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SOPHIA HOFFMANN, *Iraqi Migrants in Syria: The Crisis before the Storm* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2016). Pp. 264. $65.00 cloth, $29.95 paperback. ISBN 9780815634850.

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Sophia Hoffmann's book, *Iraqi Migrants in Syria: The Crisis before the Storm,* offers a detailed account of the interactions between Iraqis displaced by war and instability in their country, the Syrian government, and international NGOs operating in prewar Syria. According to Hoffmann, by 2007, the situation of Iraqis in Syria was becoming increasingly visible in the international sphere, prompting a series of humanitarian interventions based on internationally hegemonic standards of nationalism and liberalism. One of the book's main claims is that the norms associated with the hegemonic standards introduced by international aid organizations would have a notable effect on the Syrian government's understanding and practice of state sovereignty and on its policy toward Iraqi refugees. The book is based on seven months of ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 2009 and 2010, while Hoffmann was living in the Damascene suburb of Jaramana, which at the time was host to a significant number of displaced Iraqis. Hoffmann's fieldwork consisted of interviews with Iraqi refugees, Syrian aid-workers, and the expatriate managers of aid organizations, as well as participant observation with two NGOs, one of which was involved in interactions with larger United Nations organizations.

As the title indicates, Syria went from being a major host country for Iraqi refugees in the first decade of the twenty-first century to being ensnared in a war that has generated close to five million Syrian refugees. While Hoffmann's book focuses on the lives of Iraqis in prewar Syria, its broader conclusions seek to address recent events in Syria as well. For example, Hoffmann argues that the Iraqi refugee crisis served as an incubator for the massive, international aid

apparatus that has, "since 2007," become entrenched in the Middle East (2). Her book provides interesting and useful insights into the events, politics, and ideas that shaped the international aid sector's current involvement in the Middle East, which largely focuses on Syrian refugees.

One of Hoffmann's major arguments is that international aid organizations assisting Iraqi refugees introduced a different concept of "state-citizen" relations and a different concept of "statehood" into Syria. The expansion of the international aid sector, she contends, resulted in a transition from a more flexible and fluid relationship between the Syrian host government and displaced Iraqis living in Syria to a stricter one that carved Iraqis as clear outsiders in relation to the Syrian nation. Iraqis went from being "brothers" or "guests" to being clearly marked a "migrants" or "refugees"—categories that set them apart as fundamentally different from Syrians on the basis of their nationality. Hoffmann points out that, compared to Europe's increasingly draconian policies toward migrants, the (prewar) Syrian government engaged in a rather liberal, laissez-faire attitude toward the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees who began to appear in Syria after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. The Syrian government's more flexible engagement with Iraqi refugees meant that many Iraqis were able to find work despite lacking the official right to do so, and enjoy de facto residency and freedom of mobility, regardless of whether or not they were officially registered as refugees.

The above leads Hoffmann to conclude that Iraqis encountered more freedoms in Syria than those allocated to migrants in supposedly liberal Western states. She persuasively contends that the Syrian government's authoritarian character and its liberal attitude toward migrants are not in tension with each other. It is precisely the Syrian government's illiberal character that explains the relative freedom that Iraqis and other migrants enjoy in Syria. Indeed, Hoffmann argues that, in prewar Syria, allegiance to the Syrian government (whether or not one was a Syrian national) was more important than whether or not one belonged to the body national. As long as migrants "accepted the limitations of life in Syria, they were welcome and would not face any particular hurdles to integration" (13).

By comparing the Syrian government's rather flexible and liberal approach toward migrants to the stricter and more intolerant one of supposedly liberal Western states, Hoffmann adds a layer of nuance and complexity to our understanding of the Syrian government as an authoritarian regime. She also forces us to rethink some of our

assumptions about liberalism and illiberalism as modes of governance, and their implications for understanding state sovereignty.

While chapters one and two of the book are geared toward giving the reader a sense of how Iraqi refugees were apprehended by the Syrian government, the rest of the book (chapters three through six) focuses on the international aid sector's involvement with Iraqi refugees. In these latter chapters, Hoffmann develops her argument that the expansion of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) in Syria and of the international aid sector more broadly, led to the introduction of new governance techniques into the Syrian landscape. These techniques, Hoffmann argues, resulted in more restrictive policies toward migrants and had a transformational effect on Syrian state sovereignty. She points to the fact that Syrian authorities progressively came to define Iraqis on their soil as "refugees" and tighten visa restrictions. These examples aside, there does not seem to be much ethnographic data to support her claims that new governance techniques appeared on the Syrian landscape or that international humanitarian intervention transformed Syrian state sovereignty. The ethnographic examples in the book's latter chapters focus mostly on the day-to-day interactions of Iraqi refugees with the international aid sector: how they comply with it, resist it, or manipulate it.

Another part of the book where the analysis could have been a little more thorough is in Hoffmann's comparison between Syria's Palestinian refugees and its Iraqi refugee population. Hoffmann engages in a comparison of the Damascene suburb of Jaramana, which became a hub for Iraqi refugees, and the Damascene suburb of Yarmouk, home to a significant Palestinian population. Given the focus of her study, it makes sense that she would integrate the situation of Palestinian refugees into her analysis. However, this integration is done in a somewhat uneven manner that leaves out important relevant information at times. For instance, Hoffmann argues that before the Syrian government allowed large-scale aid operations in Damascus from 2008 onward, "the country had been closed off from international humanitarian discourse" (2). This appears to be somewhat of an overstatement. Syria's Palestinian refugees have been assisted by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees) in Syria for about seven decades now. A more explicit acknowledgement of the history of Syrian cooperation with UNRWA might have resulted in a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between the Syrian government and international humanitarian

governance. It is also somewhat puzzling that in her comparison between Jaramana and Yarmouk, Hoffmann leaves out the fact that Jaramana, in addition to being home to Iraqi migrants and other minority groups, is also the site of the officially recognized and UNRWA-run Palestinian camp of Jaramana. Finally, in her comparison between Iraqi refugees and their Palestinian counterparts, there are differences that merit emphasis in terms of dissecting the Syrian government's "liberal" approach toward migrant populations. While, as Hoffmann states, the Syrian government's liberal approach toward Iraqi refugees stems to a certain extent from assistance through a murky and unstable bureaucratic apparatus that Iraqis can turn to their advantage, the government's liberal approach toward Palestinian refugees is enshrined in a law that guarantees Palestinians the right to public employment, education, and health services. This is a significant difference between the two populations that, while not necessarily contradicting Hoffmann's general assessment about the Syrian government's liberal approach toward migrants, complicates it a little.

Overall, Hoffmann's book makes a valuable contribution to the current literature on the politics of humanitarianism, state sovereignty, and the relationship between (il)liberalism and immigration policy. It also provides rare ethnographic insight into the lives of Iraqi refugees in Syria during the few years that preceded the country's descent into war. The book will appeal to undergraduate and graduate students interested in humanitarian governance, Iraqi refugees, and in refugee studies, more broadly.