

Hilary Falb Kalisman. *Teachers as State-Builders: Education and The Making of the Modern Middle East*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022. xxi + 274 pages. Paperback, \$29.95.

Based on primarily archive analysis of both memoirs of influential individual educators and “collective biograph of educators as a social group,” Kalisman explores the teachers’ role as state-builders in the modern Middle East. She is particularly interested in several important questions including political manifestation in education, arena educators attempted to engage, and the role teachers played in the process of state-building.

The book is divided into five chapters. In Chapter 1, Kalisman reviews the historical legacies of education in the region from the mid-nineteenth century through World War I. The education during this period was marked with several very interesting features. First, there was a transition from the traditional education to modern education. There was significant differences between the traditional “Kuttab” and the modern schools in terms of location, content of teaching, quality of teachers, roles of teachers, students’ composition, discipline actions, etc. Second, curriculum, pedagogical style, size of schools and languages used varied significantly in both government and nongovernment schools. Third, the Ottoman government was eager to train students to become part of cadre of civil servants. Fourth, because of lack of schools, both students and teachers need to travel even after the imposition of mandate borders. Finally, the schools in Arab Provinces are very diverse and in flux, particularly with religious and foreign institutions. Kalisman concludes that the education system in the region showed profound lack of systemization, both at institutional and individual levels. Nevertheless, the Ottoman government was trying to push educational reform including expansion, standardization, and improvement for its survival. It is important to note that government schooling and government employment are closely related.

Chapter 2 reviews the education system and changes in the interwar years in two periods. During the first period, British officials followed Ottoman regulations on education in the region. Then, education laws and regulations were promulgated in Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine from 1929 to 1939. British adopted various tactics combining “reliance on religious, foreign and missionary schools, as well as a continuation of Ottoman laws and infrastructure” to protect colonial interests. They wanted to offer elite education to small number of local residents and basic education to lower class of farmers to increase agricultural productivity. British officials did allow some local variations because locals provided funding for schools and for hiring teachers. The first generation of teachers under the mandate were mainly young, urban, and Christian. During this period, teachers were in high demand because, on the one hand, locals demanded government education for its automatic connection to government employment. On the other hand, mandate administrators refused to fund schools or to train sufficient teachers. It is important to note that educators could leverage their scarcity and qualifications against governments’ desire to prevent rebellion.

In Chapter 3, Kalisman discusses a very unique situation in the region, namely the transnational feature of the education systems in the process of state-building. Both students and teachers travelled a lot crossing borders because of lack of schools as well as educated people in the region. These educational elites are not only transnational, but also international. They became elites through strict selections and schooling, particularly secondary and college education. In addition, they became connected through schooling crossing the borders. Consequently, the textbooks and curriculum also reinforced transnational ideas, and transnationalism. They speak, dress, behave differently than the rest of the society. They became modernized, and political awakening. Although female educators achieved a higher status as well, however, those status

are related with domesticity and development. During this period, educators not only negotiate their status, promote their own welfare, but also participated in political activities such demonstrations and strikes against governments that hired them. Educators also involved in transnational politics by criticizing educational policies of the mandate.

Comparing education systems of Iraq, Transjordan, and Palestine during the transition from mandate to independence or occupation, Chapter 4 emphasizes the relationship between educators and government. First, educators were able to combine work in educational bureaucracies with agitation against governments employed them to a degree. In addition, they actively participated in anti-imperial political movements. Even female teachers joined women's associations trying to advance nationalism and women's liberation as part of a broader national struggle. Second, the rise of military in politics also affected education system. For instance, government's scouting programs were reinvented and reestablished. Some even believe that teachers should be a type of soldier imparting a militant anti-imperial strength. Third, although teachers and students from Iraq, Transjordan, and Palestine promoted nationalism through their educational efforts, they were divided in their prescriptions for nationalism and for educational policy. Fourth, it is important to note educators in Palestine are more rebellious than those of Iraq and Transjordan because of the lack of Arab representation and support for Zionism under the British mandate. Some teachers even served as advisors for the major strike that lasted for six months. Fifth, during this period, many educators became high ranking politicians, particularly in Iraq and Jordan. Those educators-turned-politicians were divided into two groups, the old elite group who have been around for a while and contributed to the stability of the government. The younger generation, especially those who lacked government schooling and upward mobility tended to be more radical, anti-government and nationalistic.

Education in the region after the end of mandate witnessed some interesting major changes. First, after the independence or forced occupation, governments allocated more funding to education recognizing that education is the foundation for modernization. Data shows that number of schools, number of students, and number of teachers increased in Iraq and Transjordan, especially after the 1950s. At the same time, government passed laws and regulations redefining and codifying teachers' roles in society. Schools are places to cultivate a new, moral, loyal, and literate generation. Teachers are defined as a cog of the bureaucratic machine. Nationalist education must match with the nationalism of the governments. Partisan political propaganda that potentially endangers national unity were prohibited. Standardization of teachers' credential, textbooks, curriculum, classroom activities and even inspections was used as a mean of control. In addition, teachers were cut off from their government's upper levels because the fear that "their integration into government had the potential to undermine the state." Compare with their predecessors, teachers have fewer individual power for negotiation, thus, they joined unions hoping to gain collective bargaining powers. Nevertheless, their efforts faced counterattacks and repressions. Sadly, correlating with the move from elite to mass education, teachers' socioeconomic status declined even without feminization.

This is a very important book because it is the first systematic study of history of education of the region under the British mandates. It provides a very interesting historical review of the education systems and their changes since late Ottoman Empire.

It is always a challenge for historical studies, particularly with scatted information everywhere and with no systematic data. It is also very challenge that how we can extract the essence from the complicated historical materials. Impressively, Kalisman was able to accomplish both. She used more than two dozen archives from different countries. She also

examined government reports and syllabi, newspapers, and periodicals. In addition, she conducted over two dozen interviews with informants. Her reference list is approximately thirty pages long.

Kalisman pinpoints three most important findings in her book. First, educators worked across multiple states promoting a variety of nationalisms in the region which affected public education, anti-imperial movements, nationalism, and nation-state building. She concludes that the “transnationalism of public-school teachers was both crucial to state-and nation-building in the modern Middle East and disruptive of links between state and nation.”

Second, educators played a dynamic role in state-building in the region. At the early stage, they could express antigovernment sentiments while working for them; they were able to become political leaders and high-ranking administrators, and they were able to negotiate with government for their agenda and welfare. They helped building of the modern nation-states. Ironically, after building and expanding the state bureaucracies, they were cut off from their government’s upper levels, and eventually became a cog of machine or the “birds” in the bureaucratic cage.

Third, along with transition from elite education to mass education in the region, teachers’ socioeconomic status changed downwardly. They were a group of elites in the past due to lack of educated people. However, because of the rapid expansion of schools, students, and educators, teachers lost their elite status in the society.

It would be ideal if Kalisman summarized her major findings in the epilogue. The current one is rather weak in which she only addresses the issue of teachers’ downward socioeconomic status. In addition, the term “Hazards of Mass Education” may seem provocative, but it can be misleading as if that mass education is the cause of teachers’ downgrading status. Although mass

education and teachers' downgrading status are correlated, mass education is not the only cause of the change. Further, that they were cut off from their government's upper levels is not because of mass education, at least in Iraq where the military held power for many years after their independence.

Xun Wang
Full Professor
Department of Sociology
University of Wisconsin-Parkside,
Kenosha, Wisconsin