

Call for Papers

Political Violence in Syria: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

14-15 September 2018

Workshop at Utrecht University

Organizers:

Dr. Uğur Ümit Üngör, Department of History, Utrecht University

Dr. Roschanack Shaery, Department of History, University of Antwerp

In 2011, the uprising in Syria rapidly escalated into a large-scale, complex, multi-dimensional civil war. As the violence became more extensive and intensive, within six years, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, the economic infrastructure and civic life devastated, Syrian territory fragmented, with massive internal and external displacement. Local activists, civil society members, and ordinary citizens have engaged in various practices to make public the violence, varying from uploading videos, social media discussions, to more organized forms of activism like creating NGOs and carefully documenting the events. Since 2011 and in particular with the rise of ISIS, academics, policy makers, and the global media have taken keen interest in the spectacle of violence in Syria.

The conflict in Syria has been framed in different ways: insurgency and counterinsurgency, sectarian and ethnic civil war, regional proxy war, and international terrorism. In much of these frameworks, the dynamic of the violence itself has either been overexposed as particularly atrocious, or under-examined as an epiphenomenon. This workshop challenges both the notion that the recent violence is an entirely novel development in Syria, and the assumption that violence is a perennial phenomenon in Syria. It rather contextualizes violence by placing it in long-standing histories and practices that predate this civil war. The current war appears to have put Syria in a state of exception, where the state is fighting to maintain its sovereignty and stop the country's disintegration. The violence has doubtlessly taken unprecedented numeric dimensions, but the structural conditions for the emergence of this violence predate the war.

This workshop is intended to look at the long standing tradition of political violence in postcolonial Syria and historicize the recent developments. It aims to bring together approaches that include pre-existing structural conditions as well as contemporary empirical studies that examine the causes, courses, and consequences of such large-scale violence in present-day Syria.

We welcome papers that focus on, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- Forms and repertoires of violence;
- History and politics of the Syrian security forces;
- Theorizing ideology, ethnicity, sectarianism, paramilitarism;
- Case studies of violence: regions, cities, neighborhoods, villages, tribes, families;
- Empirical studies of political economy, demography, and geography;
- Forced displacement, internal and external;
- Perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and others.

Transport, accommodation, and meals during the workshop will be covered by the organizers. Please submit abstracts for papers (max 300 words) and a CV to: u.ungor@uu.nl and roschanack.shaery@uantwerpen.be

Deadline for abstract submission: 15 April 2018

Announcement of selection: 1 May 2018

About the organizers

Uğur Ümit Üngör is Associate Professor at the Department of History at Utrecht University and Research Fellow at the NIOD Institute in Amsterdam. His main areas of interest are state formation and nation formation, with a particular focus on the history and sociology of mass violence. He has written on the history of political violence in the Middle East, and he is the author of three books on the Armenian genocide, including the award-winning *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950* (Oxford University Press, 2011). He is leading a large NWO-funded research project on political violence in the post-Ottoman lands, and is currently writing a book about the dynamic of political violence in Syria.

Roschanack Shaery is assistant professor in the Center for Political History at the University of Antwerp. Formerly she was a researcher in the Political Science Department at the University of Amsterdam in 2009-2010. Her research focuses on the Arab East and Iran, and her publications include *From Subjects to Citizens? Civil Society and the Internet in Syria*, Special Issue on Modern Syria in *Middle East Critique* (2011). Her book *Missing Recognition: Enforced Disappearance and Syrian Military Security in Lebanon* is forthcoming as a monograph. Her new book project is tentatively titled *Middle Eastern Lives: Dreams Against All Odds*, a comparative social history of Lebanon, Syria, and Iran from the early 1970s, based on a series of biographies.