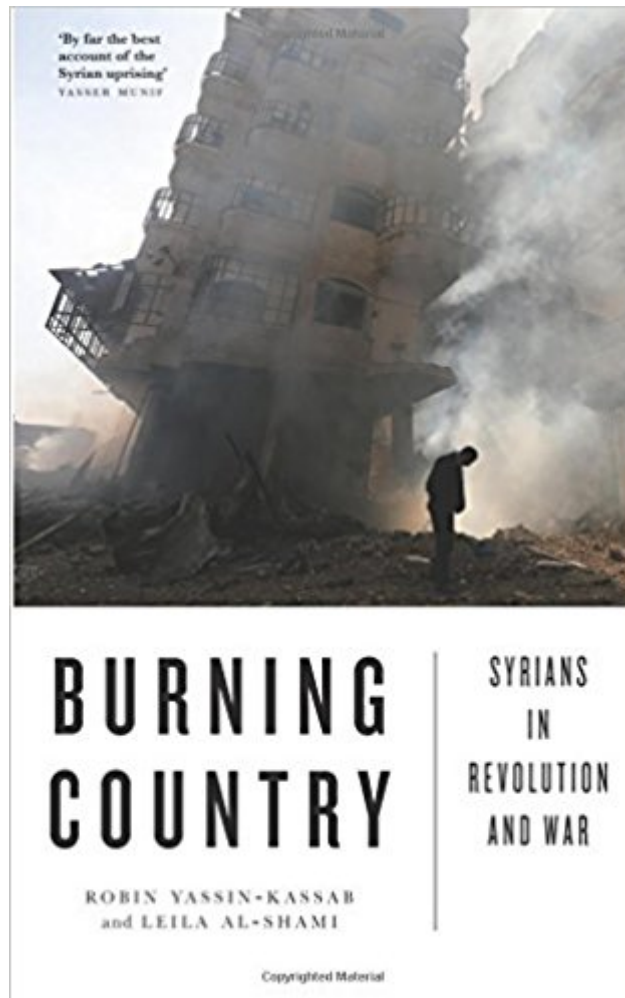




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# Burning Country: Syrians In Revolution And War



## Synopsis

*\*Shortlisted for the 2017 Rathbones Folio Prize\** In 2011, many Syrians took to the streets of Damascus to demand the overthrow of the government of Bashar al-Assad. Today, much of Syria has become a warzone where foreign journalists find it almost impossible to report on life in this devastated land. *Burning Country* explores the horrific and complicated reality of life in present-day Syria with unprecedented detail and sophistication, drawing on new first-hand testimonies from opposition fighters, exiles lost in an archipelago of refugee camps, and courageous human rights activists among many others. These stories are expertly interwoven with a trenchant analysis of the brutalisation of the conflict and the militarisation of the uprising, of the rise of the Islamists and sectarian warfare, and the role of governments in Syria and elsewhere in exacerbating those violent processes. With chapters focusing on ISIS and Islamism, regional geopolitics, the new grassroots revolutionary organisations, and the worst refugee crisis since World War Two, *Burning Country* is a vivid and groundbreaking look at a modern-day political and humanitarian nightmare.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Those in search of perspective on Syria's devastation should turn to *Burning Country*, by the reporter Yassin-Kassab and the activist al-Shami. Their book offers a knowledgeable, empathetic, morally lucid account of the revolt against the Assad regime and an explanation of why it came to the horror of many of its supporters it became a civil war. *Burning Country* avoids the easy indulgence of indignation; instead, it elicits the voices

of many different Syrians involved in the uprising, acknowledging their suffering as well as their courage, intelligence, and humanity, while explaining the terrible choices that have been forced on them." (The Nation) "Burning Country is both exposition and record of the people behind the Syrian uprising. Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami work to undo the narrative traps that define popular perceptions of Syria, giving color to the individuals who have mounted alternatives for the country and whose stories are little known. What distinguishes the book from other reporting on Syria is its deep look at how cultural and intellectual production has evolved alongside the conflict. (Guernica) "Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami want to keep faith with the original impulse of the Syrian revolution—their book is full of fascinating details about the early protest movements—and they also stress the importance of letting Syrians speak. The chief interest of Burning Country...is its inclusion of voices from the front lines. Burning Country lets us listen to many voices we aren't likely to hear on the news." (New York Review of Books) "Judging from the news coverage, you'd think the Syrian conflict was about everyone but the Syrian people. Syrian perspectives have been almost entirely absent from conversations about the refugee crisis, ISIS and the fate of the Assad regime. Burning Country offers a compelling counter-narrative, rich with the voices of the Syrian people. Equal parts history and analysis, Al-Shami and Yassin-Kassab foreground the grassroots organizations and culture that have flowered in Syria since the revolution began, despite the Assad regime and ISIS's attacks. Most illuminating is the authors' discussion of the local councils that oversee the functioning of public services primarily in rebel-controlled territory, of which there are more than 400." (In These Times) "A number of gripping new books have recently been published that evocatively describe the grim trajectory of Syria's uprising and war. Burning Country explores how Syria's peaceful uprising gave way to armed insurgency and sectarian jihad. They offer a sympathetic portrait of a heroic uprising gone wrong, describing in all too painful detail the transformations wrought by armed groups and Assad's brutality. This is an important, honest and insightful book, well worth anyone's time." (Washington Post) "Provides a comprehensive account of the Syrian revolution from its inception in 2011 to the present. Through interviews with Syrians from across the spectrum of society, the book charts the trajectory of the uprising from the grassroots civil society initiatives that lie at the core of the uprising to its militarization and sectarian polarization." (The Brooklyn Rail) "This book provides an emotionally restrained history of the Syrian people's struggle against the Assad regime. Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami describe a bloody war between two enemies both claiming the soul of a nation. With the Syrian civil war as context, the reader is also presented with

instructive and absorbing discussions of the struggles for power and over ideas within the forces claiming the revolutionary mantle. Although the account written in these pages is of a tragedy beyond most readers' comprehension, it is a tragedy that will continue to be felt around the world, as refugees leave their ruined lives behind in search of some kind of living peace. [Burning Country] should be read by as many people as possible." *The New York Times* (Counterpunch)"As well as a non-orthodox telling of the conflict from the point of view of the activists and fighters who took part in the revolution, the book also speaks to the confusion and reluctance of western progressives to engage in the reality of Syria." (Middle East Eye)"A work that gives a voice to the Syrian revolutionaries who are the political and moral descendants of the brigades that took up arms against Franco in the name of democracy and social justice." (New Politics)"In their new book *Burning Country*, journalist Yassin-Kassab and human rights activist Al-Shami provide a bracing and timely reminder that no matter how long the war rages or how unreachable a political settlement may appear, the world owes it to the Syrian people – especially the peaceful revolutionaries – to listen to their stories and support their cause." *Burning Country* is a portrait of the opposition, a movement of protest against Bashar al-Assad's brutal regime, which has been nearly forgotten amid the humanitarian strife, factionalism, and power politics surrounding and driving the conflict." (Boston Review)"Burning Country is poised to become the definitive book not only on the continuing Syrian conflict but on the country and its society as a whole. Very few books have been written on the kingdom of silence that effectively capture how we all got here while not omitting the human voice, the country's heroes and heroines – a combination that is rare but essential for understanding the conflict and its complexities. Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami have written a must-read book even as the conflict still rages to understand what happened, why it happened and how it should end." (Hassan Hassan, co-author of *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*)"For decades Syrians have been forbidden from telling their own stories and the story of their country, but here Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami tell the Syrian story. Their words represent the devastated country which has denied them and their compatriots political representation. *Burning Country* is an indispensable book for those who wish to know the truth about Syria." (Yassin al-Haj Saleh)"By far the best account of the Syrian uprising yet. It is a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of a multifaceted geopolitical conflict and myriad grassroots struggles. Anyone interested in comprehending the highly convoluted situation in Syria must read this extremely sophisticated book." (Dr. Yasser Munif, co-founder of the Global Campaign of Solidarity with the Syrian Revolution)"It is in British-Syrian writers Yassin-Kassab and Al Shami's *Burning Country* that we find a definitive people's history of the

uprising. The book explains in scrupulous detail the context of the uprising, the aims of the revolution, the regime's brutal response, the causes of militarization, the rise of the Islamists, and the resilience of Syrian society through repression, war, and exile. "Yassin-Kassab, Al Shami, and others have ensured that the answer to 'What do Syrians want?' is no longer a mystery." (Dissent) "Burning Country could have been titled A People's History of the Syrian Revolution and War: it provides a view from below that constitutes the perfect antidote to geopolitical reductionism. This book is unique in its combination of first-hand material derived from fieldwork, factual and analytical rigour, and unshakable faith in the Syrian people's struggle for justice and dignity." (Thomas Pierret Lecturer, University of Edinburgh, Director of the Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World) "This is the best book yet interpreting the tragedies that have befallen Syria since the outbreak of civil war in 2011. It offers the best coverage of the war by two Syrian scholars and journalists who have participated in it. They describe the increasingly oppressive government of President Bashar al-Assad before the war. They also analyze the inability of the secular nationalists to offer meaningful opposition due to societal, class, sectarian, religious, and geographical differences. Syria is, indeed, a burning country, and it will continue to burn. Essential." (Choice) "Illuminates the lives of everyday folks who are traumatized or displaced by violence and war.... The authors' passion for the courage and language of everyday people emboldens their narrative of Syria's 'Arab Spring.'" (Christian Century) "[Burning Country] really digs into the various stages and evolutions of the current conflict." (Megan Price, executive director of the Human Rights Data Analysis Group)

Robin Yassin-Kassab is a regular media commentator on Syria and the Middle East. He is the author of the novel *The Road from Damascus* (Hamish Hamilton, 2008) and a contributor to *Syria Speaks* (Saqi, 2014).

Informative, intelligent, compassionate. A great exposition of one of the great tragedies of our age. We see a people struggling to live meaningful lives as a diverse national community, up against a coalition of fascists whose sole intention is to stamp authoritarian rule on the population. Of particular interest to me was how local communities are organising themselves into people-centred, democratic structures in order to foster the development of caring, cooperative values and at the same time, to defend themselves against the brutality of the regime and its allies. Required reading for all leftwing social activists in particular. There's so much to learn in terms of what one can do in

one's own communities.

Great book. I taught college courses on Syrian history, society and civilization several years ago, and I feel that this book provided an excellent, though stark and horrifying, narrative on the chaos enveloping Syria since 2011. I recommend this book for anyone wanting to make sense of what has and is happening in Syria. This book arrived in the mail in time, and in perfect shape.

Extraordinarily well written, accessible and inspiring. A must-read for all serious about understanding Syria today.

It took me a long time to read this, because there was a lot of information and it wasn't something I could read in long sittings. It was clearly written and well organized, and absolutely fulfilled my goal in reading it to become more informed about the Syrian refugee crisis and it's causes.

Fantastic truth to power account: The revolution protesters' main enemy is the regime - Bashar al-Assad. These were peaceful protesters against a repressive regime. Since his scorched-earth policy and fomenting sectarian divisiveness, the revolution has had to use guns. With Soviet, Iranian and even U.S. policy that claims that ISIS is the primary enemy, has fed into Assad's hands. Everybody is the enemy of ISIS, but even my hero Obama, to help secure the Iran nuclear deal, allows us to think ISIS is the real culprit. All the revolutionaries want is not for Obama to bomb the hell out of Assad, but to supply the rebels and let them fight their own battles. This book explains in horrifying detail the development of the revolution, from background Western influences, to on-the-ground democratic resistance to the steady annihilation of innocent civilians of his own country AS A STRATEGY OF WAR, to modern outside influences ,including Moslem countries and forces in the region, Even the plight of supportive communities who have helped hundreds of thousands of starving refugees in Jordan, for example, are now starving themselves...and so much more about the internal complicated strange bedfellows that have emerged. What a tragic story boldly told.

I had the honor of meeting the authors of this wonderful book and was fortunate to hear them speak in even greater detail about the content. They were so kind and willing to answer any questions that I had. They are so passionate about their work and will go to the ends of the Earth to ensure that the voices of those in Syria are heard. This is a must read!

I had the privilege of meeting the authors when they did a book tour in the United States and continue to keep in touch with them via their blogs. This is the best researched and documented book on the conflict and I urge everyone to read it. I would question anything written by non Arabic speaking Westerners that make it all about the US or all about the west.

This is the most comprehensive and accurate account of the Syrian uprising that I have come across. The details and key points they pick for each event are exactly the ones that need to be highlighted. Now when people ask me for the "one book" to read on Syria, I know what to recommend.

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