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Narratives of Transformation

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Preface

OMAR IMADY

We are pleased to present VOL 12, NO 1, *Narratives of Transformation*. This issue of *Syria Studies* includes three articles: “The Digital Party as a Vehicle for Transformational Political Change in Arab Spring Countries: *Opportunities for Syria*” by Dina Ramadan; “Military and Politics in Syria (1946-1963): *Alliances, Conflicts and Purges*” by Khouloud Al Zghayare; and “The Images of Syrian Refugees in the Mainstream Narrative: *A Case Study of Lebanon*” by Ahmad Barakat.

In “The Digital Party as a Vehicle for Transformational Political Change in Arab Spring Countries: *Opportunities for Syria*”, Dina Ramadan notes correctly that “instead of assuming their role in modernizing Syrian society, raising awareness, educating citizens and building a common national identity...” Syria’s political parties chose to follow “narrow ethnic or ideological interests, and sometimes foreign agendas”. A viable and convincing alternative to the current status of political *misrepresentation* is identified by Ramadan: the digital party. The digital party, with “its open, easily accessible, participatory platform allowing for transparent bottom-up policies and decision-making processes” might succeed in reversing the trend of “popular apathy and distrust, and motivate the masses to participate again”.

In “Military and Politics in Syria (1946-1963): *Alliances, Conflicts and Purges*”, Khouloud Al Zghayare shares an extensive and detailed analysis of different stages of Syria’s contemporary history, focusing on the “consistent processes of exclusion and purges between and within the military and politics” which impacted and depleted both institutions. It is as a direct consequence of this struggle and its implications that, over a century after the establishment of modern Syria, there remains

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“no consensus on an inclusive national identity, and no constitutional government subject to separation of powers”.

In “The Images of Syrian Refugees in the Mainstream Narrative: A Case Study of Lebanon”, Ahmad Barakat documents how mainstream media in countries hosting Syrian refugees, Lebanon in particular, is complicit in “communicating a negative image of Syrian refugees”. Through “overreaction, panic, and focus on the most controversial and sensitive problems in the host communities”, the media has communicated an image of the Syrian refugee as “ranging between being pitiful and being ISIS affiliates”. What this has sadly amounted to, in so far as the majority of Syrian refugees are concerned, is a choice “between the horrific or something worse.”

These articles, each in their own distinct way, constitute examples of how a narrative can transform our perception of Syria’s politics (Ramadan), history (Al Zghayare), and even suffering (Barakat). The narrative is the ‘story’ which becomes the basis for the essential point the author is advancing. The field of Syrian studies is replete with narratives that compete with each other to capture our attention, and the articles found in this issue, by virtue of the evidence they provide, significantly challenge contrary narratives.

Over the last seven years, it has been a pleasure and an honour for me to serve as a Managing Editor of *Syria Studies*. As of the end of April 2021, my editorial responsibilities will end. My aim throughout has been to help provide a platform for distinguished, and emerging scholars who sought to deepen our understanding of Syria’s history, politics, and economy. The underlying premise of the journal was, and so remains, that to increase our knowledge of Syria, however minimally, is to ultimately advance the processes that will one day create an inclusive and democratic country where respect for human worth, freedom and the rule of law are absolute.