silience of the communities. As Oslender holds it,

> The Aquatic Space, however, will remain. Not the same as today. Its assemblage of constantly changing relations will produce new expressions … And somewhat along the Guapi River, Doña Celia will observe her grandmother as she applies medicinal herbs and prayer to cure the evil eye, while Don Agapito is still chasing and shooting rabbits in the Guajuí basin (217).

Farid Samir Benavides Vanegas
Universidad de Los Andes—Bogotá
Universidad Ramón Llull—Blanquerna—Barcelona

Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila Al-Shami, *Burning Country. Syrians in Revolution and War* (London: Pluto Press, 2016). 280pp. Paperback $20.00.

In the mid 1990s, I lived in Damascus in order to brush up my knowledge of Arabic. These were the times of *Suriyya al-Asad,* the Syria of Hafez al-Assad, as the slogans on buildings and along streets clearly indicated. Indeed, the "eternal leader" and "beloved president" was omnipresent. Hafez al-Assad filled the daily news and one could not escape his gaze in the public sphere. In *Ambiguity of Domination,* Lisa Wedeen aptly described the disciplinary power of this cult around Assad and the culture of hypocrisy and opportunism that animated the Syrian security state of the 1990s. However, besides this coercive symbolism and the relentless repression of any opposition, the power of the regime also rested on a certain security bargain with at least parts of the population. In their introduction to *Burning Country* Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila Al-Shami point to the very nature of this security bargain according to which "people could live in relative peace." The regime was able to rely on the "partial consent of a cross-sectarian peasant constituency" and co-opted parts of the intellectual and economic elites (13). It was the breakdown of this bargain after the death of Hafez al-Assad in June 2000, during the rule of his son Bashar al-Assad, that "set the scene for the uprising" (34).

In *Burning Country*, Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila Al-Shami construct a convincing analytical narrative of the transformation of *Suriyya al-Asad* into a humanitarian disaster. They do so by giving a voice to those people who "dared to demand freedom" and "received annihilation instead" (225). *Burning Country* is informed by many of the voices of the vibrant popular movement that tried to displace the Assad regime by non-violent means. In ten well-organized chapters the book describes the historical path which led Syria into brutal civil war. There is hardly any doubt that Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami wrote a partisan book. They clearly express their sympathy with the grassroots activists and local committees trying to push for reform in the years 2011–2012. Yet this partisanship does not

prevent the authors from presenting their readers with an analytically sharp and balanced account of the course of events. The book is animated by the authors' intimate knowledge of Syria and it provides remarkable insights into the complexities of its civil war. In short, it is a must-read for all those who want to better understand the country's descent intro tragedy.

From a scholarly perspective, one central argument of the book seems particularly important, going far beyond the Syrian case: the dynamics of violence that transformed popular resistance into wicked warfare. From the beginning, the Syrian regime applied violence in a strategic way. While it brutally suppressed the demonstrations of civic movements, the regime proclaimed a series of amnesties for incarcerated militant Islamists. "From March to October 2011, at the same time that it was targeting thousands of non-violent, non-sectarian revolutionaries for death-by-torture, the regime released up to 1,500 of the most well-connected Salafist activists from its prisons" (120). In this way, Damascus set the course for an increasing militarization and Islamization of the conflict. For the regime, the civil activists and their demands for dignity, justice, and democratization represented the greatest threat (45). Turning popular unrest into military conflict was a way to destroy the legitimacy of the political demands of the opposition. The regime followed a deliberate strategy of violent escalation. Moreover, the militarization of the conflict marginalized the grassroots organizations and brought about the rise of militia leaders, war profiteers, and criminal gangs who intimidated the population. Together with the relentless attacks on civilians by the regime, the unleashed dynamics of militia violence led to a situation in which "four million had fled the country and 7.6 million were internally displaced" by July 2015 (153).

The authors present their readers with a detailed analysis of these dynamics of violence underpinned by empirical evidence from reliable sources on the ground. In this way, the book not only contributes to our understanding of the Syrian war, but also offers a good read for scholars engaged in war and conflict studies more generally. Moreover, with its focus on the early revolutionaries and the "explosion of creativity, expression and debate" they brought about, this book represents a refreshing read for a global public otherwise preoccupied with the struggle against the Islamic State (177).

In a more critical vein, however, even such an excellent book has its flaws. The authors sometimes uncritically reproduce questionable historical narratives. Praising the Ottoman millet system as a form of cosmopolitanism, for instance, is an utter historical anachronism that does not reflect the social realities of the Ottoman Empire (3). Simply juxtaposing the imperialist map-making and sectarian engineering in the early twentieth century against the embitterment of the Arab peoples, to take another example, is a gross simplification of very complex historical events (12). More importantly, it glosses over the factual involvement of Arab actors in the map-making of the modern Middle East. I was also slightly puzzled, at some points, by the normative judgments of the book. Do the authors really believe in

the "refugee-friendly policies" of the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan , whose staunch Turkish nationalism otherwise troubles the region, in particular when it comes to the Kurdish case (159)? Is the brutal air-war against civilians in Yemen a result of "Saudi clumsiness" (206)? Or is Riyadh not following a military strategy not too far removed from that of the Assad regime?

To be sure, given the high standard of the authors' study, these are minor points of critique hardly affecting the quality of an otherwise remarkably well-written book. *Burning Country* is essential reading on the Syrian war, addressing scholars of the Middle East, of political science, and of International Relations at the same time. Given its accessible style and well-calibrated argumentation, the audience of the book certainly goes beyond the scholarly realm. In particular, I consider it to be authoritative reading for policy makers and journalists engaged in Middle Eastern affairs. In times in which Jihadism has almost exclusively taken over the attention of a global audience, this book reminds us strongly of those people who started the Syrian revolution and whose dreams for a better future of the country hopefully will prevail.

Dietrich Jung
University of South Denmark

Andrew Cornell, *Unruly Equality: U.S. Anarchism in the 20th Century* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016). 399pp. Paperback $37.95.

As the United States, and indeed the world, faces up to the realities of Donald Trump's presidency, anarchism's red and black banner has once again been seen fluttering in the winter breeze of cities across the globe. It is difficult not to wonder, when reading Andrew Cornell's fascinating and thorough study of the history of twentieth-century anarchism in the US, how the potpourri of thinkers, activists, and artists he examines would have reacted to the opening acts of an administration seemingly unperturbed by the accusations of racism, misogyny, and authoritarianism that continually confront it. Perhaps the rise of European fascism would have been the natural point of comparison, a political ideology that many anarchists feared was gaining ground in the US in the troubled 1930s. These activists would have recognised, therefore, the historical association lurking behind the speculation about what Trump's "first 100 days" would entail, and perhaps seen FDR's presidency as a fitting point of reference, especially when some feared the New Deal was nothing but a plot to inaugurate "American Fascism" (125). Others may be seduced by the impulse which continually reappears in Cornell's book, judging that if revolution had been indefinitely postponed in the face of ascendant reaction, then the time was ripe to realise anarchist values in experimental communities. To, in the words of one practitioner, "create a community life in … [a] … pleasant setting much better than anything we as individuals could hope for in a teeming city like New York"