

The Stakes of Trust: Sponsorship Relations and Regulation of Mobilities in Iraqi Kurdistan



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Since 2005, more than 2 million Iraqi Arabs fleeing political violence have sought out a Kurdish sponsor who would allow them to stay in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. For Iraqi Kurds, the process of offering sponsorship contracts (known as kafala) is highly fluid and legally unstable, involving heated negotiations with Kurdish authorities and humanitarian workers. Despite its tenuousness, Iraqi Kurdish civilians increasingly offer sponsorship contracts as a personal claim to sovereignty over this mountainous northern region, and to ensure its stability. Meanwhile, Iraqi Arabs must prove themselves trustworthy of receiving sponsorship, while encumbered by the long history of the former Ba’athist government’s violence against Kurds. My project investigates how this sponsorship system generates discourses and practices of morality, law and order in the otherwise unpredictable post-invasion Iraq.

In this talk, I will sketch out some of the arguments I have been working towards that intend to challenge assumptions about popular sovereignty, scalar logics of law, and moral obligations in contracts. The bulk of the project cohered rather quickly, and I will be presenting vignettes that are flawed in one way or another. I welcome your feedback of any kind.

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Building 50, 51A



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BROWN BAG FORUM