

Celebrating the launch of *Social Change in Syria: Family, Village and Political Party* by Syrian anthropologist Sulayman Khalaf

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Dr Sulayman Khalaf's long-awaited book *Social Change in Syria: Family, Village and Political Party* (Routledge 2020) is a remarkable anthropological account of social change in a Northern Syrian village in the 20th century. The study, interweaving ethnography and social history, is based on Khalaf's unpublished (but hugely influential) 1981 PhD thesis, and it has quietly awaited publication for over 40 years. Finally, this work is published, and no doubt it will become indispensable to anyone wishing to understand Syria, but also to the anthropology of the Middle East, and the complex processes of social change.

What is the book about? Why is it important?

This study is a model of how social science should be done. It was ahead of its time when written and today is a classic in its field.

In the seventies there was a burst of interest in rural politics in the Middle East. A seminal book, *Rural Politics and Social Change in the Middle East*, edited by Richard Antoun and Iliya Harik had been published that combined analysis of broader social and political trends with studies at the local level and it was an inspiration to all of us at the time. Iliya Harik also produced a wonderful study on political mobilization in an Egyptian village that traced the impact of national level struggles in the village.

But nothing similar was being done on Syria. There had been some ethnographies of Syrian villages from the fifties but the country was too difficult to research after the Ba'th came to power. So Syria remained a puzzle: The Ba'th party seemingly came out of the village, led by "ex-peasants" with a radical agenda. But did national level ideologies, development plans and political struggles actually have any impact in the rural periphery or did they remain on paper? Did the Ba'th regime penetrate the villages and carry out its policy or not? And how would the village in turn effect what the government sought to do?

Suleyman Khalaf's study was a breakthrough in this respect but also went beyond this particular puzzle in that the study looked at how the broader social forces had over many decades left their mark on the village, and how the villagers, far from being passive, were agents adapting to and even manipulating those forces in their localities. In linking the micro histories of individuals in the village studied to the macro level, Khalaf exposed all the nuances and complexity that you miss if you only pay attention to the sweep of social forces and political struggles: he allowed us to grasp what these macro forces meant when concretized in the relations of individuals and families in the village. A tour de force.

But the book also signals a unique contribution to the anthropology of Syria, and to the discipline of anthropology as a whole. Venturing into territories few ethnographies go, through the combination of social history and participants' narratives, it paints a vivid trajectory of a village in changing times and its inhabitants' perceptions and adaptive strategies. Methodologically diverse, Khalaf's work simultaneously mixes a careful historical

record with villagers' experience, ethnographer's pen with actors' voices. Khalaf is a grand master of the ethnographic art and of the life history form: the persons jump out of the pages: contradictory and complex, with ambitions, desires, and confrontations. Instead of caricatures, Khalaf gives us the Syrian bricoleur, the ambiguous, marginal and occasionally deviant *mukhadram*. And whilst foreshadowing the future, this work is vested in categories embedded with crucial historical and local meanings: 'village' 'family' and 'party' are still painfully important in today's Syria, as they were at the time that Khalaf was writing his PhD thesis in the late seventies/early eighties.

The study's ethnographic astuteness creates a bridge between the classic ethnographies of Syria from the 70s and 80s, to contemporary anthropological themes of deviance, ambiguity and conflict. In this way the book's method is a fertile trope through which to look forward to the anthropology of Syria. But the book is a bridge in two more unique ways: one is through a combination of macro and micro levels of analysis, it opens up a conversation with other disciplines. The other, being the first ethnography of Syria by a Syrian it embodies Syrian hospitality and collegiality into a robust call toward the decolonisation of academic knowledge production.

How was the book published?

The book was originally Sulayman Khalaf's 1981 PhD thesis. Many reasons inhibited its publication as a book in the interim 40-year period, yet Sulayman always wanted to publish an updated version of his thesis upon his retirement. Unfortunately, both the Syrian war and a life-changing stroke meant that Sulayman enlisted the help of his family and friends in finally publishing his book. Under the editorial help of his friend and colleague Ray Hinnebusch, Sulayman's wife, Barbara Heyward, his cousin, Ali al-Khalaf, and his anthropology student, Maria Kastrinou, worked together with Sulayman to update the manuscript and write the final 'updating' chapter. However, as in all ethnographies, and as Sulayman notes in his original PhD thesis, this has always been a work of collective effort, with contributions from many of his family and extended-family members, by other anthropologists in the original thesis, and of course by the continuing support and encouragement of the people of Hawi al-Hawa, to whom this work is dedicated.

For a link to the book, click [here](#).

The online celebration of Social Change in Syria

To celebrate the publication of this seminal work, the Centre for Syrian Studies at St. Andrews' University and Brunel University hosted on June 25th 2021 an online book launch. In our online *madafa*, we were joined by esteemed scholars of Syria from anthropology, historical sociology, social geography, Arabic Literature and politics. Since Khalaf's book is so multifaceted, we had a hard time narrowing down who and what would be discussed. Indeed, we invited speakers and asked them to speak to particular themes of the book (such as tribes, Orientalism, or neoliberalism). Having, thus, asked of our guests to provide their 'homework', we were pleasantly surprised by our participants' intellectual engagement as much as by their personal recollections of Sulayman as a teacher, mentor, friend. We decided, then, to publish

their critical appraisals in this online special review. We hope you will enjoy it, as we believe that works like Khalaf's illuminate crucial spheres of Syria and will lead to future scholarship. [Here](#) is the link to the recording of the session (the first few minutes unfortunately were not recorded).

What the book tells us about Syria

The participants prepared written mini-studies on different aspects of the book, which we assemble below: Dawn Chatty discusses the book's insights into the pre-Ba'th Raqqa tribes turning into cotton shaykhs; Paul Anderson looks at what we learn about the tribal--Aleppo merchant connection; Haian Dukhan examines what the book tells us about the interaction of the Raqqa Tribes with the rise of the Ba'th; and Myriam Ababsa discusses what we learn about Raqqa under Bashar's neo-liberalism. Finally, Chris Davidson discusses the contributions of the book to Middle East studies and of the wider contribution of Dr Khalaf to Gulf Studies. (See bios of participants at the end of the document).

Prescient of 21st century anthropological tools: the use of auto-ethnography and second-hand ethnography in Sulayman Khalaf's book *Social Change in Syria*

Dawn Chatty

This commentary on the book by Sulayman Khalaf revolves around several questions. Is it possible to illustrate the ways in which individuals both mirror and shape the process of social change? Conversely, can an examination of social processes at the individual level help provide an understanding of how broad trends of change take place? Social change and development were perhaps the foremost themes in applied anthropology in the latter part of the 20th century, and Sulayman Khalaf's book based on his doctoral dissertation completed in 1981 is a fine example of such studies. Life got in the way of its publication as a book earlier on, but at least now it sees the light of day and is a strong addition to a rather limited anthropology of Syria. It still has much relevance as a historical contextualization of rural Syria, especially from the late 1960s into the early 1980s.

Methodologically, the work is prescient of anthropological tools that were to become more common in later decades. I will call these methodological approaches 'second-hand ethnography,' where someone else conducts interviews on behalf of the anthropologist, and 'auto-ethnography,' where the key informants write their own interviews, in this case in the form of long letters responding to some of the questions put forward by the anthropologist. Both tools became important for Sulayman who felt unable to return to the field after 1977 when he left for the United States to pursue his PhD. The auto-ethnography is generally when the key informants directly create the texts for ethnographic analysis. In the case of Sulayman's doctoral dissertation, he wrote to his relatives in his home village and elsewhere and asked them to write to him about their lives and life stories. Relying on these texts from his key informants answering questions he had set out for them to consider was, in its time, a unique approach to ethnographic research. Second-hand ethnography has come to be used when the key researcher cannot, for one reason or another, conduct his or her own interviews

but has to rely on others to do so. In Sulayman's case he requested that interviewing of some key figures in the Meshrif lineage be conducted by anthropological colleagues in the field in Syria at the time.

Using these two tools – second-hand ethnography and auto-ethnography, as well as notes from his earlier fieldwork undertaken during research for his master's degree from the American University of Beirut, he amasses a body of data from which to set out his contribution to anthropological thought. The primary notion he sets out is that of the *mukhadram*, an individual who lives through several epochs, or in Sulayman's shorthand the term is translated into 'cultural collagist'--someone who manages to be deviant and marginal but progressive as well. The coining of a term is always an effective way of drawing attention to a phenomenon, but I wonder whether the *mukhadram* who Sulayman identifies in his eight life histories are not rather adaptive, entrepreneurial, and opportunistic individuals fairly typical of Bedouin in Arabia? In a close reading of the life histories of the Meshrif family and the Afadla tribe, I am not so sure that they can be described as exhibiting deviance and marginality; rather I would suggest we see these life responses as adaptive and resilient.¹

This book is the story of Hawi al Hawa and its people, a village in north central Syria. The village was founded in 1950 by the al Meshrif families of the Afadla Bedouin tribe. The main actors in this foundation were Hajj Khalaf and his 4 brothers. Their father, Hajj Ibrahim, ran a successful sheep raising enterprise making good use of the natural grazing of the Badia where he moved his herds in continuous migratory patterns in small circles around Tall al Samin. When Hajj Ibrahim died in 1949, his sons, led by Hajj Khalaf bought all the adjacent agricultural land from an absentee landowner in Aleppo and began farming cotton as a commercial enterprise. Thus, Hajj Ibrahim was one of the first Bedouin or tribal entrepreneurs to enter a compact with merchants from Aleppo. He combined dry farming in the Ma'moura in the 1950s with mechanized and irrigated farming (for cotton production) bringing great wealth to himself and other tribal leaders who bought or registered land in their personal names. This was an era often referenced but little studied or recorded in ethnographic literature.

By late 1950s, Hajj Khalaf's enterprise was so successful that he brought in 80 sharecropping peasant families to work the land. The Meshrif family *adapted* to contemporary conditions and grew cotton with mechanized 'horsepower' for the global market. Although they were called the 'Cotton Sheikhs', they continued to raise sheep, and dry-land farmed winter cereal crops, especially wheat, and barley. They also became landlords by renting plots of land out in the village of Hawi al Hawa.

By the 1960s, the period of merchant tribal entrepreneurism came to an end with the establishment of the socialist ideology of the Baath party in Syria. Under the land reform principles of this new party, large tracts of land were expropriated by the state to give land to the *fellahin* (farmers). This was a decade of some struggle followed by Hafez al Assad's

¹ Numerous such studies can be found in my edited book, *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa* (2006), Leiden, Brill. Chapters by Donald Cole, Fabietti, Claudot-Hawad, Keenan, and Hobbs, are a few that might be consulted.

Correctionist movement in 1970 which saw a diluting of some socialist principles and a relaxation of control over both land holdings for agriculture and herding.

Adaptability, resilience, and resistance were the keys to success. This was something at which the Meshrif family was very good. They were as Sulayman argues 'cultural collagists' but also adaptive, opportunistic, and entrepreneurial – as I have argued in my own work on Syrian and Omani Bedouin.²

The move from black tents in the pre 1950s, during the French Mandate, to simple 2-3 room cement houses in the early years of Syria's independence, and finally to elaborate villas and 'madafas' (guest rooms) in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s is a reflection of the resilience, resistance, and adaptability of these tribal Arab social groups – the Afadla. The Meshrif tribal lineage of the Afadla, which is the core of this study can be regarded as *mukhadramuun*, people who have lived through several epochs: sheep herders in pre-1950s Syria; entrepreneurial landowning farmers and agro-pastoralists in the 1950s; quietly resilient and resistant to Ba'ath socialist extremism and land expropriation in the 1960s; and finally adaptable and accommodating landowners, farmers and herders after the 1970s Correctionist movement of Hafez al-Asad. But *mukhadramuun* as people who live over several eras, can also be cultural brokers, innovators, and survivors. All the above describe the Meshrif lineage.

This study, and the book which has finally appeared, is very personal to Sulayman. The patriarch of the village, Hajj Khalaf al Ibrahim al Meshrif, is the grand uncle of the author. Hajj Khalaf had two wives (he was widowed and remarried) 8 sons and 2 daughters. One son, Mahmoud, took over managing the extensive family agricultural business and was also the *mukhtar* (mayor) of Hawi Al Hawa. Mahmoud's second wife, Tieba al Khalaf, was the sister of Sulayman.

In recent conversation with Sulayman, he has declined to identify the Afadla tribe as Bedouin. This brings to mind the ways in which self-identity is articulated and changes over time. That is, have all members of the Arab tribe of the Afadla disassociated themselves from being Bedouin (bedu) as opposed to being 'shawi' (sheep herders)? Is this a personal decision on the part of Sulayman or one shared by most of the Afadla tribespeople? And what can be made of the distinction between *shawi* and *bedu*?

Through interviews – several of which were conducted on his behalf by the anthropologist Annika Rabo while he was undertaking his doctoral study at the University of California - as well as letters to him from his main informants and relatives, we see the world through their eyes. We come to understand the choices they have made from the opportunities, as well as the barriers they faced in living their lives as they wanted. And we come to understand how change occurs and what kinds of negotiations are required within and among the social group in order to search for a life of dignity, 'happiness' and free from hardship.

²See for example, *From Camel to Truck: The Bedouin in the Modern World* (2013) 2nd edition. Cambridge: White Horse Press and *Mobile Pastoralists: Development Planning and Social Change in Oman* (1996). New Yorke: Columbia University Press.

Cotton Capitalism: Social Dislocation and Market Solidarities between Aleppo and the Jazira

Paul Anderson

Dr Sulayman Khalaf's sensitive account of social change in northern Syria does what ethnography does best, combining structural analysis with person-centred accounts and experiences. Along with fascinating first-hand accounts, it offers revealing historical and sociological analysis of the relations between urban merchants and tribal leaders-cum-“cotton shaykhs” along the Euphrates. We learn that Aleppo's merchants and agricultural entrepreneurs were significant agents in driving capitalist development of the cotton economy in the Jazira, from the late 1940s through the 1950s and early 1960s – a period that saw cotton production grow 20-fold in some cases, and catapult Syria past Egypt and Iraq in agricultural output. The book reveals that Aleppo's merchants were providers of credit, allowing the purchase of irrigation pumps, tractors, and wage labour. They were marketers, taking a fee for connecting the cotton harvest to cotton mills and factories. And they were, perhaps most importantly, entrepreneurs – actors with particular skills and attitudes to risk and value. They saw land as a developable resource and as a commodity – a resource whose value was connected to money and the market. Some tribal leaders were quick to learn from these skills and attitudes, becoming first registered landowners and then agricultural operators themselves, thereby making the transition from tribal leaders to cotton shaykhs.

So Aleppine capital and attitudes were helping to drive a remarkable change through the 1950s: a change from pastoralism and small-scale subsistence farming to a large-scale market economy stretching across and integrating a swathe of northern Syria. This was liberating for some; the book recounts how some minor lineages, who had been subordinated in the old order of tribal notability, went up in the world by purchasing and registering land. More than this, social worlds were shifting: urban-rural relations were intensifying, introducing new tastes and forms of education. Where fathers had learned how to herd sheep, sons were learning how to keep the books and how to negotiate with merchants and state officials.

As the book eloquently shows, the other side of this process was social dislocation. Khalaf describes how the commoditisation of land led to social and economic precarity for many. For one thing, relations with Aleppo's merchants could be exploitative – especially for small landowners, as urban merchants claimed the lion's share of the crop. Not needing the political support of these smaller players, they were uninterested in developing multi-stranded social ties or obligations. Large landowners were often able to negotiate more equal partnerships. Khalaf recounts how, enabled by credit from Aleppo's merchants, some tribal notables became feudalists themselves, reducing their fellow tribesmen to dependent wage labourers. Regulated neither by state law nor by tribal custom, these relations of economic dependency could become ungoverned sites, leaving labourers at the mercy of their kinsmen, the entrepreneurs. So, the book, I think, very persuasively connects economic to social and political change. It shows how the influx of Aleppo's merchant capital led to a breakdown of tribal social solidarities, producing both economic dynamism and a socially and economically

precarious underclass. Many in this class ceased to see tribal leaders as legitimate, and they became as it were fertile ground for the Baathist promise of agrarian reform and revolution. This is a carefully argued analysis that, through a fine-grained account of one village, speaks to social changes occurring in lands across the Euphrates region.

And yet, the book's attention to people and their stories also introduces a good deal of nuance. This is not a simple story of capitalism dissolving social bonds and solidarities, and disembedding economy from society, or of a market economy reducing members of a community to atomised individuals. That story of course is familiar in Western narratives about markets and money – you can find it in social theorists ranging from Aristotle to Georg Simmel and from Karl Marx to Karl Polanyi. Khalaf's book does not shy away from describing the destabilising effects of the influx of merchant money and attitudes. On the contrary, it describes in detail the new modes of domination and – for some – dispossession and underdevelopment that it brought. We hear of accusations that tribal elites with new sources of wealth had lost their tribal values, their concern for their fellow tribesmen; we learn of accusations that they had started to see the world through a new materialist lens, in which relations were purely economic and transactional.

The book also shows how new forms of solidarity, mutuality, and affective bonds, were reforming through the 1950s. They were forming between the cotton shaykhs and Aleppo's *khanjis*, the owners of caravanserais, who provided the credit, and who did the marketing. These merchants were described as friends; they hosted the villagers when they visited Aleppo, putting them up in the khan and taking care of shopping and other needs; they were remembered fondly as having charged minimal marketing fees in lieu of interest on loans. Doubtless Aleppo's *khanjis* found other ways to profit handsomely. They combined the roles of broker, marketer, and merchant – they also bought the cotton and sold it on to other merchants or to cotton mills and factories. But nevertheless, relations of partnership formed with cotton sheikhs that were capable of being suffused in some cases with emotion and loyalty. In the case of the Al-Meshrif lineage – we learn that these affective-cum-economic ties were passed down across a generation, from father to son, from Hajj Khalaf to Al-Mukhtar Mahmoud. And when state intervention led the *Khanjis* to lose their role as agricultural middlemen, and they fell on hard times, members of the Al-Meshrif lineage provided support from the village on the Euphrates – loans that they never expected to be repaid. So, if affective solidarities were disappearing in one domain, they were reappearing in another. And they were reappearing, not within the idiom of the tribe, but on a larger scale that connected the village to the metropolis. Affective ties were restructured and configured in a new geography. Khalaf emphasises the dynamic of national integration. His historical sociology, and person-centred narratives, show us how relations of credit and marketing intertwined with hospitality and charity, weaving this early fabric of national integration. This prefigured the project that the Baathists were to pursue a few years later, albeit through different institutional mechanisms and in a very different ideological key.

By showing us momentous social changes at the human level, Khalaf provides a richly satisfying and complex picture of the ties between economic, social and political change. The affective-cum-economic bonds between Aleppo's merchants and the village's tribal-entrepreneurial elites have already entered into collective memory in more than one part of Syrian society. They mark a golden age which is looked back on, even today, among Aleppo's

old merchant lineages. This was the period when “the lira spoke” and had a value. When Syrian cotton gained its global reputation. This book recounts the formative dynamics of that period from unique and sorely needed perspectives. And it does so with such clarity and integrity that it will stand now as a collectively held record for a long time to come.

Unveiling the interaction between the tribes and the Ba’th Party: Socio-economic changes in turbulent times

Haian Dukhan

In this fascinating study, Dr Sulayman Khalaf (2021) explores the impact of the rise of the Ba’th Party on the tribal structure in Syria in the years since 1963. This is an important period of Syrian history that lacks rigorous academic research. In my book *State and Tribes in Syria: Informal Alliances and Conflict Patterns* (2019), I investigated the policies of Syrian state towards the Arab tribes from 1946 until the eruption of the Syrian uprising. Khalaf’s research constituted one of the major points of reference for the rupture and change that tribal communities went through in the 1960s.

The Ba’th Party was an ascendant political power that tried to build itself a base in the rural areas of Syria. Many of the tribal youths joined the Ba’th Party while studying in Damascus or Aleppo, as the movement preached equality and revolution against the oppression that these youths had experienced from the heads of their tribes (sheikhs) who managed to acquire large tracts of land for their cooperation with the French Mandate authorities during their presence in Syria. Khalaf describes the rise of the ‘cotton Sheikhs’ who emerged as an elite in the ‘50s and benefited from the agricultural boom in the Jazira-Euphrates region. The rise of the ‘cotton Sheikhs,’ however, led to the alienation of most of the tribes, who were wrestling with a life of toil and misery. This estrangement played a role in the consolidation of political parties such as the Ba’th. Khalaf narrates in intricate detail what the Ba’th Party aimed to achieve after its military coup in 1963. Ba’th’s strategies aimed to consolidate its position of domination, and one of the ways to achieve that was to close the gap between the centre and the periphery by reaching out from the urban centres to the villages to build up its support base. The Ba’th political ideology considered tribalism as an obstacle to achieving the main goals of the party, proclaimed in this representative slogan: ‘unity, liberty and socialism’. The Ba’th Party established Peasants’ Unions to safeguard the interests of the peasants in terms of fighting tribalism and factionalism. Land reforms were initiated based on the party slogan: ‘The Land Belongs to He Who Works It’. Large tracts of land were expropriated from tribal leaders and were distributed to the peasants. During this period, peasants streamed into the cities to make their claims on the spoils of the revolution. This phenomenon is portrayed by Khalaf who mentions that a whole genre of humour was developed, particularly among the Damascenes, depicting with ‘obvious bitterness the character of the aggressive village Party members who were at the same time naively crude and lacking in urban city ways’ (Khalaf 2021: 83).

What did all of this mean for the tribal structure in Syria? Khalaf answers this with illuminating examples from the governorate of Raqqa.

1) Implementing land reform measures in the Jazira completely destroyed the old system of landlordism. Large landowners like the Haweidi of the Afadilah tribe were left with very small parcels of land, while others in neighbouring areas, such as the Muheid families of the Fed’an,

were left with nothing. These land reforms also affected the al-Meshrif family of Hawi al-Hawa, who had almost two-thirds of their land confiscated.

2) Tribal sheikhs were rendered economically powerless by the destruction of their material base and by denying them any effective participation in the political process, such as membership in the Syrian Parliament. One member of the Haweidi family told Khalaf in 1974, '*Kunna bil na'im wasurna bil jahim*' (We were in paradise and now we are in hell) (Khalaf 2021: 98).

3) The regime under the Ba'th before 1970 perceived the course of the revolution in terms of waging a class struggle in which the Ba'thists classified other Arab countries as either 'progressive' or 'reactionary.' Some of the tribal leaders were rounded up and were asked questions such as 'Why do you go to Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf States? How often? What are your connections with these reactionary regimes?' (Khalaf 2021: 99). Since the late 1960s, most of the chiefs of noble Bedouin tribes in Syria (including the Muheid sheikhly families) have left the country. Now most of them live in Saudi Arabia. A few live in Jordan.

In short, Khalaf provides us with a compelling analysis of the micro dynamics that took place in the rural areas of Raqqqa and how these relate to a broader national framework. What is specifically fascinating about this book is that it takes us out of the binary lens that anthropologists used to study tribal communities in Syria that analyse them either through the lens of primordialism or instrumentalism. Khalaf shows us how these communities do not always act according to their 'tribal instincts' nor do they act according to what the state dictates them to be. Rather, they are active agents in the process of development and transformation that their communities have gone through.

Finally, Khalaf's work intersects with my new research project on "State devolution in Syria: Tribal Auxiliaries in the Margins" where my findings show that the tribal militias that fought alongside the state in both civil wars, are a grassroots phenomenon which aim to gain influence and power in their locality and are not mere puppets that are made by the state.

Dukhan, H. (2019): *State and Tribes in Syria: Informal Alliances and Conflict Patterns*. Routledge, London.

Generational breaks along the Euphrates: A reading of *Social Change in Syria: Family, Village and Political Party*

Myriam Ababsa

It is an honour to underline in this brief note how Sulayman Khalaf's PhD (1981) and its current book (2021) has guided my understanding of the impact of ideology and politics on social and territorial transformations in Raqqqa countryside. It is precious as most work in anthropology on Syria was written by foreign scientists, and we lacked research based on indigenous familial

networks. His work covers social relations between landowners, farmers and peasants through three key periods of rural transformation along the Euphrates.

The first was the time of Bedouin *mashaykha* over the semi-nomadic tribes of the Euphrates before the 1958 drought. It was a time of poverty, and fear of losing one's land to the Raqqawi notables and moneylenders. The families of Raqqa were initially able to finance bucket wheels (*gharraf*) on their own, but the use of motor-pumps was the work of Aleppo investors, owners of khans, the *khanjî*.

This period was followed by the cotton "gold rush" of the 1950's, still in the memories of most, when even medium-sized landowners of the local tribes managed to make fortunes by investing in motor pumps to extend the cotton areas on the steppe plateaus. The price of cotton having increased tenfold during the Korean War, hundreds of Aleppo entrepreneurs and medium-sized landowners (10 to 30 ha irrigated), invested in motor pumps and extended the cotton areas on the steppe. Sulayman Khalaf provides estimates of the fortunes amassed by the 'Afadla sheikhs during the 1950s. The richest 'Afadla owner and entrepreneur was 'Ali al-Bechir al-Howeidi. His income from cotton cultivation increased 28 times in 13 years, allowing him to invest in 30 motor pumps of 100-150 horsepower, 4 tractors, 4 American cars and three pick-ups (Khalaf 2021: 48). His cousin, Faysal al-Howeidi, had built up a fortune of around one million Syrian pounds in the early 1960s, and also owned two tractors, two cars and a pick-up truck. Both of them grew cotton on the fertile land along the Euphrates, but rented out their land in Jazira on the plateau to contractors. The 'Afadla became so rich that they rose to the level of the Feda'an sheikhs. As proof of their considerable wealth, Adfala sheikh Faysal al-Howeidi, married in 1951 Fouza, the daughter of the great sheikh Mujhim ibn Muheid, who had administrated Raqqa between 1920 and 1921 (*dawlat Mujhim*, Ababsa 2009). The Raqqawis referred to these newly wealthy *Shawâyâ* as *kulak*, the Russian pejorative designation, common in the Syrian press in the 1970s to designate the owners of motor pumps who obtained credit from the Agricultural Bank (Hannoyer 1985, p. 27). They owned good land located along the river, which benefits from natural gravity drainage. But in the interest of rapid enrichment, no crop rotation was undertaken, and no drainage of these irrigated lands was provided. The result was the salinization of these steppe lands within a decade, which was highly criticized by the Ba'thists.

The third period was the time of land reforms implemented after the 1963 coup, when former large owners were expropriated in favour of the landless farmers. These three periods are illustrated in the first analytical part, but also in the eight portraits that make the other half of the book. In these portraits, we discover a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences, from that of the cotton sheikh, who regretted losing his lands, to that of the landless farmers who experienced the benefits of land reform. Sulayman Khalaf underlines the breaking of the former tribal links after the Ba'thist revolution. He also presents crucial elements to generational breaks in the 1960's and then in the 1980's. The Syrian agrarian reform was intended to provide the state with the means for rational management of agricultural resources, likely to put an end to the "plundering" of land by a minority of absentee landlords or city investors, as was the case with the Aleppo *khanjîs* in Jazira.

Khalaf's main paradigm is the rupture of the tribal link in the 1960's, when minor members of the tribes of the Euphrates were appointed to high administrative ranks within the

Governorate of Raqqa and its several institutions. They then started to compete with the former sheikhs and opened *madafas* to convert their symbolic power. It led to a reshuffling of tribal ties according to political power, not inherited status. The accession of the members of the semi-nomadic tribes of the region (Afadla, Sabkha, Beggara, Bou Hamid) to the political and administrative power was denounced by Raqqa city-dwellers as the emergence of a lobby of *shawî* (a pejorative term used by the townspeople to designate the semi-nomadic tribes of the Euphrates). As stated to me by a Raqqawi intellectual in July 2001: "From 1963, the sons of the kulaks joined the Army and the Baath and came to live in Raqqa. The countryside now rules the city (*al-rif yahkam al-madina*)".

As Khalaf points out, relations between the Fedaan and the city's notables in the 1950s were quite good. He describes them as an alliance (*wala*) and not as a dependency (*tabiya*) (Khalaf 2021: 33). This is especially true since these city dwellers dealt with Bedouins who had attained a high social position and were respected by the urban notability. In contrast, Mujhem ibn Muheid's daughter, Sheikha Fouza, who married Sheikh Mohammed al-Howeidi of the Afadla in 1951, was angry at the contempt in which she is held by the people of Raqqa, as a Bedouin living in the small town of Mashlab. When I visited her in 2001, she told me that the 'Ujaily and the Sattaf, Raqqa's main families, were after all, only her "father's writers", meaning that they were only educated urban notables, and not noble bedouins bound by the three moral obligations of honour, frugality and generosity. Sheikha Fouza declaimed in verse the great episodes of war in which her father and uncle distinguished themselves. She also praised their generosity (*karama*), which made them great leaders: thus in 1911, during a difficult winter, Hajem, who had just become the *wajih* ("the face") of the clan, managed to feed the whole tribe during 40 days of snow. As for his father, during a famine, he rented the bakeries of Raqqa and distributed bread to all.

Accounts of prominent ladies among the Euphrates tribes were not so current in academic writings about Syria in the 1980's. Accordingly, the gender dimension is not the main focus of Dr. Khalaf's book. This dimension emerged in the 1990's in the academic field on the Middle East. Nevertheless, women appear as wives and daughters within the eight portraits of Khalaf's book. Typically, not a single woman owns land, and very few is educated. For instance, Ustaz Omar longs for a city educated wife, but has married his cousin. In the 1980's, the level of female illiteracy was particularly high in Raqqa governorate: 83% of women were illiterate in 1981 (94% in 1970), versus 42% of men (62% in 1970, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics). Thanks to the Bath Party investment in education, a generation of educated women would rise in the 1990's, and progressively appeared working in the public sector (education, health, administration), rather few in the private sector.

The portraits have a literary dimension and depict with sincerity the aspirations of the members of the Euphrates Arab tribes. The portrait of Tieba sent by letter to the author, her brother, is really of great value for its sincerity. Tieba describes how she loved growing up with her grandmother in the village, but also how she agreed to marry without even meeting with her husband, at 16, as she heard about his good reputation, wealth and social position as *mukhtar*. She mentions how she insisted to receive one kilo gold of jewels the second day of her wedding, enjoying shopping in Aleppo. As the second wife of the *mukhtar*, Tieba lived in a modern apartment in the city of Raqqa, with all the modern amenities (telephone line, radio and television) not found in the village. These intricate and authentic portraits echo the

novels written by other sons of Raqqa: Dr Abdessalam Al Ujaily, Ibrahim Khalil and Fayez Al-Fawaz.

Khalaf's book and portraits document a society before its destruction by the ten years conflict Syria has gone through since 2011. A second generational divide occurred in the 2000's between impoverished tribesmen who had neither land nor jobs and their parents -- Baathist civil servants. The sons of the city's main families managed to migrate to the Gulf countries, some to Saudi Arabia. The majority, between a quarter to fifty percent, could not find jobs in Raqqa. The invasion of Iraq by US forces in 2003 came as a shock to the Raqqawi populations. The Iraqi army soldiers dismissed by the US occupiers formed Salafist movements that supported al-Qaeda which had a presence along the Euphrates from this date. Children excluded from the economic growth of the 2000s, without land and jobs, turned to the Syrian Free Army, or joined the Salafist formations in search of revenge against the Baathist state, accused of having impeded their development and robbed them. The youth of the Euphrates tribes backed the opposition movements that infiltrated into the region in 2011, while some of their parents remained loyal to the regime until 2013 (Ababsa 2018). Then, in November 2013, fourteen sheikhs of the Euphrates tribes pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, only to bitterly regret it very soon (Tabler 2017). Khalaf gives us keys to understand the change in social relations under the influence first of agrarian capitalism, then of Ba'thist socialist ideology, and more recently of jihadism. The constant throughout was how local leaders continued to look out for the interests of their kinship groups.

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Ababsa, Myriam, 2018, « Raqqa après l'organisation de l'Etat islamique. Les défis de la gouvernance urbaine d'une ville détruite, *Moyen-Orient*, n°38, Avril-Juin 2018.

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Dr. Sulayman Khalaf – From Syria to the Gulf

Christopher M. Davidson

Though best known for inspiring and assisting a generation of Syria and Levant-focused anthropologists, Dr. Sulayman Khalaf has also had a major impact on the work of numerous researchers interested in the Gulf states. In my case, for example, following successive meetings on the side-lines of Exeter University's area studies conferences (circa 1999-2000), he kindly agreed to serve as my field supervisor in the United Arab Emirates. Generously taking the time to introduce me to his colleagues and students at the University of Sharjah — where he was working at the time — he also substantially honed my interview and survey techniques (and rather sternly kept testing my Arabic in all too public situations!). Playing a major role in helping me prepare my [2003 St. Andrews University dissertation](#) and then transform it into a [viable monograph](#), we continued to collaborate. Notably, Dr. Sulayman

began to visit me on the Zayed University campus in Dubai, where I had begun to teach, and on a number of occasions he gave guest lectures to my enraptured Emirati students. Intellectually, beyond his celebrated anthropological scholarship and methods (the latter motivating me to embed myself with various local and expatriate communities, often renting apartments in obscure parts of the UAE for months on end), Dr. Sulayman's research on tangible and intangible forms of heritage in the Gulf was revelatory and pathbreaking. In particular, his work on the sorts of cultural legitimacy being sought out by ruling elites such as the Al-Maktoum and Al-Nahyan families of Dubai and Abu Dhabi helped cast new light on their evolving brand of softer authoritarianism. In particular, he had begun to build fascinating case studies incorporating qualitative data from grandiose camel racing events, the numerous lavishly funded museums and galleries, and Bedouin poetry recitals. In all cases he demonstrated how these invariably reflected and embellished the histories and personal statuses of Emirati leaders.

In fact, as part of some sort of public relations drive, I remember once being invited to a camel race (at a time when [trafficked Pakistani child jockeys were still being used](#)). As well as witnessing a boy fall and being trampled to death — with the race only being paused for a couple of minutes — I was struck by the political spectacle, as much as anything else. Years later, I also remember attending a poetry festival featuring the ruler and crown prince of Dubai as its star guests — again, given the circumstances, foremost in my mind was Dr. Sulayman's earlier thesis. Crucially, of course, he had effectively offered a refreshing and vital parallel to the more dominant strain of political science explanations for Gulf statecraft during this period, which as many will recall tended to heavily focus on political economy aspects such as rentier state privileges (including subsidies and public sector employment, in return for political acquiescence), and favourable international relations with perceived Western protector states (most prominently the United States, Britain, and France). As such, Dr. Sulayman certainly helped shape the now substantial body of 'post-rentier' literature on the Gulf, including the recent innovative studies produced by [Matthew Gray](#), [Jessie Moritz](#), [Calvert Jones](#), and [Courtney Freer](#).

Importantly, following on from his heritage work, Dr. Sulayman's later emphasis on so-called 'sheikhly authority' on the Arabian Peninsula has also proven enormously useful. In particular, writing alongside historian James Onley, [his highly cited explication](#) of how earlier Gulf rulers successfully leveraged tribal and religious legitimation (and then buttressed their regimes with consensus or consultative politics) has helped educate numerous scholars exploring other non-material aspects of the social contracts or 'ruling bargains' in the region. Indeed, beyond my own recent work on possibly more [sultanistic 'post-sheikhly' polities in the UAE and Saudi Arabia](#), this has also undoubtedly fed into the broader literature on Arab authoritarianism, demonstrating alternative Gulf forms of contemporary neo-patrimonialism to those witnessed in Egypt, Syria, Libya, and elsewhere (see, for example, recent studies produced by [Michael Herb](#), [Mehran Kamrava](#), and [Neil Partrick](#)).

Short Biographies of Participants Sulayman Khalaf Book Launch

Myriam Ababsa is a social geographer, associate researcher at the French Institute for the Near East (Ifpo Amman) and at CNRS Géog. Her work focuses on public development policies,

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Dawn Chatty is Emeritus Professor in Anthropology and Forced Migration and former Director of the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, United Kingdom. She was elected Fellow of the British Academy in 2015. Her research interests include refugee youth in protracted refugee crises, conservation and development, pastoral society and forced settlement. She is the author of *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, *From Camel to Truck*, White Horse Press, 2013, and *Syria: The Making and Unmaking of a Refugee State*, Hurst Publishers, 2018.

Chris Davidson A graduate (BA & MA) of [Cambridge University](#), he completed his doctorate at [St Andrews University](#) in Scotland He is the author of multiple books on the [Middle East](#), including "Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success" published by Columbia University Press, *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies*; *Shadow Wars: The Secret Struggle for the Middle East* (2016).

Haian Dukhan is a Carnegie Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Central European University's Centre for Religious Studies in its research project (Striking from the Margins). He is the author of "State and Tribes in Syria: Informal Alliances and Conflict Patterns" (Routledge, 2019).

Dr. Barbara Hayward worked as an educator and administrator in higher education institutions in the Arabian Gulf for over 30 years. Her last post was Director of Strategic Initiatives Higher Education at the Knowledge and Human Development Authority, Dubai. She also has a background in publishing and editing. She married Sulayman Khalaf in 1983.

Raymond Hinnebusch is professor of International Relations and Middle East politics and Director of the Centre for Syrian Studies at the University of St. Andrews. His works include *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba'thist Syria* (Westview 1990) and *Syria: Revolution from above* (Routledge: 2001); he co-edited *Syria: From Reform to Revolt*, (Syracuse, 2014) *The Syria Uprising: Domestic Factors and Early Trajectory* (Routledge 2018) and *The War for Syria: Regional and International factors in the Syrian Conflict* (Routledge 2019); he edited *After the Arab Uprisings: between democratization, counter-revolution and state failure*, Routledge 2016

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reference to Western influences, notably Anglo-American Orientalism, publishing over 800 articles, papers, reviews and translations.

Maria Kastrinou is Lecturer in Social Anthropology at Brunel University. Anchored in political anthropology, her work interrogates sectarianism, resistance, and statelessness among the Druze in Syria and beyond. She is the author of *Power, Sect and State in Syria* (IB Tauris 2016).

Sulayman N. Khalaf is an anthropologist, with a PhD from University of California Los Angeles. He has published widely on Syria, Gulf Arab Societies and tribal communities. He taught at Arab Gulf universities and is an expert on intangible cultural heritage. He retired in 2015 and now lives in Exeter, England.