

INTRODUCTION

POLITICS

Politics matters.

If you live in Syria today, you are stuck in a kind of hell: life is frightening, violent, unpredictable, impoverished and, for all too many Syrians, short. As I write, estimates for the number of Syrians killed in the civil war range from 80,000 to 200,000. (The gulf between the estimates is a sign of how bad things are: the dead have disappeared into a cloud of disinformation.) The people who have seen their quality of life displaced runs into the millions. The number who have seen their quality of life depleted because of the violence includes just about everybody in the country (unemployment in 2014 is reckoned to be about 60 per cent). No one in their right mind would choose to live in Syria right now.

If you are lucky enough to live in Denmark, you are in what is by any historical standards a version of heaven: life is comfortable, prosperous, protected and civilised, and it lasts. The world envies Denmark its fantastic restaurants, its classy television programmes, its elegant design culture, its generous social security provisions, its environmentally friendly lifestyles. Denmark comes at or near the

top of international comparisons that measure quality of life and the contentment of citizens. Danes regularly report that they are happier than anyone else. Perhaps not everyone would choose to live in Denmark: the downside, like many versions of heaven, is that it might be a little boring. But if you had no prior attachments, you’d pick Denmark over Syria any day.

SYRIA 2014



The difference isn’t that Danes are better people than Syrians. They aren’t inherently nicer or smarter: people are pretty much people the world over. Nor have Danes been blessed with greater