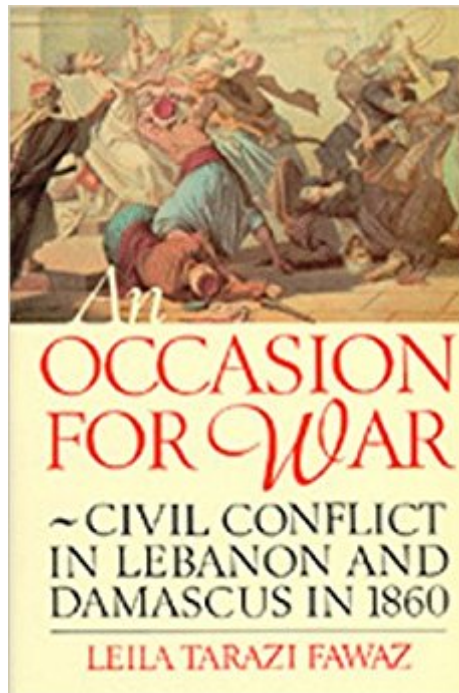


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An Occasion For War: Civil Conflict In Lebanon And Damascus In 1860



Synopsis

Leila Fawaz's pioneering study tells the story of the 1860 civil wars that began in Mount Lebanon and spilled over into Damascus. This period witnessed the most severe outbreak of sectarian violence in the history of Ottoman Syria and Lebanon. The author's close analytical narrative of the dramatic events of that year is set against the broader themes of nineteenth-century social, political, and economic change. Fawaz shows how social conflict, including "ethnic" civil wars, cannot be explained without analyzing the regional and international currents that play upon both central state power and local autonomy. She also demonstrates the important role of the communal balance between social and political institutions within regions. Fawaz's new insights into the formation of sectarian identities and conflict will make *An Occasion for War* essential reading for all students of the modern Middle East.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book may be accused of being biased but it's well worth reading nonetheless as it provides an account that is invaluable in explaining the more recent civil war in Lebanon and in fact the roots of many Middle East problems as the Ottoman empire crumbled and led to increased European intervention. Fawaz is one of the main researchers in 19th century Social and Economic transformation in the Levant and is an excellent complement to fine general accounts by Roger Owen, Charles Issawi and Chevallier. Bias aside. Fawaz discusses the centralizing administrative reforms of the mid-19th century Syria and how these acted in conjunction with a unique combination of internal and external social and economic forces that collided to generate a violent civil war in the

Lebanon and Damascus in 1860. The book analyzes the socio-economic conditions and circumstances that contributed to the civil conflict in Syria of 1860. It also considers the changes in the international economy in the mid-19th century and its effect in the context of Beirut and Damascus, European cultural, economic and political influence in the Syrian province and the changes in Christian-Muslim relations in terms of the application of the reforms. Ultimately it shows that while the 1860 Civil War in Syria was confessional in its manifestation, it was largely an expression of grievance against the rapid and widespread social and economic transformation that occurred in the first half of the 19th century.

The author is clearly biased, she has tailored her research and the subsequent conclusions to idealize one side of the conflict while demonizing the other. On some occasions she dives into treacherous scholastic investigation, revealing the number of cows, pigs, and sheep slaughtered during a marauding but then makes blatant generalizations and oversimplifications on issues that matter greatly, most notably the issue of identities, narratives and historical oppression in the Mountain. On one occasion she writes something like: The Maronites are most likely (it could have been "probably") Arabs." Where did the analytical analyses go? It seems to me that such a fact is significantly relevant and might have warranted a bit more research which would have eliminated the uncertainty in her statement. She also gives way too much credit to the economical disparities in the Mountain which is indicative of her school of thought but fails to capture the spirit of the conflict. This is quite simply a bad book, aside from the biography it is worthless.

Instead of being a fascinating account of a crucial period in the history of the Christians and Druzes in Mount Lebanon and Syria, the book appears to be an obvious attempt at demonizing the victims and justifying the massacres. It is disappointing that so much bias was camouflaged as an objective interpretation of historical events. On several occasions, the book gives the impression that the author's interpretations of events constitute the ultimate truth. At times, this is done without taking into consideration even the interpretations of the people whom the book uses as references. The only beneficial part of the book is the extensive bibliography, otherwise very disappointing.

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