-based humanitarian organizations with close ties to the government were an exception.

Also in 2016, as Turkey was preparing for a change from a parliamentary system to a presidential one, Erdoğan revealed plans to offer citizenship to qualified Syrians. This move added the "Syrian problem" to the political polarization that had been increasing in the country since the Gezi uprisings. The naturalization of Syrians troubled the opposition and minority citizens who believed them to be loyal to the ruling party that had welcomed them to the country.

Even if the Syrian population was insignificant in the context of nationwide voting, some predicted that the new constituency could alter the political map of Hatay ahead of the 2019 municipal elections, in which even a few thousand votes would matter. Contrary to these expectations, Syrians did not seem interested in Turkish politics. During an interview shortly after those elections, in which the AKP lost the mayoralties of major cities, including Hatay, after 18 years of uninterrupted rule, a government representative in Antakya expressed her disappointment with "ungrateful Syrians." Drawing on data gathered from the neighborhoods that they populated, she said that few of the roughly 13,000 naturalized Syrians in Hatay went to the polls.

The arbitrariness of migration regimes reinforces the instrumentalization of Syrians in Turkish politics. The government did not allow any anti-refugee rhetoric in Turkish mainstream media outlets over which it has gradually gained control. Yet it responded to racist attacks against Syrians not through rights-based actions, but by trying to make Syrians less visible—for instance, by banning Arabic shop signs. In early 2022, the Turkish interior ministry introduced so-called mitigation projects to reduce the density of foreign nationals relative to Turkish nationals to no more than 20 percent in over 1,000 neighborhoods across the country where Syrians have been concentrated.

In Antakya, officials turned a blind eye to Syrians opening unregistered small businesses. But this leniency has been quickly reversed when required by rising anti-Syrian sentiment or other political considerations, resulting in such businesses being fined or closed. And given that fewer than 100,000 Syrians out of several million have obtained work permits in the whole country, Syrians in Hatay, as elsewhere, rely heavily on personal connections to find jobs in construction, agriculture, and the service sector. These jobs are typically under the table, subject to exploitative terms and pay.

Ambivalence about Syrians continues in Hatay, but now that Assad's hold on power looks more secure since his regime has regained control of most of Syria, minority citizens no longer fear the possibility of a civil conflict in Hatay that would feed on and threaten the province's ethnoreligious diversity. Their relative relief is unfamiliar to those living in Turkey's major cities, far from the sound of bombs and missiles, the border barrier and surveillance, and the sight of refugees being victimized while crossing the border. The more dramatic scenarios have yielded to deep structural problems that hinder the full integration of Syrians into social and political life in Turkey.

Tethering Hatay's fate to the rest of the country, Turkey's authoritarian turn has minimized the space for alternative voices and cooperation within civil society. The economic crisis in Turkey and the wider region has made life more precarious for most people living on both sides of the Turkish-Syrian border. And the Turkish intervention in Syria has altered the terms for discussing Syrian displacement. For Hatay's Turkish citizens, the term "bad Syrians" no longer signifies undercover Islamist fighters. The attribution of "goodness" or "badness" depends on where people locate Syrian migrants in relation to their own mundane troubles of living under intense political and economic pressures.

OCCUPATION, REPATRIATION, DEPORTATION

Besides enabling the Turkish state to exercise sovereign power over citizens and noncitizens alike, the Syrian war has also marked the expansion of such power beyond Turkey's national territory and population. Following several military operations conducted by the Turkish armed forces in collaboration with Syrian rebel groups, a key goal of the Turkish occupation of northern Syria has been to create an ethnic belt intended to end

the presence of the Kurdish-led People's Protection Units (YPG) and Democratic Union Party (PYD) along the border. Turkey views these organizations as a threat to its national security.

Projects to create "safe zones" in the occupied areas, involving plans for infrastructure investments and reconstructing cities and towns, have also given rise to an emergent discourse on the repatriation of Syrians, in concert with increased deportations. As of August 2022, Turkey's state-owned construction enterprise had built over 50,000 housing units in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib. Construction of more units and services in Sere Kaniye, Tel Abyad, Jarabulus, and al-Bab is ongoing as part of Turkey's plan to encourage Syrians to return to their home country.

Though many are troubled by the government's sectarian framing of the Syrian war, most people in Hatay do not have a strong stance against the Turkish occupation of northern Syria. Critical voices remain obscure, given the anti-Kurdish tendencies prevalent among the general populace. Most consider the cross-border operations justified, whatever their overall views of the AKP government.

The repatriation of Syrians is presented in the mainstream Turkish media as voluntary. But in fact, it has been entangled with the normalization of detention and deportation. Many returnees were forced or deceived into signing "voluntary return" documents that formalized the process. The framing of the Syrians' safe and voluntary return as the most desirable solution to the refugee crisis has also contributed to the circulation of anti-immigrant discourse during electoral campaigns in Turkey. Some opposition parties have taken a harder line by including the "forced" return of Syrians among their campaign promises.

Leading up to Turkey's military offensive in northern Syria in October 2019, Turkish authorities began forcibly deporting hundreds of Syrians, often following arbitrary identification checks that turned up minor offenses such as traveling or living in cities other than those in which they were initially registered. As of early 2022, after a slowdown due in part to COVID-19 restrictions, mass deportations had increased in volume and frequency.

As a human rights lawyer representing Syrian clients in Antakya explained, there is some degree of complicity between state actors and citizens in the legal functions of deportation. When locals file complaints against Syrians, the courts can make

use of these accusations as a pretext to detain or deport them on the basis of maintaining public order, regardless of whether the allegations are proved. Yet we also met Syrians who received support from Turkish neighbors when their family members were deported. In general, people in the province concur that voluntary return and deportation are no longer realistic, humanitarian, or desirable solutions.

"They are now embedded in the province's socioeconomic fabric," said one interlocutor working in Antakya's historical souk, where Syrians constitute an important segment of both the labor force and the clientele. Others admit that refugees have brought money and movement to the city's economy, which had come under strain when the Syrian war ended cross-border trade and tourism. But they also complain bitterly that the Syrian presence in their neighborhoods has been driving up rents, consuming limited resources, creating unfair competition, and corrupting the community.

Syrians themselves are not willing to give up the lives they slowly and resiliently built in Hatay to relocate to northern Syria. They are unconvinced that these occupied zones will remain "safe" for them, given how quickly political terrain and alliances shift in the region. They are also aware that the conditions of everyday life in the Turkish-occupied parts of Syria are unpromising, as Turkey's economic woes spread into those territories.

Their conditions of residence within Turkey are also getting worse, however. The mitigation projects to reduce their population density make it impossible for Syrians to remain in Hatay's low-income neighborhoods, where they could previously afford to live. The trend of deportation, most recently marked by the repurposing of Hatay's inactive refugee camps as detention centers, encourages many who could not naturalize their status to remain undocumented, exposing them to further exploitation.

Unemployment, low pay, mobility restrictions, and the lack of job security, benefits, and ownership rights leave Syrians among the most vulnerable in the face of Turkey's worsening economic crisis. And with citizenship applications now halted completely, it is unlikely that most Syrians in Hatay will be able to secure some sense of

permanence to build long-term relations with Turkish citizens.

PRECARIOUS COEXISTENCE

Neither representative of Turkey nor divorced from Turkish reality, the case of Hatay requires rethinking the predicaments of Syrian displacement at the juncture of border politics, migration policies, and citizenship ideologies. A border province at Turkey's national margins, Hatay has been a site of ambivalence in response to the Syrian war and displacement since 2011.

Shared histories of connection that defied territorial borders blur the boundaries between Arab citizens of Turkey and the Syrian newcomers, often crosscutting various religious identifications. In contrast to major Turkish cities where Syrians arrived much later, anti-Arab racism has never had as much purchase in Hatay, where shared language and ethnicity underpin citizen-migrant ties. Yet the porosity of the borderlands, especially in proximity to a civil conflict, has reinforced ethno-religious boundaries in the form of sectarian tensions.

Dramatic changes in migration and border dynamics, as well as the instrumentalization of displaced Syrians in Turkish politics, have intensified anti-Syrian voices across the country, making it impossible to discuss these events in isolation. Hatay has been no exception. Nativist populism figures occasionally in the public statements of local politicians who warn that Syrians have overtaken the province, associating their demographic influence with a potential reversal of Hatay's union with Turkey.

At the level of everyday relations, however, a more dominant attitude is enduring ambivalence, with shifting assumptions about "good" and "bad" Syrians. In the absence of structured asylum mechanisms, Syrians coexist with local citizens as their neighbors, tenants, coworkers, or clients, constituting an important segment of the workforce. Characterized by multiple forms of precarity and socioeconomic disparity, these interrelations remain vulnerable to any flash point at the local, national, or global level. They nonetheless trouble Turkey's citizenship ideologies, which historically have conjoined the processes of minoritization and displacement. ■

“[H]igher education and its concerns were a crucial component of the broader societal discontent that led to the revolution.”

Egyptian Universities Search for a New Role

DANIELE CANTINI

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of education, especially higher education, in contemporary Egypt. After the 1952 revolution, in which army officers overthrew the monarchy, education—and the promise of government jobs that came with it—became one of the pillars of the social pact between the military regime and the populace. In recent decades, this tacit accord has been shaken, but Egyptians continue to hold education in high regard as a facilitator of social advancement.

Demographics also play a part. Egypt has an overwhelmingly young population, which has grown unabated for decades. According to the World Bank, Egypt's population tripled in five decades, soaring from slightly above 30 million in 1965 to well over 106 million in 2022. It should come as no surprise that education—*ta'lim* in Arabic—occupies such a prominent space in public discourse and official policies, as well as in the everyday lives of millions of people.

A new cohort of more than one million pupils starts school in Egypt every year. This ever-increasing demand trickles up to tertiary education, and it has caused an unprecedented boom in both the number and the types of institutions offering some form of higher education. They range from public research universities to private, for-profit universities (including branch campuses) to many different sorts of higher education institutes with a diverse range of offerings.

Between 2011 and 2015, Egypt went through a turbulent period. It began with the January 2011 *thawra*, or revolution, though many commentators traced the genealogy of the uprising to the preceding decade of protests and reforms. A subsequent chain of events led to the

reinstatement of military rule in 2013. During this period, universities took part in the momentous political developments in the country. Campuses have also been the scene of clashes between different visions of what universities are for and how they should operate.

In the past few years, the situation appears to have stabilized as a consequence of thorough repression of all sorts of political and even social activities—but this calm is only at the surface. After a decade of unprecedented debt accumulation, inflation and economic crises have hit the country hard. The sharp depreciation of the Egyptian pound against the dollar in 2017 caused severe difficulties for large parts of the populace. High population growth continues to exact a toll on declining natural and financial resources, which are also under stress from the effects of climate change. And problems in education, particularly higher education, are far from being solved.

Higher education is a major preoccupation of the Egyptian state, yet its nature is changing. It is among the pillars of Egypt Vision 2030, an agenda for sustainable development promoted by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, but in a way that differs significantly from the role of universities in the 1950s. At that time, President Gamal Abdel Nasser had a plan to establish large public universities that were supposed to be at the core of the socialist state and its development, whereas the current regime appears to favor private universities, often with foreign connections and a core mission of providing care and services for students, while preventing their participation in political or social activism.

REVOLUTIONARY DISCONTENT

On January 25, 2011, Egyptians took to the streets and squares to protest police abuses. The demonstrations quickly grew in number and

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scope. Protesters resisted several attempts to crush the uprising, and they achieved a great success on February 11, when President Hosni Mubarak resigned after ruling for thirty years. That span of 18 days drew global media attention, thanks in part to the iconic pictures of masses of protesters gathered in Tahrir Square in central Cairo and across the country.

As was immediately apparent, young people accounted for a large proportion of the protesters, as might be expected in a country where almost two-thirds of the population is under 30 years of age. Many commentators noticed that these young people were also educated, skilled in the use of new media, in organizing spectacular forms of protest, and in articulating their demands.

In the broader context of what came to be labeled the Arab Spring uprisings, which started in Tunisia and quickly spread across the region, countries with solid education systems experienced stronger political protests that were sustained over time. This reflected deeply rooted traditions of political activism among university students. In the 1930s, Egypt witnessed waves of protests by university students, a pattern that repeated itself in almost every decade until the revolution. In 2011, students once again gathered at Cairo University's main gate and marched across the campus bridge toward Tahrir Square.

But universities were not just aggregators of activists. After Mubarak's resignation, universities' role and status in broader society once again became a political issue. While the protests in Egypt, as in Tunisia and elsewhere, were fueled by demands for political freedom and dignity, discontent over the state of education was among the main drivers. Higher education had been at the center of political debates for some time; recurrent denunciations of poor quality and lack of resources pointed to the consequences of the sector's tremendous expansion without commensurate funding increases.

A persistent theme in these debates has been the mismatch between educational offerings and the realities of the job market. The unemployed graduate is a familiar figure in the public discourse. Calls to reform higher education in order to produce more employability among graduates have become mainstream.

A direct causal connection between the structural condition of youth unemployment and civilian unrest is hard to trace. But higher education and its concerns were a crucial component of the broader societal discontent that led to the revolution. The state was held responsible for a lack of action.

After the fall of Mubarak, universities became sites of political activity, retaining their strong mobilizing power. They played a conspicuous role in the series of strikes and protests that roiled the country during the period of rule by a military council from 2011 until the presidential election in June 2012, and continued well into Mohamed Morsi's presidency over the following year. Most important were the struggles that took place on university campuses.

CAMPUSES IN CONFLICT

The revolution occurred during exam season. When the second semester of the 2010–11 academic year resumed, Cairo University, like many other Egyptian campuses, witnessed a general revolt against existing conditions. It began with the dissolution of the student union, whose members were widely believed to have been elected under heavy political pressure, abetted by the exclusion of some groups. That was followed by a new election in which diverse ideologies were represented and students were allowed to mobilize.

Students, faculty, and even some administrative staff organized many protests. The main concessions they won included new bylaws allowing student initiatives to be more independent of external control, the expulsion of police from campuses, new space for political groups in public universities, and the free exercise of these new rights.

Other changes pertained to the functioning of the university as an institution. A major event in this period was the struggle to change bylaws concerning the election of the dean of the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University. There were also demands to oust the university provosts and to require elections for senior academic posts, replacing the existing system of appointments made from above.

Toward the end of 2012 and in the first half of 2013, the political situation grew more tense. Clashes between supporters and opponents of the ruling Muslim Brotherhood became more

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common, and campuses were affected. The removal of Morsi from power was a watershed moment. Large popular protests gave Sisi, then minister of defense, the occasion to depose Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood who had been elected president only a year earlier. Denounced by some as a coup d'état and hailed by others as a second, corrective revolution, Morsi's ouster further polarized the country.

A six-week stalemate ensued, as pro-Morsi crowds occupied squares in Cairo demanding that he be reinstated and opposing crowds supported the military takeover. The sit-ins were dispersed by the military with the use of massive force that resulted in perhaps the largest massacre in recent Egyptian history, with more than 800 confirmed deaths. The conflict between the military and the Islamists continued for well over a year as the military regime cracked down on the Muslim Brotherhood and various civil society groups and critics.

Hopes for any meaningful change in university life were quickly dispelled as the conflict spilled onto campuses. In the 2013–14 academic year, more than 800 students were arrested and 16 were killed in antigovernment demonstrations, according to the Association of Freedom of Thought and Expression, an independent nongovernmental organization headquartered in Cairo. Particularly heavy clashes occurred at Cairo's historic Al-Azhar University, at Cairo University's Faculty of Engineering, and at Alexandria University. In response, the new regime tightened control over faculties and resorted to the use of private security companies. Hundreds of university students across Egypt were suspended for their alleged roles in on-campus violence and protests. Faculty members known or suspected to be affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood were suspended from duty, and in some cases were incarcerated or forced to flee the country.

The state's effort to regain control of the campuses was not limited to eradicating supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood; it extended to the institutional level soon after Morsi's ouster. Most of the major gains of the 2011–13 period were quickly reversed. New bylaws and internal regulations treated universities almost as facilities under military jurisdiction—many of the arrested students were referred for military trials. University presidents were given the right to immediately expel students allegedly involved in violence. Exercising freedom of expression and assembly at universities was effectively criminalized.

The new system of student union elections put in place after the 2011 revolution was reversed, as was the system for electing university presidents and deans. They are now appointed by the president of Egypt. Under Mubarak, deans were appointed by the prime minister, creating at least a degree of separation from executive power.

By 2016, a new “normalization” was achieved. After many years of activism, campuses went forcibly quiet, as had been the case in the most repressive phases of previous Egyptian governments.

THE TURN TO PRIVATIZATION

The revolutionary moment occurred at a time when higher education in Egypt was already undergoing a profound transformation, from an essentially public system in a mostly national context to a more diversified, international, and private sector endeavor. The first private university was nationalized in 1925, but it was the 1952 revolution and its emphasis on social advancement for all citizens that gave education, and higher education in particular, its special place in the Egyptian social imagination. Nasser's government enshrined the right to a free education, up to the university level, in the constitution.

This has rightly been cited as one of the principal successes of the 1952 revolution, and a legacy that proved to be lasting. In the decades that followed, universities expanded all over the country—previously they had been limited to Cairo and, since 1942, Alexandria. Usually the new outposts were branch campuses of major public universities, built in an effort to decentralize educational offerings. Within a couple of decades, elite institutions of higher education gave way to universities as a mass phenomenon, a trend that was also occurring in other parts of the world.

This state-socialist system of education as a right, free for all—with a guaranteed state job at the end of one's studies—entered a crisis in the 1970s. President Anwar Sadat introduced economic liberalization policies that were continued, and even expanded, under Mubarak. At the university level, liberalizing and internationalizing policies provoked serious conflict, not least because they contradicted the revolutionary principle of the right to education. In Egypt, as in most countries, higher education became a major ideological battlefield.

For-profit private universities were introduced in 1992 with the passage of Law No. 101. The official aim of this initiative was to address the mismatch between labor market needs and

educational provision, while providing alternative, less crowded institutions that could help decongest overpopulated public universities. (The American University in Cairo [AUC], founded in 1919 by Protestant missionaries, is a private, non-profit university, unique in Egypt, and would require a separate discussion.)

The first four of the new, for-profit private universities started operations in 1996, and they proliferated rapidly. When I first started researching them in 2010, they had almost caught up with their public counterparts in number of institutions (24 private and for-profit universities, versus 27 public), but they enrolled only 5 percent of the 1.5 million university students in the country.

At the time of this writing, a dozen years later, there are 29 public and 39 private universities—the latter figure combining for-profit “private” (*al-khassa*) and nonprofit “national” (*al-ahliyya*) structures, despite their differences, and including the AUC. Although their share of all university students is little changed, at around 7 percent, the number of students in private universities almost tripled in that period. This gain was driven by the steady growth of the overall student population, which surpassed three million in 2020–21, according to government statistics.

The rise of private universities parallels the development of satellite cities, built within 30 to 50 kilometers of Cairo and, to a lesser extent, Alexandria. Both housing compounds and private universities are advertised on major thoroughfares, with the same promises of a safe, green, and happier life outside congested urban centers. A similar logic has started to apply to public institutions as well, where some forms of privatization have been introduced, usually under the banner of internationalization. For instance, courses in foreign languages are offered at public universities only to fee-paying students, who usually come from international private schools catering to the upper and middle classes in Egypt.

Most private universities are located in the satellite cities around Cairo and Alexandria, and they are run more like private companies than educational institutions. Typically built as closed campuses or even compounds, with guards at the entrances and strict policies for external visitors (including visiting scholars), they promise an effective—meaning quick—education and an array of services catering to their students’

comfort. These amenities include air-conditioned classrooms (uncommon in public universities) and dedicated buses to transport students, workers, and professors from the cities in which most Egyptians still live to these satellite cities, with air-conditioning and Wi-Fi connections on board. Private universities also offer sports and recreational activities, in addition to job fairs and other events.

The professor-to-student ratio is much lower than in public universities, where the number of enrolled students routinely exceeds the maximum capacity of large lecture halls. But professors at private universities tend to be very busy, since many teach several courses at different institutions to boost their rather meager salaries. The libraries are often lacking. Many critics lament that the quality of private education is not much better than that provided by dilapidated public institutions.

TOP-DOWN CONTROL

It is difficult to disentangle urban development schemes from the growth of private universities that would have struggled to thrive in congested Egyptian cities. A senior administrator of one such institution told me that universities should be regarded as enterprises that support a stable form of tourism—students come from other Arab or African countries or from different places in Egypt, and they reside and consume services near their campuses for several years, helping the economy. Such developmental plans can hardly be defined as private; they are top-down initiatives.

This kind of private university is part of a process whereby the state decentralizes functions and incentivizes private initiatives, while retaining full control over planning. Private universities are subject to the authority of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Supreme Council for Private Universities. It is not uncommon to see officials at public entities such as local governorates or banks serving on the boards of private universities.

At the height of the uprising in 2011, private universities claimed to side with the revolution, saying that they encouraged students’ political participation. They eased their policies on organizing conferences and inviting scholars. Some private universities were active during the revolution, allowing protests or political initiatives on

*After years of activism, campuses
went forcibly quiet.*

campus, for instance, albeit on a much smaller scale than at the large and more central public universities. But changes in internal governance, if they took place at all, were short-lived.

In the years following the reinstatement of the military government, security again became the top priority of the state, and space for public participation shrank or was organized from the top down. Private universities, like private housing compounds in satellite cities, appear to have profited from the insecurity of the revolutionary years. They have established themselves firmly in the Egyptian higher education landscape, overcoming much of the resistance with which they were previously met amid allegations of corruption and incompetence, and an unclear distinction between public and private.

Private universities are part of the broader struggle over higher education reforms. In a country like Egypt, they also reflect changing notions of statehood. The discourse of crisis in higher education, prominent in national debates for at least four decades, has been instrumental in creating the space for new reforms. These reforms are part of a global agenda, pushed by international agencies such as the World Bank, positing that developing countries should expand higher education to help citizens escape poverty, but that they should do so through privatization. Higher education worldwide thus becomes, like other previously public endeavors, a marketable commodity—a business. This raises questions of equity and accessibility, as well as challenging the link between statehood and education.

The expansion and reform of Egypt's higher education system in the 1990s was supported by funding from such international donor institutions, which involved themselves in the planning of reforms promoting internationalization and privatization. Some of the strongest resistance to these ongoing reforms has come from the ranks of professors, students, and others directly involved in academic life, despite the risks associated with taking sides at times of intense political repression. But government support for the reforms has never been wholehearted. Bureaucratic resistance and delays have been common. Reforms are loudly announced, yet rarely implemented as originally envisioned, and never with the political autonomy that would be necessary to truly allow private institutions to play a more substantial role in the country's development.

The education reforms were initiated at a time when democratization was a keyword of policymakers. They are continuing in the post-2013 era, when democratization is no longer on the agenda. Critics pointed out early that such reforms were part of the overall trend of democratization in Egypt: the government refused to relinquish power, and instead sought to expand it by using the new lingua franca of internationalization and privatization. This also appears to be the case in the current phase, albeit under remarkably different conditions.

STUDYING IN SISI'S EGYPT

Since coming to power, Sisi has sought to eliminate all possible forms of opposition to his rule, whether from the Muslim Brotherhood, from revolutionary youth, or even from within army ranks. Political debate and activities have come to an almost complete halt, while the government has pursued legal action against foreign NGOs. This repression has consequences for political and social life on university campuses. At large and increasingly underfunded public universities, political control is ubiquitous, as is the privatization of security. Scores of professors and students have been dismissed, imprisoned, or forced into exile, producing a climate of fear and intimidation that is hardly conducive to research and teaching activities, let alone social and political initiatives.

The situation in private universities is even harder to assess because access is limited and dependent on personal contacts. But there are signs that private institutions will acquire a more prominent role in the higher education sector. In 2021, for the first time, they were allowed to offer postgraduate courses—contingent on ministerial accreditation.

Egypt presents itself as a stable, knowledge-oriented country, open to foreign students and international collaboration at different levels. It is integrated into several international funding schemes and educational projects, some backed by the United States and the European Union. The international mobility of students and, to a lesser extent, scholars is increasing again despite the toll of the COVID-19 pandemic. The growth of the higher education sector continues unabated, with the proliferation of branch campuses and the ever-increasing presence of international schools that funnel students to this kind of private institution.

These trends point to changes in the role and scope of higher education in Egypt. Until recently,

the norm was represented by large public institutions in which students have the right to some degree of self-organization, including at the political level, and where faculty can carry on their teaching and research activities in at least partially self-determined ways. This model, though still numerically predominant, is being challenged by a newer understanding of higher education as a private good, to be sold to paying customers and organized in forms that resemble corporations.

These private universities operate in a heavily top-down and authoritarian context, which subordinates the autonomy of university staff and channels student activities away from direct social and political participation. Political influence dictates research and teaching priorities. The rector of Alexandria University in November 2018 proposed a requirement that all postgraduate thesis topics be linked to the developmental goals set in Sisi's Egypt Vision 2030 agenda.

Egypt's new administrative capital is currently being constructed well outside Cairo, and private universities are part of this massive urban development project. In June 2022, the minister of higher education and scientific research, Khaled

Abdel Ghaffar, announced that six branches of foreign universities, including British and Canadian ones, would be established in the new capital. They are hosted by "university foundations" or "knowledge hubs," which present themselves as international organizations, yet are largely run by Egyptian entrepreneurs and fully integrated in the Vision 2030 development agenda. These organizations advertise their services with slogans such as "study in Egypt and graduate from the UK."

Despite such developments, the challenges that led to the 2011 revolution, such as deteriorating living conditions and economic prospects, lack of political participation, and environmental problems, are still present and even worsening on many levels. Given the history of mobilization at Egyptian universities, it is likely that students and staff will find ways to express their demands for dignified lives and working conditions, as well as quality education. After steadily growing for decades, the sheer number of people attending universities guarantees that educational institutions and the struggle to determine their role will continue to be central to Egyptian society. ■

“[T]he forcible eviction of a sizable part of the population might harm the local economy and foster even wider dissatisfaction with the regime.”

The Violent Remaking of Jeddah

ANONYMOUS

In January 2022, a photo went viral in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia's second-largest city. It showed a wall on which the word *ikhla* (“vacate”) was spray-painted. In the southern quarters of the city, this word had quickly become an indication that neighborhoods were to be destroyed. Once houses were marked, residents were given from a few hours to two weeks to vacate their homes. The warning was followed by cutoffs of water and electricity. Those who refused to leave were evicted by force as each quarter was cordoned off and its outward-facing buildings were irreparably damaged. In the days and weeks thereafter, the quarters would be systematically erased, though they were still labeled on Google Maps.

The viral photo showed that authorities had sprayed the order to vacate on the wall of the cemetery of al-Kandara, one of the quarters designated for destruction. The municipality hastened to erase the ominous writing on the wall, but the image continued to spread on social media. It became a meme in which a shrouded figure fled the cemetery.

The destruction, which has led observers to compare Jeddah to a war zone, is scheduled to last until the end of 2022. According to the slightly divergent official and leaked plans, this gigantic urban clearing will encompass at least 35 quarters and affect an estimated 750,000 residents, though it might turn out to be twice as many—more than a quarter of the city's entire population of 4 million.

What is happening in this famously cosmopolitan port on the Red Sea? And why did the viral photo become so sensitive that a leading local newspaper intervened, clarifying that the

announced destruction of the cemetery had been a mistake that was quickly corrected by the municipality? In order to answer these questions, an excursus into the recent urban history of Jeddah is necessary.

OLD CITY, NEW VISIONS

In 2014, parts of the old city of Jeddah were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Among the features of the city singled out in the designation were its distinctive coral buildings—according to UNESCO, they represent a multicultural environment symbolically tied to the Hajj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, for which Jeddah has long been an entry point. Since this designation, there have been efforts to restore the notoriously crumbling old city and turn it into a major tourist attraction, in line with Vision 2030, the ambitious national development agenda launched by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2016.

In 2019, the Ministry of Municipalities and Rural Affairs, of which the Jeddah municipal administration is a branch, developed a city profile with a proposal for the redevelopment of Jeddah within the Future Saudi Cities Program. It paid particular attention to the areas surrounding the old city, characterizing them as “vernacular urban patterns” to which it ascribed many positive attributes. Among these it noted, besides the architecture, “perfect climatic performance” in the local heat due to the building features and small alleys, as well as the availability of public services and vibrant urban life.

Many of these neighborhoods have their roots in villages that can be traced back at least to the eighteenth century. They were often settled by Bedouin, fishermen, and immigrants, and frequently served as official or unofficial trading hubs. They began to expand during the economic upturn of the nineteenth century. The expansion

The author, who judged that the political sensitivity of the topic made it necessary to publish this essay anonymously, wishes to acknowledge the critical comments and material provided by Saudi friends.

was even more rapid after Jeddah became part of the Saudi state in 1925.

Two of these neighborhoods, al-Kandara and al-Nuzla, had also served as summer retreats for richer families attracted by their slightly cooler climate. They boasted a number of lavish houses, in one of which the notables of Jeddah held their first meeting with the future Saudi king, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. The king himself built his first palace to the south of the old city. This area became one of the first to which prominent families moved after outgrowing their houses in the old city. From the 1950s to the 1970s, many public services were extended to these quarters, which were considered to be modern and wealthy at the time.

This history explains why the ministry’s city profile attests to these neighborhoods’ historic value and clearly distinguishes them from the “unplanned” or “informal” settlements that grew on the edges of Jeddah in the past few decades. Only these latter settlements are cited in a plan for complete refurbishment, published by the municipality in July 2021. Confusingly, in Arabic, both the “vernacular” and the “informal” or “unplanned” quarters are often called by the same name: *ashwa’iyyat*, which, literally translated, means “unorganized formations.”

When the notion of large-scale urban change in Jeddah arose in the first decade of the twenty-first century, local activists made an attempt to introduce a linguistic distinction by using a different term, *afwi* (spontaneous), to refer to older neighborhoods. It was not taken up in official planning. In official parlance, *ashwa’i* is often used to impart a general notion of “slum.” In this, Jeddah is no exception: the term *ashwa’iyyat* has become common in the Arab parlance of radical urban development.

From the 1960s onward, new construction for the middle and upper-middle classes was concentrated mostly in northern Jeddah, where the modern urban center developed. Wealthier families often left their quarters in the southern and eastern suburbs to move farther north. Increasingly, the old city as well as the southern suburbs became home to less wealthy inhabitants, who often immigrated from other parts of the country or from abroad in search of work. This caused the (partly relative) decline of these older quarters.

As a city of merchants and pilgrims, Jeddah had long accommodated immigrants who historically

had blended easily into the local population. But this changed in the 1950s, when the discovery of oil caused unprecedented immigration and the Saudi state tried to limit access to its expanding welfare provisions by making it increasingly difficult to obtain citizenship. Those who had not previously recognized the need to apply for citizenship suddenly found themselves to be marked out as foreign residents.

In the course of repeated attempts since the 1980s to quell Saudi youth unemployment, the residency conditions have become ever more restrictive, and permits are expensive. The increasing separation of “nationals” and “foreigners” has been accompanied by the construction of labor camps for migrant menial laborers. Wealthier expatriates often reside in special compounds that until recently were exclusively foreign.

SURPRISE OPERATION

Viewed from the glitzy buildings of northern Jeddah or Riyadh, the traditional neighborhoods were eyesores. Since 2005, there have been repeated attempts at infrastructural and social improvement in some of these poorer quarters. Some called for radical measures, particularly in a small area viewed as a haven for criminality and drug dealing. On a number of occasions, residents and landowners managed to prevent large-scale urban interventions. This resistance has served as a justification for the speed at which eviction orders have been implemented in the current intervention.

Vision 2030 provides for large-scale urban development projects, the flagship being the futuristic new city NEOM in the northwest of the country. The 2019 Jeddah city profile lists three such projects, in addition to substantial investment in the hitherto barely existent public transport system. But the first eviction orders targeting entire neighborhoods, rather than specific houses or blocks, caught everyone by surprise. These measures were neither announced in advance nor part of earlier published plans.

Videos posted on social media showed residents scrambling for their belongings and trying to salvage as much as possible. Often they had nowhere to move household members or belongings. Some found temporary shelter with relatives, or sought

*As a city of merchants and
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to rent in a shrinking market with prices rapidly rising as the destruction gathered pace. Many ended up far from their workplaces.

Videos of the sites where new quarters are supposed to be created show empty spaces without infrastructure or buildings. It appears that the alternative destinations mentioned by the authorities are often far from habitable.

In early November 2021, an online news site published a plan to demolish 45 Jeddah quarters. The plan cited reasons of public health and safety, as well as urban modernization and accessibility. By the end of January, the mayor announced that up to 60 “undeveloped” quarters would be “dismantled and developed.” Shortly thereafter, a supposed plan was leaked, followed by an official announcement that 35 neighborhoods would be “redeveloped.” These different documents point to the fairly erratic way in which the destruction was conceived.

At the end of January 2022, the conditions for compensation for the loss of property and the steps necessary to obtain it were announced. Since no full land register exists, only property holders with full documentation of ownership were to be offered alternative housing until receiving compensation. This compensation was for the value of the land and for “rubble”—presumably referring to the building materials—but not for rebuilding apartments or houses. It was later announced that those with only partial documentation would just be compensated for the rubble.

Apparently the compensation payments started in June 2022. According to a leaked presentation by the State Properties General Authority, which must have been prepared after mid-February 2022, more than \$13 billion will be needed for these payments.

At a time when, according to official records, almost 70,000 people had been made homeless, the municipality announced proudly that 550 families had been offered alternative accommodation. All those who had lived in rented housing—a typical situation, though no percentages are known—faced the loss of a year’s worth of rent, since it has to be paid in advance. Because the landlords themselves faced the loss of their property, any rent repayments are hardly likely. And poorer people cannot afford a second year’s advance rent for a new home, which is likely to be more expensive.

The Jeddah events have a grim precedent: the wholesale destruction of most of the old quarters of Mecca and Medina during the past two decades, and the replacement of those historic

neighborhoods with gigantic hotels and malls. Large-scale displacement of residents, disregard for private ownership, and highly problematic compensation schemes characterized these projects, too, though it would seem that the state was not as directly involved in the profit-sharing as it was in Jeddah’s case. Furthermore, clear plans existed for the Mecca and Medina projects, which were officially justified by the need to expand the services available to ever-increasing numbers of religious visitors. Developments similar to those in Jeddah, albeit probably on a smaller scale, are now taking place in cities around the country.

PUBLIC OUTCRY

Since the end of the so-called Arab Spring—which gave rise to unprecedented debate on social media even in Saudi Arabia, where other manifestations of dissent remained subdued—dissenting voices and criticism of the authorities have all but disappeared. The 2015 ascension of King Salman and his all-powerful son and heir to the throne, Mohammed, only exacerbated this trend. So the eruption of exasperation, despair, and anger at the destruction in Jeddah must have caught the authorities by surprise.

By January 2022, the general prosecutor republished a 2020 decree that spreading “rumors and lies” on social media amounted to a punishable crime. Even such a drastic announcement could not quell the public outcry, which can be roughly divided into the largely spontaneous reaction by neighborhood residents; the more studied documentation of the doomed quarters by community leaders and activists; and decidedly antigovernment protests by opposition forces mostly living in exile.

Graffiti that appeared in many of the neighborhoods slated for demolition was disseminated via Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. The graffiti ranged from nostalgic images of flowers, to inscriptions and poems about a house, its inhabitants, and their memories, to more outspoken criticism of the authorities, sometimes including the crown prince. These open criticisms seem to have been produced by a small group of political activists. Images of children in front of their houses were also posted, as were brief videos showing apartments after being hastily emptied.

Most of the quarters that were evacuated, such as Ghulayl or Sabil, organized farewell “parties” that included public meals in the squares, the performance of the long-outlawed popular dance

al-Mizmar, and poetry recitations. In addition to videos of these events, images of the quarters' football clubs and of processions around the quarters, which could be seen as (clearly unauthorized) demonstrations, were posted on social media. The posts show events that appear to be exclusively attended by men, but women held their own parties simultaneously; they did not share the images in a similarly public way for cultural reasons. These farewell celebrations demonstrated the strong social cohesion of the neighborhoods that would soon be lost. There are no plans to move extended families together, and each household was struggling to find shelter by itself.

Elsewhere, mosques supplemented their calls to prayer with long readings from the Koran. This, too, must be interpreted as a manifestation of protest. Such readings, as well as the airing of sermons through mosque megaphones, had recently been forbidden to protect residents from "noise pollution."

Members of the community and younger activists have also started to systematically document the quarters before they undergo destruction, producing videos and photographic evidence that are posted on social media. Since outright political resistance seems pointless, not to mention highly dangerous, many feel the need to at least record an important part of the city's history. Often the videos are accompanied by music or poems, or an almost stylized commentary that one activist described as the "culture of farewell."

A number of videos posted on social media ranged from carefully to openly critical. Residents said that without prior or clearly calculable compensation, they did not know where to go. Some mentioned how long they had served in government or even military positions, only to be evicted after their retirement. One particularly angry contributor not only called for systematic documentation and expression of dissent against this kind of urban violence, but also exclaimed: "You need to know, Son of Salman, that there is a people that gets annoyed. A people that gets angry. That there are persons who say 'no' to tyranny."

In a state like Saudi Arabia, this is a dangerous stance. The video has since been removed from the Internet. A similarly risky undertaking was the creation of a hashtag on the topic, which identified

with a "committee of the people of Jeddah opposing the forced expulsions."

Eventually, the small organized diaspora opposition also took up the theme, posting some of the farewell videos, such as one in which women wave goodbye to their houses. A number of videos posted by the satirical channel *Khatt al-Balda* note that the demolitions have caused homelessness, job losses, and poverty. A cartoonist using the name "Prison of the Ghost" posted several images that depicted the crown prince as personally directing the destruction of houses and mosques, linking these actions to the construction of NEOM.

VANISHING HISTORY ON DISPLAY

From mid-December 2021 to mid-March 2022, the architecture and design studio Bricklab put on a remarkable exhibition entitled *Saudi Modern* in a private house constructed in the early 1960s. The exhibition aimed to draw attention to the urban, and specifically architectural, history of Jeddah between the discovery of oil in 1938 and the drafting

of the first formal master plan in 1963. This modern architecture, the organizers argued, had all too often been considered inauthentic and hence worthless.

The exhibition traced the historical development and specific formation of modernism in the Arabian context through a combination of historical and architectural documentation and modern artwork. It thereby documented the evolution of modern architecture in Jeddah. Sadly, most of the buildings documented in the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue vanished on the ground while the exhibition was on display.

The show was part of the annual *Jeddah 21,39* exhibition, which was held at a number of venues and, in 2022, bore the title of *Amakin* ("Places"). This title, alluding to a famous song by the renowned Saudi musician Muhammad 'Abduh, reflects a widely felt need across the kingdom to engage with an urban heritage and lifestyle that is vanishing ever more rapidly. These days, art seems to be almost the only way to handle that theme in public. But this is something of a double-edged sword, entailing the risk of reducing the very real urban violence experienced in Jeddah and other cities to material for widely publicized and commercialized art.

The 'slums' are described as hotbeds of crime, mostly inhabited by foreigners.

Ironically, art is one of the sectors much encouraged by Saudi leaders in the context of Vision 2030. This often creates dilemmas for artists who wish to critically engage with current developments while benefiting from unprecedented opportunities, after a long period in which art was considered suspect by the then-dominant religious establishment. The case of high-profile artist Ahmed Mater is emblematic of this situation. Mater became world-famous for his openly critical depictions of urban change in Mecca in the series *The Desert of Pharan* (2016). But from 2017 to 2019, he served as founding director of the Misk Art Institute, a prominent subsidiary of the Mohammed bin Salman Foundation.

'VICTORY OVER THE SLUMS'

From the outset of the demolitions, and at first mostly in the context of a new megaproject called *Wasat Jeddah* ("Jeddah Central"), newspaper articles and commentators have celebrated not only the modernity supposedly brought about by the project, but also the "victory over the slums." These quarters are depicted as completely dilapidated health and fire hazards infested by vermin—in contrast to the videos showing entirely new buildings and modern neighborhoods that are being erased together with older ones. The "slums" are also—in a very general manner—described as hotbeds of drug dealing, money laundering, theft, and the production of counterfeit clothing. Illegal buildings had encroached on government lands that had to be recovered through the demolitions, newspapers argued. (Space for critical debate in the official media—never very wide—has all but disappeared in recent years.)

Moreover, the "ticking time bomb" slums were mostly inhabited by foreigners, with Saudis constituting a tiny minority, as the daily *al-Okaz* informed its readers, quoting a PhD thesis that focused on the issue of criminality. In reality, overall estimates of the population of the southern suburbs put residents with foreign (or possibly no) passports at just under 50 percent of the total, the remainder being Saudi citizens. Nonetheless, the depiction of slums inhabited by Africans, Indians, Burmese, and many other foreigners resonates with segments of the population in wealthier parts of the city, and possibly elsewhere.

This becomes visible in the often extremely spiteful and racist comments under posts about demolitions. To quote just one of many comments: "By God, one of the most beautiful news items I

heard was about the destruction of the old quarters like Ghulayl and Kilo 6 . . . the areas are all rife with illness and drug dealing by the illegal Africans."

Even if we can safely assume that some of these comments are produced by bots, they also reflect larger debates about Saudi identity. People from outside the Hijaz region, where Jeddah is located, long looked down on it as being populated by a very mixed population lacking the supposedly pure tribal origins of people in the interior. More recently, Hijazis originating from outside the cities and striving to join the nationalist discourse emanating from the interior have reclaimed their own tribal origins. They in turn have begun, on social media, to stigmatize the city dwellers as foreign immigrants and occupiers of land that rightfully should be theirs.

CONSEQUENCES OF DISPLACEMENT

What are the consequences of these sustained demolitions, which may be described as a specific form of violence against a particular notion of urbanism—and what will take its place? A future megacity, resembling Dubai, replete with an opera house and an aquarium, where the poor live in remote new villages of high-rise towers? Neither the final transformation nor the economic effects of the destruction of a major part of the city's small businesses can be projected with certainty, but other consequences are clear.

The first is the displacement of up to a quarter of the urban population. Though some have moved to live with friends or found other accommodation, often situated in quarters slated for eventual demolition, many others seem to have left the city, or, if possible, the country. Among them are many Yemenis who lost their livelihoods and could not afford the rents elsewhere in Jeddah, in addition to the residency permits. Given the dire circumstances in Yemen—where, according to the United Nations, more than half of the population faces acute hunger—returning there can rarely be interpreted as a free decision. The home countries of the large Somali and Sudanese communities that lived in the destroyed neighborhoods are in straits almost as desperate.

From the perspective of the Saudi government, which has tried for decades to reduce the share of foreign labor in the country, this might actually be a success; for the people involved, it is a human disaster. The fallout extends to most of those who manage to remain in Jeddah or Saudi Arabia, regardless of their nationality. Will they move to other cities, or will new settlements crop up, this

time truly spontaneously, in unexpected, distant locations? To what extent the overall economy of Jeddah will suffer from losing a significant portion of its population remains to be seen.

The second consequence of the demolitions is the disappearance of a lifestyle in mixed-use, high-density neighborhoods enjoying strong social cohesion. Although the dispersed residents of the destroyed quarters still meet in parks, and their football teams continue to play one another in the south of the city, it is doubtful whether such reunions can continue much longer, given the distances to be traveled from various parts of the city and the high cost of transport. Though the state is expending much effort to create a kind of neighborly feeling in new, largely anonymous districts where people live in houses surrounded by high walls, it is destroying this very feature elsewhere on an unprecedented scale.

To a large extent, the easy integration of people from different parts of the world was the central characteristic of Jeddah as a hospitable port city. This spirit constitutes the core of Jeddah's multicultural environment, or "difference," which is used as a central marketing slogan to describe its special atmosphere for both Saudi and foreign tourists. Since the old city has been mostly converted into a rather sterile cultural tourist attraction, it was the so-called vernacular neighborhoods that kept this multicultural environment alive. It manifested itself in the small shops, the simple coffeehouses and restaurants, the circles of people of similar origin and language, and the many institutions that connected such communities.

Much of this has now disappeared. The Jeddah of the colorful pamphlets advertising the megaprojects is a copy of Gulf cities such as Dubai and Doha, where people shop in large, anonymous supermarkets belonging to regional and global chains, and meet in expensive cafés. From the perspective of sustainability, the older neighborhoods were much better adapted to the local climate. None of this is to deny the problems that existed in some of the old quarters, or their need for support; but it does raise the question of whether erasure was the best remedy.

The new Jeddah is dependent not only on the megaprojects, but also on the plans for most of the demolished areas, which are as yet completely

unknown. Rumored plans for a royal commission to take charge of the matter have not been confirmed. What is known is that the land will be owned by a company controlled by the country's sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund (PIF). After developing the properties, it is likely to resell them.

According to real estate agents in the city, land values are already rising considerably, indicating that those driven away for the most part will not be able to afford homes in the new developments. Even if some of the land in the south belongs to very affluent families, there were many property owners from the less wealthy classes. Thus, there has been a redistribution of wealth toward the upper-middle and upper classes—in line with many other recent reforms in Saudi Arabia that have created new opportunities, for example in investment or entertainment, that mostly benefit richer people.

Furthermore, the PIF is likely to make a massive profit, even if it must pay compensation to the displaced. Since the fund is headed by the crown prince and owns the NEOM Company, pundits predict that much of the income generated through the massive land acquisitions in Jeddah will be channeled north, instead of funding the construction of livable housing for the evicted Jeddah residents.

IRRETRIEVABLE LOSSES

Judging by developments up to the time of writing, there is no real danger of serious political repercussions. But the summer and autumn campaign of demolition is moving from the poorer south of the city toward the wealthier north. The more affluent residents might get angry.

Perhaps of more concern to the powerful might be another factor: in 2017, the crown prince had a large number of leading businessmen, as well as many princes, arrested on corruption charges. Many among them had to hand over a major part of their wealth in exchange for freedom, as did victims of later, similar campaigns. In Jeddah, residents are also being forced to give up their property, often acquired at great cost, for presumably meager compensation. In the future, will people trust the state sufficiently to invest the much higher sums now necessary to buy property and build businesses?

Finally, the character of parts of the old city will change further. Many inhabitants have already been

Eviction orders targeting entire neighborhoods caught everyone by surprise.

driven out in the course of its transformation into a touristic center, and the authorities evidently are keen to remove whoever remains. Can the markets that served as a node of wholesale trade, particularly for textiles and clothing—and which were, at the time of writing, still quite lively—continue to exist when the surrounding areas are destroyed? After all, the business was intimately connected to the infrastructure and customers based there. Similarly, one of the leading urban institutions from the late Ottoman period, the privately endowed al-Falah school, which trained many among the cultural elite, most likely will need to give up its historic premises, since there are no longer students in the vicinity. The old city will turn into a mere museum in the midst of a modern urban desert.

It seems that the “unorganized” (*‘ashwa’i*) decision to demolish a large number of older neighborhoods will, in the best of cases, turn Jeddah into just another Gulf city. In the worst case, the forcible eviction of a sizable part of the population might harm the local economy and foster even wider dissatisfaction with the regime. What will be irretrievably lost, in any case, is the cosmopolitan lifestyle of the less wealthy classes. In its place will be further segregation of the local and foreign populations. Jeddah’s much-praised tolerance and openness to the world is at risk of becoming ever more elusive. One wonders whether the irony of a policy that advertises Saudi heritage as a major attraction for visitors, while destroying it on an unprecedented scale, can be lost on the authorities. ■

Visions and Mirages of Tourism in the Middle East

WALEED HAZBUN

International tourism across the Middle East, as elsewhere, has always been shaped by the circulation of images that reflect shifts in geopolitics and capital flows. Travel, as in the Islamic tradition represented by the fourteenth-century *rihla* (travelogue) of Ibn Battuta, can serve as a means to seek knowledge about the world and its peoples. But efforts to develop modern tourism sectors often reinforce economic inequalities, political hierarchies, and unequal access to travel. Since the region's 2011 uprisings, the bulk of tourist flows now passes through authoritarian Arab Gulf states seeking to remake their images and consolidate their regional dominance. In this light, plans to invest heavily in tourism as an engine of growth and economic diversification raise troubling questions for the future.

The Middle East has long drawn leisure visitors to its sites of cultural heritage and pilgrimage. But these travel patterns can only be understood in relation to larger geopolitical and economic trends. The meticulous illustrations in *Description de l'Égypte*, a product of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, drew upper-class Europeans to ancient Egyptian ruins. Readers of travel narratives later booked tours organized by the firm Thomas Cook & Son, which built the modern international tourism economy in Egypt within the context of the British Empire.

After gaining independence, many states in the Middle East used tourism development as a vehicle to present the trappings of modernity, with flag-carrier airlines, modernist-style hotels, preserved ruins, and cultural displays of national heritage. Tourism also became a vital source of hard currency for many economies that lacked oil resources, such as Tunisia, Jordan, and Egypt. But the conflicts of the twentieth century took a toll.

By the mid-1970s, the civil war in Lebanon left Beirut's gleaming hotels in ruins, while the Arab-Israeli conflict fragmented the region with militarized borders and persuaded potential tourists to view the Arab region as unsafe to visit. Israel, meanwhile, used its conquests in the 1967 war to expand its tourism sector.

In the early 1990s, tourism economies across the region seemed poised for transformation. The end of the Cold War unleashed an expansion of global travel. Pressures for economic liberalization prompted many Middle Eastern states to view tourism as the sector that could lead their quests for privatization, foreign investment, and job creation. The end of the civil war in Lebanon and the breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process generated heightened expectations for tourism's economic potential.

Those visions of a borderless region vanished when the peace process collapsed. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the US invasion of Iraq, the paths of states in the region began to diverge more than ever. Though images of war and violence came to define much of the region, elsewhere oil wealth gave rise to new tourist destinations.

A SHIFTING LANDSCAPE

Several states that had long relied on tourism income, like Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, and Lebanon, struggled during the volatile 2000s. But the tourism landscape was shifting. New patterns emerged, along with new images of the region. More travelers and tourism investments from the region were directed toward destinations within the Arab world. Lebanon and Egypt rose again as popular destinations for Arabs, while Jordan sought to develop niche markets like ecotourism and cultural tourism. Israel focused on attracting ideologically committed diaspora Jews and evangelical Christians.

Dubai and other Gulf states, flush with petrodollars, began to build tourism economies based

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not on heritage sites or natural landscapes, but on resort complexes, shopping malls, entertainment centers, and even artificial islands. When it opened in 2005, reports on the indoor snow-covered slope of Ski Dubai in the Mall of the Emirates swamped international media. In a period of regional conflict and a civil war in Iraq, Dubai became one of the fastest-growing international tourist destinations with the help of its rapidly expanding Emirates airline. Abu Dhabi and Doha sought to use their hydrocarbon wealth to emulate Dubai's success with iconic architecture, ambitious museum projects, and flashy airports bustling with wide-body jets from across the globe.

When the Arab uprisings broke out in the early 2010s, Tunisia and Egypt, along with Jordan and Lebanon, had just survived the global financial crisis by coming to rely heavily on income from international and regional tourism. Though images of Arabs protesting for dignity and democracy might have shifted external perceptions of Arab civil society, tourism economies in those locations again fell into crisis. The onset of armed conflict and civil war in Syria and Libya shut down their tourism efforts and impacted neighboring states. But Turkey, with its relative stability, large size, and diverse markets, drew visitors from all directions and emerged as a major tourism economy.

By the late 2010s, Egypt's coastal resorts had bounced back, despite suffering occasional terrorist attacks, and Jordan was recovering. The expanding tourism sectors in Turkey, Israel, the Gulf states, and elsewhere benefited from new global trends. These included the rise of low-cost airlines as well as the expansion of super-connecting airlines based in the region (providing long-haul routes from Asia to Europe and North America), innovations in mobile technology that facilitated travel, and the growing diversity of international tourism markets and destinations.

The World Travel & Tourism Council reported in 2019 that the tourism sector in the Middle East was "booming" at the fastest rate of any region. But in a flash, the COVID-19 pandemic devastated tourism like nothing before it. In 2020, the contribution of tourism to the region's economies was cut in half. Borders were closed, tourist sites emptied, development plans came to a halt, and workers and businesses in the sector struggled with little income.

BRUSHING OFF CONCERNS

During the pandemic, many scholars, activists, and policymakers suggested that the global pause in travel might offer a moment to reconsider patterns of tourism development. They argued that the recent global growth in tourism, which had become more affordable and accessible than ever, risked making the sector an unsustainable, extractive industry. Social media and hyper-commercialization, some argued, were making many tourist experiences more superficial. Popular European destinations have been suffering from acute "overtourism" that radically alters the character of urban spaces. And as global consciousness about climate change hit a tipping point, activists highlighted the carbon footprint of air travel and called for rethinking norms of mobility from the era of globalization.

These concerns did not carry the same weight with authoritarian states. Tourism in the Middle East is especially dependent on air travel. Yet it is predicted that climate change will have a devastating impact on the largely unprepared region. The

Syrian refugee crisis, global social justice protests, and US President Donald Trump's so-called Muslim ban, barring visitors from a number of largely Muslim countries, also highlighted concerns about the implications of

unequal access to travel.

With the lifting of pandemic travel restrictions, few of these concerns appear to have affected tourism plans in the Middle East, beyond the marketing of "sustainable ecotourism" offerings and zero-carbon aspirations. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) was proudly one of the first countries to reopen, and it quickly reemerged as a leading global destination. Dubai hosted large events, including the delayed 2020 Expo and the opening of its imaginative but Panglossian Museum of the Future.

Meanwhile, geopolitical changes have opened up connections across the region. Several states, such as Saudi Arabia, removed tourist visa restrictions, the UAE and Morocco normalized relations with Israel, and the Saudi-led blockade of Qatar was lifted. Tourism developers began to promote limited tours for adventurous travelers in less likely destinations in Iraq, Libya, Syria, Iran, and even on Yemen's Socotra Island.

It is not clear if any of these plans address the concerns raised by critics. Too often, tourism

*Travel patterns must
be understood in relation
to geopolitical trends.*

enterprises are organized as enclave economies structured around wealth inequality between host and guest societies. Tourism often does little to transform the economic conditions of local communities, while generating negative social and cultural impacts. Most analyses of tourism development suggest that economic benefits increase and negative cultural impacts diminish to the degree that a project is integrated with other aspects of the local economy and the planning is based on cooperation with local communities.

Across the region, there are numerous plans for the kind of sustainable, low-impact tourism that allows visitors to encounter the diverse cultures and perspectives of local communities. Local NGOs in Palestine help organize political solidarity tours, and Jordan works with local social enterprises to promote “meaningful travel.” Responsible travelers can book tours to sample local foodways across Lebanon or take walking tours featuring cultural encounters inspired by the multifaith legacy of Abraham. Saudi Arabia cultivates tourism connected with religious pilgrimages, as do Shia holy cities in Iraq. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and other states are promoting more domestic, leisure-oriented tourism.

But such efforts cannot be scaled up to provide the employment opportunities required in the twenty-first century. Instead, many states in the region are launching high-profile plans and marketing schemes targeting the international luxury tourism market.

In April 2021, while still struggling with the pandemic, Egypt hosted a made-for-TV spectacle, “Pharaohs’ Golden Parade,” about transporting artifacts to the new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization—part of an effort to expand the heritage market in a sector now dominated by coastal leisure tourism. As Lebanon was suffering one of the worst financial crises in modern history, its Ministry of Tourism launched a campaign to attract its diaspora for the summer 2022 season with the slogan, “Even in your madness, I love you.” The 2022 soccer World Cup in Qatar is by far the largest of many efforts across the region to host major sports events and conferences intended to draw international visitors and highlight local leisure and entertainment offerings for global media audiences.

HIGH AMBITIONS

Saudi Arabia has ambitious schemes to build a tourist sector as a leading element of its economic diversification strategy. The state has relied

heavily on highly paid consultants and designers for these top-down master plans, trumpeted with a blitz of futuristic video projections. The Vision 2030 agenda, which seeks to radically transform the kingdom’s economy and society, allocates \$1 trillion for tourism development over a decade. Aiming to elevate the kingdom as a global destination, it calls for at least half a dozen massive “giga-projects.” NEOM, a \$500 billion development in the country’s northwest, promoted as a luxurious and green “smart city,” includes TROJENA, a mountain resort with outdoor skiing, a spa, and a nature reserve. Other giga-projects include a major heritage complex at Diriyah Gate in Riyadh, the Qiddiya Entertainment Complex outside the capital, and an ultra-luxury coastal resort complex on the Red Sea.

There is little reason to believe these turnkey projects can meet the economic needs of the country or benefit most Saudis. Instead, they create luxury enclaves for wealthy and mobile Saudi and expatriate elites. Despite a new training program, jobs in the tourism sector are still mostly filled by foreign workers under the region’s exploitive *kafala* (sponsorship) system and tend to be on the low end of the pay scale.

Most of these projects appear dependent on externally produced goods and services rather than based on linkages to the existing economy, skill base, or infrastructure. Ambitious claims about sustainability rely on untested technologies that will be financed by hydrocarbon exports. Preliminary reports cast doubt on the feasibility of such massive projects and warn of negative social and environmental impacts. But the initial goal seems to be rebranding the national image.

Tourism continues to serve as a vehicle for fostering flows of people, goods, capital, and images between the Middle East and other areas of the world, and among different parts of the region. Although these flows have played a vital role in providing jobs, revenue for states, and profits for regional and external firms, such benefits come with social, environmental, and political costs. Societies lacking accountable government risk failing to debate these trade-offs and choosing paths that serve the narrow interests of political and economic elites rather than the broader interests of communities. Viewed through the lens of tourism, the future of the Middle East looks in danger of being structured as a set of connected enclave economies based on hierarchies, exclusion, and mirages for domestic and global consumption. ■

Bread and the Art of Being Governed

ANNY GAUL

It is a common maxim, even a cliché, that bread is vital to Arab politics. Calls for “bread, freedom, and social justice” were refrains of the Arab uprisings of 2010–11. Scholars and policy analysts debate the extent to which authoritarian rulers use bread subsidies as a bargaining chip to compensate citizens for a lack of political freedoms. Recent headlines warn of the threat to food security in the Middle East posed by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, since many Arab countries import large amounts of wheat from the two warring countries. The political significance of bread in the region appears obvious—a matter of common sense.

And yet, José Ciro Martínez explains in his book *States of Subsistence*, most discussions of food politics in the Middle East render bread itself—and the people who produce millions of loaves each day—“all but invisible.” As a result, prevailing understandings of the region’s “bread politics” take a number of things for granted: the expertise required to transform wheat into fresh bread, a predictable state structure that subsidizes and regulates that process, and the ready acquiescence of citizens to authoritarian governance for the price of a subsidized loaf. Martínez deftly overturns these assumptions by showing that the state is not so much an entity that provides bread to its citizens as an effect that materializes through the entanglements of flour, bakers, consumers, and inspectors that making subsidized bread entails. To understand how state power is shaped and consolidated, he suggests, we should look not to the halls of parliament or government ministries, but rather the ordinary chaos of neighborhood bakeries.

Martínez joins other scholars of the Arab world, like Jessica Barnes and Katharina Graf, who are

bringing sharp ethnographic detail to the literature on bread and its role in the region’s food security. Discussions of the topic typically take place in broad, quantitative strokes with descriptors that do not vary from country to country: import statistics, wheat prices, debt-to-GDP ratios. But these scholars show how qualitative data on everything from local neighborhood politics to culinary cultures can illuminate the origins and impacts of concepts like “corruption,” “leakages,” and “shortages” beyond the numbers that often express them.

States of Subsistence provides these insights through a political ethnography that follows bakers, government inspectors, and ordinary citizens as

they interact with subsidized loaves of *khubz ‘arabi*, or Arab flatbread. Its evidence draws primarily from fieldwork that Martínez conducted in several neighborhoods of the Jordanian capital of Amman and two other cities. Among other activities, Martínez worked as a baker in several Jordanian bakeries for over a year.

By reconsidering the state through the lived experiences of inhabitants, Martínez suggests, we can see clearly what import statistics and global wheat prices obscure: that state and society are not as easy to delineate as one might assume. As one of his Jordanian interlocutors says of the state, “They give us bread and nothing more. We have no say, no escape, because we are part of the same system we oppose.” This statement comes not from an opposition parliamentarian or a political dissident, but a baker whose labor transforms the bread subsidy policy into tangible reality. Centering the perspectives of Jordanians with intimate knowledge of bread and baking, Martínez demonstrates the analytical payoff of taking cultures of consumption and culinary knowledge seriously.

States of Subsistence: The Politics of Bread in Contemporary Jordan

José Ciro Martínez
(Stanford University
Press, 2022)

SUBSIDIES AND STABILITY

Jordan, a kingdom that borders Israel, Palestine’s West Bank, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi

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Arabia, has witnessed (and at times been party to) regional conflicts practically ever since its independence in 1946. Today it is home to hundreds of thousands of refugees from Palestine, Iraq, and Syria. Even so, Jordan has remained relatively stable politically since the 1970s, compared with many of its neighbors.

To explain how the Jordanian state's evident stability is produced, Martínez introduces the concept of "stately sensations," ordinary and embodied practices like buying and making bread that render the state tangible. These "sensations" tend to be produced consistently across Jordanian territory, even as other elements of state power have spread across its governorates unevenly over time. They orient inhabitants' political expectations of the state, provide an interface for them to express grievances about the misuse of public resources, and conjure moments of relief for people who know they can rely on the comfort of warm, tasty, affordable bread even when nothing else is certain.

This was not always the case. As recently as the 1970s, Jordanians baked the majority of their bread at home rather than purchasing subsidized loaves from bakeries. Before the bread subsidy was instituted in 1974, as much as 40 percent of flour milled in Jordan was locally produced, Martínez writes. Now most of it comes from

*The bread subsidy circumscribes
the parameters of the
state's actions.*

abroad—a particular irony given that wheat was first domesticated in the Levant ten thousand years ago. *States of Subsistence* argues that the rise of the subsidized bread loaf in Jordan did not merely coincide with the emergence of modern state power; it was, and remains, intrinsic to that process.

For most of its history, the bread subsidy was universal—available to any citizen, refugee, or migrant worker who entered a bakery. Martínez argues that this allowed the subsidy to become a manifestation of state power even in the absence of a cohesive national community. This state of affairs took a sharp turn in 2018, however, in a change detailed in the book's epilogue. Under the terms of a 2016 International Monetary Fund loan agreement, the bread subsidy was transformed. Prices were increased, and universal access to subsidized bread was replaced with means-tested direct cash assistance that made up the price difference—but was available only to qualifying Jordanian citizens.

In a sense, the reforms did not erase so much as rearrange the terms of the bread subsidy, which persists as a red line that continues to circumscribe, for now, the parameters of the state's actions. But the episode also stands as a powerful illustration of the human costs of austerity measures on the vulnerable groups of migrants and refugees who fall between the administrative categorizations of nationality.

HANDS-ON REGULATION

Martínez's ethnography offers a front-row seat to the intricacies of producing bread in massive quantities. Descriptions of long hours spent as an apprentice baker convey a deep appreciation for the sensory, embodied, and intuitive forms of expertise required to make a living by producing subsidized bread. In one bakery, he swiftly realized that the bread recipe taped to the wall was of absolutely no use to him, however much he read it, because his hands were "not literate" and had not yet learned to execute the necessary motions and steps.

Somewhat less expectedly, Martínez describes the practice of regulating the subsidy system as its own form of skilled craft, one that similarly "requires social, technical, and manual dexterity."

His observation of the unlikely similarities between the types of labor involved in both baking and regulating bread supports his argument that the divide between state and society is a porous one.

Martínez introduces us to government inspectors who are members of the communities they regulate. Dismissing the efficacy of tracing fraud through numerical data or "pre-formatted technical expertise," inspectors draw on embodied experience as they feel, sniff, and notice minute details in order to evaluate bakeries that have been allotted subsidized flour. They also chat with dozens of passersby about their local bakeries' operations, often receiving candid complaints from customers who are themselves discerning experts on bread quality. Rather than interpreting such complaints as resistance or opposition to the state, Martínez argues that they reflect one way by which Jordanians aim to shape the state's workings through whatever outlets are available to them.

RIGHTEOUS BAKERS

States of Subsistence highlights the agency of citizens under authoritarianism most cogently in a chapter entitled “Tactics at the Bakery.” Describing several instances of extralegal practices at bakeries, Martínez interprets acts that would conventionally be classified as “corruption” or “leakage” as practices that uphold principles of care and human dignity. In the process, he argues, these practices, regardless of what motivates them, counterintuitively consolidate and uphold state power.

Drawing on the concept of “tactics” from Michel de Certeau’s 1984 book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Martínez locates these creative ruses within “the vast political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt.” One baker, for example, provides bread for a neighborhood that has experienced an influx of Syrian refugees since 2012, driving up demand. After his requests for a corresponding increase in his flour quota from the regulating ministry are repeatedly denied, he begins bribing an official to provide him with black market flour. The costs of this practice cut into his profits but enhance his social standing in a neighborhood where many depend on cheap bread for daily nourishment. Though it is technically an instance of corruption, we might also read this tactic as a citizen actively leveraging public resources to fulfill the stated intent of a state welfare policy.

Also striking is the case of Samir, a baker regularly shut down by ministry inspectors for funneling subsidized flour—intended strictly for standard loaves of *khubz ‘arabi*—into batches of *ka’ak*, sweet cookies that have been a part of Arab cuisines since at least the tenth century. By using subsidized flour, the bakery owner could sell *ka’ak* at a fraction of the normal price. Samir was unapologetic about the practice, standing by his “misappropriation” of public funds for the sake of rendering a small luxury accessible to those who otherwise might be unable to afford it. Although inspectors frequently shut down the offending bakery, carefully orchestrated protests carried out by Samir’s friends and community typically reversed those decisions swiftly. The episode

reveals Samir and his loyal, appreciative customers as anything but quiescent in the face of the state.

Even so, Martínez is careful not to romanticize these practices and pushes back against interpretations that would characterize them as undermining state power. In his account, they are instances of how the bread subsidy succeeds, rather than fails, to govern. In the course of describing tactics like these, he argues for the need to study state power not only through governance, but through the art of being governed.

In the book’s opening pages, a baker declares that “bread is never the beginning or the end. It’s always the middle.” Martínez builds on this framing to describe the state as something that, like bread, is reproduced and internalized as part of a process of continuous becoming. But the book shows that bread and bakeries are also positioned in the middle of international formations and arrangements that extend far beyond Jordan’s borders. The long spans of today’s food supply chains deliver wheat that is milled and distributed to Jordanian bakeries; global financial institutions condition Jordan’s access to capital on its limitation of subsidies, thereby determining bread’s price and accessibility.

In this sense, the art of being governed requires bakers, consumers, and government regulators alike to navigate more than the dynamics of the state. They must also contend with transnational structures that may determine whether Ukrainian wheat is available for import, or what an acceptable price point for subsidized bread is. Their impact is made all the more acute by recent unprecedented stresses from climate change, COVID-19, and the war in Ukraine.

Martínez writes of the many ways in which humans reckon with the systems that order their lives, navigating them with creativity, acuity, and sometimes even joy and pleasure, in order to “make precarity livable.” What will it take to make precarity livable on a global scale? If anything, this book underscores the need to account for the local, messy particularities at work in the many contexts where ordinary people are stuck in the middle, even when doing the most seemingly mundane of tasks: buying bread for their tables. ■