



Druze Studies Journal

Book Review:

“Kamal Jumblatt and the Soul of Socialism in Lebanon,” review of: **Hazran, Yusri.** *The Druze community and the Lebanese state: between confrontation and reconciliation*. London: Routledge, 2014, 326 pp. ISBN 9780367867522.

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Yusri Hazran discusses the relationship between the Lebanese Druze community and the state from the 19th century until the beginning of the civil war. The author relates this complicated relationship with the Druze rivalry to the Maronite community in Lebanon. The emphasis here is on the Druze feeling of alienation after independence, which according to the author, radicalized Kamal Jumblatt, Druze leader and founder of the Lebanese National Movement (LNM),² to begin working with different ideological groups in order to create a secular, nationalist, socialist, and revolutionary system. The book employs a mixture of political, sociological, and historical approaches to substantiate the author's argument about alienation, radicalization, and the anti-establishment approach pursued by Jumblatt.

The book consists of seven chapters. Chapter one serves as a historical background that addresses the Druze political history in Lebanon. Chapter two discusses the Druze political struggle, with a special focus on post-independence Lebanon through the political behavior of the Druze-dominated Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) until the mid-1950s. This chapter provides an important foundation for the book as it hints at the path dependency of the Druze political behavior in modern Lebanon. Chapter three analyzes the civil unrest of 1958 and Jumblatt's PSP stance throughout the process. Chapter four deals with Jumblatt's relationship with the state during the era of Fouad Shihab and his successor until 1970. Chapter five studies Jumblatt's alliance with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and how they both worked to change the system in Lebanon. Chapter six talks about political confessionalism and the role of sectarian affiliation in the Lebanese political scenery, while chapter seven discusses the Druze work on producing a new historical narrative to emphasize their role in the making of the Lebanese political entity.

The book is well-written and researched, with the author employing important primary documents in addition to vital secondary sources to support his argument. It is an added value to the literature of the Lebanese Druze from the prism of communal vs. state relationship rather than studying communal relations exclusively in this deeply divided place. The point I would like to emphasize, however, relates to a major theme in this book about Jumblatt's alliances and political stances. I believe the author has over-relied on the theory of political instrumentalization to explain Jumblatt's anti-establishment behavior. My argument is contrary to

² Jumblatt founded the Lebanese National Movement as a coalition of the left-wing, Arabist, and socialist parties to mobilize the population against the right-wing parties.

that, particularly because Jumblatt was known to be a committed socialist and an idealist too. He was pragmatic within limits, and his perception of Arab nationalism was genuine. His support of the Palestinian cause from the first day of the war in 1948 was revealed by President Khoury when Jumblatt asked him to militarize the Druze and the Shia of Baalbek to fight the Zionists, to which Khoury judged that the young man was hot-headed. Jumblatt's stance as a staunch supporter of Palestine is intertwined with his belief in Arab nationalism.

Jumblatt's alliance with the PLO in Lebanon was ideological, and this opened the door for the LNM to benefit from the PLO's military experience. If he wanted an instrumental approach, he would have accepted a deal with Syria's Assad rather than risk severing relations after the famous 1976 meeting between Assad and Jumblatt in Damascus.

With respect to Jumblatt's socialist ideology, it is hard to imagine that he employed an instrumentalist approach to socialism, particularly because of his lifestyle, which resembles something similar to scientific socialism. For instance, Jumblatt sold his property in Seblin to farmers in exchange for a small amount of money and established agricultural cooperatives in different agricultural places around the country. Moreover, he created the famous Seblin cement factory prior to the Civil War, which worked as an industrial cooperative in which workers and shareholders owned the company. He lived in one room in his castle, wore modest clothes, and ate a farmer's diet.

Finally, the book is a good read for any scholar of Lebanese politics. Students and scholars from all fields will definitely enjoy reading this book as it attempts to provide a comprehensive academic understanding of Druze and state relations in Lebanon.

References

Hazran, Yusri. *The Druze community and the Lebanese state: between confrontation and reconciliation*. London: Routledge, 2014.