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VOLUME 2-1 (2014)



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON



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Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: “Brill”. See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISBN 978-90-04-70652-1 (paperback)

ISBN 978-90-04-70653-8 (e-book)

DOI 10.1163/9789004706538

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Editorial

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Almost a century ago, Memduh Selim wrote in the Kurdish magazine *Jîn*, which appeared in Istanbul, about the importance of festivals and commemorations for national awareness, and he urged the Kurds to follow the example of other nations and cultivate their national days. The mobilising potential of such celebrations and the various symbols associated with them has been amply proven in the case of the Kurds. As the major festivals to be celebrated, Memduh Bey mentioned Kurdish New Year (*sersal*) and the day of Kawa the Blacksmith, the hero who slew the tyrannical king Zahhak. He believed that the latter day was to be celebrated towards the end of summer. Later generations joined the symbol of Kawa's uprising to the spring festival, making Newroz/Nowruz a festival of rebirth, resistance and liberation. Although other Iranian and Turkic peoples also celebrate Nowruz, the day has acquired a distinct symbolic meaning for the Kurds. The festival and the myth associated with it are shared by Kurds of all countries; it has become a core aspect of Kurdish identity as well as a symbol of the Kurdish struggle against oppression.

It did not occur to Memduh Bey to mention days of mourning in this connection; the century that separates us from him, however, was marked by grave human-made disasters that left deep imprints on people's memories and collective consciousness. For the Kurds, the chemical attack on Halabja (on 16 March 1988) and the following Anfal operations (in summer 1988) constitute such defining traumatic events – especially Halabja, if only because of the iconic photographic images of victims, which were endlessly reproduced, and Şivan Perwer's haunting elegy. Halabja has become part of the Kurds' collective memory, not only in Iraq but in Turkey, Iran and Syria as well. The memory of Halabja is part of what it is to be a Kurd, of what constitutes Kurdish identity. So is the memory of earlier dramatic massacres such as those of Dersim in 1938.

Before the age of mass education and literacy, it used to be storytellers and bards, known as *dengbêj*, who were the keepers of Kurdish society's social memory, handing down narratives of major events as well as stories

embodying Kurdish values from generation to generation. As Kurdish society urbanised and books and newspapers gradually came to replace oral tradition, the *dengbêj* appeared to be losing their social function, although cassette recordings of the greatest *dengbêj* of the past continued to be sold. Due to the resurgence of interest in Kurdish culture that began among the Kurds of Turkey in the 1990s, the *dengbêj* were rediscovered as the core institution of Kurdish oral tradition, becoming themselves symbols of Kurdish culture and Kurdish identity, and a remarkable revival of the *dengbêj* tradition took place.

The reworking of these various symbols of identity in Kurdish cultural production is the overriding theme of this second issue of *Kurdish Studies*. Hilla Peled-Shapira's contribution focuses on the impact of Halabja on literary writing, and Wendy Hamelink and Hanifi Barış write on the revived *dengbêj* tradition. In his broad comparison of the Kurdish political struggles of the 1980s and the 2000s, Hamit Bozarslan implicitly comments on these symbols too. Halabja and the Anfal were the culmination of a period that boded defeat and weakness for the Kurdish people, but in the same years Newroz became a widely shared symbol of continued struggle. In the past decade, in spite of divisions, the Kurds have established themselves as major political actors in the region, who will play key roles in the future of Iraq, Turkey and Syria.

These contributions also exemplify the range of disciplinary approaches that are flourishing in the field of Kurdish studies. We intend to publish interesting and innovative work in yet other disciplines in our future issues. Kurdish studies have moved from the margins of academia and have become a respectable subject that attracts numerous young researchers working in academic institutions across the planet. The increasing prominence of Kurdish studies in academia reflects, of course, the increased prominence of the Kurds in the Middle East and the strength of the Kurdish diaspora as well as global shifts in academic interest and research funding.

One dramatic consequence of such global shifts has been the decline of Soviet Kurdology, which had long been the most strongly institutionalised school of Kurdish studies. Khanna Omarkhali's obituary of Moscow-based scholar Olga Jigalina (Ol'ga Zhigalina) is, in a sense, also an obituary of Soviet Kurdology: there is no real successor to Jigalina in Moscow. Khanna Omarkhali is herself the last young scholar to have received the thorough philological training of the Leningrad/St.-Petersburg school, but she now works in the West. Only a small fraction of the important work by Soviet Kurdologists (and the Iraqi Kurds who studied in the Soviet Union) is available in Western translations or summaries, but its significance remains undiminished.

On the other hand, Kurdish studies are now developing seriously in what used to be a most unlikely place: the Republic of Turkey. Mardin's Artuklu

University is the main centre of this development, with a large department of Kurdish language and literature and with anthropologists, historians, archaeologists and art historians whose work is focused on the region, but several other universities have also opened modest departments of Kurdish linguistics. Moreover, at numerous other universities students are writing theses and dissertations on Kurdish subjects. This is not to say that the old prejudices and biases of Turkish academia have disappeared overnight, they have not, but this is no doubt a most significant development, which we shall hope to see reflected in future issues of this journal.

Istanbul, 8 May, 2014

Editors' Acknowledgment

We hope the second issue of *Kurdish Studies* with its diverse content including an interview, commentary and articles will stimulate our readers and invite and encourage fresh and insightful research in the field and for future issues. As always, we are indebted to our colleagues who made this issue possible by submitting their high quality work. We are also grateful to our colleagues on the editorial board and all those who continue to contribute, support and promote *Kurdish Studies*. Our gratitude extends to our anonymous reviewers who shared their expert knowledge and provided constructive feedback helping us aim for the highest quality content. Through their kind translation of the abstracts of the articles into Kurmanji and Sorani, Deniz Ekici, Farhad Shakely and Beyan Farshi have made it possible for us to continue implementing this important journal policy. We would also like to take this opportunity to welcome on board our new copy editor Naomi Houghton, who has done an excellent job in editing the content of this issue. Finally we would like to thank Ahmed Foundation for Kurdish Studies (USA) for sponsoring online open access for the articles in this issue.

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The Kurds and Middle Eastern “State of Violence”: the 1980s and 2010s

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Abstract

Through a macro-level analysis this article examines the evolution of the Kurdish issue since the occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the Syrian crisis in 2011, underlining the necessity of a comparison between the current period and past situations, namely that of the 1980s. Kurdish actors participated from a rather weak position in the Middle-East wide conflicts during the 1980s; alliances with regional states that gave access to political and military resources ensured their durability, but a high price was paid for their transformation into subordinated players of a broader “state of violence”. Since 2011, the trans-border Kurdish space finds itself once again in the heart of a “system of transaction” based on violence, but Kurdish organisations face the new region-wide conflicts in a position of empowerment in Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

Keywords

Kurdish movements – state of violence – Iraq – Syria – Turkey

Kurd û Rewşa Tund ya Rojhilata Navîn: 1980yan û 2010an

Ev gotar, bi rêka helsegeka asta-makro, vedikole li peresîna pîrsgirêka Kurdî ji dema dagirbûna Iraqê di 2003yê da û qeyrana Sûriyeyê di 2011ê da û bi taybetî beldikişîne

ser pêwistiya berhevdaneka di navbera serdema niha û rewşa borî, anku rewşa salên 80yan. Di salên 80yan da hêzên Kurd pitir ji pozisyoneka qels û lawaz beşdarî dijberî û aloziyên Rojhilata Navîn bûn; hevalbendiyên li gel dewletên li herêmê rê da bikaranîna çavkaniyên siyasî û leşkerî bo misogerkirina berdewamiya hêzên Kurd; lê van dewletan, bi hewldanên giranbûha, hişt ku kurd bimînin wekî aktorên bindest di nav rewşa tund ya herêmê da. Ji 2011ê ve, tevgera kurd ya dersînor careka din xwe di navenda pergaleka tund da dibine; lê vê carê rêxistinên kurd yê li Iraq, Sûriye û Tirkîyeyê ji pozisyoneka bihêz rûberî vê dijberiya berfireh ya heremî ne.

كورد و ”بارى توندوتیژی“ی رۆژه‌لاتی ناوه‌راست: ١٩٨٠کان و ١٠١٠یەکان

حەتە گەرچی ئەم گوتارە شیکردنەوێهە لە پلە یەکەم بەلادا، لە گەشە کردنی پرسى کورد ورد دەبینێتووه لە داگیرکردنی عێراقەوێهە ساڵی ٢٠٠٣ و لە قەیرانی سووریاوێهە ساڵی ٢٠٠٣، ئەوێهەش جەخت دەکات کە پێویستە بەراورد بکەیت لە نێوان قۆناغی ئێستا و و هەلومەرجی رابوردوودا، واتە هەلومەرجی ١٩٨٢. ئەخشیگێرانی کورد لە هەلۆیستیکى تا رادەیه‌ک لاوازه‌وه بەشدارییان لە ناکۆکییه فراوانه‌کانی رۆژه‌لاتی ناوه‌راستی ١٩٨٢. کاندای کرد؛ هاوێه‌ییمانیکردن لە گەل دەوله‌تانی ناوچه‌ییدا کە ده‌بووه‌ هۆی ده‌ستکه‌وتنی سه‌رچاوه‌ی سیاسی و عه‌سکه‌ری، مانه‌وه‌یانی دااین ده‌کرد، به‌لام ده‌بوو نرخیکی زۆریش بده‌ن بۆ ئەوێه‌ی بینه‌ یاریکه‌ری لاوه‌کی له ”بارى توندوتیژی“یەکی به‌ربلاویدا. لە ساڵی ٢٠٠٣ به‌ دواوه‌، روویبۆی کوردی ئه‌مدیو و ئه‌ودبۆی سنوره‌کان جارێکی دیکه‌ خۆی له‌ ناوچه‌رگه‌ی ”سیسته‌میکی بده‌ و بستینه‌“دا ده‌بینێتووه‌ کە له‌سه‌ر توندوتیژی هه‌لچنراوه‌، به‌لام رێکخراوه‌ کوردیه‌کان کە رووبه‌رووی ناکۆکییه‌ به‌ربلاوه‌کانی ناوچه‌کە ده‌بنه‌وه‌، له‌ پلە یەکەم توانستدان له‌ عێراق، سووریا و تورکیا.

The Middle East of the 1980s¹

The aim of this article, which deliberately adopts a macro-level analysis, is to suggest that in order to understand the evolution of the Kurdish issue since the occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the Syrian crisis in 2011, one needs to take into account the dynamics of a middle-term historical period going back to 1979, as well as a broader spatial scale, including other parts of the Middle East.

1 Some aspects of this article feature in my forthcoming contribution “The Kurdish Issue in Turkey of 2010’s” (*Orient*, 2014).

The choice of the year 1979 is in no one way arbitrary. Through its long-lasting follow-ups and by-products, this date, together with those of 1918/19 and 1948, became the third most important year in the very formation of the Middle East (Lesch, 2001; Bozarслан, 2012). Following the recognition of Israel by Egypt, the Iranian Revolution and the occupation of Afghanistan by the Red Army, all in this same year, the Middle East broadly speaking entered a new historical cycle determined by the extreme weakening of left-wing movements and an almost hegemonic domination of Islamism. In the following decade, while the heavily authoritarian regimes consolidated their grip in Iraq and Syria, the Iran-Iraq War, the war in Afghanistan and the intensification of the Lebanese Civil War cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Throughout the 1980s, inter-state borders, which Anthony Giddens defines as “power containers” (Giddens, 1987: 120), were transformed into intensely violent zones, where frontiers separating state and non-state actors became blurred and a wide-scale military transhumance propelled tens of thousands young men, including the future leaders of al-Qaida such as Bin Laden and al-Zawahari, from the Arab world to Pakistan and Afghanistan. While no external power could play the role of an arbiter or a regulator in the resolution of these conflicts, major regional states and non-state actors found themselves drawn into a “system of transaction” based on violence (Pécaut, 1997). This violence, which cannot be understood without taking into account the power relations at the macro, mezzo and micro-levels, thus appeared as a resource allowing the grand and small regional forces to ensure their durability.

Following the French philosopher Frédéric Gros, one can define this long decade as the decade of a “state of violence” (Gros, 2006). By this Gros means the “end of discontinuities” between war and peace, periods of mobilisation and demobilisation, domestic law-keeping and external war making operations. Beyond this *ad minima* definition, which Gros proposed mainly to understand the evolution of the Western democracies in the 1990s and 2000s, one can also define a “state of violence” as the end of discontinuities between war and ordinary forms of violence, states and non-state agents, state-making and consolidation processes and those of violent contests targeting the states’ authorities. In such a configuration, violence does not only affect the peripheries of a given state, but also its very heart, the “centre” itself being transformed into a producer of a social, political and communitarian violence through the systemic use of non-state actors and/or means. Such a “state of violence” challenges, both theoretically and empirically, Eliasian or Weberian sociology, which present the state building process as the process of pacification of a delineated space and the state itself as an organ monopolising successfully the instruments of coercion.

The State of Violence of the 2010s

To some extent, the historical cycle which started with the dramatic events of 1979 lasted until the Arab revolutionary contests of 2011. Less than three years after the fall of Ben Ali, Mubarak and al-Ghaddafi, with the beginning of mass-contests in Bahrain, Yemen and Syria, the Middle East broadly speaking appears, once again, to be gripped by the turmoil of a new state of violence. Notwithstanding the important transformations of the very political landscape of the region, one is in fact struck by the parallels between the situation of today and that of the 1980s. Many parts of the broader Middle East, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, Yemen, Syria (Iraq and Lebanon are also heavily affected by the Syrian conflict), Sinai and Gaza, Libya and the vast neighbouring zones in Africa, experience a massive phenomenon of violence. Not only has the internal territorial fragmentation gained a paroxysmal feature in all these spaces, the sectarian dynamics have become much stronger than in the 1980s, re-drawing the entire map of the “narrow” Middle East (Egypt, the “Fertile Crescent”, Gulf countries, Iran and Turkey, Pakistan) along sectarian borders. While the frontiers between state and non-state actors are once again blurred and many trans-border or supra-territorial armed militants are active throughout the region, many parts of the so-called national territories are controlled by an increasing number of intra or supra-state militias. No external power, be it Russia or a Western country, can impose itself as an arbiter or as an “international” Leviathan able to resolve these regional conflicts. As the main world powers have little capacity of intervention or arbitration, the macro-level *status quo* remains unchanged, but as in the 1980s, no state or non-state actor can itself refrain from the use of violence as a survival safeguard.

As in the 1980s, in the 2010s Middle Eastern minorities² find themselves, either geographically or politically, in the interstices of these regional conflicts. There is no doubt that they pay a heavy price for these wars, which are, in no way, related to their cause, but they are also obliged to adapt themselves to the constraints of this new situation, or even to try to survive thanks to the resources and new opportunities that they can engender. In fact, one of the decisive features of the on-going state of violence (as in the 1980s) is that, the regional powers have deeply contradictory long-term interests and yet, they are condemned to producing almost exclusively day-to-day policies. This uncertainty, which

2 The term “minority” is understood here not in a demographic sense, but in the sense of the communities that have been reduced to “minorities” as a consequence of relations of domination and subordination of a given political space and through a series of mechanisms of exclusion and denial.

obliges them to favour tactical steps instead of developing coherent long-term strategies, prohibits the formation of a regional system of security, and creates some room for manoeuvre for non-state actors, among them the trans-border or supra-territorial minorities, including Kurds. The relations that the states establish with non-state actors in the course of this process do not have any transformative effect on the region-wide power equilibrium, nor on the long term status of the minorities; still, they clearly show the limits of the Westphalian model of state, as it was imposed throughout the 20th Century, through forced divisions (Kurdistan, mandatory Arab world of the 1920s), or constraint unifications (Libya, Yemen), to Middle Eastern societies.

The Kurds in the 1980s, the Kurds in the 2010s

The Kurds were among the major victims, but minor actors of state of violence during the 1980s. More than 200,000 Kurds were killed between 1979 and 1991 as a consequence of state coercion in Iran, Iraq and Turkey; thousands of villages have also been destroyed in these two latter countries. Moreover, ethnic cleansing of the Kurds took a dramatic shape in Iraq, with tens of thousands of Kurdish families being expelled from the Kirkuk region (Randal, 1997). One should also mention that through the assassination of Abdurrahman Qasimlo, the leader of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (*Partiya Demokratîk a Kurdîstana Iranê*, PDKI) in 1989 in Vienna, the Iranian government managed to decapitate the Kurdish leadership within Iran.

Conversely, as we shall see later, during this decade Iraqi Kurdish organisations found some shelter in Iran as well as in Syria, while Iraq hosted Iranian Kurdish organisations (van Bruinessen, 1988). The Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK), which gradually became the hegemon Kurdish actor in Turkey, was able to establish an alliance with Syria and to reorganise its combatants in Lebanon during the civil war before launching its long-lasting guerrilla warfare in Turkish Kurdistan in 1984. In sum, *nolens volens* the Kurdish organisations took part, although in a subordinated position, to the regional system of violence as well as to the region-wide military mobility.

As the 2013 fighting between the Party of Democratic Unity (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*, PYD) and Jabhat al-Nusra (*Front of Victory*, affiliated to al-Qaida) in Syria show, Kurdistan is also one of the main theatres of the state of violence of the 2010s. However, compared to that of the 1980s, Kurdish society, politics and politicians present an entirely new shape (Ahmed and Gunter, 2013). The dynamism of the Kurdish diaspora, formed in the wake of the arrival of tens of

thousands of militants, intellectuals and young men and women who fled wars and repression in Kurdistan and sought shelter in Europe in the 1980s (Eliassi, 2013; Başer, 2013), and the vivacity of the Kurdish studies, arts and literature both in Europe and in the Middle East, suffice to understand the sharp contrasts between the two periods (Scalbert-Yücel, 2014). Among the most important differences between the two periods, however, has been the emergence of a Kurdish federal entity in Iraq which, in spite of its domestic problems such as wide-spread corruption and lack of integration of younger generations, represents one of the most dynamic, politically pluralistic and peaceful spaces in the Middle East. For the first time in the 20th Century, an entire generation has been formed under “Kurdish rule”, and, notwithstanding the political clientelism, viable institutions, including parliamentary ones, have been established (Lawrence, 2008). The weak post-Saddam Hussein Iraqi state has obviously no means to envision, at least for the foreseeable future, a policy based on a military option against its Kurds as its predecessors did (Ahmed and Gunter, 2005).

The second major – and still uncertain – evolution concerns the constitution of a *de facto* autonomous Kurdish region in Syria. After a long decade of repression against any Kurdish civil or political initiative (Tejel, 2009), Bashar al-Assad decided to retire his forces from the Kurdish regions in the summer of 2012 in order to consolidate power in his strategic strongholds. Although the formation of this new entity was a result of the al-Assad regime’s incapacity to control the entire Syrian territory, as well as its intense conflict with Turkey (which openly armed the Syrian opposition), it has radically changed the very shape of the Kurdish issue in the Middle East.

Finally, in Turkey, where the military has for the moment been politically subordinated, the government of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) decided to improve its relations with the Iraqi Kurdish authorities. While Ankara’s commercial interests and its will to ease an almost exclusive energy dependency on Iran and Russia push it towards a rapprochement with Iraqi Kurdistan (Idiz, 2013),³ its limited room for manoeuvre obliges it to accept the existence of a Kurdish entity in Syria (Çandar, 2013). The aid it has given to *Jabhat-al Nusra* in the summer of 2013 and the building of a wall militarising the intra-Kurdish borders separating Syria and Turkey, show however that it has not abandoned its policy of “containment” vis-à-vis the Syrian Kurds.

3 See also: “New Kurdistan Oil Pipeline Boosts Kurds in Stand-off with Baghdad”. (2013, 17 October). *Reuters*.

There is no doubt that Turkey's domestic and region-wide Kurdish policy aim at the transformation of the Kurdish movement into a subordinated actor of AKP's policies inside Turkey; whatever Ankara's short and long-terms aims might be, however, its Kurdish "overture" has largely legitimised the PKK and the legal Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP), and consolidated their social basis (Ekmekçi and Kaya, 2013). The formation of a real hegemonic bloc around the PKK-BDP in Kurdistan in Turkey (more than 30 deputies, around 100 municipalities, among them those of seven important large cities) (Watts, 2010), should be mentioned not because it is a new phenomenon, but because it has become such a substantial and durable one. The end of the Kurdish taboo in Turkey (Gunes and Zeydanlıoğlu, 2014) does not mean that one should exclude the possibility of a return to extremely repressive policies, such as Erdoğan's government followed in 2011–2012; but after 30 years of internal war, Ankara seems finally to be aware that "coercion" cannot be its *exclusive* political line. Thus, bar a new military coup or an electoral victory of the Turkish ultra-nationalist parties, a return to a policy of simple denial of the Kurdish issue, which marked the 1980s and 1990s, would be most unlikely.

Given the changes observed in these three countries, it would be possible to say it is only in Iran that the main determinants of the Kurdish question have remained almost untouched over the past decade. However, if it is true that the extremely timid "overtures" of the Muhammed Khatami period (1997–2005) did not survive the repressive presidency of Mahmud Ahmadinejad (Elling, 2013), it is also important to underline that, after a decade of heavy fighting between the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (*Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê*, PJAK) and the *pasdarans* (*Revolutionary Guards*), Tehran, for tactical reasons, agreed to negotiate a cease-fire with PJAK in 2011. Although it would be illusory to expect radical changes in the Iranian domestic and militia-based foreign policy in the short term, the presidency of Hassan Rohani, which started in 2013, may take some steps to reduce the massive Kurdish discontent that marked the 2000s. The intellectual and social vivacity of the Iranian Kurdish society, which has largely boycotted post-Khatami elections, is a clear sign that in the event of a deep political crisis, the Kurdish question will be at the top of the political agenda in this country.

These developments, which would have seemed unbelievable even to the most optimistic observer only two decades ago, naturally do not mark the end of the process of subordination of the Kurds in the Middle East. However, they provide the Kurds with an important capacity of "empowerment" and resistance, that no Kurdish movement could have had during the previous periods of military contest (1920s and 1930s, 1946, 1961–1975), or between 1979 and 1991.

They also go hand-in-hand with profound changes that one observes in Kurdish society, including in the very formulation of “Kurdish politics”. During the last decades, Kurdish society in Iraq and Turkey has become a predominantly urban society, where thousands of villages were systematically destroyed during the 1980s and 1990s, and in Iran and Syria, where developments gave way to the emergence of a middle classes, distinct from the former urban notabilities or craftsmen. The emergence of this class metamorphosed the Kurdish urban landscape and gave birth to a new *habitus*, new ways of consuming, living, socialising, thinking and struggling. An intellectual “class”, distinct from the politicised intelligentsia of the 1950s and 1960s, also appeared and became the agent of new forms of socialisation, political mobilisations, as well as cultural production. In the 1970s and 1980s, but also in the 1990s, being a “Kurdish militant” primarily meant being a member or sympathiser of a political party; in contrast, the intellectuals of the 2010s develop non-partisan forms of being, behaving, and struggling. Both the middle classes and this intellectual stratum are widely integrated across Kurdistan and entertain close relations with the outside world.

Kurdistan in a Conflicting Regional System

During the last decade, the strategic positions of states in the region-wide power relations, as well as their policies concerning the Kurdish question have, broadly speaking, changed drastically. In the wake of the internal break-up of Syria, which in the 1980s was one of the most important independent players in the Middle East, has largely become a client state, whose regime depends for its survival on Iranian aid as well as military strategies decided by the *pasdars* and Lebanese Hezbollah. Similarly, Iraq, a major independent player and a regional “patron” throughout the 1980s, is today essentially a broken-up client state. While Iraq’s fragmentation explains its incapacity to effectively control its own Sunni areas, not to mention the Kurdish ones, Iraq’s internal paralysis and clientelisation by Iran explains its inability to resist the policies dictated by Teheran.

The absence of Syria and Iraq, two traditional regional players on the regional scene, leaves space for the Gulf countries (which are not under consideration in this article), and two non-Arab countries, Turkey and Iran. Turkey, which in the 1980s was opposed to any Kurdish activism anywhere in the Middle East (but probably hosted non-Kurdish anti-Iranian activities on its soil), is henceforth able to develop complex strategies, seeking an alliance with Iraqi Kurdistan and trying to “co-opt” the Middle-East wide Kurdish political

class. Moreover, Turkey is much more exposed to the domestic impacts of regional conflicts today than in the 1980s, making it even more pressing to seek “regional allies”, including those among the non-state actors.

As the on-going instability along the Turkish-Syrian borders and the Gezi Park protests in the summer of 2013 show, the sectarian orientations of Turkish domestic and regional politics under Erdoğan transformed the Syrian conflict into an intra-Turkish conflict and outraged Turkey’s Alawite and Alevi communities. As a paradoxical and largely unpleasant outcome of this evolution, Turkey also feels “obliged” to defend the Sunni communities throughout the region, among them, Iraqi Kurds. It is true that this “generosity” has not been extended to Syrian Kurds, who are almost exclusively Sunni, but after months of hesitation, Ankara recognised the dangers of its policy of supporting Jihadist movements and was obliged to invite the PYD’s co-chair Salih Muslim to Turkey in order to establish a link with this pro-PKK organisation. Concerning Iran, one should note that it remains a major force in the transborder Kurdish space, and, by the very “green-light” that it has indirectly given to the pro-PKK PYD in Syria, it exerts a great impact on the Kurdish movement within. Similarly, by holding PJAK, close ally of the PKK, in a position of political hostage through the agreement of a long-lasting cease-fire, Tehran also exerts an undeniable pressure on the PKK itself and encourages it to resume its armed struggle against Turkey.

The Kurdish Movement in the 2010s: Unity or Division?

As mentioned earlier, the trans-border Kurdish movement of the 1980s was, by and large, divided; but strange as it might appear, it could also find some parcels of power in its own divisions, which were dictated by the constrained alliances that it had to negotiate with Iran, Iraq or Syria. These divisions, which caused a series of internal conflicts, have further aggravated the dark subjectivities of this decade. The alliances of Kurdish movements with the states which had extremely repressive policies vis-à-vis their own Kurds provoked heavy intra-Kurdish tensions and fratricide and created a real malaise among Kurdish public opinion. This was, to some extent, the price that Kurds, but also other Middle Eastern non-state actors, including the Palestinians, had to pay in order to access resources, to ensure their physical durability.

Compared to this past situation, the Kurdish “political class” of today seems to be much less vulnerable. It is of course difficult to comment on its future ability to preserve such unity in the context of a major regional conflict, for example a deeper “cold war” between Iran and Turkey, or a further aggravation

of the Syrian state of violence, but one should also admit that it was successful enough to keep peaceful and fluid internal relations throughout the 2000s. To some extent, the Kurdish region-wide political landscape has also become more clear-cut during this decade: after the crisis it went through in the wake of Öcalan's arrest in 1999, the PKK imposed itself almost as the sole reference actor in Turkish Kurdistan. It has also become, at once, the inspirer, organiser and protector of the PYD in Syria and the PJAK in Iran, two political parties which are directly linked to the Syrian and Iranian Kurdish society's internal dynamics, but which are often regarded as the PKK's local branches.

There is no doubt that Öcalan's party is unchallenged in Turkey itself. In contrast, and in spite of its willingness to establish its total hegemony, the PYD in Syria is obliged to accept a high degree of intra-Kurdish plurality in what is henceforth known as Kurdistan's *Rojava* (*Western Kurdistan*) region. It is obviously difficult to predict the future evolution of Iranian Kurdistan, where any Kurdish political activity remains underground; but in the context of a future political change, the PJAK will probably also be tempted to impose its hegemony and, at the same time, be forced to accept an asymmetric plurality with other Kurdish actors such as the PDKI, Komala and their dissident branches. One could thus consider the PKK as a major actor with a trans-Kurdish implantation, and therefore, as a structural pillar of the Kurdish political sphere well beyond Turkey.

As far as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (*Partîya Demokrata Kurdistan*, KDP) of Massoud Barzani is concerned, it occupies a dominant (but not a hegemonic) position Iraqi Kurdistan; but it imposes itself as a model and protector of the other Kurdish political formations in Iran and Syria, such as the PDKI and the Kurdish National Council (*Encûmena Nîştîmanî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê*, KNC). It is naturally obliged to accept Iraqi Kurdistan's internal plurality, and the challenge posed by the strong opposition of the Goran (*Change*) movement, now the second major political force in Iraqi Kurdistan; but thanks to important symbolic and material resources at its disposal, it can be considered as the second structuring pillar of the Kurdish political scene.

A Constrained Coexistence

This evolution does not only illustrate a highly fascinating model of construction of a trans-border political space, but also obliges Kurdish organisations, among them the two major players the PKK and the KDP, to establish a mutual understanding, to fix the rules of coexistence, including those regulating their respective autonomies and interdependence, and to delineate their individual

margins of action. It also means that they have to accept that no one can deny the other the possibility of “contracting” tactical alliances with a state, but at the same time, both of them have to agree that these alliances must not threaten a given Kurdish actor and the Kurdish cause broadly speaking, as was the case in the 1980s. It is, however, obvious that given regional constraints, as well as policies of blackmail used by Turkey and Iran on their own Kurds, this political system can only evolve on a knife edge.

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BRILL

Was Halabja a Turning Point for the Poet Buland al-Haydari?

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Abstract

This article examines the writings of the emigré Iraqi-Kurdish poet Buland al-Haydari (1926–1996) and thus explores components of his identity as reflected in themes and motifs of his poetry, in light of the fact that Iraqis belong to a variety of ethnicities, religions and sects. This article will also address the question of whether the poet's self-perception was transformed from a complex hybrid identity with Muslim, Christian, and other influences but excluding Kurdish elements, to a “new” Kurdish identity, as an outcome of the Iraqi chemical attack on the Kurdish town of Halabja in 1988. The assumption is that although the Halabja incident was the point at which the poet began to relate to his Kurdish origins, he was still loyal to Baghdad, to Iraq and to Arab culture, rather than solely emphasising his Kurdish identity. The article will examine the thematic and aesthetic effects of the tragedy in Halabja on al-Haydari's poetry in Arabic, focusing on different forms of identity as reflected in the poetry of this political activist.

Keywords

Iraq – Halabja – Buland al-Haydari – Kurdish identity – poetry

Gelo Helebçe xala werçerxê bû bo helbestvan Bulend el-Heyderî?

Ev gotar vekolînek e li ser nivîsên helbestvan Buland el-Heyderî (1926–1996) ku koç-berekî ji Kurdên Iraqê bû. Ji ber hindê, ev gotar hêmanên nasnameya wî, yên ku di babet û motîvên helbestên wî da rengvedane, derdihîne li gel hayjêhebûna ku Iraqî xwedî nasnameyên têvel yên etnikî, dînî û mezhebî ne. Herwisan, ev gotar dê hewl bide ku pîrsekê ji bibersivîne: Gelo wekî encama êrîşa Iraqê ya kîmyayî li ser bajarê Helebçeyê di 1988ê da, xwebîniya vî helbestvanî ji nasnameya wî ya durehî ya têkel – wekî Misilmanî, Mesîhîti û bandorên din, ji bilî hêmanên Kurdîtiyê – ber bi nasnameyeka Kurdî ya nû ve daguheriye? Pêşbînî ev e ku herçend helbestvan vegeriya ser rehên xwe yên Kurdîtiyê, ew pirtir maye dilsozê Bexda, Iraq û çanda Ereban, ji dêlva ku tenê pûte bi nasnameya xwe ya Kurdîtiyê bide. Ev gotar dê bandora tematîk û estetîk ya trajediya Helebçeyê li ser helbestên Haydarî yên bi Erebi vekole bi baldariyeka li ser şeweyên têvel ên nasnameyê ku rengvedane di helbestên vî aktivîstê siyâsî da.

ئايا هه‌له‌بچه خالی وه‌رچه‌رخان بوو بۆ بۆله‌ند ئه‌لحه‌یده‌ریی شاعیر؟

ئهم گوتاره‌له‌نووسینه‌کانی شاعیری عیراقي – کوردی کۆچبهر بۆله‌ند ئه‌لحه‌یده‌ری (1926–1926) ورد ده‌بیته‌وه و به‌و شیوه‌یه‌یش به‌شه‌ پینکه‌ینه‌کانی ناسنامه‌ی وی، وه‌ک له‌ بابته‌ و موتیفه‌کانی شیعره‌کانیدا ره‌نگیان داوه‌ته‌وه، ده‌رده‌خات، له‌بهر رووناکیی ئه‌و پراستییه‌دا که عیراقيیه‌کان سه‌ر به‌ ئیبتنیک و ئابین و کۆمه‌لی جۆراوجۆرن. ئهم وتاره‌ رووبه‌رووی ئه‌و پرسیاره‌یش ده‌بیته‌وه که ئایا خۆناسینی شاعیر ئه‌و شیوه‌گۆرییه‌ی به‌سه‌ردا هاتوو له‌ ناسنامه‌یه‌کی تیکه‌لاوی ئالۆزکاوه‌وه که کارکردی موسلمان، مه‌سیحی و شتی دیکه‌ی له‌سه‌ر بووه، به‌لام کوردی تیدا نه‌بووه، بیته‌ ناسنامه‌یه‌کی ”نوی“ی کوردی، وه‌ک ئه‌نجامیکی ئه‌وه‌ی که عیراق شاری کوردی هه‌له‌بچه‌ی له‌ 1926 دا گازباران کرد؟ وا داده‌نریت که ئه‌گه‌رچی رووداوه‌که‌ی هه‌له‌بچه‌ ئه‌و نوخته‌یه‌ بوو که شاعیر لیبه‌وه‌ ده‌ستی پین کرد بگه‌رپه‌ته‌وه‌ بۆ ره‌گۆریشه‌ی کوردانه‌ی خۆی، به‌لام هیشتا‌یش هه‌ر دلسۆز بوو بۆ به‌غدا، بۆ عیراق و بۆ فه‌ره‌نگی عه‌ره‌ب، نه‌ک ئه‌وه‌ی ته‌نیا ناسنامه‌ی کوردانه‌ی خۆی جه‌خت بکات. وتاره‌که‌ له‌ کارکردی بابته‌ و ئیستییتیکی کاره‌ساته‌که‌ی هه‌له‌بچه‌ له‌سه‌ر شیعره‌ی عه‌ره‌بیی ئه‌لحه‌یده‌ری ورد ده‌بیته‌وه و پین له‌سه‌ر شیوه‌ی جیاوازی ناسنامه‌ داده‌گریت وه‌ک له‌ شیعره‌ی ئهم چالاکه‌ سیاسیه‌دا ره‌نگی داوه‌ته‌وه.

Introduction

In his article on the formation of national identity, Smith (1995: 129–153) explains that human beings have several identities and can simultaneously identify with all of them. Among these different identities, the status of the ethnic community to which the individual belongs is predominant. Smith's observation notwithstanding, young intellectuals in Baghdad in the 1940s and 1950s did not pay much attention to their ethnic, religious or sectarian heritage. On the contrary, they stressed the fact that they were first-and-foremost a part of Iraq, prior to being a part of any other entity, especially "Arabised Kurds", "who had long been integrated into the Arab milieu" (Bashkin, 2009: 183, 185). Indeed, Natali (2005: 44–46) asserts that in the mid-twentieth century Kurds in Iraq "chose to be Iraqis first and emphasise Kurdish nationalism within a democratic Iraq", for several reasons, mainly political. Whether Shia, Sunni, Jewish or Kurdish, they took an active part in the social and cultural milieu in Baghdad at that time (Bashkin, 2009).

In this article I argue that the *Halabja* massacre in 1988, in which thousands of Kurdish men, women and children were brutally murdered with lethal nerve agents dropped by the Iraqi air force, was the turning point at which the Iraqi-Kurdish poet Buland al-Haydari began to relate to his Kurdish identity, but in a way that did not completely change his Arab identity or his longing for Arab culture and for Baghdad. Through my analysis I will show that until *Halabja* al-Haydari ascribed himself a complex hybrid identity, but following the *Halabja* atrocity, apart from describing the massacre and Kurdistan with great pain, he still considered himself an Arab and Iraqi before any other identity.

Cultural and Political Background

Baghdad of the 1940s and 1950s was a city in which art and literature flourished and artists, sculptors, poets, novelists, painters etc. gathered and intensely discussed political and artistic issues (Bashkin, 2009). One of the literary groups in Baghdad during this period was *Jama'at al-waqt al-da'i* (*The Lost Time Society*) in which members from different ethnic and religious backgrounds were active. The members of this group strived to promote Iraqi culture and literature in particular, under the influence of Western movements and trends (al-Musawi, 1985: 334–335; Shulayba, 1996: 61; Caiani and Cobham, 2013: 38–41). Buland al-Haydari was a prominent member of this society and an integral part of the literary fabric of the Iraqi capital of the 1940s (Baram, 1991: 87).

Al-Haydari was born to an aristocratic family but was largely self-educated. Following the transformation of Iraq from a monarchy to a republic in 1958, al-Haydari had hopes for a more benign government. Nevertheless, despite the creative atmosphere in Baghdad, leftist artists, communists in particular, suffered harsh persecution by the Iraqi authorities. Artists, journalists and intellectuals with leftist leanings, were dismissed from their jobs, arrested, imprisoned, tortured, executed and exiled (al-Azzawi, 1997: 271–272; Al-Sa'idi, 1996; Al-Hajj, 1993: 103, 121–122; Fattal, 2003: 304, 309–317). Places where they used to gather were shut down (Jabra, 1994: 175) and those who were editors of newspapers were put on trial (Fawzi, 1985: 47–78). Al-Haydari, too, was a victim of such persecution. Thus he emigrated to Beirut between 1963 and 1976, returning to Iraq until 1980 and then moved to London (Ajami, 1998: 3–7; Basri, 1992: 91; Jabra, 1994: 123–124; Campbell, 1996: 519–520; Moreh, 1976: 271; Boullata, 2010: 278).

Like other Iraqi-Kurdish novelists, who sometimes preferred to write in Arabic rather than in Kurdish in order to reach a larger audience (Zeidel, 2011: 29), in addition to his poems in Kurdish, al-Haydari chose Arabic as the language of his books on culture and literature, articles on art, and nine poetry collections.¹ This choice of language, and his choice of subject matter, as will be described hereafter, could in fact be taken as evidence that al-Haydari perceived himself as an Iraqi prior to any other identity.

In 1988, at the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi army launched an onslaught during the *Anfal* operation against the border town of *Halabja*, in which Iraqi aeroplanes dropped canisters of poison gas brutally killing around 5000 men,

1 The following is a list of al-Haydari's publications. Poetry collections: *Khafqat al-tin* (*Clay Pulse*, Baghdad, 1946), *Aghani al-madina al-mayyita* (*Songs of the Dead City*, Baghdad, 1951), *Aghani al-madina al-mayyita wa-qasa'id ukhra* (*Songs of the Dead City and Other Poems*, Baghdad, 1957), *Khutuwat fi al-ghurba* (*Steps in Exile*, Sidon, 1965), *Rihlat al-huruf al-sufri* (*Journey of the Yellow Letters*, Beirut, 1968), *Aghani al-haris al-mut'ab* (*Songs of the Tired Guard*, Beirut, 1971), *Hiwar 'abra al-ab'ad althalatha* (*Dialogue across Three Dimensions*, Baghdad, 1972), *Ila Bayrut ma'a tahiyati* (*To Beirut with Greetings*, Cairo, 1984, London 1989), *Abwab ila al-bayt al-dayyiq* (*Doors to the Narrow House*, London, 1990), *al-'amal al-kamila* (*Complete Works*, Kuwait and Cairo, 1992). Essays and books on literature and art: *Isharat 'ala al-tariq wa-niqat daw'* (*Signposts on the Road and Points of Light*, Beirut, 1980), *Zaman li-kull al-azmina: nazarat wa-ara' fi al-fann* (*A Time for All Times: Views and Opinions on Art*, Beirut, 1981), *Madakhil ila al-shi'r al-'iraqi al-hadith* (*Introductions to Modern Iraqi Poetry*, Cairo, 1987). The excerpts from al-Haydari's poems quoted in this article are taken from his *Complete Works* (*al-'amal al-kamila*), Kuwait and Cairo, 1992. This date of publication is probably mistaken since it includes al-Haydari's last collection from 1993, i.e. *The Complete Works* must have been published no earlier than in 1993 and this is how I will refer to it in this article.

women and children. As a consequence of the *Anfal* campaign as a whole, which lasted between February and September 1988, over a hundred-thousand Kurds fled to neighbouring Turkey and Iran. The Iraqi regime continued using chemical weapons in the following months in other regions as well, but the *Halabja* atrocity was such that it became a symbol of the genocide committed by the Iraqi authorities against the Kurdish population. Halabja is also well-known and well-documented due to the fact that it was widely filmed and photographed by journalists whose entry was facilitated by Iran, and because the graphic images were repeatedly broadcast on Iranian TV while the war was still in full swing.

Many survivors later died from their injuries and others were transferred by the Iraqis or executed. Hundreds of Kurdish villages were systematically destroyed and forcefully abandoned in order to prevent Kurdish guerrilla fighters from receiving assistance (Hiltermann, 2007; Bengio, 1989: 193–197, 1996: 228–229, 1999: 153, 2012: 177–183; Tripp, 2000: 244–245; Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, 2001: 268–270; Shohat, 1989: 10; Baram, 1991: 22; Aziz, 2011: 78–79; Hardi, 2011: 13–37).

Al-Haydari's Kurdish Contemporaries

Before we turn to al-Haydari's own complex identity, we should highlight that other Iraqi-Kurdish poets of his time never hesitated to mention and emphasise their Kurdish ethnicity, and thus we do not expect a drastic change in their attitude as a consequence of *Halabja*. If we take, for example, the well-known poet Sherko Bekes (1940–2013), who was banished to southern Iraq and later lived in Iran and Sweden, eventually returning to Kurdistan in 1992 to become the minister of culture in the Kurdistan Regional government (KRG), we see that he wrote poems full of love for Kurdistan and admiration for the brave Kurdish children who dreamt of carrying a gun from a very young age. These poems were written in 1979 and 1985, with no connection to *Halabja* (Weissbort and Simawe, 2003: 62, 267–268). A perusal of the poems of Ahmed Hardi (1922–2006), who like al-Haydari and Bekes had to go into exile, also reveals a very explicit affection for the Kurds as “*God's freedom lovers*” (Weissbort and Simawe, 2003: 90, 268); in fact, he openly identifies himself as a Kurd when he writes: “We Kurds”. A similar attitude towards the Kurds can be found in the poetry of the exile Abdulla Peshew (1946–) as well, although with a more militant tone (Weissbort and Simawe, 2003: 192–193, 272).²

2 The poems in Kurdish to which I refer in these passages were originally translated into English by Muhamad Tawfiq Ali for Weissbort and Simawe's book (2003).

Al-Haydari's Poetry before the *Halabja* Massacre

In contrast to these Kurdish poets, whose Kurdish origins were very dominant in their poetry, al-Haydari did not place much emphasis on his Kurdish background before *Halabja*. He possessed a complex, hybrid identity: he was an Iraqi communist intellectual born to a wealthy Kurdish family, but preferred to associate with the poor; a poet and thinker; a Muslim but probably with secular views, to judge by his bohemian lifestyle; a resident of Baghdad, Beirut and then London; a prisoner and an exile. All these components were part of his life and poetry, but the Kurdish identity had been “abandoned” by him and was “revealed anew” for a while after *Halabja*. We aim to explore whether this newly re-emergent Kurdish identity was of significance or only a vent to express his feelings with regards to the massacre.

Over the years al-Haydari combined influences from different sources in his poetry, alongside unique metaphors derived from the animal world and time expressions that went far beyond physical time and were being used as metaphors for his relations with his homeland and the authorities (Peled-Shapira, 2012, 2013). Many of his poems speak of his love for a woman, real or virtual, and some are addressed to the poetic speaker's son or mother. Some poems describe the opposition intellectual's relationship with the Iraqi regime, his imprisonment and torture, and many others relate to the experience of exile and its attendant difficulties. In other words, al-Haydari “was interested in the depths, in the dark abysses, more than he was interested in clouds, or in feelings which hover in colorful skies” (Huri, 2006: 82).

Muslim Heritage in al-Haydari's Poetry

In his poetry Al-Haydari used traditional Muslim terminology and characters to reflect various difficulties in his intellectual and personal life. Sometimes the distinction between the personal and the collective becomes blurred. One poem with an Islamic hue is “Shall I return ... to whom ...?” (*A'a'udu ... liman ...?*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 793–797). In it the poet reminds the reader of *Abraha*, the Christian Ethiopian ruler of Yemen who according to Muslim tradition tried, unsuccessfully, to destroy the Ka'ba in Mecca. The poetic speaker asks him:

What did you leave for your people
Oh Abraha with the hewn nose
But blind shadows
Inspecting in the corners of the deserted neighbourhood

And black cracking nights
Between the mud and the blood (p. 793)

The character of Abraha in al-Haydari's poem carries a double meaning, since on the one hand it seems to represent the Iraqi ruler who ruins everything, but in the last verses of the poem the poetic speaker requests Abraha to die inside him, so that the speaker will be able to live again, like a forlorn memory that must die in order for a better memory to flourish. The ruins here are the ruins of the people and they are real, in contrast to Abraha's unsuccessful attempt to destroy the Ka'ba. What al-Haydari does here is a technique called *secularisation of the holy*, which was very common among communist writers in the Middle East at the time: The Holy Ka'ba gets the "secular personality" of a nation instead of a concrete real place.

Another instance of *secularisation of the holy* in al-Haydari's work is the prayer niche (*Mihrab*) in the mosque, which is given a new meaning, that of an object of personal prayers of the heart, in the poem "Furious Nature" (*al-Tabi'a al-ghadiba*. al-Haydari, 1993: 83–86. First published in 1946):

And as if behind the night
There is a heart tired of the continuation of its suffering
The silence is weary of the noise of the spirits in its prayer niche (p. 83)

Like the *Mihrab*, *Janna* or heaven is used in a unique way by al-Haydari when he describes the situation in the cities that he knows in the poem "Six Dots and a Silence" (*Sitt niqat wa-samt*?. Al-Haydari, 1993: 729–731. First published in 1990):

This night the gates of heaven were
Opened
But heaven was but the body of a murdered man
And I
Was his wounds (pp. 729–730)

In this poem al-Haydari compares his homeland Iraq to a map made of a lie and a dream (*Watani ya kharita min kadhab [...] min hulm*. [p. 730]) which bring its people nothing but pain and death. The object of the Muslim believer's hopes, to reach heaven, becomes here the nightmare of the exile.

Like the *Mihrab* and the *Janna*, the pre-Islamic deity *al-Lat* also appears in a poem, "The Feast" (*al-Walima*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 609–610, first published in 1989), as part of the description of a land that eats its inhabitants alive:

And when the morning newspapers told us
 That they crucified al-Lat and that his flesh
 Was being handed out right now in the city's temples
 [...] How great is al-Lat, that becomes while dying
 A feast to a sad nation (pp. 609–610)

Al-Lat here receives the meaning of a god who becomes the food of the land's inhabitants, as a symbol to ungratefulness. Although in pre-Islamic history *al-Lat* was considered female, according to this poem *al-Lat* is a male god, a change that constitutes a breach of convention.

In the aforementioned poem "Shall I return ... to whom ...?" we can also find a symbolic Muslim date: *The year of the elephant* (*ʿAm al-Fil*. Al-Quran, chapter 105), the year in which Muhammad the prophet of Islam was born and the year in which *Abraha* wanted to destroy the Ka'ba, around 570 AD. But in the poem that year is mentioned among depictions of blood, bereavement and dead people, signifying that nothing has changed over the years and that the blood of the people has still not been avenged.

Another figure from Islamic history in al-Haydari's poetry is the cruel Umayyad governor of Iraq, *al-Hajjaj b. Yusuf al-Thaqafi* (661–714), who was known for his iron fist, and for a speech in which he predicted that blood would flow from the people's decapitated bodies. In the poem "The Return of the Victim" (*ʿAwdat al-Dhahiyya*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 761–764) al-Haydari maintains a dialogue with al-Hajjaj, based on a historic confrontation between the governor and his opponent Sa'id b. Jubayr, a scholar from Kufa (Motzki), in which the poetic speaker describes what happens in a land where the only sound that is heard is the echo of the ruler's voice, shouting in the name of the devil:

There is nothing but my shadow ... I will not leave behind anything
 But my shadow
 And the gleam of the drawn sword
 And blood that hasn't been avenged (p. 761)

The poetic speaker also tells al-Hajjaj that a time will come in which the murderer will become the victim (see also: al-Musawi, 2006: xvi). In this way, the poet uses figures from Islamic history who were condemned for their cruelty, in order to criticise the cruelty of the modern Iraqi regime, whether against the Kurds or the Iraqi nation in general. Al-Hajjaj also appears in a poem entitled "Stolen Borders" (*al-Hudud al-Masruqa*. al-Haydari, 1993: 693–697, first published in 1990), in the context of a "homeland of executioners" (*Watan*

al-jalladin [p. 693]) in which the intellectual is considered worthless and dragged by his ears through all the cities.

Also *Al-Saffah*, the first ‘Abbasid Caliph, whose name means “blood thirsty” (Moscati), appears in the poem “Death Within the Four Voices” (*Al-mawt ma bayna al-aswat al-arba’a*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 819–824) alongside al-Hajjaj:

I open my window [...]
 I hear the voice of the merchants
 Announcing
 A history for sale and leaders
 Whose faces gleam like shining shoes
 Murder victims asking for a cemetery
 And prisoners
 And offenses
 Moving uncomfortably in the speeches of al-Hajjaj and the sword of
 al-Saffah (p. 820)

Al-Hajjaj and al-Saffah serve as an allegory for the cruelty and boastfulness of the Iraqi rulers at the expense of the people they brutalised. As mentioned above, al-Haydari uses historical Islamic characters and terminology in his own unique way in order to criticise the Iraqi authorities. Even though al-Haydari was a communist, we can assume from the intense use in his poetry of these elements taken from Islamic history, that they were inculcated in him as a child, and that this part of his identity is fairly dominant. We observe that in most of the cases described above he refers to Iraq in general and not to the Kurds in particular.

Christian Symbolism in al-Haydari’s Poetry

Christian symbols were frequently used by Arab socialist and communist poets, due to the fact that such symbols “propound the Christian idea of redemption through suffering and the belief that death is overcome by Christ’s resurrection” (Moreh, 1976: 270–271). The symbols were taken from Christian hymns, and were in use among the young Arab poets of the mid-twentieth century, not in order to reflect a religious experience, but a mental and physical state as persecuted intellectuals (Moreh, 1976: 247). This claim finds support in the notion of *palms pinned with nails* in al-Haydari’s poems representing the arrival of death, e.g. in the poem “Guilty Even If Innocent” (*Muttaham walaw kuntu bari’an*. al-Haydari, 1993: 541–544, first published in 1973 [p. 544]), and

the feeling of helplessness in the same poem: "I remained crucified by the wall" (*baqitu masluban lada al-jidar* [p. 541]).³ In the previously mentioned poem "The Feast", al-Haydari also combines the pre-Islamic goddess *al-Lat* with *the Cross* and the flesh of the goddess that is being handed out in the temples of the city:

That they crucified al-Lat and that her flesh
Was being handed out right now in the city's temples (p. 609)

Al-Haydari is thus making an inevitable comparison between the blood of the poetic speaker which appears at the end of the poem and the flesh and blood of Christ. In addition, there are *wounds* that appear frequently in al-Haydari's poetry which symbolise sorrow, suffering and pain like the Crucifixion wounds of Jesus, for example in his "Waiting" (*Intizar*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 87–89, first published in 1946): "And dawn will be born again on the streaming of the wound" (*wa-l-fajr yulad marra ukhra ala nazf al-jirah* [p. 89]).⁴

The Crucifixion also finds its way into the poem "Disappointment of the Prehistoric Man" (*Khaybat al-insan al-qadim*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 389–391, first published in 1968) where we find descriptions of how life and time make it difficult for the exile to continue, to such an extent that he compares his situation to the Crucifixion:

Life was
Nailing the cross in the forehead
Crucifying the Messiah every hour
Crucifying this dead man every moment (p. 390)

In the poem "Who Knows, Baghdad" (*Man yadri ya Baghdad*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 535–539, first published in 1973), the poet describes the Iraqi capital as

3 A wooden cross is linked to everlasting death in Beirut during the civil war in the poem "Your Forgiveness ... Beirut" (*Ghufranaki ... Beirut*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 617–619, first published in 1989).

4 See also the poems "The Death of a Poet" (*Mawt sha'ir*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 101–104, first published in 1946), "That Small Thing" (*Dhalika al-shay' al-saghir*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 153–154, first published in 1946), "Death within the Four Voices" (*Al-mawt ma bayna al-aswat al-arba'a*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 819–824); "At the Time of the Accused Innocence" (*Fi zaman al-bara'a al-muttahama*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 443–448, first published in 1968); "On the Way of Migration from Baghdad" (*Fi tariq al-hijra min Baghdad*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 671–674, first published in 1990); "Then He Went Away from Us" (*Thumma rahala 'anna*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 647–653, first published in 1989).

sorrow in the eyes of the crucified, i.e. the exiled communist intellectual. In the afore-mentioned poem “Disappointment of the Prehistoric Man” we can see how the wanderings are such a burden that the exile feels that he is dying like God in his exile:

And here I am dying, my sister
As God dies in his exile (pp. 390–391)

According to this poem, al-Haydari and God are both in exile, while crucifixion occurs again and again.

In another use of Christian symbolism, the title of the poem “Judas’s Penance” (*Tawbat Yahudha*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 309–312, first published in 1965) alludes of course to *Judas Iscariot* who was accused of betraying Jesus; in it the poet regrets that he did not help his people enough, and undergoes self-flagellation for not having been able to save them. Intellectuals are frequently perceived as social leaders who warn of social ills. Nevertheless, opposition intellectuals in the Arab world often found themselves in the horns of a dilemma, since on the one hand people were not always intellectually capable of grasping their Western ideas and on the other, the authorities persecuted them because of their left-leaning ideas. Here al-Haydari presents Judas’s regret as a paraphrase on his own remorse:

I have been against you my people
I know
How I threw you away
And left you with nothing
But hunger
And destruction [...]
[Even] the death penalty will not wipe off my shame (p. 311)

In contrast to poems by al-Haydari’s contemporaries, in which they mention Judas Iscariot as a symbol of the tyrants (Moreh, 1976: 249–250), here al-Haydari refers to himself as Judas, because he did not succeed in saving his people.

Al-Haydari uses this Christian symbolism, alongside Muslim terminology, to stress the feeling of suffering and to introduce his tormented personality. Even though he was Muslim, al-Haydari used Christian elements to express his experience as a persecuted intellectual and as an exile. These elements shed light on his complex identity, which is drawn from his Muslim heritage, alongside Christianity. This is not to say that al-Haydari had a Christian aspect to his identity, but like other writers of the time, he made use of Christian

components among other devices to express his feelings. Al-Haydari also combines the Islamic and the Christian when he refers to the poets as despised (*awghad*) and swindlers (*dajjalun*) in the poem “Who Knows, Baghdad”. The Arabic word *Dajjal* refers to the Antichrist, and also alludes to the negative attitude of the Prophet Muhammad towards poets before he had his own private poet, Hassan b. Thabit, as reflected in the Chapter of the Poets in the Quran (chapter 26, verse 224–226).

Greek Mythology in al-Haydari's Poetry

Al-Haydari uses Greek mythological elements to express the experience of wandering.⁵ A prominent character from Greek mythology that appears in Arabic poetry of the mid-twentieth century was *Sisyphus*, who was used by the poets at that time to convey the wanderings of the Arab communist exile (Moreh, 1976: 256–257). Al-Haydari uses *Sisyphus* in order to express the exile's disappointment at the lack of positive change in his condition in the poem “The Postman” (*Sa'i al-barid*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 213–215, first published in 1951):

No doubt, there is no news
That the earth is carrying for this outcast [...]
And the earth still has its Sisyphus
And a stone (pp. 213, 214)

According to al-Haydari, every age and every land has its permanent *Sisyphus*, who must eternally push a boulder up a hill only to watch it roll back down. The pointlessness and hopelessness of existence is enhanced by the comparison between the communist exile and *Sisyphus*, and by the postman bringing no news to the exile; i.e. his situation is not going to change, and no good news from the homeland arrives.

Another mythological figure in al-Haydari's poetry is *Oedipus*. In a poem entitled “Oedipus” (*Udib*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 451–455, first published in 1968) the poet identifies with the tragedy of *Oedipus* in the following words:

I am deserted like the night ...
Like the silence I am deserted [...]
I am the deceived man [...]
How long my journeys are in my chest (pp. 451, 452, 454)

5 On the scant Mesopotamian inspiration on his poetry see: Baram, 1991: 87.

The tragedy of Oedipus, who had to abandon his adoptive parents' home in order to prevent the prophecy of the oracle from materialising, i.e. to avoid killing his father, symbolises in al-Haydari's poetry the need, or rather the urge, to leave Iraq in order to avoid the bitter end that awaits opposition intellectuals.

Opposition to the Regime in al-Haydari's Poetry

Prison and torture play a considerable role in al-Haydari's poetry. In many of his poems the experience of torture receives various expressions, including depictions of the torturer who tears out the prisoner's nails, burns the latter's hair, whips him and metaphorically (or not) stabs him in the chest. Al-Haydari does not spare his readers distressing descriptions of the helpless intellectual in the clutches of the representative of the regime, as in the poem "Secret" (*Sirr*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 299–302, first published in 1965):

You will strengthen the rope, and you shall not kill me
 you will smash my chest [...]
 The whip will bark in my flesh
 Like venom
 Will penetrate into my body [...]

You will once more burn my hair
 And tear out my nail
 But my secret
 Will remain like your blade in my chest
 Two symbols for a free man (pp. 299, 300, 301)

Al-Haydari thus conveys to the reader the experience of being a communist opposition intellectual, hunted by the regime. The barking venom-like whip in these verses gives the reader the impression that the intellectual is a small animal being voraciously eaten by the omnipotent authorities. Al-Haydari also gives torture artistic expression by depicting in detail the murders committed by the regime's representatives inside the prison walls in the poem "You Came at Dawn" (*J'itum ma'a al-fajr*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 313–315, first published in 1965):

You came at dawn
 ... And there was here
 A massacre that developed without pardon [...]

You came at dawn
 And we were here
 Murdered in silence [...]
 The sun will never rise
 And in my home
 Sinking in death
 My children's steps without voice (pp. 313, 314, 315)

Al-Haydari's identity as an opposition intellectual being "hunted" by the Iraqi regime cannot be denied, given the great significance he attributes to this aspect of his identity in his poetry. The way the regime perceives the intellectual's donation to society is summed up in the following verses from the poem "City Destroyed by Silence" (*Al-madina al-lati ahlakaha al-samt*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 723–728, first published in 1990):

You (the intellectual) must not become more than a whore's thighs
 Or a pimp's hands (pp. 727–728)

In this way, the regime clarifies to the intellectual what he has to do, or rather what he should not do. The comparison of the latter to a whore's thigh or a pimp's hand alludes to the standing of intellectuals in Iraq in general, and to the standing of the communists in particular in that country in the second half of the mid-twentieth century. Each and every intellectual who dares to oppose the Iraqi regime can end up as described in the poem "A Drop of Blood" (*Qatrat dam*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 683–684, first published in 1990):

We might be killed ... we might be burned
 We might be executed (p. 683)

This is very reminiscent of the depictions of torture in the above-mentioned poem "Secret" from 1965; in other words, according to al-Haydari's poems nothing has changed in this respect during the three decades from the 1960s until the 1990s.

Multiple Identities in al-Haydari's Poetry

For al-Haydari, the experience of exile was more formative for his identity than any other, as in the afore mentioned poem "Death within the Four Voices":

How big is the humiliation of exile
 What misery it is not to know yourself as a human being
 But
 In exile (p. 822)

According to al-Haydari, exile makes a person more aware of his identity and ask more questions about it. But one's identity is not always shaped solely by a single clear experience. In a poem entitled "The Ten Identities" (*al-Huwiyyat al-'ashr*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 621–628, first published in 1989) the poet gives expression to the various identities he has and to the complexity of being "divided" between so many affiliations:

And I went out tonight
 In my pocket ten identities allowing me
 To go out tonight
 My name is ... Buland bin Akram
 I am from a well known family
 I swear I did not kill anyone
 And that I did not steal from anyone
 And in my pocket I have ten identities testifying for me
 So why won't I go out tonight? (p. 621)

In this poem the poetic speaker does not seem to belong to any specific ethnic or national group. On the contrary, he has doubts as to where he belongs. The speaker describes all he has done in order to belong somewhere, with no success. He describes his exile as a route to a happiness that never materialises. The poem begins on an optimistic note, when a man goes out for a walk at night with ten identities in his pocket. Those ten identities, be it Muslim, communist, Iraqi, Kurdish, Secular, Sunni, etc., are nothing to be ashamed of, and at this point the speaker is proud of them, since they testify that he did not do anything wrong or harm anyone. As the poem continues, in analogy to the poet's continuing exile, the reader becomes aware of the darkness (*zulma*) and the empty streets where the only sound is that of the poet's steps (*rasif al-shari' kan khilwan illa min sawt hidha'i*). The man's shadow is gathered for a while and scattered for another, but he does have a shadow, i.e. he exists. As far as he is concerned, Iraq has no specific identity, and he himself has an abundance of identities. The speaker checks in his pockets to ascertain that his identities are still there, and tries to prove to himself that he is who he thought he was.

This is my name
 This is my description
 This is the signature of the chief of police in my town [...]
 And I have another seven identities with me (p. 624)

Apparently, the poetic speaker has many identities, but does not feel that any of them belong to him. He checks again and again to make sure he still has them, and the more identities he finds the less he feels that he belongs. The paradox grows when two policemen come by his door and ask him who he is. When the man says his name, Buland bin-Akram, and shows them his ten identities, they laugh at him and at his identities, and tell him that he is guilty. Thus, even after revealing his ten identities, they still treat him like a stranger and condemn him. The different identities that he has do not matter at all, whether Muslim, Iraqi, Sunni, Secular, communist, Beirut, Londonian, or maybe more. His conclusion is as follows:

I grasped that my identities are but false evidence
 And that I will be sleeping tonight in jail in the name of my ten
 identities [...]
 In a time ... in a land without any identity
 Anyone with an identity is condemned (p. 627)

Even in jail the prisoner invites the jailor to tear up the identities and to wear them out, since they have no value anymore:

Tear them up ... Tear them up, oh my jailor
 Wear them out ... Wear them out, oh my jailor (p. 627)

The ten identities, instead of providing the Iraqi opponent of the regime some confidence and a frame of reference, actually cause him difficulty. The representatives of the law (policemen, jailors) pour scorn on his identities, and these are no longer of any assistance for him. The policemen who are supposed to protect the citizen ridicule him, and the only shadow seen at the end of the poem is the one of the policemen, i.e. they are the only ones who dare walk in the streets; they are the only ones who exist, in contrast to the beginning of the poem, where the poetic speaker was the one who existed, the one with the footsteps:

There is no shadow of anyone in my country but that of the police (p. 627)

The conflict between his different identities thus ultimately results in him being thrown into jail with no identity at all, exactly as al-Haydari had been treated in Iraq for years. The man's different identities, which turn to be one complex and fluid identity – Iraqi, Muslim, Secular etc. – in his eyes, are completely erased by the regime. Ultimately, these various components of the poet's identity – Muslim, Christian, Iraqi, persecuted scholar and an exile in search of his way – appear alternately in al-Haydari's works over the years, before and after the massacre of *Halabja*. But before the massacre hardly any sign of al-Haydari's Kurdish origins, or any notion of Kurds or Kurdistan can be detected in his poetry. Nonetheless, after *Halabja*, al-Haydari identified with the Kurds so much that he gave poetic expression to this subject, something that he had not done before.

Kurdish Identity in al-Haydari's Poetry after *Halabja*

In the poem "So That We Will Not Forget" (*Li-kay la nansa*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 769–773) al-Haydari freezes that horrible moment in which the planes attacked *Halabja*, and he deeply identifies with the Kurds. In this poem, al-Haydari mourns the dead and attacks Saddam Hussein. We should note that even when still living in Iraq, al-Haydari was in Baghdad and not in Kurdistan; when writing about *Halabja* he identified with the Kurds to such an extent that he described the mountains of Kurdistan as if he missed them himself, as a Kurd who grew up there. At the beginning of the poem he depicts the town before the attack, the gardens and homes, the green dreams of narcissus and roses, until suddenly one day as a stark contrast to the scent of the flowers, something else fills the air:

A poisonous wind blew
Blown by the eyes of a Booma
To poison all your youngsters, my home ... my country (p. 772)

A *Booma* is an owl, usually possessing the connotation of bearing bad news,⁶ and here it probably represents the planes which dropped the canisters of lethal gas. In this poem al-Haydari's empathy towards the Kurds is perfectly clear from his description of Kurdistan as the cradle of his birth and his depiction of the changes it went through following the chemical attack:

⁶ This is why the Arabic word here is more suitable than a literal translation.

The way to my home turned into a cemetery encompassing two thousand
 graves
 In Kurdistan
 Nothing but death and its shadow
 No daffodil dreaming of growing in a garden
 The filthy [Iraqi airplanes] did not leave anything
 but murdered people and their ashes together with black smoke (p. 772)

This description of complete destruction and the demise of every man, animal and flower, when two thousand gardens turn into two thousand graves, is factually accurate, and fits exactly the testimony of Abbas Abd al-Razzaq Akbar, who had accompanied the peshmergas and later also documented what happened to the *Halabja* area. He said: "The gas had killed all natural life, animals and trees. I saw thousands of goats and sheep, all dead. Also wolves [...] I filmed hundreds of dead animals on the roads around *Halabja*. I couldn't hear anything. No birds. There was absolutely no sound [...] the silence drove me crazy" (Hiltermann, 2007: 105).

Here al-Haydari reaches the peak of the poem in a few lines that some would see as wishful thinking and some as prophecy:

The blood of the victims will pursue the devil's face
 From this mirror to that mirror
 From the furthest past to eternity
 And the rope will be wrapped around the hangman's throat (pp. 772–773)

From a current perspective the poem's end shows that al-Haydari's prophecy materialised exactly as he predicted, when Saddam was hanged in 2006, 18 years after Halabja.

In the same poetry collection al-Haydari published a poem entitled: "Shall I Return? ... to Whom? ..." (*A'a'udu ... li-man? ...* Al-Haydari, 1993: 793–797), in which he does not mention *Halabja* specifically, but the descriptions of the ruins and the date of publication leave little doubt as to the connection to the Kurdish town:

Shall I return to whom ...!? To my home ...!?
 To the body of a dead toddler ...!?
 To a pile of stones turned into ruins
 Which are about to quietly burst into tears ...!?
 [...] Shall I return to look for my daughter
 For my home
 In a pile of stones ...!? (pp. 795, 796)

Together with a bereaved mother who is mentioned twice in the poem, and the bodies of little children, the impression is that al-Haydari describes *Halabja*. In another poem, “A New Reading of Old Pictures” (*Qira’a jadida lisuwar qadima*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 655–659, first published in 1989) al-Haydari ridicules the news broadcasts and the newspapers in the West that pay lip service to a concern for what is good for the world and for peace, while the bodies of little children in Kurdistan still lie on the ground. The red ink in the newspapers symbolises the blood of innocent victims, and it stands in stark contrast to the empty words of the White House, which, according to al-Haydari, are aimed to cover the world’s eyes as regard to the victims of *Halabja*.

However, although al-Haydari mentions Kurdistan and the destruction of *Halabja*, when one examines his last collection of poems, it is obvious that in spite of *Halabja* and the *Anfal* campaign, al-Haydari still writes about Baghdad and Iraq with great pain and love. As an “Arabised Kurd” he continues to feel Arab and Iraqi, and still misses the Iraqi capital, writing about its agony: “*And they say that the spark in the eyes of the people in my city had dried out*” depicting the sadness and helplessness of the city in the poem “Tomorrow if It Explodes” (*Ghadan idha ma infagarat*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 775–778 [p. 776]).

In another poem, “Apology” (*Ptidhar*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 779–782), he writes “*And there is no sea, no pearls ... no island in Baghdad [...] in a big lie whose name was Baghdad*” (p. 779, 782), describing the illusion of the historical rich Baghdad and the emptiness and pitifulness of the contemporary city. In the poem “From Behind the Closed Door” (*Min wara’a al-bab al-musada*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 799–800) the poet accuses his homeland of being both the killer and the victim: “Oh my homeland ... oh you the killer ... oh you the murdered” (p. 800). Al-Haydari’s longing for his life in Baghdad, as can be seen in various other poems as well,⁷ is far more strongly conveyed than his longing for Kurdistan as expressed in his poems written after *Halabja*.

Conclusion

Al-Haydari’s poetry reveals different influences which should be taken into consideration as part of an exploration of the poet’s background. Iraq of the 1950s

7 See also the poems: “Between Two Signs” (*Bayna ’alamatayn*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 807–810) whose first word is “Baghdad”, to whom he addresses a moving speech; “The Will” (*al-Wasiyya*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 825–826) in which the poetic speaker tells his son about his land and a promised dawn; “And If Iraq is a feast for her locust” (*Fa-idha al-Iraq walima li-jaradiha*. Al-Haydari, 1993: 831–835), in which the title already hints at the poet’s longing for his previous life in his homeland.

in general, and Baghdad in particular, were a mixture of various ethnicities, religions, sects and political affiliations; this was the background against which al-Haydari operated. He was born to a wealthy family but had friends among the poor and the rich alike, and although economically he could afford to study in distinguished institutions, he was mostly self-educated. Indeed, al-Haydari had Kurdish origins, but since he was raised in Baghdad, which experienced a period of intellectual and cultural bloom no less than other Arab capitals such as Cairo and Beirut, he came to see himself more as an Arab rather than a Kurd, and thus came to belong to the “Arabised Kurds”, who felt that they were an integral part of the afore-mentioned Arab milieu. So while theoretically he came from a mixed background, namely Arab and Kurdish, the fact that he experienced life among Arabs in an Arab capital in the formative years of his life, and that he was deeply involved in the lively cultural scene of Baghdad, was more influential in his life than the impact of his Kurdish origins. Furthermore, as a Muslim who was acquainted with Christians and people from other religions, and subjected thereafter to further influences such as Communism, political persecution and exile, al-Haydari’s identity could be expected to be hybrid and fluid. All the components of his identity, as explored in the current article may, when considered separately as well as in combination, help uncover his inner world.

Two main conclusions may be drawn from the study. Firstly, as expected, al-Haydari’s identity as reflected in his poems is divided among various components. It includes affiliations with different entities, with links to a Muslim heritage, Christian symbolism and Greek mythology, which are used to express not a religious experience but a state of mind, and to reflect the position of Iraqi communist intellectuals in the mid-twentieth century who were persecuted and driven into exile. In his poetry we can find a multifaceted, fluid identity of a person looking for a path as he describes his relations with the Iraqi regime and the ways he finds for coping with it.

Secondly, upon examining the poems of other Kurdish poets from al-Haydari’s generation, we find that they regularly mentioned their Kurdish origins, and hence we do not expect that they will relate differently to *Halabja*. But al-Haydari was an “Arabised Kurd”, and so we find that although he dedicated many verses to the massacre in *Halabja*, in his last collection of poems he still writes with much nostalgia about Baghdad and Iraq as his home. It seems that as a participant in Baghdadi cultural life and the city’s artistic groups from the 1940s until the 1960s, when sectarianism was not as blatant as it is today, al-Haydari did not pay much attention in his poetry to the Kurdish component of his identity, a tendency that apparently remained in effect in poems written after *Halabja*, even if one would have expected that some change would take place in his relation to the Kurds.

Indeed, after the massacre in *Halabja* he referred to Kurdistan as his cradle of birth, and described his longing to it as if he had been brought up there himself, but it was possibly only a vent for his feelings against the atrocities, since in his poems he still placed emphasis on his Iraqi and Arab rather than on his Kurdish identity. We may thus say that in spite of the *Halabja* incident, al-Haydari continued to be loyal to and write about Baghdad and Iraq, and although the *Halabja* massacre influenced quite a number of verses, it was not as influential on his identity as was his Iraqi and Arab past.

Exploring this so-far under-researched poet's inner world may fill an existing gap and give us more information as regards to the life of Iraqi exiles in the second half of the twentieth century, in the broader context of the cultural and political situation in Iraq of those times. In a more specific sense, it can give us an indication of the extent of "Arabisation" of "Arabised Kurds", since in spite of the *Halabja* massacre, which was a traumatic event by any standard, al-Haydari nonetheless remained faithful to Iraq and clung to his Arab and Iraqi identities.

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BRILL

Dengbêjs on Borderlands: Borders and the State as Seen through the Eyes of Kurdish Singer-poets

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Abstract

This article investigates how the Kurdish home, borders and the state are depicted in one of the most important Kurdish cultural expressions in Turkey until 1980: the dengbêj art. The recital songs of the dengbêjs form a fascinating source to investigate how Kurds experienced life on the margins of the (nation-)state. We argue that the songs demonstrate that many Kurds perceived the political geography of the state they officially belonged to as foreign and not as a legitimate part of Kurdish sociopolitical reality. The Kurdish political geography created in the songs exists in small-scale local structures and alliances, and there is mostly no reference to a common Kurdish cause. Borders are presented as foreign interference in the Kurdish landscape. In the conclusion we suggest that Kurdish fragmented political structure should be understood as a deliberate means to avoid being incorporated in a state structure. This speaks against a (self-)Orientalist interpretation of Kurdish history that defines a lack of Kurdish unity as primitive.

Keywords

verbal art – self-orientalism – modernity – nationalism – politics

Dengbêj li ser sînoran: Dîtina sînor û dewletê bi çavên dengbêjan

Ev gotar vedikolê bê welatê Kurdistan, sînor û dewlet çawan hatine şayesandin di yek ji girîngtirîn derbirînên çanda Kurdî da li Tirkîyeyê, heta 1980yê: anku dengbêjiyê. Kilamên resîtal ên dengbêjan çavkaniyeka hijmetkar pêk dihinin bo vekolîna serboriyên Kurdistan ku mane li qeraxên netewe-dewletan. Em angaş dikin ku, herçend Kurd bi xwe bi rengê fermî parçeyek ji erdnîgara fermî ne, kilam destnîşan dikin ku gelek Kurd vê erdnîgara siyasî ya dewletê wekî diyardeyekî biyanî dibînin, ne ku wekî parçeyek rewa ji rastiya sosyo-polîtîk a Kurdîtiye. Erdnîgara polîtîk ya Kurdîtiyê ku di kilaman da hatiye afirandin pile-biçûk e û, bi piranî bêyî dozeka Kurdî ya hevbeş, ji hevalbediyên deverî pêk hatiye. Di kilaman da sînor wekî destwerdanên biyaniyan li welatê Kurdistan hatine berpêş kirin. Di dawiyê de em pêşniyar dikin ku a rast Kurd bi zanebûn vê siyaseta parçebûyî meşandine da ku xwe vebidizin ji bişaftinê di avahiya dewletê da. Ev nêrîn di derbarê dîroka Kurdistan da li dijî şîroyeyên (oto)-oryantalîst e, çikû ew nebûna yekîtiya Kurdistan wekî diyardeyekî prîmîtîv dibînin.

. كوردەوێ گۆرانییێزی و شاعیری روانگه له ولات و سنوور . سەرسنوور دەنگبێژانی

سالی تا تورکیا له کوردی کولتوری چه مکی گرنگترین له یه کجی له چۆن دهولت و سنووره کان کوردان، ولاتی که دهکا لهوه باس وتاره ئەم لهسه کوردان ژيانی چۆنیهتی لهسه لیکۆلینهوه بو پرن و چر سه چاوهیه کی دهنگبێژه کان گۆرانیهه کانێ . دهنگبێژی هۆنهری : دراو نیشان ۱۹۸۰ تورکیایه دهولتهتی فهرمیهی سیاسی جۆگرافیا ئەم کورده کان زۆرینهی که ده کهن لهوه باس گۆرانیهه کان که بلتین دهمانهوی ئیمه . دهولهتان سنووری ناو کوردی سیاسی جۆگرافیای . کوردی سیاسی کۆمه لایهتی چوارچێوهی له یاسایی به شیککی وه ک نه ک ده کهن، سهیری بیانی ولاتیکی وه کوو وه کوو سنووره کان . پیناکرێ ئاماژهی کورد مهسهلهی و کیشه ناوی به شیک تهنا تهنا و هاتوووه پینک چکۆله ناوچهی کۆمه لیک له گۆرانیهه کان راسته وخۆ که رهسه یه کی وه کوو دهین کوردی دابه شبووی سیاسی چوارچێوهی کۆتاییشدا، له . ده کردین سهیر کوردان خاکی سهیر بیانی دهستدرێژی که کورد میژوووی سهیر له ئۆرینتالیسته - سیلف باوهری شیکردنهوهی به دژ ئهوهش . دهگرێ کوردی دهولهتیکی سازبوونی به پیش که بکرێ سهیر . دهکا بنه تدا له کوردی یه کگرتوووی نه بوونی له باس

Introduction*

You should get to know these mountains.
 (...) Each of them is a shelter for a people
 that does not own these mountains,
 but has chosen to belong to them.

SELIM TEMO (2013: 1)

Divide that ye be not ruled.

ERNEST GELLNER (Quoted in SCOTT 2009: 209)

The dengbêjs¹ are singer-poets who used to perform at village gatherings and weddings.² It is a secular oral tradition that almost vanished from Kurdish society in Turkey after 1980, but was revived during the 2000s.³ The art of the dengbêjs is in the first place an art of the imagination that transports one to another dimension. Together or alone, singing one *kilam* (recital song)⁴ after the other,

* This article is a rewrite of a part of the first chapter of Hamelink's dissertation, *The Sung Home: Narrative, Morality, and the Kurdish Nation* (2014). It is based on twelve months of field research in 2007 and 2008. The first chapter, as well as this article, were prepared in cooperation with Barış whose father, Ahmedê Aqutê, is a dengbêj. Barış' interest in his father's kilams means that he has profound knowledge of their meaning and archaic language. The interpretation and translation of the kilams is a result of our shared interest and study.

- 1 The word dengbêj can be translated as "master of the voice", *deng* meaning voice, *bêj* from the verb "to say".
- 2 This section is based on Hamelink's field research, most of which took place in 2007–8. She conducted lengthy interviews with fifty-seven Kurdish singers, most of them in Turkey and several in Germany and France. Of these singers, forty-two were regarded as dengbêjs by the larger public. The others were Alevi aşiks and other types of performers (such as a derviş and singers of popular Kurdish music groups). She also interviewed Kurdish authors and journalists who wrote about the dengbêjs and used their books as secondary sources (for example Parlîti, 2006; Kevirbirî, 2005; Kızılkaya, 2000), she interviewed program makers at two Kurdish TV channels, and people who were active in promoting the dengbêj art and in setting up new performance opportunities for them. Hamelink followed the Dengbêj Houses (*Mala Dengbêja*) in Diyarbakır and Van by visiting each of them regularly during her research period, and by attending their performances and activities for many days a time on each visit.
- 3 Based on Hamelink's interviews. See also Scalbert Yücel (2009: 16) "Like many of interviewees, however, this dengbêj had simply stopped singing after 1980. Collecting and recording were also much more difficult after 1980".
- 4 Among Yezidis in Armenia, Amy de la Breteque (2012) found that kilam is not defined as music, but as melodised speech. In the context of Kurds in Turkey, Kurdish musicians often refer to kilams as the source and inspiration of their music and Kurdish music generally. Also, singers such as Dêlîl Dîlanar and Rojda have made modern interpretations of dengbêj

the dengbêjs create a world that calls up and speaks of individual and social living experiences. It is a world in which the geographic location of one's own living environment forms the central stage, and in which regions outside of this geography are presented as foreign. The kilams create a home, a place of belonging that is contrasted with a *xerîbî*, a foreign place.⁵ They also sketch a world of village life, local lords, farmers, shepherds, rebellions and warfare that recalls and re-enacts a Kurdish past.⁶

In this article we investigate how the home and the foreign are defined in dengbêj kilams of our corpus. Through the examples that follow, we suggest that the kilams create a Kurdish life world, but that most of them do not yet articulate a nationalist ideology. This can also be concluded from the attitude of political activists; the many songs about local tribal battles made the dengbêj art⁷ unfashionable for some time. The dengbêjs were seen as connected to the old order of Kurdish aghas and feudalism that is defined as divisive rather than unifying. Political activists see aspects of traditional Kurdish society as backward and in need of modernisation. However, instead of defining the fragmented structure of Kurdish politics as primitive and primordialist, one could

kilams and mixed their own voices with old dengbêj recordings. Since Kurdish musicians have interpreted dengbêj kilams as music, we follow them in that and understand the kilam as a recital song.

- 5 The "foreign" in this context can be a place outside one's immediate environment where one does not know the people. Amy de la Breteque also refers to the concept of *xerîbî* as not necessarily geographic: it "shapes not a geographic space but rather an affective one, clearly dividing the world into two kinds of places – those of the household/village and those of exile" (2012: 138).
- 6 In the interviews and performances, dengbêjs made it clear that they see themselves as guardians of Kurdish history and culture, and as specialists on Kurdish life lived in villages and in the past through their embodied experiences. Also others who spoke about the meaning of the dengbêjs today explained their current position in such terms. Additionally, the kilams the dengbêjs sing show a preoccupation with the home and foreign through their topics and figures. Part of that can be found in the kilams discussed in this article. In her dissertation, Hamelink argues that the dengbêjs "perform tradition" in their performances and in the ways they present themselves, whereas many other people, such as political activists and TV program makers, attempt to make the dengbêjs "perform the nation" (Askew, 2002). These different views on the meaning of the dengbêj art today demonstrate some of the processes involved in Kurdish efforts to build "a distinct national culture" (Scalbert Yücel, 2009: 8).
- 7 In this paper we use the term dengbêj art to refer to the total practices carried out by Kurdish dengbêjs. Many Kurds today use the word *dengbêjî* to refer to this. We felt it is confusing for the non-Kurdish speaker to use the Kurdish term. Also, we did not want to use the word "tradition", as this is part of the discourse on modernity and nationalism that we wish to deconstruct. The word "art" does not have such connotations.

also explain this feature as an important mechanism to deliberately avoid being incorporated into a central state structure.

Following Scott (2009), we suggest that the fact that the Kurds have no nation-state of their own cannot be explained by sheer failure on the part of Kurdish nobility, but that the element of deliberate choice to avoid and evade the state is also involved. Although this is not a mainstream understanding of freedom and independence in the era of nationalism, it is clearly a no less valuable line of thought. The Kurds did not only resist incorporation in state-structures when they were pressured to do so, they also prevented “states from springing up among them” (Scott, 2009: x) until the early twentieth century. Even though such an understanding of Kurdish history may seem unconventional, we believe that many scholars have already cleared the path towards this conclusion by pointing to the relatively late development of nationalism among the Kurds.⁸ Moreover, the dengbêj kilams occasion such analysis.

Our primary concern is to emphasise the element of choice involved in Kurdish political activism that reflects a consistent tendency to keep the state at a distance. This tendency comes to the fore through the dengbêj songs of our corpus. Contrary to self-Orientalist arguments, we stress that the local or regional character of Kurdish politics, and their relatively late interest in forming a national unity, should not be seen as a failure on the part of Kurdish political activism, or as a lack of certain traits and qualities of Kurdish people. Rather, we explain this as a matter of choice, which, we believe, is reflected in the life world that we find in the dengbêj kilams. Our undertaking is thus not in the first place a study of Kurdish oral tradition, but is meant to investigate how ideas about politics, borders, and the state are articulated within the kilams. The corpus is limited to kilams that were sung during Hamelink’s research in Turkey (see below).

Of course, we are aware of the limitations of the corpus and of kilams as a source. However, we do think that the kilams give us important insights into how Kurds perceived borders, the state, and political structures in Kurdistan. Below we elaborate on the time frame we speak about. Although kilams are always the product of a specific moment of composition and performance by individual dengbêjs, and thus mediated, they are also always directed to, and

8 Examples are numerous, but Özoğlu (2004) gives an elaborate argumentation for this. For example: “Surely, Kurdish nationalists in the twentieth century made many attempts to provide their cause with historical depth by rethinking and romanticising the nineteenth century Kurdish movements as nationalist. However (...) the cultural and militant activities of various Kurdish groups prior to the Great War were not nationalistic. Furthermore (...) Kurdish nationalism emerged as a response to the breakdown of the Ottoman state rather than contributed to it” (p. 69).

engaging with, an audience. This turns them, like all narratives, into sources that reflect the social context of the time in which they are composed and performed (Jackson, 2002; Finnegan, 1992). Kilams are on the one hand characterised by their fluidity: an oral performance is never the same as a previous one. On the other hand, the historical path that was taken to reach that moment of performance is also always present in the material that is presented while performing a certain kilam (Vansina, 1985, 1990).

We begin by discussing what we mean by self-Orientalism in the case of the Kurds, and why we think the dengbêj art can offer us a different understanding of Kurdish politics. We will discuss some characteristics of the kilams that help us understand them and suggest that in their performances dengbêjs draw an imaginary map of a Kurdish centred geography. Subsequently, we discuss four recurring figures that emerge in the kilams: the local leader, the fugitive, the rebel, and the traitor.⁹ Each figure provides an insight into the Kurdish internal political structure, and about the evolving relationship between the Kurds and the state. To conclude, we counter a (self-)Orientalist interpretation of Kurdish history and suggest an alternative understanding.

(Self-)Orientalism and the Dengbêj Art

During her research Hamelink found that since the late 1990s, and more strongly in the 2000s, the dengbêjs and their art became the subject of stories produced by political activists on Kurdish history, tradition, and modernity. These activists can be defined as people involved in and related to the Kurdish political movement.¹⁰ The narratives which they produced about the dengbêjs

9 These figures are chosen from a range of figures that Hamelink (2014) presents in her dissertation. It was outside of the scope of this article to include all of them here. She calls them figures because they are not isolated personalities but return frequently in the kilams, and have the ability to point to larger social developments that speak through them.

10 We use the term Kurdish movement to refer to the shared goals of a number of different actors. Casier et al. (2011) use the term Kurdish movement to refer to the “pro-Kurdish” organisations including the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*), BDP (*Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi*), (or DTP (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*) at the time of Hamelink’s research) and KCK (*Koma Civakên Kurdistan*). On the one hand, these actors have a variety of visions and political positions, ranging from violent action to electoral politics, but, on the other hand, they operate in some ways as a unified voice promoting and supporting Kurdish emancipation in Turkey, and, as such, have managed to “reinforce their presence” (Casier et al., 2011: 104). Watts also shows how since the 1990s pro-Kurdish actors have gained increasing access to government offices and have provided “new access to domestic and

place their art in the context of a global path towards nationalism, modernity, and progress.¹¹ Within this thought, they understand dengbêj art as “tradition”, “oral”, and “heritage”, words that next to their positive connotation are also charged with ideas about backwardness and underdevelopment. In that sense, they relegated the dengbêj art “to the museum”, in Arif Dirlik’s words, since “it is the burden of the past in one form or another that marks a society as traditional, which impedes its ascent to modernity” (Dirlik, 2003: 277 and 1996: 100).

The political activists Hamelink spoke with often explicitly articulated concerns related to modernity and nationalism. For example, they felt that the dengbêjs have the task to contribute to a common Kurdish cause, to develop a nationalist mind-set, and to adapt their performances to current norms. The clearest example of this is that they expected the dengbêjs to refrain from singing kilams about internal tribal conflicts, as these were seen as divisive and as possibly harmful for Kurdish unity.¹² Here, in their attempt aimed at “resolving the tension between the past and the present”, we see that the modern Kurdish political activist is “informed by a Eurocentric teleology of modernity”; in which the dengbêj art and the values it represents “must inevitably be relegated to the past with the victory of modernity as represented by the modern nation” (Dirlik, 2003: 278). If the dengbêj art has “been resurrected once again” (Dirlik, 2003: 278), then, it is expected of the “resurrected” dengbêj art to adapt itself to new political conditions imposed by the on-going conflict between the state and the Kurdish political movement.¹³

This approach towards the dengbêj art can be seen as a form of self-Orientalism, and as part of the larger modernity discourse that Scott (2009) tries to deconstruct. Orientalism refers to an intellectual discourse and a popular consciousness in which “non-European societies were characterized (...) not by what they had but by what they lacked – in other words, the lack of one or more of those characteristics that accounted for European development” (Dirlik, 1996: 100). The global economic, political and military dominance of the Euro-American nations translated itself into “an epistemology of power” (Dirlik, 1996: 99), which was defined and studied as Orientalism, following the seminal work of Edward Said, published with the same title in 1978.

international audiences, and new symbolic resources” (2006: 126). She calls these actors “activists in office”.

- 11 The Kurdish movement offered “an alternative, Kurdified set of national symbols to those of the Turkish state” (Watts, 2006: 132).
- 12 As Hamelink (2014) shows in her doctoral dissertation, many dengbêjs incorporated such narratives in their self-definition, but often gave their own twist to it.
- 13 See Hamelink (2014) for more examples.

In the late Ottoman period¹⁴ the Ottomans mobilised Orientalist thought by presenting the Arab provinces of the empire as in need of progress, civilisation and Ottomanisation. This can be defined as self-Orientalism.¹⁵ The Ottomans perceived the centre of the empire as “western”, progressive, well organised, urban and civilised, whereas they regarded the margins of the empire as “eastern”, lawless, rural, and inhabited by people living “in a state of nomadism and savagery” (Deringil, 2003: 311). Their self-definition was thus shaped by and created through the image of the uncivilised Other modelled after European Orientalist thought. Since the Empire was the object of Orientalist imaginations, and the late Ottomans and early republicans in Turkey adopted Western Orientalist models and performed for an “imagined Western audience” (Ahiska, 2003), one can clearly see the Orientalist legacy at work in the discursive space of Ottoman and Turkish political thought. The nationalist elite in Turkey took upon itself “the ‘white Turkish man’s burden’ in order to carry out a civilising mission on a supposedly backward and traditional Anatolian society” (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008: 158). A recent example of such self-Orientalist views in Turkey can be seen in the following quote by a prominent constitutional theorist in Turkey: “the Ottoman statesmen and intelligentsia recognized the European supremacy in every field of life, and the Turkish avocation of Europeanization or Westernization had already started” (Özbudun, 2009: 81).

Kurdish society and geography was presented by the Kemalist elite as the “East”, the backward, and the least civilised part of Turkey (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008: 163–165). In her address to the parliament last year, a Turkish politician noted: “You cannot convince me that the Turkish nation (*Türk Ulusu*) and the Kurdish nationality (*Kürt milliyeti*) are equal”.¹⁶ The supposed inequality seems to lie in the fact that the Turkish nation has a state of its own, in which sovereignty is exercised in the name of Turkish nation. In this context, the nation-state

14 During the Tanzimat reforms starting in 1839, “much of what was synthesized into the Ottoman modernity project was the result of historical processes and trends which were taking place already in the eighteenth century” (Deringil, 2003: 316).

15 Dirlik explains this as follows: “While the occident/orient distinction, and orientalism as concept and practice, are of European origin, and the term orientalism has been used almost exclusively to describe the attitudes of Europeans toward Asian societies, I would like to suggest here that the usage needs to be extended to Asian views of Asia, to account for tendencies to self-orientalisation which would become an integral part of the history of orientalism” (Dirlik, 1996: 103–104).

16 Birgül Ayman Güler, an MP of the People’s Republican Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) and a former professor of politics at Ankara University. 2013, 24 January. *Today’s Zaman*.

is perceived and presented as the marker of political maturity, which has its ground in Orientalist thought that regards nation-building as the peak of contemporary civilisation.

We suggest that this “epistemology of power” is internalised by the nationalist “elite” in Kurdistan of Turkey of which the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK)¹⁷ is the most dominant player. PKK ideology is therefore important in this respect. Abdullah Öcalan¹⁸ depicts the Kurds as lacking certain qualities before the PKK was founded. For example, in a very recent article, Öcalan labels Kurdish political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan as “primitive” and “tribal”.¹⁹ He argues that the Kurdish rebellions between 1806 and 1925 were designed by European powers to weaken, control and manage the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. By doing so, he denies agency to Kurdish actors involved in these rebellions, and detects in them a lack of knowledge and national consciousness. In another article, he regards the PKK as the means to transform the Kurds into a modernised Kurdish society.²⁰ As stated above, many activists referred to this line of thought in interviews with Hamelink. Likewise, some dengbêjs have stated that they were criticised or at least not welcomed by political activists because of their alleged lack of nationalist awareness, prior to the broadcast of Kurdish TV in 1995. In the early 1990s, Barış witnessed more than once how Kurdish political activists scolded minibus drivers for playing the records of dengbêjs, because the kilams spoke of internal battle. The rationale was that these kilams were damaging national unity. Once, Hamelink was working with a group of dengbêjs in the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır and recorded their performance. When she asked for songs about tribes the reaction was clear: they refused to sing them. One of the dengbêjs of the House gave a lengthy explanation of their refusal, which was met with agreement by the other dengbêjs. He said among others:

17 The PKK was officially founded in 1978. Guerilla warfare began in 1984.

18 Öcalan is the imprisoned leader of the PKK who serves a life sentence on the Imrali island in Turkey.

19 2014, 29 January. Kurdish-Arab relations and the laboratory of the Middle East. *Yeni Özgür Politika*.

20 “I have never doubted that the PKK is the contemporary Kurdish rebirth. Founding a party, in that period, was a matter of honour. There were no means available to pose an immediate solution. However, a significant lack of honour was pressing itself at every stage. Almost wherever I looked I sensed ignominy. It seemed like everything was being betrayed. It was certain that something should be done! It was not just the foundation of the party in a narrow sense; it was the foundation of a new way of life”. 2013, 27 November. PKK çağdaş Kürt miladının doğuşudur. *Yeni Özgür Politika*.

Our kilams from the past, about the tribes that fought with each other, now show that there was grave ignorance (*gelek nezanî hebû*). Why? Because they oppressed, you know, their friends, their fellow men, they did bad things to their neighbouring tribes (*zordestîyê hevalên xwe kiriye, li merwêya xwe kiriye, li aşîrên keleka xwe kiriye*), to become stronger and become the sovereigns of their region. The struggle for power should have been abandoned, but they could not abandon it. Therefore, you must not show any interest in them. (Interview with *dengbêj Xelîl, Diyarbakır, 2008*)

This statement reveals how some *dengbêjs* had internalised PKK nationalist discourse about their kilams. As Gunes (2012) and Aydın (2005) emphasise, the PKK had a socialist agenda since it adopted the leftist legacy of earlier Kurdish and Turkish Marxist political movements. According to Gunes (2012: 107), PKK's emergence coincided with socio-economic developments of the 1960s and 1970s in Turkey and Kurdistan, a period in which "the influence of the feudal classes and the 'grip' of traditional identities and values" were in decline. Thus, it is not surprising that the PKK did not only challenge Turkey's political system in general, but it also took a critical stance against Kurdish landlords, political figures, religious leaders and petit sovereigns, and all cultural elements and social values that were considered to be part of that world. This is why the PKK initially had no interest in the *dengbêj* art. Traditional and feudal cultural elements were considered to be obstacles for national unity and liberation. Scalbert-Yucel (2009: 9) also emphasises that "at that time, the *dengbêjs* did not appear at all a priority for the PKK, which was a socialist party that fought against feudalism, of which *dengbêj* were considered to be fully part. Thus, *dengbêjs* fell into oblivion for a while. (...) the *dengbêj* never had high visibility among the cultural activities of the Kurdish movement until recently".

To highlight a further point on the attitude of the PKK until the mid-1990s, it is worth emphasising that the PKK "had a share in marginalizing *dengbêji*" (Scalbert-Yucel, 2009: 8). For example, a *dengbêj* who originates from Erzurum stated:

In 1980 happened two things: there was a coup, and the Kurdish movement came into being. And now the *dengbêj* art was something a bit opposite to the Kurdish freedom movement. The reality is that *dengbêjs* are connected to feudalism. They sang for the landlord, for the sheikh, and they sang what the public liked. And this really didn't match with the freedom movement. [The latter] regarded it a bit negatively. They didn't do anything but they judged it negatively. And if the public doesn't want

to listen, where will the dengbêjs sing?' (Interview with dengbêj Osman, Istanbul, 2007)

Another indication for this attitude towards the dengbêjs was that political activists told Hamelink they were initially not interested in the dengbêj art. For example, Zana Ciwan, a singer born in 1955 who was a member of *Koma Berxwedan*, a popular music group that was founded in Europe by the PKK and sang PKK songs (Gunes, 2012), indicates clearly in his interview how it was only much later in his musical career that he became interested in the dengbêj art. From that point on he was proactive in promoting the dengbêj art, by making television programs about them and by singing in their style. The fact that such an artist, who was involved in cultural activism for many years, only began to pay attention to the dengbêj art in the 1990s, shows that traditional music had not been high on the agenda for political activists.

During Hamelink's research, political activists articulated the view that the dengbêjs had not developed the right attitude and had made "wrong" choices. For example, one of the activists involved in setting up and organising the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır said it was due to oppression that the dengbêjs stopped singing after 1980, however, in his opinion, they would have continued if they had possessed a different ideology:

They did not have nationalist thoughts. But if they would have been under nationalist influence they would have gathered in that time and they would have started recording by themselves!²¹ (Interview with Zeki Kalan, Diyarbakır, 2008)

Scalbert-Yücel also noticed that "in the 1990s, people interested in folkloric and oral literature were considered 'reactionary' (*gerici*)" (Scalbert-Yücel, 2009: 10).

Although the PKK had established cultural institutions and founded music bands first in Europe and then in Istanbul and Diyarbakır, no reference was made to and no interest was shown in the dengbêj art. We think that this is testimony to the reluctance of the PKK to engage in any activity that might be perceived harmful to its socialist world-view and its revolutionary rhetoric. The main objective of these musical and artistic activities was to build "a new culture (...) on the ground of the guerrilla struggle" (Scalbert-Yücel, 2009: 9). Here it is imperative to mention that this new culture was to be built through a reinvention and revival of Kurdish culture, in which "[M]usic (...) served as

21 "Na, ramana wan netewî nebûn (...) lê eger bi ramanekî netewî bandawî ev çax tişt berhev bikirane, wan bi xwe tomar bikirane!"

a medium through which the PKK's struggle was represented. In fact, music served as important medium for the construction, dissemination and narration of the PKK's contemporary myth that played a key role in the sedimentation of the PKK's national liberation discourse in practice and its embodiment as the Kurds' national struggle" (Gunes, 2012: 112).

This political and cultural distance began to narrow-down shortly before the fifth congress of the PKK, convened in 1995, in which the organisation "detached" itself, from its socialist agenda and adapted a more nationalist character (Aydın, 2005: 103). Only when the PKK gained a substantial support among the Kurds in Turkey and saw no harm in referring to nationalist elements and symbols did it embrace Kurdish cultural elements and perceived no danger in opening up its institutions to "traditional" forms of cultural performance.²² Interest in the dengbêj art returned in the early 1990s when the Kurdish movement started validating Kurdish traditions as Kurdish "heritage" that were regarded as demonstrating the "authenticity" of the Kurds as a people. From that time, dengbêj kilams started to be collected and recorded, even though this was still only a minor development. With the start of TV broadcasting in Kurdish from Europe, dengbêj art attracted further attention.

During the period Hamelink conducted her research, the dengbêj art also became one of the means through which the Kurdish movement claimed increasing space in Turkey's public life. The foundation of the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır is a clear example of the growing visibility of Kurdish culture and language performed and displayed in Diyarbakır's city centre. The opening of the House in May 2007 attracted much attention from political actors. The mayor Osman Baydemir held the opening speech:

In every culture, in every region, there are some valuable things that become the reason for a culture and a language to live on, that become the reason for progress of the people. One of those are, in our region, the dengbêjs, for [the progress of] our culture and language. Indeed, we are very much indebted to the dengbêjs who have prevented from dying out this language I am now speaking, this language that today still exists.²³ (Osman Baydemir, May 2007)

22 This was a reaction to the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War.

23 "*Di her çandî da, di her kulturî da, di her herêmî da, hinek tiştên giranbuha hene, ku dibin sêdem jibona jiyana çandê û jiyana zimên, û dibin sêdema pêşketina gela. Yek ji wan jî, li her-ema min, jibona çanda min, jibona zimanê min, dengbêj in, û dengbêjtî. Bi rastî, em gelekî dengdar in ji dengbêjan, ku bi rastî wunnebûna, dibik ev zimanek niha ez pê biaxivim, ev zimana îro nûn mana*".

This is one of the many examples of the revival of interest in the dengbêj art in the 2000s. The explanations above show how political activists rediscovered the dengbêj art, but could only accept such rediscovery by placing it in a self-Orientalist framework. Dengbêjs were encouraged to act as nationalist actors, and to purify their art from tribal elements. That is why they did not want to sing such kilams during Hamelink's research, and why kilams about internal warfare continued to be seen as problematic.

In short, the self-Orientalist views internalised in Kurdish political thought define Kurdish political structures before the modern nationalist movement as primitive, primordial and backward. Precisely because the kilams were and still are a topic of debate due to their assumed "tribal" and "divisive" character, we regard them as an important source of differing views on Kurdish politics. Instead of following the self-Orientalist explanations of political activists as well as scholars in Kurdish studies,²⁴ we suggest that this perception could be deconstructed by presenting the fragmentation of Kurdish politics until the early 1920s as a different, rather than primitive, understanding of politics and society. In the next section we turn to the primary material for our article: the kilams.

Time, Place and Perspective Presented in the Kilams

Central to the performance of a kilam is that each kilam tells a (hi)story; most kilams are understood as real events that happened in either a near or distant past. The dengbêjs emphasised that they learned most of their kilams from one or several masters, who also again learned their repertoire from others. They often had some kilams of their own creation, but usually they did not give these prominence. Kurdish experts Hamelink spoke with regarded the dengbêj art as anonymous and derived from this a sense of collective Kurdish ownership. In 2007, the public places where dengbêjs had only recently started

24 For example, McDowall (1996: 184): the Turkish state "seriously underestimated the durability of the primordial ties that bound groups of Kurds together". White (2000: 84): "In so far as they were tribesmen acting completely along traditional (that is, pre-modern) lines, they were acting as the blind instruments of political modernization. It would not seem an exaggeration to describe them as 'primitive rebels.'" Van Bruinessen (1992: 316): "Kurdish nationalism and, to some extent, radical and populist varieties of socialism had become the dominant discourse among the Kurds; many, moreover, explicitly and sincerely denounced narrow tribal loyalties. This did not mean, of course, the end of primordial loyalties. Nationalism and socialism, rather, came to be used to lend additional legitimacy to traditional authority".

performing, such as the Dengbêj Houses, festivals, and on Kurdish television, the majority of kilams also belonged to this category. As we chose to study the dengbêj art in its present and most public form, we focus on the collectively shared songs and stories of dengbêjs, rather than on individual compositions of a more recent date.²⁵ This article is mostly based on a hundred and twenty kilams from Hamelink's recordings²⁶ and three anthologies written by Kurdish folklore collectors (Özalp, 2011; Kevirbirî, 2001; Aras, 1996). The kilams presented in this article are not given in full. The full versions can be found in Hamelink's dissertation (Hamelink, 2014).

The majority of these kilams are about a specific time and character. Many of the events they speak of can be situated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the characters that are described in the kilams are often Sunni Kurdish men and women who lived in the Kurdish region that is encompassed within modern-day Turkey. The historical context is the downfall of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. Placed in this specific timing, the kilams give shape to ideas about Kurdishness, identity and belonging. Although the kilams tell the adventures of both elite and commoners, most of the kilams are sung as if from the viewpoint of commoners who comment on the events they witness in their near environment. The dengbêjs divided the kilams into *kilamên şer* (war songs) and *kilamên dilika/kilamên evînî* (love songs). Terminology and the meaning of terms vary from

25 With "collectively shared" we refer to the body of kilams that dengbêjs learned from their masters and from each other. During Hamelink's research the dengbêjs mainly sang such kilams rather than their own compositions.

26 Since Hamelink was interested in getting an overview of the topics of the kilams, Zeki Aydın listened to her recordings and wrote Kurdish summaries of the kilams. Aydın has a good knowledge of dengbêj kilams, is fluent in Kurdish, and worked for a local Kurdish television channel as a translator at the time. The summaries he wrote were between 150 and 300 words, sometimes longer. As it would have been impossible to transcribe and translate all the kilams one by one, the summaries supplied Hamelink with a general idea of song topics. For full song transcriptions, she used the anthologies of Özalp and Kevirbirî. They consist of kilams collected from dengbêjs who were also part of Hamelink's research and could therefore also be used as a source of the kilams dengbêjs sing today. If there were kilams within Hamelink's own recordings of which a different version could be found in these anthologies, we used the transcription from the anthologies and made our English translation. In other cases, we transcribed the recorded kilams ourselves. The main aim of this undertaking was to get an idea of what contemporary dengbêjs sing about. Additionally, we used Aras (1996). Although his research is from a much earlier period, Evdalê Zeynikê kilams are such an important part of the dengbêj art today that we found his book to be an indispensable source of information, and thus included it in our corpus.

region to region, but has become more standardised in recent years due to media attention on this topic.²⁷ Following Yüksel (2011), we divide the *kilamên şer* into battle songs (about internal battles) and rebel songs (about clashes with the state).²⁸

Although the kilams offer the mediated views of a dengbêj on a certain event, and were reproduced and changed in the process of transmission, there are many reasons to assume that parts of the storylines, topics and symbols date from past times. Although idealised, the kilams speak of a past social and political world. They speak of caravans, horse riders, tribal alliances and other features that no longer exist today. In the kilams where a specific time is given or can be reconstructed, this timing falls primarily between roughly 1850 and 1930 for our selection of kilams, with some exceptions. The historical events that receive most importance are internal battles taking place during this time period, and the rebellions against the Turkish government between 1920 and 1930. Most dengbêjs learned the kilams from their masters, composing only a few themselves, thus most kilams date back at least one or two generations. The political views that speak from the kilams do not have immediate reflection in today's political climate, but seem rather to refer to past moral narratives. There are old recordings of famous dengbêjs like Şakiro, Karapetê Xaço, Reso and Huseyno. Many dengbêjs made use of these recordings to enhance their knowledge, or to learn kilams by heart. The recordings were copied and distributed individually, through radio stations, and nowadays through television and the internet. The dengbêjs thus have direct access to at least some older recordings. This does not mean that they uncritically adopt kilams from others. They are selective in what they sing, and leave out certain kilams that are too much in contradiction with current views.

27 For example, Allison (2001) found the word *stran* as the most common term. From her description it seems that the term *stran* among the Yezidi in Iraq is comparable to the term *kilam* in Turkish Kurdistan. She mentions that “in much of Turkish and Syrian Kurdistan these *stran* are known as *lawiq/k*”. Although we occasionally heard the term *lawiq*, nowadays *kilam* is much more commonly used.

28 Allison (2001) divided the topics of songs among Yezidi oral performers in Iraq into three main categories: battle, love and death. Although much of what Allison writes is also valid for the dengbêjs in Turkish Kurdistan, the category of death did not precisely fit the kilams we investigated. Death is a theme that arises in both love and battle songs, and when Hamelink asked the dengbêjs if a certain song was a “kilama sine”, a song of mourning, they replied that it was a love or battle song in which someone had died, and not a song of mourning. This seems to be connected to the fact that songs of mourning are regarded as the sole domain of women in Turkish Kurdistan.

A Kurdish Geography: Place Names and Landscape Marks

The kilams as a collective create a Kurdish landscape by drawing an imaginary map of the local geography, in which the Kurdish local environment occupies centre stage. Through the continuous mentioning of place names and physical marks in the landscape during a performance, the dengbêjs draw a map of the Kurdish region. On hearing a kilam with all its details, past listeners²⁹ would have been able to follow the journey in their imagination. An example is the below mentioned kilam *Silêmanê Mistê*, that is rich in landscape descriptions. The roads the protagonists take, the landscape, and the villages they pass, are described in detail. This is how the kilams created a map of the local environment that may have functioned as reference points for listeners, as the kilams could make one aware of the larger picture of one's own living environment. It also shows that the local environment was perceived as a reality of its own, without immediate reference to the states and larger political systems it belonged to.

In the selected kilams from Hamelink's recordings, we encountered 55 kilams with place names. Most of them are situated in Turkish Kurdistan, and only a few outside of this region. As we do not have full transcriptions of these kilams, there are likely to be more place names mentioned than we counted, therefore we also examined the first 84 kilams of the *Antolojiya Dengbêjan* (2011). We have listed them in the table below. The numbers after the place names refer to the total number of times they occurred. The place names in these kilams demonstrate that the majority are about Kurdistan in Turkey with Diyarbakır, Muş, and the Serhat region³⁰ at its centre. From the total of 180 times that a place name was mentioned, 36 times these were places outside that region. From these 36 times, 17 times they were places in Syria, and 8 times places in Turkey. The foreign places are usually mentioned in the kilams to refer to something the place symbolises (for example the prison of Bursa, the oranges of Dört Yol). Iran and Syria are often mentioned as possible places to escape to. Ankara is mentioned twice and Istanbul just once.

29 We refer here to the time before the 1980s when the social structure of villages was still vibrant in Turkish Kurdistan, when the dengbêjs still played an important role for people living in villages, and when it was more difficult to travel to other regions. After this period the dengbêjs lost much of their past importance. Current listeners often lack knowledge of the kilams, the archaic language, and the Kurdish place names, to be able to immediately understand them. Only elderly listeners who are used to the kilams will be able to have a similar experience.

30 Welatê Serhedê is used in Kurdish to refer to the highlands around Muş, Van and Agirî. This geographical term is not familiar to Turkish speakers.

It seems justified to conclude from our sample that the imaginary landscape of the kilams focuses on the Kurdish socio-political experience, and that the Ottoman Empire and Turkey do not appear as important places in the kilams. This Kurdish geography does not take the shape of a larger Kurdistan as a socio-political entity, but of smaller local structures that must have resonated with the dengbêjs' and their audiences' everyday reality.

TABLE 1 Place names mentioned in 84 kilams

Aydin	Hama	Ridwana river
Besra 2 (Basra)	Hamûdê 3 (Amuda)	Şam 4 (Damascus)
Batman	Hauran	Sarusiya
Bedlîs (Bitlis) 2	Hedhedik	Şengal mntns 4
Bêkende mountain	Heka (Hakkari?)	Şerefdin 4
Beirut 2	Heleb 5 (Aleppo)	Serhed 8
Beytulşebab	Hezro (Hazro)	Sêrt 2 (Siirt)
Bexdad (Baghdad)	Iran	Şînoza
Bilêder	Kayseri	Sîpan
Bingol 6	Kevir	Swerêg 2 (Siverek)
Bireka Qîrê	Kilîskende	Stembol (Istanbul)
Bişêrî	Kolê village	Sûriye/Binxetê 3
Botan 3	Kop	Şûşan
Bulanix 2 (Bulanik)	Kosedax 2	Tersus (Tarsus)
Bursa	Licê	Tetwan (Tatvan)
Cizîra 3 (Cizire)	Medina	Tirkiye 2 (Turkey)
Dêrezorê	Meka	Tûtax (Tutak)
Dêrik 3	Melazgir 5	Qaf mountain
Diyarbakir 14	Meletiyê (Malatya)	Qamûşla (Qamishli)
Dortyol	Meleto	Qaranliq
Enqera 2 (Ankara)	Memediyan river	Qazgol
Entab (Antep)	Meraş (Maraş)	Qerejdax 3 (Karacadag)
Erdîş (Erciş)	Mêrdîn 7 (Mardin)	Qerekilise (Karakilise)
Erzirom 3 (Erzurum)	Meteranî	Qers (Kars) 2
Farqîn 2 (Silvan)	Midyad	Qubîn (Beşiri)
Firat river 2	Mîrezilya	Wan 2 (Van)
Gire Xane	Mosul	Xinis (Hinis)
Girîdax 2	Murade rivier 2	Xozan
Goksu	Muş 11	Xuruc village
Gola Xelil	Nardizî	Yemen

The Figure of the Local Leader

In many kilams the local leader³¹ is the main protagonist. Surmeli Mamed Pasha, Bişarê Çeto, Cemîlê Çeto, Silêmanê Mistê, Memê Emê, Filîto Quto, Ferzende Beg, Eliyê Ünîs are all legendary heroic leaders about whom a variety of kilams exist. The leader appears in the kilams as someone remarkably close to his people and he is both praised and criticised. Praise is given regarding the battles in which he took part and the way he courageously fought with a host of enemies. The battles about which the dengbêjs sing broke out for a variety of reasons. Many kilams relate clashes between tribes, clans and families. Others are about clashes or the collaboration of tribes and individuals with the Ottoman or Turkish governments. In our selected kilams the names of the heroes are of people who lived in a relatively recent past, often in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Battle songs are characterised by the many detailed names of people and places which are often part of stock elements and repeated frequently so that they cannot easily be forgotten. The dengbêjs emphasise the accuracy of the kilams and of the people they sing about. As the figures of these kilams lived relatively recently they can sometimes be verified by historical sources such as written reports, eyewitnesses, or people who had heard about them from eyewitnesses.³² Tribal enmities and battles are presented as an accepted part of social life, even if criticised for failures and unwise choices. Battle songs sketch a socio-political world in which local and small-scale connections occupy central stage and overshadow larger political concerns.

In the kilam *Silêmanê Mistê*, a young hero from the House of Dîbo of the Elikan tribe was killed after he looted the farms of the House of Faro of the Pencînaran tribe. The kilam takes place in the early decades of the twentieth century³³ in the Xerzan region around Batman. Silêman's mother Xatê is the

31 The figure of the "local leader" is based on the following songs: From Hamelink's recordings: *Kuştîna Mihemedo bavê Meys* and *Elîyê bavê Şêxmus* by İbrahimê Pîrikê (Diyarbakır, May 2007, nr. 45 and nr. 27), *Haso Axa Mala Nasir* by Ahmedê Aqutê (Istanbul, April 2007, nr. 5), *Şerê berxê mala Tûjo û Siloyê Sedikê* by Üsivê Farê (Diyarbakır, May 2007, nr. 44), *Kilama Xezalê* by Memik Ganidağlı (Pazarçık, May 2007, nr. 60), *Dewrêşê Evdî* by dengbêj Bedir (Van, July 2008, nr. 192), *Şêx Tahir efendî* by Apê Silhedîn (Van, July 2008, nr. 195), *Mihemedê birayê Gulnazê* by dengbêj Bedir (Van, July 2008, nr. 197), *Silêmanê Mistê* by dengbêj Xalitê Xerzê (Diyarbakır, June 2007, nr. 109), From Kevirbirî 2001: *Filîte Quto* (p. 57), *Emê Gozê* (p. 23), *Evdilê Biraşîm* (p. 47), *Bişarê Çeto* (p. 85), by Salihê Qûbînî. From Aras 1996: *Lo mûro* (p. 55), *Minê li hafa nexşê nexşîwanê* (p. 77), *Wey Xozanê* (p. 92), *Evla Begê mîrê zirav* (p. 104). From Yüksel 2011, *Îskano* by Reso (p. 134).

32 Kevirbirî (2001) and Aras (1996) for example worked on the historical verification of some kilams.

33 This event should have taken place before 1920. In that year Cemîlê Çeto was arrested together with his four sons (Tansel, 1991: p. 142).

one who mourns his death in the kilam and sings about the battle and its fatal outcome. She relates how Silêmanê Mistê dresses and arms for the battle, he is well-prepared. He and his three companions aim to attack a neighbouring tribe. The kilam describes the road these four men take from their houses to the hills in the Kolik Mountain. In the hills the young men sit down to discuss what to do and how the booty will be divided. When they have outlined their plans, they descend to the plain of Xerzan and go to nineteen farms that belong to the Pencînanan tribe:

<i>Şêwr û mişêwireteka giran danîn</i> ³⁴	Then they engaged in tough bargains and discussions
<i>Sê heb şade şûtên Silêmanê Mistê</i>	The three hot-shot gunmen of Silêmanê Mistê
<i>Bavê Xelîl, Gula mala Dîbo hene xwe berdaye Deştê Xerzan</i>	Father of Xelîl, Rose of the House of Dîbo They descended to the Plain of Xerzan
<i>Peşîya terş û talanê Xatimîyan</i>	And they looted the Xatimîs
<i>Peşîya terş û talanê Mala Keran</i>	They looted the House of Keran
<i>Peşîya terş û talanê Mala Faro</i>	They looted the House of Faro
<i>Ga û gamêşê nozde cotan ji Gola Modê</i>	Oxes and bulls of nineteen farms of the Lake Modê
<i>Ji xata diya xwe re lawo vê sibê diyarî anînê</i>	And they presented the booty, oh son, This morning to Xato, his mother, as a gift

Xatê praises him as the Rose of the House of Dîbo, a division of the Elikan tribe. She describes him as a brave hero who went to loot the neighbouring farms and came back to present the booty to her as a gift. She articulates support and praise for his actions. However, the looting is met with an attack led by Cemîlê Çeto, the famous leader of the House of Faro, who mobilises seven other families. The attack results in the untimely death of the hero. Xatê therefore also rebukes Silêman in this kilam, telling him it was “ignorance” to loot the farms of the House of Faro, as they are “murderers”. After her son is killed, she incites his cousin to avenge him:

<i>Dibê: Xatê rebenê, termê Silêmanê Mistê</i>	[Emê] says: [You] poor Xatê, the corpse of Silêmanê Mistê
<i>Bavê Xelîl Gula Mala Dîbo</i>	Father of Xelîl, Rose of the House of Dîbo
<i>Li serê Çiyayê Kolik</i>	Has remained on the Kolik mountain

34 From Kevirbirî (2001: 63–67).

*li Mexera Bênderokê mayê
 Were ha weylê
 Xatê dibê, Emê lawo memanî
 Tu bala xwe bide Cemîlê Çeto
 Bavê Feremez bi tan û niça îro
 çi bi serê kekê te ve anî
 Tu bavê diya xwe bûyo lawo
 Şerê xwe bikin îro bi giranî
 Belkî Xwedê Teala siûd û iqbalê
 ji te re li hev dû anî
 Te heyfa Silêmanê Mistê Bavê Xelîl
 Gula Mala Dîbo bi destê xwe hilanî*

In the small forest of Bênderokê
 Oh my!
 Xatê says, Emê, my son
 See what Cemîlê Çeto,
 father of Feremez, today
 has done to your brother
 May you be my father, my son³⁵
 Fight bravely and tough today
 May God bring the oaths and chances
 on your side
 You revenge Silêmanê Mistê, father
 of Xelîl
 Rose of the House of Dîbo, with
 your own hands

Emê then kills Cemîl's newly-wed young brother Genco. The one who died in retaliation for Silêmanê Mistê's death is Cemîl's own young brother, who was just married, the henna still fresh on his hands. Xatê describes the battles in detail, and ends with the following lament:

*Heyfa min nayê li kuştina Silêmanê Mistê
 Bavê Xelîl, Gula Mala Dîbo,
 heyfa min tê li vê hêyfê
 Çardara Silêmanê Mistê
 Bavê Xelîl Gula Mala Dîbo
 Girêdane, dar nebû çar darên Gêncoyê Çeto
 Birine Eynqesra Bavê Şebo
 Lawo bi xwe re birine nav beyara*

I do not pity that Silêmanê Mistê
 is killed
 The father of Xelîl, Rose of the
 House of Dîbo
 [But] I pity [the following]:
 did they not have any wood to
 use for a coffin
 for Silêmanê Mistê, father of Xelîl,
 Rose of Dîbo
 Like they did for Gêncoyê Çeto
 And carried him to Eynqesra of
 Father of Şebo
 Whereas they took my son's
 body and left him in the open

The expression "I do not pity that ..., but I do pity that. ..." is common in these types of kilams. The death of a warrior is regarded as a possible consequence

35 In Kurdish, people may call each other "bavê min buyo" or "diya min buyo" to express their love and affection; it is not meant to be understood literally.

of a heroic battle that is naturally very painful, but can in a way be accepted. But certain circumstances or consequences of the hero's death are more difficult to accept. In this kilam, Xatê reproaches Cemîlê Çeto for not giving her son proper treatment after he died, whereas he was as much a good man and fighter as Cemîl's brother.

In several ways, the figure of the local leader thus shows that local alliances and enmities were common and accepted, and that a battle between Kurdish tribes was in itself not condemned. Since there are many kilams about tribal battles that seem to be songs praising Kurdish local heroes, they must have been popular among the audiences of the time. The fact that they were not regarded as creating divisions, but as offering praise for the tribe or family, demonstrates that local political structures were central to the life worlds of the people the kilams speak of.

Kurdish Outlaws³⁶ and the State

Next to the many kilams about relationships among the numerous tribes that made up the Kurdish socio-political landscape, there are also many kilams that speak of the relationship between the Kurds and the Ottoman and Turkish state. We discuss this relationship through the figures of the fugitive, the rebel and the traitor. We did not encounter many kilams in which Ottoman and Turkish individuals are personified. Mostly, they are referred to as soldiers, as *Rom* (the most commonly used term to refer to Ottomans/Turks in the kilams), as *hukumet* (*government*), or as Mustafa Kemal. This again points towards the distant relationship displayed in the kilams between the Kurds and the state.³⁷

State borders are often mentioned in the kilams as places of escape. One could take advantage of the political reality of borders by exchanging one tax system for another one, by escaping one government and hiding in another country until the impending punishment was barred or forgotten, or by hiding in one country until the time was ready for revenge in the first country.³⁸ Borders as escape routes do not only emerge in battle and rebel songs, but also

36 We use the word outlaw to refer to a person who willingly operates outside established norms, who is a fugitive trying to escape from the law.

37 "The central government officials were, and are, distrusted, and have not been able to replace the traditional authorities" (van Bruinessen, 1992: 69).

38 See also O'Shea: "Kurds could in certain respects be claimed to have benefited from their frontier location, both in the era in which Kurdistan acted as a buffer zone between rival empires, and later, by exploiting their proximity to international boundaries. (...) Political advantages have been largely two-edged, allowing Kurds to seek the support of rival

in love songs. For example, in the song Dewrê,³⁹ two lovers who cannot marry, lament their fate and dream of escaping the pressure of their relatives:

<i>Ti yê were bigre destê min</i>	Come and take my hand
<i>Em ê welatê xwe rizgar bikin herin</i> ⁴⁰	We will free ourselves from our country and go
<i>Em ê xwe bavên Girê Kemaliyê</i>	We will go to the Hill of Kemaliyê
<i>derkevin hidûd herin</i>	And we will pass the border
<i>Xilas kin cem birayê xwe nav Eceme ax</i>	[We will] rescue [ourselves] among our brothers in Ecem (Iran), oh

The Fugitive

The figure of the fugitive⁴¹ emerges in many rebel songs. An early kilam (the event can be situated in the late nineteenth century) in which this figure is present is a kilam ascribed to Evdalê Zeynikê about his patron Surmeli Mamed Pasha. In the kilam *Lo Mîro* the Pasha and his son Evdila Beg escape from a battle they join in the Erzurum region. The two are in an awkward situation and attacked by groups from all sides. The only chance for escape seems to be across the Iranian border, even though the relationship with the Iranians is also far from straightforward. The kilam sheds light on the troubled position of a pasha with conflicting loyalties.

<i>Lo Mîro</i> ⁴²	Oh Mîr
<i>Hayde bavo, axayo de sîyar be</i>	Hey father, mount your horse, oh agha

imperial powers to achieve their own ends, but allowing the imperial powers to combine forces to defeat them" (2004: 20).

39 Hamelink recorded another version of this song in May 2008 in Diyarbakir, sung by Remezanê Hazroyê. As we had no full transcription, we present here a version by Hesenê Kufercîni from *Antolojiya Dengbêjan* (2011: 200). The two versions are quite similar.

40 Literally, this line appears to mean "we will liberate our country and go". However, the intended meaning that we derive from the content of the entire song is as we translated it. Probably, the accent of the composer caused a difference here.

41 The figure of the "fugitive" is based on the following songs. From Hamelink's recordings: *Bavê Faxriya* and *Musa Beg* by Ahmedê Aqutê (Istanbul, April 2007, nr. 7 and nr. 15), *Îsmailê Êyo bavê Orhanê* by Seyidxanê Boyaxçi (Diyarbakir, May 2007, nr. 49), *Xêlyê* by Salihê Qûbîni (Doğubeyazit, June 2007, nr. 120), *Bavê Salih* (Diyarbakir, June 2007, nr. 103), *Bavê Hiznî siwarê Beşo* by dengbêj Xalitê Xerzî, (Diyarbakir 2008, nr. 203). From Kevirbirî 2001: *Çûro û Fesîhê Mihê Mîrzê* by Salihê Qûbîni (p. 117), *Ferzendê Beg* (p. 137). From Aras 1996: *Lo mîro* (pp. 55–59).

42 From Aras (1996: 56–57).

<i>Mîrê min sîyar be</i> <i>Ji sîyara siyarekî rindî karîbar be</i>	My mîr, mount your horse, Be the most handsome and ready rider among the riders
<i>Di ser dêlbujiyê Erebi hur da xar be</i>	Lean down on your horse crazy Erebi's neck (...)
<i>Bavo bajo! Axayê min bajo!</i> <i>Mîrê min bajo!</i> <i>Konaxa kekê min Iran e bajo!</i>	My father, ride! My agha, ride! My mîr, ride! Your destination is Iran, ride!
<i>Binê bavê Evla Begê Mîrê Zirav da</i> <i>Şev-xûn lêketye</i>	Under Evla Beg's father, the tall king, [the horse] became sick of exhaustion
<i>Zîn û pûsata weldigerîne</i>	It is anxiously turning [shaking its] harness and armour
<i>Dikim-nakim teng û bera qe nagire</i>	No matter how hard I try, I cannot get the saddle steady
<i>Evla Begê bi sê denga kire gazî</i> <i>Go: Surmeli Mamed Paşa bavo!</i> <i>Wê ji hal û hewalê me çawa be?</i> <i>Li kêleka me ya rastê esker Romê ye</i> <i>Li paşya me eskerê Hecî Usiv Paşa</i>	Evla Beg called over and over: He said: Surmeli Mamed Pasha, father! What is going to happen to us? On our right side are Turkish soldiers On our back there are the soldiers of Heci Usiv Pasha
<i>yê Sîpikî</i> <i>Sofi Paşayê Hesenî, Temo yê Cibrî ye</i>	from the Sipikî tribe And Sofi Pasha from the Hesenî, Temo from the Cibran
<i>Wê ji hal û hewalê me çawa be?</i>	What is going to happen to us? (...)
<i>Axayê min sîyar be! Mîrê min sîyar be!</i>	Mount your horse, my Agha! Mount your horse, my Mîr!
<i>Ji bo malê dunê ne sefil</i>	You may neither be sad about the property you leave behind
<i>Ne jî tengezar be</i> <i>Bira felek bi te ra yar be</i> <i>Nebû bira çend saleka li erdê Iranê</i>	nor may you despair May fortune be your friend If not, then let it be, for some years in Iran
<i>Kafîrê Ecem bi te ra neyar be bajo!</i>	Let these infidel Persians be your enemies. Ride!

Surmeli Mamed Pasha is rousing his horse until he is sick of exhaustion. On the anxious call of his son Evla Beg he promises that they will make it. On their right side are Ottoman soldiers, on their back the soldiers of three Kurdish

tribes. The Han of the Circassians is also hunting them. Altogether the situation is rather desperate, but the father and son seem to be able to reach Iran before they get caught. The kilam demonstrates that Surmeli Mamed Pasha and his son are persecuted from all sides: the Ottomans, enemy Kurdish tribes, and Circassians. At the moment of the escape, all of them are described as enemies. As van Bruinessen (1992), MacDowall (1996) and others have shown, Kurdish tribal leaders made alliances with a range of different parties, be them Kurds, Turks or other groups.

The fugitive also plays an important role in kilams from the early period of the Turkish Republic. After the Kurdish rebellions⁴³ that began in the 1920s, people tried to escape from the hands of the Turkish government by fleeing across the border. A well-known kilam is *Bavê Fexriya*, “Fexriya’s father”. The kilam speaks of Zêro, an Armenian woman who secretly fell in love with this married man and continues to love him after his escape to Syria:

<i>Ji xêra mala xwezîyê Xwedê re</i> ⁴⁴	I wish in the name of God
<i>Hikûmeta Cîmûryetê</i>	That the government of the Republic
<i>fermana min jî rakira</i>	would also uproot me
<i>Ez ê çend saleka</i>	So that all those years
<i>Bavê Fexriya re</i>	I would have been with Bavê
	Fexriya
<i>Bî mehkûmê sere çiyê</i>	The fugitive in the mountains
<i>Min ê pê re sere xwe daniya</i>	Together with him I would have laid
	down my head
<i>Li ser dara mîrata modolîyê</i>	On doomed wooden branches [as a
	pillow]

Zêro wishes that she could have been a fugitive like him, so that she could have joined him in his destiny. Clearly, she regards the condition of the man she loves, or possibly of herself, not as dishonourable or condemnable. The “government of the republic” is not *her* government, but a foreign power deciding her and her lover’s destiny. Instead of siding with that government, she sides with the fugitive and prefers to be uprooted with him and join him as a fugitive.

43 In the Treaty of Lausanne, which was signed after laborious negotiations in July 1923, Turkey emerged as a sovereign state, but the Kurds were bitterly disappointed by the Treaty, in which none of the promises made to them had been fulfilled (White, 2000: 73; Zürcher, 2004: 170). The sultanate was abolished, and Kurdistan was divided over Iran, Syria, Iraq and Turkey. The profound feeling of disappointment and lost hope among the Kurds led to a series of rebellions starting in the 1920s.

44 From Kevirbirî (2001: 108).

The Rebel

Another figure that shows how the relationship with the state is depicted in the kilams is the figure of the rebel. Naturally, not all rebels⁴⁵ managed to escape. Some were caught, and many were executed or forcibly exiled. A hero one often hears about in the kilams is Bişarê Çeto, the leader of the Pencınaran tribe, and for some time on the run from the Ottoman government. After his first arrest he finds a way to escape from prison, but he is arrested again. This kilam takes place after the second arrest and is a good example of how a hero is criticised for being caught, and challenged to do better. Bişar, son of Çeto,⁴⁶ is in the prison of Bitlis and his father comes to see him.

*Çeto dibê: Bişaro lawo*⁴⁷

Bejna Bişarê Çeto, Bişarî Axê

Kulîlka di nava kûnciya

Hêşîn dike li Gozelderê, li Marîbê,

Li ‘Eynqesrê, li Kêşa Xerzan, li

Birincîyan

Dema ku Bişarê Çeto, Bişarî Axê

Dibû mehkumê sere çiya

Gelekî dilê min bi rehma Xwedê xweş bû

Min digo qê wê bigîje eskerê Eliyê Ūnis

Bibe qewmê Çiya

Çeto says: Bişar my son!

The tall figure of Bişarê Çeto, Bişar the Agha

Is a flower among sesames

that sparkles in Gozelderê, in Marîbê,

In ‘Eynqesrê, in the Xerzan Plain, and in Birincî

When Bişarê Çeto, Bişar the Agha

Had become a fugitive⁴⁸ in the mountains

I was expecting God’s blessings

I thought that he would surely join

Eliyê Ūnis’ soldiers

And become a part of the mountain people

45 The figure of the ‘rebel’ is based on the following songs: From Hamelink’s recordings: *Seydxanê Kerr* by Îbrahîmê Pîrikê (Diyarbakır, May 2007, nr. 25), *Şerê Navala Kela Reşê* by Mihemedê Şêxanî (Diyarbakır, May 2007, nr. 47), *Şerê serhildana Zilanê* and *Ferzendê Beg* by Memê Bazîdê (Doğubeyazıt, July 2007, nr. 122 and nr. 130), *Rizayê Xêlîd* by dengbej Alî (Van, July 2008, nr. 199), *Bavê Salih*, *Xwîna Şêx Ahmedê*, *Bavê Heyder Begê*, *Qudret*, (recorded in Diyarbakır in June 2007, nr. 103, 104, 107, 108). From Kevirbirî 2001: *Bişarê Çeto* (p. 85), *Raperîna mala Eliyê Ūnis* (p. 93), *Ferzende Beg* (p. 137).

46 Ūngör (2009) writes that Bişarê Çeto had provoked the feud between the Elikan and Pencınaran tribes and had: “telegraphically expressed his joy over the 1908 revolution in the hope of being left alone by the government. Together with his equally trigger-happy brother Cemil Çeto, they were known for their extortion of Armenian, Kurdish, and Syriac villagers in the region”.

47 From Kevirbirî (2001: 85–89).

48 The first meaning of the word *mehkum* is prisoner, but its second meaning refers to fugitives and outlaws, which is the correct translation regarding the content of the song.

At first, Bişar's father Çeto conveys the important position of his son and his pride in him. But after he learns the fact that Bişar was arrested he is deeply disappointed that his famous son did not manage to stay out of the hands of the government. "People of the mountains" is a term used for those who are on the run from the state, rebels or fugitives who are praised for their heroism because they were able to escape, whereas arrest by the government is embarrassing and brings shame on a family. Çeto accuses his son of not having taken appropriate care, of hiding with the wrong person, and of letting himself be arrested. Bişar feels insulted by his father's reproaches and defends himself by reminding him of all his earlier heroic deeds. When Çeto continues to insult him, Bişar tells him to go back home and tell his wife Gulê to visit him in prison and smuggle a gun inside. In another kilam about this same event, the dialogue is between Bişar and his wife Gulê, which follows a similar vein. Gulê challenges Bişar and tells him how he used to think big of himself, and she believed his bold words. But she felt heavily disappointed after seeing that he could not save himself, and blamed him for being arrested and for embarrassing his house and her name:

<i>Lê heyla malxerabo îro min nizanibû</i> ⁴⁹	Oh your house may be destroyed, I would not know
<i>Tu qelsê temamî mêran î (...)</i>	(that) you are the weakest of all men
<i>Îro dor li te girtin, te bi hêsîrî digirtin</i>	Now, they surrounded and captured you,
<i>Destê te girêdan navê te ji min ra</i>	Handcuffed you, and, they have deliv- ered your name, to me,
<i>Îro bi hêsîrî anîn</i>	as the captive today

Against the accusations of his wife, Bişar tries to defend himself by mentioning all the heroic deeds he accomplished and by trying to remind her that he is not the weak person she imagines him to be after his arrest. Both his father and his wife challenge him, and seem to want to encourage him to break out. Because finally, when he manages to break out, he is praised as a hero:

<i>Hepsa Belîsê têr î tijî ye</i>	The prison of Belîs is overfull
<i>Xilas nabe ji tirka, ji kurmanca,</i>	There is no end to the inflow of Turks, Kurds,
<i>Ji axe û axalera</i>	aghas and landlords,
<i>Ji teketûkê qizilbaş</i>	and a few Qizilbash

49 From the CD *Ji bo bîranîna dengbêj Husêno* (2003) by Delîl Dîlanar.

<i>Bişar di 'eynê deqê de</i>	At that same moment Bişar
<i>Gazî dikir li topa erqedaşa</i>	Was calling all of the friends
<i>Temamê destê xwe li hev didan</i>	All of them were clapping their hands
<i>Digotin: yaşa ji te re Bişar Axao, yaşa</i>	They were saying: long live Bişar Axa, long live!
<i>Ji wê rojê hetakî wek îro</i>	From that day until today [this event] has been written down
<i>Yazmiş bûye li paytextê tirkî</i>	[In the documents of] the Turkish capital,
<i>Li Xopana Enqerê</i>	In that ruin Ankara
<i>Li qapiyê Hepsa Belîsê qeyd bûye</i>	It has been registered at the door of the prison of Belîs (Bitlis)
<i>Li kitûkê Mistefa Kemal Paşa</i>	And in the logbooks of Mustafa Kemal Pasha

In the story of Bişarê Çeto, the criticism of his father and wife made him so angry that he regained his strength, and became again the hero they wanted him to be. The last stanza sketches the relationship with various others. The prison of Bitlis was filled not only with Kurds, but also with Turks and some Qizilbash⁵⁰ (who did not live in near proximity and may therefore have not been many). The mentioning of imprisoned aghas points to the harsh measurement of the government towards the ruling class many of whom were killed, forcibly resettled, or imprisoned. The kilam turns Bişarê Çeto into a hero not only for the Kurds but also for the other prisoners, who did not speak Kurdish, congratulating him in Turkish. The kilam says that his rebellion was noted in the government registration and ridicules the new capital Ankara (“that ruin”), and the leader of the Republic.

To conclude, the state is foreign to Bişarê Çeto and his father and wife. Imprisonment by that state means he will lose face and destroy the good name of his family. Escaping from the hands of the state turns him into a “person of the mountains”, a hero on the run, and someone who will be remembered.

The Traitor

Another regularly recurring figure in kilams about clashes with the government is the figure of the traitor,⁵¹ who betrayed his own people (often relatives

50 Qizilbaş, lit. redheads, were adherents of a Shiite sect, today known as Alevi.

51 The figure of the “traitor” is based on the following songs: From Hamelink’s recordings: *Bavê Salih, Xwîna Şêx Ahmedê, Qudret*, (recorded in Diyarbakır in June 2007, nr. 103, 104,

or members of the same tribe) to the government. The topic of betrayal points on the one hand to frequent collaboration with the government, and on the other to the fact that this is strongly condemned. A famous example is that of Emînê Pêrixanê, also known as Emînê Ehmed. Emîn and Evdile are two of the six sons of Pêrixane⁵² who competed for succession. Evdile is portrayed as a good and popular man who is expected to become the leader of their tribe, the Reman. Emîn is jealous as he himself wants to be the successor. He has collaborated for a long time with the government, and it is said that because of his alliance with the cruel Turkish commander Samir Bey, hundreds of houses were destroyed. Eventually he betrays his own brother who is then killed by Turkish soldiers. His mother laments his death:

<i>Perîxanê dibê: wey li mine axao</i> ⁵³	Perîxanê says: woe me, agha
<i>Kula li ser kula derda li ser derdao</i>	You, sorrow upon sorrows and pain upon pains
<i>De rabe kuştiyo bê heyf mao</i>	Stand up, you the murdered but not avenged
<i>Kula Emînê Ehmed birayê xayîn</i>	You who is gone with the grief inflicted by Emîn of Ehmed
<i>di dil de mao</i>	that treacherous brother, in your heart

The figure of the traitor also emerges in the kilam *Bavê Salih*. A group of rebels to which Salih's father belonged, came from the Zîlan valley. They were fugitives from the Agirî rebellion which took place between 1926–1930, and survivors of the twenty-five villages in the Zilan valley that were destroyed by the Turkish army. They had settled in the village Talorî, south of the town of Muş. Bavê Salih had been one of the leaders of the rebellion. Many of his fellow men

108). From Kevirbirî 2001: *Emînê Pêrixanê* (p. 47), *Şerê Newala Qeremûsê* (p. 75). From *Antolojiya Dengbêjan* (2007): *Mala paşê* by dengbêj Cahîdo (p. 25), *Lezgîn û Ebûbekir* by Emînê Hecî Tahar (p. 54), *Dayê dêranê* by Evdilhadîyê Arzûoxlî (p. 74), *Tahir bira* by Îbrahîmê Pîrikê (p. 154).

52 Üngör (2009): "There were also intra-tribal intrigues and power struggles, most notably in the Reman tribe. Its famous female chieftain Perikhan, widow of Ibrahim Pasha, had six sons who competed for succession (...). In order to succeed their mother, the sons had to outclass each other in the ability to exert power and express leadership qualities. Of all her sons, Ömer was known for his ferociousness. (...) In the summer of 1914, the government declared him *persona non grata*" (p. 61).

53 From Kevirbirî (2001: 51–52).

had managed to escape. In the aftermath of the rebellion the Turkish army searched for specific individuals whom they believed had played an important role during the fighting. However, as the army was afraid of instigating more unrest by openly searching for those men, they attempted to motivate local aghas to go after the rebels. In this case the traitors were some leaders of the Badika tribe, and all of the Xiya tribe. The leaders of these tribes had the order to kill Bavê Salih and were thus collaborating with the Turkish army in hunting the rebels. When Bavê Salih hears about the conspiracy he decides to fight. His brother, nephew and son have already escaped to Syria. During the battle Bavê Salih is killed and the survivors follow their relatives to Syria:

<i>Kesekî xwedanê xêra tune</i>	There is no one of good will
<i>cihabekî bişîne binxetê cem Bavê Silho</i>	to send a call beyond the border to
	Silho's Father
<i>birayê dilşewitî</i>	the brother with a burned heart
<i>Dibê mala te xera bibê</i>	To say "you the doomed!"
<i>Agirê kulê bikeve</i>	May the fire of sorrow and pain
<i>mala Emerê Mihê lawê Perîxanê</i>	besiege the house of Emerê Mihê, the
	son of Pêrîxan
<i>Eşina Xiya, giregirê Badika</i>	And also the Xiya tribe and the leaders
	of the Badika tribe
<i>Derbek dane li bejn û bala Bavê Salih</i>	They shot Bavê Salih
<i>peyayê mala Ûsivê Seydo</i>	the man of the house of Ûsivê Seydo

Hedo, probably Bavê Salih's wife, explains that help should have come from across the border, where his brother is. But neither can she find anyone who wants to go to give notice, nor can she write him a letter. Afterwards we learn that Bavê Salih does not receive any support and Heddo returns to the reality of his death and curses the tribes that have killed him. Now that he is dead, who is to take care of the family? Who can support her and her relatives?

Through the figures of the fugitive, the rebel and the traitor in the kilams, we can see how the state appears as a foreign force. Joining the "people of the mountains" was an honourable destiny and crossing the state borders a frequent undertaking with the aim to flee government persecution. As for the figure of the traitor, cooperating with the government is presented first as dubious and later as treacherous; the enemy of the Kurdish outlaw came to be more defined as the Turkish state exclusively. At the same time, the numerous kilams that discuss traitors show that many Kurds still regarded the Turkish government as a possible supporter for the expansion of their power. One sees that

on the one hand that a nationalist ideology did not yet emerge in the kilams,⁵⁴ but on the other that collaboration with the government increasingly came to be defined as betrayal and was bitterly condemned.

Conclusion

In this article we investigated dengbêj kilams to see how the home and foreign are depicted in Kurdish oral tradition, and what this depiction tells us about views on Kurdish political structures before nationalism became the dominant ideology and before self-Orientalism became an influential way of looking at Kurdish society. This adds an important element to Scott's argument, since he was criticised for not incorporating local viewpoints. The kilams refer to events of which many can be situated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They sketch a life world that revolves around local and smallscale alliances. The near environment of the home emerges as the centre of the kilams, rather than larger political structures. Local heroes are celebrated and enmities and battles among tribes are not seen as inherently problematic. Borders and the state are depicted as unwelcome foreign interference in local issues, and therefore resisted. The figure of the local leader, the fugitive, the rebel and the traitor, point to important aspects of the socio-political life in Kurdistan which remained out of direct control of the state.

Social practices like the reluctance and even resistance to being incorporated in the spheres of state influence, the inclination to avoid being ruled, regulated, taxed, conscripted, and contained by formal state borders, could all be seen as deliberate attempts to keep the state at a distance. For instance, switching sides between imperial powers was a frequent practice for local rulers who occupied the margins of the empires and crossing state borders has been a common practice for the Kurds who live in borderlands. Many Kurds have grown up hearing stories of outlaws, bandits and ordinary peasants, who used to take shelter in the mountains of Kurdistan to escape state laws and obligations. These topics also emerged in the kilams. We suggest that these social and political practices of most Kurds until the 1930s is a testimony to their determination to escape the control of the (nation-)state.

54 Songs about a united Kurdistan emerged in the songs of Kurdish music groups *koms* beginning in the 1970s (Sarıtaş, 2010, Aksoy, 2006), and cannot yet be traced in dengbêj kilams, apart from those composed recently by individual dengbêjs. The latter were not sung much during Hamelink's research; the value of the dengbêjs was mostly sought in older kilams.

The divisions among Kurdish factions have been a consistent feature of Kurdish politics up to the early twentieth century. The wish to remain autonomous appeared to be stronger than the search for shared Kurdish interests. In Kurdish political discourse this feature is explained as a trace of primitivism and a lack of civilisation. Academics in Kurdish studies also often followed this line of thought (see above). Scott's argument is a deconstruction of such "civilisational discourses" that regard people who remained outside of the influence of central states as barbarian, raw, and primitive (Scott 2009: x). Instead of explaining Kurdish history in terms of a "lack" of unity, we suggest that it may be more accurate to see this history as a deliberate choice to avoid the state.

We believe that there are expressions of political activism free from the dichotomy of sovereignty and statelessness. Resistance to political centralisation reflected in the practices outlined above is one such expression. In the Kurdish case, exercising political autonomy revealed itself as evading the state. As Arendt (1998: 234) suggests:

If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same, then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality. No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth.

Therefore, in the case of the Kurds, the tendency towards remaining autonomous could testify to a notion of freedom as the will to evade the state. Not having a state of their own and not attempting to found one until the early twentieth century might, after all, just be an alternative vision of freedom.

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BRILL

Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Statelessness: an Interview with Craig Calhoun

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Abstract

This interview with Professor Craig Calhoun expands on issues of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in relation to the question of statelessness. Since the 1990s, Calhoun has worked on nationalism, ethnicity and cosmopolitanism. For Calhoun, nations still matter despite post-national and cosmopolitan elaboration and repudiation of so-called parochial and provincialised identities like nation or national identity and citizenship. In this interview, Calhoun discusses the material, political and cultural situations of the Kurds in the Middle East and the role of Kurdish nationalism in the context of statelessness. Calhoun finds class-based understanding of inequalities between the Kurds and their dominant others in the Middle East as problematic and incomplete since the cultural, political and material inequalities are intimately interlinked in rendering the Kurds to a subordinated position in the states they inhabit. The interview also engages with diasporic identities and examines how countries of residence can impinge on the identity formation of diasporas and how they obstruct or facilitate migrants translating their citizenship status into the right to have rights (Arendt). An important issue that Calhoun discusses is that there are both asymmetrical power relations between dominated (Kurdish) and dominating nationalisms (Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian and Syrian) and within the same nationalisms.

Keywords

self-determination – Kurds – Turkish Constitutional Court – autonomy – democracy

Introduction*

This interview with Professor Craig Calhoun expands on issues of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in relation to the question of statelessness. Since the 1990s, Calhoun has worked on nationalism, ethnicity and cosmopolitanism. For Calhoun, nations still matter despite post-national and cosmopolitan elaboration and repudiation of so-called parochial and provincialised identities like nation or national identity and citizenship. In this interview, Calhoun discusses the material, political and cultural situations of the Kurds in the Middle East and the role of Kurdish nationalism in the context of statelessness. Calhoun finds class-based understanding of inequalities between the Kurds and their dominant others in the Middle East as problematic and incomplete since the cultural, political and material inequalities are intimately interlinked in rendering the Kurds to a subordinated position in the states they inhabit. The interview also engages with diasporic identities and examines how countries of residence can impinge on the identity formation of diasporas and how they obstruct or facilitate migrants translating their citizenship status into the right to have rights (Arendt). An important issue that Calhoun discusses is that there are both asymmetrical power relations between dominated (Kurdish) and dominating nationalisms (Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian and Syrian) and within the same nationalisms.

Eliassi: What motivated you to write about nationalism?

Calhoun: The very first time I wrote about nationalism, I received an invitation to write an article from the *Annual Review of Sociology* on structure and agency. And I thought that was less interesting because it is so abstract and not connected to what was going on in the world. I wrote back and said that I would be happy to write an article on nationalism rather than structure and agency. They wrote back and said no because we want core sociological questions like structure and agency and not nationalism because that is not so important. This was in 1991 so it got me thinking about the disconnection between what people think is important in academic terms and what was going on in the world. This was a time of the break-up of the Soviet Union and all the conflicts

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that were emerging in Central Asia. I thought that nationalism was hugely important so I ended up writing an article and I started getting more and more interested in studying nationalism. I was interested in the question of social solidarity and loyalty. I had been working on issues like class, community, protest and collective action. What is a nation and how do we think about this? Of course people used words like national community. National community is not community in the same sense as local community is. It is a metaphor. Local community has all these dense relationships where people know each other. National community is more abstract by definition. That is what got me thinking about nationalism and what solidarity and loyalty mean in such large scale communities. During the 80s when I started thinking about this more and more, I was influenced by Benedict Anderson's work on national community, in particular. I was influenced by my experiences while working in China on the student movement in 1989, where I found an interesting feature regarding the student movement that presented itself in the language of science and democracy in English and internationally, but in China it also presented itself as a national self-strengthening movement. I said, ok, what is going on here? Why is this partly national but not nationalist in the ordinary sense?

Eliassi: Few of those scholars who write about nationalism are in favour of nationalism and position themselves very critically vis-à-vis this ideology. In 2005, during an interview Benedict Anderson publicly announced his support of nationalism. In response to a question on whether he was nationalistic, Anderson replied: "Yes, absolutely. I must be the only one writing about nationalism who doesn't think it ugly. If you think about researchers such as Gellner and Hobsbawm, they have quite a hostile attitude to nationalism. I actually think that nationalism can be an attractive ideology. I like its Utopian elements". (See: <http://www.uio.no/english/research/interfaculty-research-areas/culcom/news/2005/anderson.html>).

Do you agree with Anderson on his pro-nationalism stance?

Calhoun: I completely agree with Anderson on that. This is part of the themes that I discuss in my book *Nations Matter*. I do not think that nationalism is always an attractive ideology but I think that nationalism can be a force for good and it can raise people beyond narrow self-interest in various ways. I think that it can also be divisive and problematic. People try to do things like separating patriotism and nationalism. They think that patriotism is a good national thing and nationalism is a bad thing. We need to ask more complicated and specific questions about nationalism. Without national solidarity, democracy would not exist in the world today. There are potentials to organise democracy in city-states but we do not have that today. But in fact democracy has been very dependent on nationalism and the rise of democracy depended

on the idea of who could be a citizen and who could vote. This idea of citizenship is closely tied with nationalism. This does not mean that everybody should be an ethnic proponent of one ancestry and one language. There are a lot of various ways to construct the nation as I have argued in my books. You can have good or less good ways to do it. Some nations are better at integrating outsiders than others. It is a good thing to be able to integrate immigrants, so not all nationalisms are negative. From inspiration to loyalty, the kinds of arguments that are made under like the Labour¹ policy that says: Well, we are one nation and we should not let the differences between the rich and the poor get too great and we should not let certain regions of the country be impoverished while others being rich. We should try to think about the whole nation. That is an attractive thing. It is not good if you say that we are nationals and we should keep all immigrants outside of our nation. Nationalism can call upon people to care about what happens to other people in their country.

Eliassi: Can we really call the idea of nation as a horizontal comradeship despite the huge economic inequalities between different classes?

Calhoun: I think that nationalism is mainly horizontal. Having a strong horizontal understanding of the nation is not by itself enough to guarantee that you won't also have an extremely unequal capitalist economic system. Nationalism is the basis for calling upon people to do something and limit that inequality. Countries that are ruled by Social democratic governments are often more equal and social democracy is dependent on a strong national idea. That does not mean that xenophobic attacks in Sweden and Norway on immigrants are not nationalist. It is nationalist and can be a nasty nationalism. But the problem is when people try to generalise from its worst examples. They tend to look at Nazi Germany and they look at ethnic cleansings in the Former Yugoslavia. Nationalism is these nasty things. But they do not look at the achievements and the loyalties.

Eliassi: Why has nationalism been so successful?

Calhoun: Nationalism in particular is an ideology very closely related to the nation-state and helping to answer a question that demands an answer. Nationalism is about who is inside, who can vote, who can get a passport and who is a member. The rise of the state was connected to this question. The rise of the state created a sort of potential and reinforced nationalism. Other ideologies like religion are also interesting. Even Benedict Anderson compares nationalism with religion and kinship than with other ideologies like liberalism and socialism. We have seen a rise of religious ideologies that are often

1 The UK based Labour Party.

explicitly transnational like the *Umma* of Islam. The Umma is set up against the division by national identities. Muslims are expected to emphasise their unity with other Muslims. The Catholic Church is also like that. So religion is an important comparison to nationalism. But the centrality of states to the way the modern world system has been organised creates, in my view, a kind of demand for an answer to who is legitimately part of the state, who are the people of the state? And that is why I mentioned democracy earlier. Nationalism is actually reinforced by the attempt to have popular sovereignty in a state. Nationalism is always an international ideology and it is not a question of one nation-state at a time and it always grows in making a distinction between “them” and “us”. Nobody becomes national just through thinking about “us” without thinking about “them” or opposed to “them”. For instance, Europe becomes national in a process that produces distinctions and oppositions and it can produce cross-boundary movements for democracy. It is not often the nationalist idea but the idea of the nation that matters. That is the key to our understanding of nationalism. Nationalism as a political ideology emphasises the nation. Imagined is not opposed to real. The idea of the nation is that we should work together and that nothing should separate us.

Eliassi: Doesn't the idea of nation express a lack of identity?

Calhoun: Yes, sure. I believe that the nation is not a pre-existing fact. It is not that it was already there. All nations are developed through communication and the ability to be connected. If you do not have roads, you cannot connect the whole country which in turn can decrease the sense of national solidarity. It varies from country to country how much unity exists or is produced. Nations are produced mostly by social institutions like schools and media and communication, transportation and infra-structure, by all the things that connect. This can get reduced and then you get European integration and a lot of people assume that nations will automatically go away following European integration but I do not think that there is any evidence for that. In fact, in the last five years following the financial crisis, the opposite has happened. In many ways, Europe has become more nationalist. But we should not think that nationalism is just a right-wing political ideology separate from the nation. In the Third World, people would try to make distinctions like saying that I am not nationalist but I believe in national liberation. But I would say that nationalism is all about that liberation. The Middle East is a very interesting example. In the Arab Middle East, you have the question what is the nation? Is it Arab? Pan-Arab nationalism? During the 20th century you had a very strong Pan-Arab nationalism like Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970). His legacy existed among the Baath regimes in Iraq and Syria. Nationalism has often been modernising. You get strange arguments in the field where some people say that the

nation has always been there and is a part of past ethnicity (Anthony Smith). There is continuity but also some changes. The old ethnicities are assumed to be transformed into modern national identities (Anthony Smith) while others like Hobsbawm and Ranger think that it is all about invented traditions and they show that these traditions are not from ancient times but invented for just hundred years ago. Just because these traditions come from hundred years ago, nations and traditions are not regarded as *real*. But here Hobsbawm and Ranger miss the point that what they are describing is the process of adapting to larger scale social organisation and modern life (Gellner). Nation is a transformation and not completely new because they have previous roots and Smith is right in this regard. But the nation is also partially new and being new does not invalidate the idea of the nation. Hobsbawm believes that if he can just convince people that nations are artificial and they are some kind of false consciousness, then nations would not matter anymore and go away because then you have cured the false consciousness through a reading therapy about the idea that nation is invented. That is crazy. All ideas of solidarity can rise and fall and be changed over time. I do not believe in the idea of true or correct consciousness against a false consciousness. I think that there are understandings of who we are that are better or worse and their consequences. You can for instance say to Scottish nationalists that the Scottish National Party has bad economic analysis and therefore you should not believe in them or vote for independence and separate from England. But do not start by saying to the Scots that you are the real nationalist. Do not attack the nationalism, attack the economic policy and provide answers to what can be good for the Scottish people! So I think much of the discussion of nationalism creates unhelpful ideas of distinctions like this idea that you can just get rid of the nation by showing that it is historically new. It has no effect.

I think for every nation, what was there before matters in constructing the nation. China was not really national before the late 19th century. But there was certainly a Chinese language and culture but there were a new set of changes from 1890s until the 1910s that changed the way people thought about being Chinese, it changed the social imaginary about the Chinese society. The rise of a nationalist imaginary engaged with getting rid of emperors and not thinking in old ways about Chineseness. It is not only the right-wing but also the left-wing that opposed the emperors and wanted to modernise by being national in a new way. Some of the communists in China put abolishing class differences at the forefront, but they are communist nationalists because they are still focusing on China. Others say that it is just about strengthening the nation. Both the left and the right in China were nationalists because they had the strengthening of the nation as their central goal.

Eliassi: Do you think that nationalism is here to stay?

Calhoun: Well, it is part of the world. I do not think that it will stay forever. Nothing is permanent in human life. With the rise of the modern state system and the capitalist system, nations and states are related to each other and it is not easy to just say get rid of the idea of the nation and keep the rest of this organisation of the world. If there were some completely different way of organising, then it might change but I do not see that happening. I do see some sort of a return of imperial thinking in some places.

Eliassi: Do you think of Russia?

Yes, I am thinking for example of Russia. So there is a tension between a strong Russian nationalism and a more imperial idea of rebuilding the world. But that is not a complete contradiction because if you think of the rise of British nationalism, it happened at the same time as its empire.

Eliassi: How do you relate to contemporary debates about postnationalism?

Calhoun: The short version of my answer to this is that there is a false opposition to nationalism and it is a dangerous situation where people imagine that nationalism is just fading away and we are all becoming cosmopolitans (and do not ask me what that means). Do they mean one world, one government or do they mean cultures as mixing all over the world? There are certain cosmopolitans like human rights activists and there are people who are listening to world music and speaking many languages (although they are fewer than we expect). I think it is wishful thinking about nationalism as fading away and us becoming world citizens. But can you get a passport as a world citizen? The more specific (particular) forms of belonging still matter. So post-nationalism should not be sharply opposed to nationalism; that we are moving from nationalism to post-nationalism and beyond post-nationalism to cosmopolitanism. The idea of cosmopolitanism is based on the idea that we used to have backward cultural identities and now we are freeing ourselves from that and taking part in a more reasonable and rational cosmopolitan world. I think that the movement is from one form of cultural idea to another. Cosmopolitans do not accord attention to their class backgrounds. Nations can be more cosmopolitan, like for instance being better at integrating immigrants. Some nations thrive on that. Germany was a country that was very bad at incorporating immigrants and has now, more or less, decided for its own economic future that it needs to get better at making non-Germans integrate and feel at home in Germany. Germany realises 1) that it needs engineers of all kinds, 2) it needs workers, 3) it has an ageing population that will create problems for the German economy. But the problem is that Germanness has been a fairly intolerant ideology. Earlier, Germans were talking about cosmopolitanism like Immanuel Kant and later on adopted an ideology based on racial superiority. Cosmopolitanism and

nationalism were all in Germany. I think that when people become cosmopolitanism, nationalism is part of that definition because it is not either cosmopolitanism or nationalism. It is not that you give up all national things and become cosmopolitan. You should think larger about your country, like including differences and multiculturalism within your country and building good relations between your country and other countries in the world.

Eliassi: How do you look at statelessness and nationalism?

Calhoun: You can put it in two ways. National membership is complicit in creating the suffering of stateless people. Hannah Arendt says that statelessness is the great tragedy of the modern world. What is the solution? Abolishing nationalism or getting state membership for stateless people? This happens to refugees all the time. I would say that the nation-state still has a lot of power and that shows how problematic it is to be stateless, the extent to which forced migration strips people of their credentials. You were a doctor and you end up as a cleaner or a taxi driver because you are not national. I think that nationalism can be good or bad in this regard. The solution for the states is not to be more nationalist but it is to change the ability of countries to absorb and recognise immigrants. First, I don't think that abolishing national identities solves this problem, it is impossible and I think it misses the point. Secondly, we need to change the nation into a more open and accepting community. I do not agree with Brubaker and Cooper regarding the idea of "beyond identity". This reminds me of cosmopolitans who think that identity applies to old belongings and not the new ones that we adopt.

Eliassi: Renato Rosaldo in his book *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (1993) talks about the nexus between citizenship, culture and power and discusses how dominant groups often escape being labelled as cultural/ethnic and assume post-ethnic or post-cultural identities.

Calhoun: There are groups who claim this. I think we should not accept their definitions that they are not cultural or claiming to be not ethnic but they look pretty white, they all speak English and it is not that there is no class, culture, ethnicity or race but it is their claims that they are not. We have to be careful to analyse their claims and describe their ideologies. It is right that there are groups who believe that they have transcended class, race and ethnicity but this is an ideology because they are not conscious about their new ways of being exclusive. They have a cultural identity and nobody has ever moved beyond cultures. I think that some people think that they have, but it is more a matter of cultural change and some people can become less focused on nations. That is true. You can become an officer of a multinational cooperation and really work multinationally. The corporate elite figure who travels around the world and speaks three languages and is cosmopolitan still has a cultural

identity and a class identity and probably has a passport from a country that makes it easy for this person to cross the borders. So s/he is not stateless since his/her ability to travel is not based on his/her statelessness but based on coming from a state with a respected passport. If you have a Sudanese passport, you will have problem at every border. There is a great deal of asymmetry and inequality in this regard. It is almost like this: that members of dominant groups misunderstand and misrecognise their particularities. People who are dominated are conscious of this because they face these inequalities every day. But those who are dominating can afford to forget about it because it works for them. It is a crucial form of privilege. If you do have a car, you do not think about people who do not have cars. There is always a forgetting about differences by those groups who are privileged.

Eliassi: In Oxford I interviewed a Kurdish refugee from Syria who said that he thinks daily about Kurdistan, Kurdish identity and being stateless. What do you think about this situation?

Calhoun: This is what I am trying to describe when I say that nationalism can sometimes be good as Benedict Anderson also indicates. Secondly, nationalism is not simply an intellectual mistake which I think Hobsbawm's position is about, that you should really read Marx and figure out that you should have a class identity and not a national identity. I say no, that Kurdish person is correctly grasping and it is not only sentimental but he is reminded that he should do things for his nation and it does matter.

Eliassi: One of the painful moments for those Kurds that I have interviewed in Sweden and the UK concerns the question: Where are you from? For many of them saying that they are Swedish or British citizens does not suffice as an answer to people's question about their belonging. Besides, many of these Kurds want to say that they are from Kurdistan. They want to adopt a Kurdistani identity. Some dominant nationals of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria contest Kurdistan's existence and tell the Kurdish migrants to show them Kurdistan on the map if it really exists.

Calhoun: Yes, where are you really from? Where are your parents really from? The aspiration to nation in that sense makes perfect sense in every one of the countries where there is a large numbers of Kurds. The Kurds lack political control over their country and they are not fully participating and integrated and do not have equal economic chances in these states. Now in Iraq they try to achieve these rights. Kurdistan is like a pie where Iran takes a part of the pie, Iraq takes a part of the pie, Syria takes a part of the pie and Turkey takes a part of the pie. So in each one of these countries someone else or an ideology is dominant and many of them have had a dominant ideology of nation and national building. For instance, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk created modern

Turkishness and Kurds were regarded as problematic to that project. More or less, the same thing happened with Baathists in Iraq and Syria that have had modernising nationalist regimes. If there had been no discrimination against the Kurds, if the national idea had really included equality for everyone, then there would have been less incentive to focus on the Kurdish identity, it might still have been an issue. You could say that it was overly cultural. But now it is always and in every case both cultural and material because there are material consequences for admission to universities, for having books printed in your own language, for economic opportunities and for how you are treated by people sometimes. These are material conditions that Hobsbawm interprets wrongly and are not successfully grasped by the notion of class. They really do matter. Nationalist thinking, the idea that we (Kurds) need to have an independent Kurdistan is reinforced by genuine unequal material conditions of life and it is not an intellectual mistake. It is a problem because it is hard to form Kurdistan. It is hard not only against each of these states where Kurds are dominated, it becomes the case that Kurds from these states do not fully get along with each other. To form a Kurdistan, it is both a project of unifying Kurds and of separating Kurds from others. This is true for almost every national project in their earlier performative stages. A national project has to make national unity as well as make a successful claim for autonomy from others. It can be done in progressive ways with certain ideologies or in very regressive ways. Many nationalist movements are very bad on gender. They accept very unequal patriarchal gender relationships and they even incorporate them into their idea of nation and say: "This is our tradition and we have to protect our traditions". But some national movements are different and they say that the modern national idea is that women are also part of the nation. Women should also have rights. The PKK has been relatively successful in this regard. That also applies to the Eritrean national liberation movement. These nationalist groups are often more socialist and have transformative ideas about women's rights. Many within the PKK have the idea that the revolution is both social and national at the same time. The PKK has viewed modernising Kurdish lives and gender relations within the Kurdish society as part of its social and national movement.

Eliassi: How do you relate to the idea of dominating and dominated nationalism?

Calhoun: That is an important question. Nationalisms vary in terms of whether they are aspirational like Kurdish nationalism and Palestinian nationalism that are seeking a state and those who are defending a state, like we already have a state and we need to defend it against outsiders. There are dominating and dominated nationalisms in every case. Even in France that

we think is the extreme case of national formation. Well, to be from Béarn (Pierre Bourdieu's birthplace) is to be a dominated version of being French compared to being from Paris and belonging to the elites there. Everywhere there is dominated and dominating nationalism. Nationalism is shaped by the extent in which it is in one position or the other. That can be the whole nation in relation to a colonial rule but it also is inside the nation in relation to national identity. So you have a dominant version of the national identity in most countries and this is one of the things that is not consistently grasped when talking about nationalism. The idea that it is just a fact of cultural and ethnic unity is always misleading because it is always a project of greater or less inclusion. And it comes with various sorts of baggage of inequality and regional differentiations. Many people are strongly nationalist but they can say that this region is better than that region. National idea should be somehow about levelling inequalities but it does not always do that.

Eliassi: Italy is a good example.

Calhoun: Yes, Italy is an excellent example. China is another example. There is an idea that inner China is somehow more Chinese. On the one hand, there is an idea that if you are Chinese then you are Chinese, on the other hand, if you are from this core (inner China) region, then you are more Chinese. If you are from the Han national identity, you are more Chinese. The Han identity is regarded as defining the Chinese identity and Chineseness. But there are a number of people who are from other groups in China and they speak different languages. Chinese is the same written language everywhere but a different spoken language in different part of China and not often mutually intelligible. In China, when you go to an academic conference, the Chinese often have to pass each other notes to explain what they are saying to each other. One is speaking Cantonese and one is speaking Mandarin for example. It is the exact same writing but different spoken language, different numbers of tones. The same word can mean mother in one language and horse in the other. The point is that there is a strong national consciousness in China and claims to Chineseness but it is internally differentiated. Some people in China claim it more and often in a powerful way. So the subaltern and dominant division goes on even within the nation as well as between nationalisms and outside dominations.

Eliassi: To what extent have conceptualisations of statelessness changed in the 20th and 21st centuries? (Starting with Hannah Arendt.)

Calhoun: A lot. Arendt says her key things about statelessness in around the years of World War II and in relation to the massive refugee displacements. Her idea of statelessness is shaped hugely by the experience of the Jews but also others. The Jewish experience is one of a long history of partial assimilation

and of movement, statelessness and vulnerability and attacks. A distinctive feature of contemporary statelessness is the claims of territory. Arendt was not specifically Zionist and did not support Israel. For Palestinians, for Kurds and other stateless nations, there is a clear idea about where their states should be. The problem is that these territories are not recognised as their states. The Kurds know their territories but other people do not recognise it or let them have it. From '50s to the present, the world is much more interconnected by a range of international treaties and human rights recognition, protocols and agencies for dealing with statelessness. We have a more organised response to it. In the last 30 or 40 years, it has been a world of finance capitalism and rapidly accelerating globalisation and in that world, there is a return to migration levels compared to the post-war period that were very high. Some stateless groups were able to gain state membership and some were not. So it was not a general condition of statelessness and with all states trying to claim more or less birth-right nationalism (citizenship). Gaining a formal citizenship has increased although Europe is now trying to close down its borders. The big change from Hannah Arendt's time is that it was much more possible in 2000s to actually get a formal citizenship, so Sweden is a classic case in this regard. Do you become Swedish by getting a formal Swedish citizenship? It has double meaning. Yes, you can go to Swedish school, speak Swedish and have a Swedish passport, but you are not regarded as a real Swede because real Swede means ethno-nationalist. Many of contemporary stateless people are stateless with regard to a national identity but actually have a state status. The majority of Palestinians are able to get a passport in the United States or Europe, but some of them are in the extreme form of statelessness, living in refugee camps and have UNHCR documents. So I think that statelessness has become more complicated in that sense. Stateless people can be citizens in a state but that citizenship can be taken away from them. This is also what Hannah Arendt says in her work. The Jews were assimilated into the Germany society and when the Nazis came, the Jews were told that they were no longer Germans and took away their German citizenship. Arendt says that this can happen again. I think that there is always insecurity but it is not only that. What I want to say that there are two senses of statelessness, the extreme case of Palestinians living in Lebanon who do not have travel documents, and there is the case of diasporic people who may have felt permanent insecurity in whatever country they are in even if they have been given citizenship and right to social welfare and education and so forth. This feeling of statelessness does not go away and may take generations to fade away. The Roma phenomenon is about statelessness but it is also a denigrating view of Roma that Roma are a bad people.

Eliassi: Some of my Kurdish interviewees use the Roma as a metaphor for statelessness for not allegedly having a fixed territorial identity, a position that they want to escape and do not want to be associated with. Is it really possible to have a non-place identity?

Calhoun: The Jews are a good example. Zionism created a place identity for the Jews in Israel. Essentially Zionism wanted to say “We Jews need a place and a territory to anchor our Jewish identity”. So territory is extremely powerful and there are all sorts of problems and issues with territory like wars over them but it is extremely powerful. At the same time, there are fairly strong national identities that do not have the same sort of state territories. The issue of Maldives, a people whose island is going to submerge because of global warming and what is going to mean to their national identity if there is a place where they are from and it is suddenly gone. They might end up in Australia or some other places and keep a national consciousness. So the relationship between the people who are national in somewhere else and national in the so called homeland is a big deal. I would guess that this is true for the Kurds. Though more Kurds are in some version of the potential Kurdistan proportionally, the number of the Palestinian case, the proportion that is somewhere else is much higher. And it really changes it when the national identity is kept alive by people who do not live in places that are not associated with the nation.

Eliassi: There are Palestinians who think that those Palestinians who left the country “betrayed” the Palestinian national home and pave the way for Israeli occupation and settlements.

Calhoun: Even Irish people who moved to the US. Why were American Irish people sending money to the Irish Republican Army? Yes, because they felt diasporic guilt.

Eliassi: How do you see the concept of a stateless diaspora?

Calhoun: I think that the concept makes sense and it matters a lot how people relate to potential states.

Eliassi: What do you think of a diasporic identity formation?

Calhoun: The diasporic people are more conservative about the national culture than the people living back in the homeland. This is partly because they are remembering how things were when they were there. So what they identify with is a national culture that is based on an idealised memory. For people who are somewhere else outside of the original homeland, they contrast their lives with the surrounding society and think of defending their identities and the national culture. It is easier for them to fossilise the national culture and have a more culturally conservative view of it because of the role it is playing in their life. You organise Kurdishness in the private realm of your life, so you have it on

the weekend or the evening and it is less emphasised during the working day. It gets connected to those cultural activities which you can perform Kurdishness in some way. On the other hand, somebody is living in Anatolia, they Kurdish are all the time in a whole variety of different contexts. It is not the same sort of split between the Kurdish or the non-Kurdish part of life in the original homeland. That conservatism is fuelled by this split in diaspora.

Eliassi: What do you think of the concept of a stateless citizen?

Calhoun: Citizenship is such a state-centred concept. I interpret it as a metaphor than simply descriptive.

Eliassi: How can we explain that there are Kurds who enjoy Swedish/British citizenship although in subordinated terms but still claim statelessness?

Calhoun: I think that this has to do with a double consciousness that we do not have a state. The “we” that I identify with as a Kurd does not have a state but I do have a state in so far I can use my British or Swedish passport. I can vote and do things. But on which end, what counts as a valid “we”. So in Sweden do you use “we” to include you and the Swedish and when? You are also aware of many contexts in Sweden that you are not part of a “we”. This “us” and “them” reinforces this sense of statelessness.

Eliassi: Do you think that the “crucial audience” which scholars like Richard Kiely, Frank Bechhofer and David McCrone (2005) use in their article *Birth, blood and belonging: Identity claims in post-devolution Scotland*, to identify the dominant group impinges on the identity formation of stateless people to define themselves as stateless?

Calhoun: Yes, it impinges on it a lot. In general dominant identity impinges on their identity formation. But how important it is to maintain a strong sense of belong to the diasporic nation rather than the host nation varies with how welcoming the host nation is and how much opportunity you get for integration. So you have a number of cases, Sweden is one, of countries that at certain times are open in the sense that is relatively easy to get formal citizenship but they are closed in the sense that it is hard to become a cultural member. That contrasts with the US, where it is sometimes goes up and down how hard or easy it is to get a formal citizenship. But it is easier to become a cultural member because the cultural self-understanding in the US is based on a mosaic of different cultures. It is easier if you are white than if you are non-white to be included. I think the more the host nation makes it hard to integrate and fully belong and be accepted, the more people will continue to have their main sense of identity located in distant, potential homelands.

Eliassi: Eleonore Kofman in an article about the *Figures of the cosmopolitan: Privileged nationals and national outsiders* (2005) talks about the Jews

in Europe as being historically conceived as *outsider within*, which partially resembles the contemporary anti-Muslim debates in Europe. Yet, Jews were historically regarded as fully assimilated and thus presented as a danger. Today, the Muslims are regarded as segregated and living in parallel societies in Europe.

Calhoun: This sounds true to me. That is an interesting topic to study regarding when are the exotic outsiders attractive and when they are bad. In Germany, a hundred years ago, there was a kind of intellectual culture that was very engaged with Islam in a stylised Orientalist way, a cultural appropriation was going on and partly because there were not any actual Muslims there. The Muslims who were there were sort of attractive and exotic, while the Jews were regarded as a problem for the Germans. Then it changes. Now, the German consciousness says that the Muslims are the problem and there are too many of them here and what they are doing here is changing the identity of Germany. Muslim cultures are no longer attractive and fascinating. On the other hand, after the Holocaust, there is a sort of attractive fascination with the Jews, when Jews show up in Germany, they are proving that Germany is no longer the bad Germany and it is experienced as something very positive. See! Jews are here and we are not bad Germans like our grandparents! So there has been a reversal of position for the Muslims and the Jews.

Eliassi: Can you say something about stateless diasporas (e.g. Kurdish and Tamil) and state-linked diasporas (e.g. Turkish)?

Calhoun: It is a question of power and the double consciousness. When you are stateless, you always have to use other states to get in or get around and get anything done. The vulnerability to a constant kind of status injury or insult for being from a stateless side. Your example of the Kurd who wants to say that he is from Kurdistan but he cannot show Kurdistan to people on the map. This is a status injury. Even if you come from a poor country, you have a country and there is a pride and you are on equal footing with everybody else who has a country. But if you come from a stateless situation, then you are in this disadvantage in certain way and vulnerable constantly to being insulted and put down by the difficulty to answer the question where you are from. What do we do about this? Most of the cosmopolitan theorists have said that we should all be stateless. But statelessness looks pretty terrible so we really should create possibilities of effective state membership and be open to redrawing boundaries. I do not think that solution is that everybody becomes stateless is very realistic. You have to deal with people who are stateless case by case and see what the possibilities are. But it is not easy. My prediction for the Kurds is not that there will be *a* Kurdistan but maybe two or three Kurdistans, not a unified Kurdistan. This will be terribly disruptive for Kurdish nationalism. It will

not be easy just to say that we are all one and we are all Kurds. It will be like the Arabs. People want to be Arab but they are still Egyptians, Tunisians and Jordanians.

Eliassi: Why do you think that the nationalisms of dominant groups are regarded as inclusionary while the nationalisms of dominated groups as separatist when stateless people talk about national self-determination?

Calhoun: It is subversive when you want a state or want to change a state. If you belong to the dominating side of the state, you want to continue to be in charge of political control. It is not because that one is nationalist while the other is not. Many Americans usually say that America is not nationalist but multicultural, but indeed it is very nationalistic since it has a very dominant national culture and has the power to set the rule. The dominant groups are nationalist but they do not recognise it as such. That is one of the privileges of being dominant that you are able to see what you do as natural rather than see it as dominant. But if you are subordinated, you do not have that privilege. You know all the time that what you do is in this relationship.



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Obituary



Prof Dr Ol'ga Zhigalina (1946–2013)

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Professor Ol'ga Ivanovna Zhigalina, the well-known Russian Kurdologist and Iranist and director of the Kurdish Cabinet at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Science (*Institút vostokovédenija Rossíjskoj akademii nauk*) in Moscow, sadly passed away at her place of work on 23rd October, 2013. Over four decades Professor Zhigalina made an immense contribution to the field of Kurdology and the modern history of the Kurds, and her work continues to resonate in this field.

Russia is often considered the cradle of Kurdish studies (*kurdovédenie*), which developed in Leningrad,¹ Yerevan and Moscow. One might, however, not realise that Kurdish studies in the Soviet Union was founded and developed as an independent interdisciplinary field. The USSR then ranked first in the world in Kurdish studies; no other country had as large and as qualified team of specialists.

Most readers outside of Russia are unlikely to have ever heard of Ol'ga Zhigalina, since her works are practically not available in any language other than Russian.² She was, however, one of the prominent Kurdologists who

¹ As of 6th September, 1991 the city became known as Saint Petersburg again.

² Just a few of her short articles and book chapters have been translated into other languages, e.g. Lazarev et al., 2007. There is also an article on an uprising among the Kurds of Khorasan available in Kurmanji (Jigalina, 1990). A series of her short articles, e.g. "Iran and the Iranian

contributed greatly to the survival of Kurdish studies in Russia,³ particularly in Moscow.

Ol'ga Zhigalina completed her degree in *Romano-Germanic Philology* at M. V. Lomonosov Moscow State University (*Moskóvskij gosudárstvennyj universitét ímeni M. V. Lomonósova*) in 1969.⁴ In the same year she began to work at the Institute of Oriental Studies and the following year was appointed as a junior research fellow in the Central Asia Division of the Institute, led at that time by Professor N. A. Khalfin,⁵ who was a renowned scholar in the field of historiography. Under his supervision Zhigalina prepared the memoirs of the Russian General Johann von Blaramberg for publication, which to this day continue to be a significant source for the study of Central Asia and the Caucasus in the 19th century. Her annotated translation of the memoirs from the German original appeared in 1978 (Blaramberg, 1978). A few years after the work on Blaramberg's memoirs, Zhigalina commenced her work on the Central Asian question in British historiography of the 19th century, drawing on both the Moscow archives as well as the archives of the Foundation of the Academic *Semënov* in Dushanbe. In 1973, she defended her doctoral dissertation dedicated to the Central Asian question in British historiography between the 1860s and 1890s and was granted the degree of doctor of historical studies (*kandidát istoričeskikh naúk*). The majority of Zhigalina's scientific works focus on Iranian Kurdistan, an understudied area even today. It was an extended stay in Iran, where she accompanied her husband in the 1970s, that turned her attention to the Kurds, especially those in Iran.⁶

After returning to Moscow in 1979, Zhigalina began work in the Group of Kurdologists established in 1979 by the renowned Turkologist and Kurdologist Prof. Manvel Arsenovich Gasratjan⁷ (1924–2007). The creation of this group of scholars in the Department of Near and Middle East, directed by

Kurds", "The Kurds on the way to national and political solidarity", etc. are available in English at <http://journal-neo.org/author/olga-zhigalina/> (last accessed: 16 May 2012).

3 For other prominent Kurdologists in Russia read more in, e.g., Bennigsen, 1960; Leezenberg, 2011; Mokri, 1963.

4 The information here is mainly based on the author's personal communication with Ol'ga Zhigalina in 2012–2013, Moscow, and on an article written on her 65th anniversary in 2011 by Mossaki, N. Z. (2012).

5 Professor Khalfin is known to Turkish readers by his book *Bor'ba za Kurdistan* translated into Turkish. See Halfin, 1976.

6 She was in Iran between 1974 and 1979 with her husband, who had been working as the head of the Agency of Printing the News (APN). They were able to travel throughout the country where Zhigalina had the opportunity to get to know Iran and the situation of the Kurds.

7 He is known to Turkish speaking readers by the Turkish translation of his book. See Hasretyan 1995.

Professor Ju. V. Gankovskij, was the initiative of Yevgeny Primakov, a member of the Russian Academy. The group's research focused mainly on modern Kurdish issues. In 1984, the Group was transformed into the *Cabinet of Kurdish Studies and Regional Problems* and in 1990 another prominent Kurdologist, M. S. Lazarev⁸ (1930–2010) replaced Gasratjan as the director. In 2004 Zhigalina took over from Lazarev as the director of the Kurdish Cabinet in Moscow, and held this position until her death in 2013.

Besides her outstanding scientific achievements and valuable contribution to Kurdish studies (see below), Zhigalina supervised a number of Ph.D. students, among them Kurds from Iran and Kazakhstan.⁹ Unfortunately, the conditions of post-Soviet Russia did not allow this generation to find employment as researchers in the field of Kurdish studies. Institutionally, the position of Russian Kurdology, in Moscow as well as in St Petersburg, was dramatically weakened.

Zhigalina participated in many conferences worldwide and organised a large number of workshops and symposiums dedicated to various Kurdish issues. Under her initiative, the annual sessions dedicated to Prof. Lazarev were organised and she edited the "Lazarevskije Chtenija" collection of articles (Zhigalina, 2012). Zhigalina was continuing the long tradition of Russian and Soviet Kurdology and in particular the classical Moscow school of Kurdology, which basically aimed to investigate historical and political studies; in contrast to the Saint Petersburg school of Kurdology which specialised mainly in the fields of philology and literary studies. The strength of both schools, however, can be said to be their work on archival documents. What is probably most valuable in Zhigalina's work is that a considerable amount of her scientific work was based on the analysis of Russian and Soviet archival documents. This archival material is mostly consular notes, reports, and different reviews from Tabriz, Kermanshah, Khorasan and Mashhad. The archives also contain military reports. Her field of study includes Kurdish studies in general and the Kurdish question in Iran, Central Asia, and English historiography in connection with the Middle East in particular. Her knowledge of different European and Oriental languages facilitated access to a variety of sources and enabled the appreciation of the issue from different perspectives. It is especially difficult to

8 Lazarev is known to Turkish speaking readers, e.g., by his translated book, see Lazarev 1993.

9 Afrasiab Hawrami (d. 2011) was granted his Ph.D. in 1996 from the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Science. His dissertation was dedicated to the Mahabad republic. Another Ph.D. candidate was a Kurd from Kazakhstan, Amin Mustafaev, who was also granted his Ph.D. in 1996 for a dissertation on the Iranian-Iraqi war (1980–1988) and the struggle of Iranian Kurds for autonomy.

investigate problems of modern Kurdish history in Russia, since the number of new publications appearing in the libraries is extremely limited and there is practically no access to electronic publications.

Zhigalina is the author of more than one hundred scientific publications, among which are a number of monographs. From the 1980s onwards her scientific publications appeared in the fields of Kurdish studies, especially on Iranian Kurdistan. In 1988, she published her book on the national movement of the Kurds in Iran 1918–1947 (Zhigalina, 1988). It is written mostly on the basis of the archival sources of the National Foundation of India, the foreign policy archives of the Russian Empire, the private archive of the famous Russian Kurdologist O. L. Vil'chevskij, and the materials of the Archive of the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts. In her important book, among others Zhigalina analyses the uprisings of the Kurds, the centralising policies of the Shah, and the political situation in Kurdistan in the 1930s. Two years later in 1990 Zhigalina's monograph based on her doctoral thesis, "Great Britain in the Middle East (19th and early 20th centuries)", was published (Zhigalina, 1990). In 1996, Zhigalina completed her habilitation (*dóktorskaja dissertácija*) on the ethno-social processes in Iran in the 19th and 20th centuries (Zhigalina, 1996). On the basis of the historical material Zhigalina analysed tendencies of development in Iranian society and the dynamics of ethno-social transformations. The special focus of the work is on the escalation of the ethnopolitical situation and conflict in Iranian Kurdistan.

In 2002, she published another monograph, this time on the Kurdish khanates of Khorasan during the late Qajar period (Zhigalina, 2002). Four years later, Zhigalina published a monograph on the Kurdish question in Western Asia at the beginning of the 21st century (Zhigalina, 2006). In 2008, based on extensive Russian archival material, she produced a unique monograph on the Kurds of Kermanshah (Zhigalina, 2008). In 2011 "The Kurdish question in the politics of the modern Iran. The problem of the resolution of the Kurdish ethno-political conflict in Iran" was published in Germany by Lambert Academic Publishing¹⁰ (Zhigalina, 2011). The book studies the politics of Iran towards the Kurdish question after the overthrow of the Shah's monarchy in 1979 up until 2010, examining the Kurdish national movement in Iran during the period of the revolution from 1978–1979 and the policy of Iran towards the Kurdish population after the death of Khomeini. In the book, Zhigalina also analyses the evolution

10 The publication of this book by LAP reflects the difficulty of publishing in Russia. Many works written by Russian Kurdologists languish on their tables for years because of the financial difficulties of publishing works in the field of Kurdish Studies, which usually receive no external financial support.

of Kurdish political organisations in Iran. She emphasises the impossibility of solving the Kurdish question by the use of force, and posits the possibility of a peaceful political solution through interlocution of representatives of the Kurdish opposition with the Iranian leadership. Moreover, she gives emphasis to the active participation of the Kurds in the socio-political life of the region and their contribution to revitalising the region's economy (Zhigalina, 2011).

Based mostly on archival material, the works of Professor Zhigalina are novel and crucial not merely for Russian Kurdology, but also for Kurdish studies in general. The majority of Zhigalina's works are innovative and introduce significant new data to the scholarship. Over the past 43 years Zhigalina worked at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow, with 34 years spent focusing on Kurdish issues. With her passing Kurdish studies suffered a great loss. Ol'ga Zhigalina was a remarkable person and she will always be remembered not only by her colleagues, but by everyone who was fortunate enough to know her personally.

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Book Reviews



Cengiz Gunes and Welat Zeydanhoğlu (eds.), *The Kurdish Question in Turkey: New Perspectives on Violence, Representation and Reconciliation*, London: Routledge, 2014, 288 pp., (ISBN: 978-0-415-83015-7).

With its 12 chapters each addressing a specific aspect of the Kurdish question, the edited volume *The Kurdish Question in Turkey: New Perspectives on Violence, Representation and Reconciliation* reflects the growing output of research in the field of Kurdish studies. This increase has been apparent in the comparably high number of accomplished PhDs located in a whole range of disciplines and applying a variety of methods. This volume, which includes a foreword by Hamit Bozarslan and a comprehensive introduction by the two editors, echoes this multiplicity of approaches and brings together articles engaging with three different areas: the various forms of state violence, discourses and strategies within the Kurdish movement and questions of peace and reconciliation.

Instead of ordering the chapters according to these three topics, the authors have chosen to distribute the chapters regarding the first two areas evenly throughout the volume and leaving the chapters on reconciliation to the end. Four chapters specifically address forms of state violence, understood in a broad sense, including the judiciary, media and language policies.

The first chapter by Derya Bayır presents an analysis of a range of legal documents and court cases from the past decade, including the current trial against alleged members of the Union of Kurdistan Communities (*Koma Civakên Kurdistan*, KCK). This substantive chapter shows how under the present Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) government the judiciary continued, as in the past, to eradicate the Kurdish movement by criminalising their political claims and forms of activism.

Derya Erdem explores how the mainstream media reproduces the militaristic state discourse by refusing to recognise the Kurdish question in itself. Erdem presents a comprehensive examination of mainstream print and visual media outputs from the end of 2008 to the end of 2009, a period which

witnessed local elections, the beginning of the AKP's democratic initiative and the closure of the Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, DTP), and illustrates the way in which the DTP was represented as a promoter of terrorism and separatism in order to delegitimise their claims for recognition.

The chapter authored by Ramazan Aras gives an overdue in-depth analysis of the narratives of people's experience of violence. Although arguing that the state used terror and surveillance as a mechanism of control will not seem unfamiliar to anyone in the field, this form of analysis of interview material is still novel in academic research on the issue. However, unfortunately his chapter leaves the difference between the experience of violence and the use of fear as a political strategy slightly underexplored, which becomes clear especially when he suggests that *both* the state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK) utilised such a "culture of fear". This suggestion, which he only hints at in this chapter, will certainly generate some future debate.

While all contributions are led by contemporary questions, Welat Zeydanlıoğlu specifically discusses the policies of the current AKP government. This significant inquiry provides a detailed review of the AKP's policies towards the Kurdish language, contextualising them historically within the state's language policies towards Kurdish and convincingly argues that despite the AKP's more pluralistic discourse of brotherhood, its policies are strongly dominated by nationalist and militarist discourses which deny the question of collective rights.

Another four chapters then explore different facets of the Kurdish movement from its ideals and programme to its discourses and strategies. Delal Aydın takes the reader through the history of the Kurdish national movement from its early beginnings via the Marxist organisations of the 1970s until today's PKK, analysing the different ways in which the myth of Newroz and the legend of *Kawa the Blacksmith* were narrated to construct a Kurdish identity and form a counter-hegemonic discourse. This chapter draws on her earlier work which already exists as an important point of reference for many scholars despite being unpublished (Aydın, 2005).

Kariane Westrheim's chapter adopts a unique approach to addressing questions of mobilisation and recruitment within the Kurdish movement. By specifically focussing on the processes of learning within the PKK and the impact of participation on individual political activists, she makes an original contribution both to the analysis of the Kurdish movement as well as social movement studies in general.

Analysing three different Kurdish women's journal from the 1990s, Necla Açıık critically engages with the dominant discourses on the role of women within the Kurdish liberation movement. Acknowledging the importance of feminist discourse to open spaces for women to fight gender discrimination, Açıık argues that the essentialist and static understanding of women's role, especially regarding the intersection of gender/nation, have impeded far-reaching changes within Kurdish society. With this chapter Açıık revisits arguments made in an earlier article which has recently become central reading in gender studies in Turkey (Açıık, 2002).

The chapter co-authored by Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jongerden turns to the PKK's project of democratic autonomy and confederalism, which has, hitherto, not received much attention from other scholars. Although the shift in the political objectives of the PKK has been discussed elsewhere (Gunes, 2012), what makes this chapter invaluable is the thorough discussion of this political concept in relation not only to the work of Murray Bookchin, but also to the concept of *prefigurism* as developed in social movements theory. Furthermore, the authors include rare ethnographic material on the topic, the full significance of which, however, remains slightly concealed by the wide scope of the chapter.

Adding another central aspect to the scope of the volume, the chapter by Zelal B. Kızılkın Kısacık examines the implementation of EU policies in Turkey regarding minority rights in two specific periods: after being granted candidate status in 1999 and when accession negotiations started in 2005. Besides illustrating the dependence of this process on the willingness of the government, Kızılkın Kısacık shows that the impact of the EU must not only be seen by its effect on the central government, but must equally be assessed by how it has empowered the Kurdish movement and therefore enabled an internationalisation of EU norms from below.

Finally, the last three chapters deal with the question of possible reconciliation in different ways. While Ozan E. Aksoy's more affirmative than analytical piece gives an optimistic take on already existing forms of reconciliation through music, Cengiz Gunes and Cuma Çiçek come to less positive conclusions in their scrutiny of party politics.

Aksoy's chapter provides an ethnomusicological account of the history of musicians and groups, such as *Kardeş Türküler*, which took a deliberate stance in promoting solidarity and mutual understanding. He maintains that despite the detrimental conditions and violence towards artists, all aspects of music – whether the lyrics, the process of production, the performance or dancing to

it – have contributed to enhancing recognition and have the potential to facilitate a dialogue and reconciliation. In this sense, his chapter touches on an area of great importance for the Kurdish question which warrants further attention.

Focusing on the AKP's "democratic initiative", Çiçek's contribution analyses the underlying conditions and the actual outcomes of the current government's initially promising steps to end the conflict. The chapter, which was originally published in 2011 and therefore before the negotiations with PKK-leader Abdullah Öcalan, locates the conditions for this initiative in the broader geopolitical context of the Middle East and on the imperial interests of the US to promote a moderate Islam in the region, highlighting that instead of enabling a comprehensive democratic solution, the AKP effectively "eliminated" pro-Kurdish politics from the arena. For Çiçek the reasons for this lie in the AKP's ideological constraints, including a lack of democratic values, as well as its administrative incapacity.

Motivated by the assumption that reconciliation and conflict resolution is dependent on the possibility of establishing a national consensus, Gunes' final chapter offers a comprehensive examination of the contemporary political conditions for such a consensus and their historical context. In doing so, he looks both at the contrasting approaches towards the Kurdish question of the mainstream political parties in Turkey on the one side, and the Kurdish movement on the other, as well as considering external factors. Thus, this substantive chapter adds to Çiçek's analysis by assessing the chances for an end to the conflict with respect to all major parties involved and endows the reader with a framework to understand the ongoing process.

While each contribution to this invaluable collection presents a unique approach towards the Kurdish question, the volume as a whole gives an idea of the complexities attached to it. At the same time the different and nuanced approaches inspire cross-reading of the articles. The volume, however, could have benefitted from including chapters regarding the crucial influence of the diaspora and the relations to other parts of Kurdistan. Nevertheless, its focus on the post-1980 period allows the volume to distinguish itself from the existing literature and provides a timely and original contribution to the field of Kurdish studies. In this sense, this book serves as a comprehensive overview of contemporary research for both those who are new to the field as well as for scholars more familiar with the topic.

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Almas Heshmati and Nabaz T. Khayyat, *Socio-Economic Impacts of Landmines in Southern Kurdistan*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, 341 pp., (ISBN: 978-1-4438-4198-6).

The Kurdistan region is heavily contaminated with millions of unrecorded and unmarked landmines and unexploded ordinance (UXO). Despite the fact that landmines and UXO have been identified as a major threat to economic development and resettlement efforts worldwide, governments in affected areas rarely focus on assuring the safety of formerly displaced communities that are exposed to extremely dangerous conditions once they return to traditional farming or husbandry practices. This reality also applies to Southern Kurdistan, where the Iraqi government established the National Mine Action Authority in 2003, which is today managed by the Ministry of Environment. In their book *Socio-Economic Impacts of Landmines in Southern Kurdistan*, Almas Heshmati and Nabaz T. Khayyat point out that a mere “one sixth of the mines laid have been cleared. According to regional government figures, landmines and explosive remnants of war have claimed 8,174 victims (including both injuries and casualties) in the Kurdistan region between the years 1991 and 2007” (p. 27).

MAG (Mines Advisory Group), an international NGO which emphasises land mine removal in regions that are disproportionately affected by unrecorded mines that kill and maim unsuspecting villagers and children, asserts that the Kurdistan region is one of the most densely filled mine zones in the entire world. According to MAG, at least one landmine has to be removed for every person in the entire Kurdistan region, which must be characterised as a devastating indictment of a number of states, militaries, and combatant organisations.

Heshmati and Khayyat emphasise four distinct historical periods in their book that produced the current landmine problems. In the mid-1970s, the Baathist regime sowed millions of unrecorded land mines throughout Southern Kurdistan to subdue Kurdish resistance. Throughout the entire Iran-Iraq war, from 1980 to 1988, landmines polluted the border regions to such an extent that certain rural zones are marked as “no-go areas”. Landmine maps have not been made available to international agencies by either Iran or Iraq, which could assist in setting up landmine removal protocols. During the Gulf war, so-called barrier mines made border zones between Turkey and the Kurdistan region inaccessible, which was followed by the enthusiastic use of landmines by various Kurdish factions without keeping records during periods of internecine

fighting. In sum, the lack of leadership from the central government in Iraq with regard to landmine removal in the Kurdistan region has been appalling.

While the horrific facts are well researched in Heshmati and Khayyat's work, the chapters are very short, frequently subdivided, and appear choppy. The book is extremely data-driven, full of charts, lists, and graphs that tend to serve a very esoteric audience. In addition, it seems that the authors could have benefited from a more rigorous editing process. In essence, Heshmati and Khayyat's work provides scientific audiences with a detailed resource guide, and specifically focuses on informing a readership with an interest in protocols and processes linked to parameters of landmine removal. The segments of the book that address health concerns, injuries, and educational outreach and programming are particularly informative. It must be pointed out that the available academic literature on landmines in Kurdistan is extremely thin, which enhances the significance of this contribution by Heshmati and Khayyat. Few scholarly articles have examined the devastating results of landmines in Southern Kurdistan, except for regular NGO reports that address the economic repercussions of landmine injuries or the social consequences for disabled persons.

What is missing in this scientific study is the inclusion of the human toll of landmines. What should be done to reduce the disturbingly high numbers of young Kurdish boys who are killed and maimed by landmines while they guard and herd their families' animals? What is the fate of landmine survivors in Southern Kurdistan? Victims typically are unable to find employment and often cannot access most buildings since even recent construction fails to consider the needs of disabled members of society. Heshmati and Khayyat's work represents an important starting point for detailed studies related to the long-term consequences of landmine usage in Kurdish communities following decades of war.

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Estelle Amy de la Bretèque, *Paroles Mélodisées: Récits épiques et lamentations chez les Yézidis d'Arménie* (Melodised speech. Heroic songs and laments among the Yezidis of Armenia), Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013, 230 pp., (ISBN: 978-2-8124-0787-1).

At the core of this impressive work is the following observation: the kilamê ser (words about) are neither song or music (stran) nor daily speech (axaftin). Kilamê ser is a form of speech with specific sound forms and uses. Estelle Amy de la Bretèque in *Paroles Mélodisées: Récits épiques et lamentations chez les Yézidis d'Arménie* analyses this specific form of speech: What is this specificity and what does it tell us? Why do the Yezidis in Armenia use this form of speech that the author calls the “melodised speech”?

The reason is to be found in the expression of emotions, shows the author, throughout a thorough, finely articulated, and extremely richly illustrated argumentation. The stran expresses joy (şabûn), together with the sound of these two instruments, the zurna (a kind of oboe) and the dohol (a kind of drum). The stran is generally danced upon, in weddings, and associated to swift vertical movements of the shoulders. The melodised speech expresses sorrow, sadness, and grief (xem). It is associated to the sound of the duduk, which the voice seems to imitate (or the other way round), and to horizontal movements of the upper bodies. The melodised speech expresses grief and sorrow at funerals, during graveyard feasts in cemeteries, but also in private settings when people talk about painful matters, and in particular the pain and suffering caused by death or exile, elicited by absence. The words are also melodised to talk about the heroes (kilamê ser mêranîê) as told by the bards and sometimes studio-recorded. These laments are melodised speech because they were originally laments on the death of the hero (or the heroic death), argues the author, who illustrates this through colourful examples, such as that of the young soldier, Gago Şerif, killed in 1993 in the Karabakh war, or of Çeko Xidir, a famous Yezidi outlaw from the Muscovite “Kurdish mafia” killed in 1996. The author shows that the laments and the clip shot on Xidir’s tomb do not differ much from the laments said during funerals and video-recorded by relatives to be sent to family members abroad: they just have gained a wider, non-localised, audience.

If the book provides a lively soundscape of contemporary Armenia (chapter 3), and describes the characteristics of both the stran and the kilamê ser (chapter 5), as the title indicates – it focuses mainly on the melodised speech. Concentrating on this melodised form of speech, it presents an interesting reflexion on the emotional and social uses of sounds. It also questions

what one could call the “borders of music”. Indeed the author notes that, “sounding like music to Western ears”, and studied by the (ethno)musicologist, the laments or the melodised speech are not considered as such by Armenian Yezidis. Presenting a thorough reflexion on the use of sound and on the category “music”, this book certainly makes an important contribution to ethnomusicology. It will definitively play an important role in enriching and deepening studies of “oral traditions” or studies of the so-called Kurdish “bards” (dengbêj) that currently develop in Kurdish studies, anthropology, and ethnomusicology.

Written by an ethnomusicologist who is also a fine anthropologist, the book is about more than the words and the sound realm alone. Dealing with the specific use of this vocal intonation and its role in people’s lives, it is more broadly a book about the ways people deal with emotions, suffering, and sorrow, how we manage the human condition. Accompanied by the words of the laments, the author underlines throughout the book (and more particularly in the last two chapters) that exile and foreignness (xeribî) are central to the expression of suffering among Armenians Yezidis, who share this vocabulary of suffering with people from the region stretching from the Balkans to the Caucasus and Persia. Death, exile, foreignness: one could speak of the suffering of separation. The laments both express and feed the separation of the multiple exiles lived by the Yezidis of Armenia: the exile from the Ottoman lands during WW1, the more recent migration to the Soviet and Russian cities, the exile of the young woman who gets married and leaves the family home, and finally, the exile of the one who dies. In this sense, the book makes a beautiful contribution to the anthropology of emotions. It is also of great interest for those studying migration and exile, an important element of both Kurdish societies and Kurdish studies.

Why then do people melodise the speech? Kilamê ser has a non “iso-chronic rhythm”; their “melodic lines are quite free, but generally follow a descending path”. The pitch is quite low (pp. 78–81; pp. 198–99). The melodised speech gives prevalence to the meanings of the words which, together with its resemblance to the sound of cries and laments, expresses and engenders sorrow, adds the author. The melodised speech is “fragmented”; it presents a “series of images”, somehow disconnected, and offers multiple points of view: through the use of reported speech, the orator makes the others speak (p. 91). The melodised speech encompasses the living and the dead, those present and those absent: the dead and their relatives during the funeral, those present in the room and those relatives long-dead or in exile. Like a “net”, through which emotions move and circulate, it creates an “affective geography” (p. 97). This weaving seems to also create a community of emotions in which all with his/her private pain

relates to the others' pain. This emotional universe is sonic but also visual: the sound connects the dead and the living, the author recalls that it is said that the dead continue to hear up to three days after death. The sight also plays a role of connector: the funerals are recorded and sent to those leaving far away, pictures of those passed away are hung on living room walls, and images of the dead are engraved on the gravestones. These make the dead and the absent omnipresent.

The omnipresence of death and sorrow enables the author to speak of the "desire for pain" and "the pleasure of suffering" among the Yezidis of Armenia: this pleasure would be illustrated when some affirm for instance that they want to keep the suffering alive forever. However, although the author stresses that the melodised speech is not necessarily cathartic, the fact that it makes possible the detachment from one's painful emotions – through the use of the reported speech, and the suppression of intonation for example – is striking. The melodised speech enables one to express the unutterable. This would be my only query regarding the author's argument about the community's "desire for pain": are we facing a "desire for pain", a "pleasure of suffering" or rather a specific way of dealing with painful emotion?

This sonic and visual emotional universe described and analysed by the author is very-well rendered by the actual form of this book. Some pictures and many transcriptions of the kilamê ser, often beautifully translated, are interspersed in the writing. The reading is also punctuated with references to 62 audio and video recordings (hosted on <http://www.ethnomusicologie.fr/parolesmelodisees/>) which reproduce and make the reading a real multi-sensory experience. Though extremely rich and dialoguing subtly with the ethnomusicology and anthropology literature, the book is, if one might say, embodied through five years ethnography (2006–2010) in the Yezidi villages of Armenia, by the videos of the dead and living, as well as by the portraits of the enunciators of the laments (professionals or old women with "burning hearts"). This work is therefore very stimulating reading for anyone interested in the culture and society of the Kurds of the Caucasus, in Yezidi traditions and rituals, but also in ethnomusicology, or the anthropology of emotions.

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Diane E. King, *Kurdistan on the Global Stage: Kinship, Land, and Community in Iraq*, New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2014. 286 pp., (ISBN: 9780813563534).

This is a very readable, insightful anthropological study that will be welcomed by all those interested in the Kurds and how Kurdish political actors affect regional and even international politics. The author tells her readers that she started her research in Kurdistan in 1995 (p. 223) “as an anthropologist traveling in the widest possible social circles in the region” (p. 217). She further explains that what she presents in her book mainly comes from “being there” (p. 43). She terms her methodology “embodied research. Such research involves the greatest immersion that is practical in local daily life and the deliberate avoidance of creature comforts that might put social distance between me and the people around me” (*ibid.*). Indigenous Kurds, however, might still argue that as an outsider who has not lived there long enough, King could not fully understand the society.

The author also explains that connecting is the main rubric for her book (p. 7), and then elaborates how “marriage arranging, relating to kin and neighbours, highly specific gender roles, and the limiting of female autonomy are the stuff of these relations” (*ibid.*). Patron-client relationships and belonging to gendered categories are additional ways people connect socially. “Kurdistan is a very socially rich place, a place in which people invest very deeply in social relations” (*ibid.*). Throughout her study, King also emphasises how partiliny (agnation), “a set of ideas about ancestry, kinship, and gender roles that centre on lines of fathers and sons traced through time” (p. 38), is “one of the most important social and symbolic forces in Kurdish life, the glue that fosters many of the social connections in Kurdistan” (p. 67).

In her lengthy introductory chapter, King tells her readers that “much of what this book is concerned with could be called ‘primordial’ symbols and social relations, which are now maintained, reformulated, and questioned in globalising Kurdistan, forming something not local, not global, but glocal”, (p. 15) a synthesis of both. The current era began in 1991, when due to the U.S. defeat of Saddam Hussein, Kurdistan went from being a mere victim isolated from the rest of the world to one where “new technologically mediated connections to the rest of the world are everywhere” (p. 9), and “life ... is changing at a tremendously fast pace” (pp. 10–11).

Although oil has been key to this prosperity, Kurdistan has so far been spared many problems of other rentier states. As one businessperson told King in 2008, “the credit crisis that is going on in most of the world is not affecting us

because everything runs on cash here" (p. 27). However, one should also note that there are a number of other factors contributing to the region's prosperity including the security and relative political stability of the region which attracts external investment from other parts of Iraq, Turkey, and expatriates. Nevertheless, many problems remain such as the inability to settle internal border lines or draw up a comprehensive hydrocarbon law with Baghdad. In addition, "poverty persists. Perceptions of corruption are high" (p. 28).

In quick succession, six more chapters follow. Chapter 2 tells how fieldwork in Iraqi Kurdistan during the 1990s was still done "in a danger zone" (pp. 41–65). "However, Kurdistan has become steadily more peaceful and secure during the past decade" (p. 55). In her final chapter, for example, the author notes that "during the past few years, I have noticed a dramatic decline in the number of firearms that are visible on the streets" (p. 219), and concludes that this "is a strong sign of the increasing power of the state Kurdistan" (p. 220). Although in the past "there was a definite stigma associated with Kurdishness" (p. 61), it has now become a land where "Kurdishness was openly celebrated" (p. 56).

Chapter 3 elaborates on patriliney or tracing descent through the male line only. Here King shows how patrilineal links to claims of origin and lend identity to their members. "They knit people together within the given space of Kurdistan in a way that is, in my view, every bit as powerful as the forces of economics, nationalism, language, and shared experience" (p. 98). They also serve as a "powerful contributor to the seclusion of girls and women in Kurdistan" (p. 68). Moreover, contrary to seeming logic, King finds that despite globally connecting Kurdistan, patriliney remains strong.

In addition, "perhaps no greater symbol of the Kurdish nation exists than the Kurdish village" (p. 88). However, now "Iraqi Kurdistanis are choosing modernity, living in cities on or near the plains, over their mountains and their villages" (p. 90). This recent trend was summed up by the saying: "In Kurdistan you don't *live* in a village, you *have* a village" (pp. 91–92). King further explains that "the aghas' ability to extract a generous income from their land has declined precipitously. In addition to land reform, high fertility and polygyny were a large contributor" (p. 99). However, some aghas have become millionaires due to the on-going urbanisation and the inflated real estate prices they can command for their properties.

Chapter 4 focuses on "gender challenges" (pp. 102–137). Patriliney implicitly forces women to be cloistered so as to insure the validity of patrilineal descent. "A lineage or tribe ... wants to be sure who its members are, and it wants to keep its child-bearing women ... from producing offspring for possible rivals" (p. 118). Thus, "a woman who drives a car can drive somewhere to have an illicit sexual relationship ... [and] would surely feel *sherm* [shame], an emotion

prompted by the scornful gaze of others in the community” (p. 104). Indeed, again contrary to what might seem logical in globalising Kurdistan, honour killings seem to be on the increase: “On countless occasions I have heard people affirm their support for virginity and chastity linked to lineages. ... Many of them female, affirm support for honour killings and indicate their disrespect for a lineage that would allow one of its female members to have sex outside of marriage and not kill her” (p. 133). And as for female genital circumcision (clitoridectomy), one older woman told the author that “a girl who has this done becomes *misikin* (well behaved; gentle)” (p. 135), an Arabic word which many, however, would translate as meaning poor. Interestingly, “some women who wear the head scarf have told me that they feel it gives them an extra measure of freedom to come and go, because their families trust that the piety they display in their dress will be matched by sexual restraint. A woman who works in an office ... can easily cut down on the chances that she will be sexually harassed by covering her head” (p. 122). Others, however, argue that Kurdish women have always enjoyed more freedom compared to their Arab counterparts and that they actually have retained their maiden and family lineage. Indeed, female education has skyrocketed, so “both non-literate older women and highly educated younger women are now found within many families” (p. 102).

Chapter 5 explores politicking, “the political stuff of state, local, tribal, and lineage governance, aspirations to such governance, as well as economic jockeying both licit and illicit” (p. 138). “The skills that allowed people to survive and thrive on the mountains of Kurdistan during centuries of imperial contests now come in handy on a whole different scale” (p. 151). “Frenemies” are neither enemies nor friends, but neighbours one deals with “in abundance in Kurdistan” (p. 150).

Chapter 6 looks at the issue of refugees and internally displaced person (IDPs) from Iraqi Kurdistan and within it. Here King argues that refugees complicate both primordial/local and modern/global regimes. Do they result from merely economic factors or also from the fear of violence? King suggests that both are explanations. The author also relates how a group of Yezidi Kurds fled a blood feud and then how a man long held as a prisoner of war in Iran finally returned home only to find it “unsatisfactory” (p. 193), and so left for Europe.

Finally, Chapter 7 shows how “the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is now a participant in the world’s system of states, even though it is technically, only a ‘region’ within a federated state” (p. 204). The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) conducts its own foreign policy and has de facto embassies in other countries. It also “has become a center for Kurdish nationalism ... where dissidents taking refuge from neighbouring governments meet, and where linguists are refining

the Kurdish language and authors are producing copious amounts of literature in it” (p. 211), a language that little more than a decade ago seemed on the verge of extinction. King rightly concludes that “a whole generation has now grown up with the Kurdistan Regional Government in control and vigorously pursuing visions of modernity and prosperity ... in an environment of relative political calm and low levels of violence” (p. 223).

By way of constructive criticism, this reviewer found only a few more minor issues. The author cites John Cooper as her source that the Simel massacre of Assyrians in August 1933 inspired Raphael Lemkin to coin the term genocide (p. 21). Most scholars, however, argue that the Armenian massacres during World War I were the catalyst for Lemkin’s term. King chooses to use the term principalities rather than the more common emirates to refer to the semi-autonomous Kurdish entities that existed up to the middle of the nineteenth century. She also states that “Bedir Khan Beg’s sons went on to provide leadership to the Kurdish nationalist movement ... by codifying the Kurdish language and promoting an awareness of Kurdish nationalist claims in Europe” (p. 187). While the sons (Kamil, Abdurrazzaq, and Emin Ali) did play a role in promoting Kurdish nationalism, it was the much more famous grandsons, Thurayya, Jaladet, and Kamuran, whom King surely means.

On several occasions the author uses the term *chete*, instead of the better known one *jash* (donkey or traitor) to refer to the Kurdish militias that supported Baghdad. Actually, however, the term *chete* means bandit. She also mentions how Nashville, Tennessee has the most Kurds in the United States but only explains this by saying the U.S. government arbitrarily began sending them there in the 1970s. Surely there were other more cogent reasons such as the role Christian missionaries played. Finally, I found King missing the major importance of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) – affiliated Democratic Union Party (PYD) in the currently raging Syrian civil war in her brief description of it on page 215.

In closing, King’s book also contains 19 original photos, 4 maps, and 2 figures illustrating patrilineal descent. The number of her endnotes falls off as her chapters proceed, probably because most of her work is based on her own primary observations, not secondary sources. Her book also ends with a glossary and acronyms, bibliography, and well-constructed index. As a long-time student of Kurdish studies, I highly recommend King’s worthy contribution to the literature and encourage her to continue her valuable work.

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Michael M. Gunter and Mohammed M. A. Ahmed (eds.), *The Kurdish Spring: Geopolitical Changes and the Kurds*, Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2013, 344 pp., (ISBN: 978-1568592725).

Is there a “Kurdish spring” comparable to the “Arab spring”? The Arab spring is a term that has been used to describe the popular demonstrations that swept across the Arab world in 2011, resulting in the overthrow of several long-serving authoritarian rulers, most prominently in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. In addition to the cover, “Kurdish Spring” appears in several of the chapter titles in this volume. However, several of the authors refrain from arguing that there is close similarity between the Arab uprisings and the political changes that are currently taking place in various Kurdish areas. Even in Syria, where the weakened Assad regime has enabled a “Kurdish spring” of a kind to emerge, a number of authors have reminded the readers that the quest for national rights among Syrian Kurds started earlier than the Arab Spring, as evidenced by the Qamishli uprising of 2004, if not earlier.

True to the subtitle of the book, the majority of the chapters are devoted to the geopolitical changes since the turn of our century that have provided dramatic opportunities for Kurds to advance their political fortunes, most prominently in Iraqi Kurdistan. The first four chapters are broadly similar in tracing Kurdish fortunes in all the four countries where Kurds represent significant minorities and have faced serious obstacles to achieving acceptance as a distinct national people, viz. in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. They are understandably cautious about the fortunes of the Syrian Kurds whose unprecedented moves to establish self-rule may be threatened or undone by the outcome of the unfolding civil war in their country. In Turkey, the authors are agreed that prospects for a settlement of the Kurdish issue and an end to the insurgency led by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK) are mixed. Many of the legal obstacles to Kurdish cultural and political expression have been removed since the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) in 2002. More recently, the Turkish government’s negotiations with Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK, has raised hopes that its faltering Kurdish initiative, first launched in 2009, may yet achieve progress. Nevertheless, as Michael Gunter recognises, there are limits to how far the Turkish government can go in granting the kind of autonomy that PKK leader Öcalan strives for, which could lead to Kurdish secession (p. 18). Iraqi Kurdistan is obviously a great success story for Kurds. Although not all is rosy in its budding democracy, it has consolidated its authority in the Kurdish region and, for the most part, fended off the Baghdad

government's efforts to limit its authority. All of the authors are agreed that there has been no improvement in the status of the Kurds of Iran, and that their prospects in the Islamic Republic continue to be discouraging.

Although the first four chapters have significant commonality in their respective surveys of Kurdish fortunes in the Middle East, they offer much that differentiates their contribution from each other. Ofra Bengio and David Romano (chapters 2 and 3 respectively) offer helpful comparisons between the Arab spring and the Kurdish challenges in various parts of Kurdistan that are referred to as the "Kurdish spring". In chapter 4 Michael Bishku asks the question "Are the Kurds a special case?" and provides much useful historical background to the role of the Kurdish issue during the Cold War, and in relations between Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria.

In one of the longest contributions (chapter 5), Mohammed Ahmed offers a detailed account of the domestic politics in Iraqi Kurdistan as well as the problematic relations between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The chapter contains much useful material on the politics of the primary Kurdish political parties and their leaders. The author also provides a lengthy account of the events surrounding Baghdad's deployment of the Dijla Operation Command, the threat it posed to the KRG, and the KRG leadership's defiance of al-Maliki's designs to limit Kurdish rights. Whether or not Maliki was justified in his critical stance toward the Kurdish leadership on the Dijla Command or other issues is a matter of opinion. However, one could argue that the alliance between the Kurds and the Shia in post-Saddam Iraq conferred mutual benefits to the Kurds and the Shia. Ahmed overlooks this case.

In the title of their contribution on the "Kurdish opening" of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey (chapter 6), Marlies Casier, Joost Jongerden and Nic Walker raise an apt question: Will it lead to a Kurdish spring or fall? The AKP government has had a remarkably strong political position commanding large majorities in parliament that attract much electoral support in the Kurdish region. And, yet, the authors contend that in its approach to the Kurdish issue, the AKP is treading the same path as its Kemalist predecessors. The AKP government has been unwilling to address "the real issues of cultural identity and political control" (p. 139), has sought to undermine the elected Kurdish political parties and, through both military and legal means, the PKK. It is no wonder that the authors are pessimistic about the outcome of the "Kurdish opening" that was launched in 2009. The authors' critique of the AKP government's Kurdish policy is amply justified. However, they have not acknowledged the political constraints that check the limits of how far the AKP, or indeed any Turkish party in government, can go to resolve the Kurdish issue.

The PKK's demands for regional autonomy and self-government are bound to raise fears of the country's break-up. The authors are right in stating that the AKP has been using the same security discourses of its predecessors, and cited the arrest and detention of large numbers of members of the PKK-affiliated Union of Kurdistan Communities (*Koma Civakên Kurdistan*, KCK) as an example. However, it is difficult to see how any government in Turkey could tolerate an organisation that challenges the government's authority to run its affairs, local or otherwise.

Just what does "democratic confederalism" and "democratic autonomy" mean? Stating that few people are familiar with these concepts beyond Kurdish circles, Joost Jongerden and Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya, set out to explain them. The authors explain that "democratic confederalism" is a form of radical democracy that has been formulated by Öcalan, the PKK leader, who was influenced by Murray Bookchin. Put simply, "democratic confederalism can be characterized as a bottom-up system of government" (p. 172). For readers who wonder how this system will work, the authors conveniently cite its application in Syria where the PKK-affiliated Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*, PYD) has applied the concept in areas where it has established control since 2011. This reviewer found it difficult to fully grasp at least some of the ideas associated with democratic confederalism, as promoted by Öcalan and others. What is one to make of the statement made by one of the advocates that "democratic confederalism as a form of political and social system beyond the state is a project for a free life" (p. 179)? The authors wisely acknowledge the utopian nature of the "democratic confederalism idea" and it is telling that the last paragraph of their chapter contains a quotation from Eduardo Galeano: "Utopia lies at the horizon. When I draw nearer by two steps, it retreats two steps ... No matter how far I go, I can never reach it" (p. 185).

Much of the burgeoning literature on the Kurds has featured studies of the Turkish Kurds and those in Iraq but comparatively little on Iranian and Syrian Kurds. This is understandable given the problematic access to Iran and Syria where the authorities consider Kurds to be a taboo research subject. The inclusion of two chapters in the volume on Syrian Kurds is therefore welcome as well as timely. Clearly, the unprecedented success of the Kurds to establish an autonomous entity and exercise self-government in parts of northern Syria is truly revolutionary. In chapter 8, Eva Savelsberg and Jordi Tejel describe the context in which Syrian Kurds emerged as important actors during the course of the revolt against Bashar Assad's regime that began in 2011. A new generation of Kurdish youth are at the forefront of the Kurdish national mobilisation that began most apparently since the Qamishli revolt in 2004. The authors describe at length the emergence of the PYD as the leading Kurdish party in Syria and its

success in exercising “state-like power in the Kurdish regions of Syria” (p. 209). But given the uncertain outcome of the rebellion against the Assad regime and serious intra-Kurd political divisions, they are cautious about future prospects. It is no wonder that they titled their chapter “The Syrian Kurds in ‘transition to somewhere”.

In chapter 9 Harriet Allsopp covers some of the same ground as the previous chapter. She reports the numerous splits within parties while the Kurdish uprising saw a concerted initiative “to unite the Kurdish party movement” (p. 220). In one of the strongest chapters in the volume, Allsopp explains how Kurdish political parties survived the draconian controls exercised by the Ba’th regime and how, until very recently, they were preoccupied with “... cultural issues, peaceful democratic reform and by survival” (p. 226). Like the authors of the other chapter on Syria, Allsopp strikes a similarly cautious tone about future prospects by noting the factionalism in the Syrian Kurdish political movement and the hostility of Syrian Arabs to the idea of Kurdish self-rule in a decentralised Syria.

While there is promising movement for Kurdish rights elsewhere, the Kurds of Iran appear to have little hope of improving their status as they continue to endure strict limits placed on their political activities. In chapter 10, Nader Entessar describes the political restraints exercised by the Iranian government on the Kurds since the founding of the Islamic Republic in 1979. He pays special attention to the Kurdish role during the course of the Khatami governments and the “Green Movement” that emerged in Iran in the aftermath of the contested presidential elections in 2009. Entessar describes the disappointment of the Kurds when their hopes for real reforms were dashed by Khatami whose authority was routinely checked by Iran’s conservative establishment. The author states that the problem for the Kurds, and other ethnic minorities, is that Iranian governments do not have clear nationalities policies and those running for political office at the highest level who promise to introduce democratic reforms that would advance the rights of nationalities fare poorly. Entessar points to other obstacles as well for, as in Syria and elsewhere, intra-Kurdish divisions have hampered unity among Kurds in Iran. While informative, Entessar’s chapter is unduly sparse. It does not sufficiently elaborate on the diversity of views among Iranian Kurds or the forms of regime controls and repression against groups that seek to expand Kurdish rights.

The final two chapters address the role of Kurdish diasporas. Vera Eccarius-Kelly discusses the role of the European Kurds in chapter 11, while Thomas Schmidinger focuses on the Kurds of Austria in chapter 12. There is a good deal of useful information in both chapters. Among other matters, Eccarius-Kelly describes the principal demands of European Kurds (p. 284), the goals of

second and third generation Kurds as compared with their parents' generation in the host states, and the political goals which they support in their respective homelands. Schmidinger does the same in reference to Austrian Kurds. Clearly, European Kurds are not monolithic and both authors comment on the various divisions which arise from ideological, religious or class, and other differences.

This volume of twelve chapters offers a rich variety of information and perspectives about Kurds in all of the four countries where they represent important minorities, as well in European diasporas. Though not without shortcomings, the chapters constitute readable and up-to-date accounts of important Kurdish developments in the Middle East. Kurdish spring or not, Kurds are poised to play an ever larger role in the politics of their region. Although Kurdish gains in Syria may experience setbacks, and the promise of further progress for Turkish Kurds may become frustrated, no one could have imagined just how far Kurdish fortunes have improved since a mere decade ago.

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Derya Bayır, *Minorities and Nationalism in Turkish Law*, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing House, 2013, 314 pp., (ISBN: 9781409420071).

Since her foundation, the Republic of Turkey has had a notorious record of diversity management. Non-exhaustive case law rendered by the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) on the basis of failed prevention of discrimination and minority protection serves as an indicative. Against this background, Derya Bayır's *Minorities and Nationalism in Turkish Law* is quintessential literature in comprehending the driving force behind this phenomenon. This book, consisting of six chapters, examines the root cause of this record: constitutionally protected nationalism and its legal consequences on minorities subject to a state doctrine, whose branches of power have continuously fostered rhetoric of oneness rather than togetherness. The lecture is very welcoming as although there now exists extensive literature on Turkey's minorities, the majority of them are analysed from a political or historical standpoint. Legal analyses, however, fall short. Thus, Bayır's study must be celebrated as unprecedented and an enrichment of this literature.

The book is very readable and well-structured, as the author takes the reader by the hand and introduces the historical climax that led to radical changes within the legal landscape. Chapters one and two prove to be beneficial in comprehending the legal transformation witnessed by both Turkey, as well as her predecessor, the Ottoman Empire. A merit of chapter one is how the author points to reforms of "secularisation and westernisation", which commenced prior to the declaration of the Republic of Turkey (1923), and not, contrary to popular belief in Turkey, afterwards. Prominent examples are, as Bayır argues, the Penal Code (1843), Codes of Procedure for Criminal Courts (1880), and the Commercial Law (1860) (p. 39). More importantly, this chapter takes into consideration the *millet* system. The harmonising Ottoman society is attributed to this legal institution; however Bayır unmistakably points out its weaknesses. Though non-Muslims were subject to the administration of their own clergy to the extent of inter alia educational and judicial matters (pp. 23 et seq), "the *millet* order was not a minority protection system in the modern sense, but an organisational structure for dealing with non-Muslim diversity within a plural society" (p. 27). Once the attempt of creating an Ottoman citizen was abandoned at a time when the empire was falling apart, Bayır then eloquently explains how the creation of a Turkish citizenship came to the rescue, which she rightfully refers to as a "campaign of nationalization".

In chapter two Bayır reviews the legal point of no return, the Lausanne Treaty, which ultimately led to a non-inclusion, particularly non-recognition, of many minorities living in Turkey. She raises the question, who the Turkish plenipotentiaries regarded as a minority, and comes to the conclusion that the “Turkish state’s perspective held that minority protection is only given to non-Muslims with reference to their religion” (p. 89). It is due this legal interpretation that only non-Muslim minorities are officially regarded as such, particularly Armenians, Greeks, and Jews. According to this intentional legal misinterpretation non-Muslim is *condicio sine qua non* to fulfill the requirement of being defined as minority. This paved the way for the following not to be recognised *strictu sensu* as a minority: inter alia Alevi, Arabs, Assyrians, Bahais, Chaldeans, Georgians, Kurds, Laz, and Zaza, to name but a few (p. 3).

The author articulates Turkey’s “civilising mission” *vis a vis* minorities in chapter three. In her view “‘unification’ in the form of ‘homogenisation’ and ‘Turkification’ under a ‘Turkish’ identity, culture, and language, as well as Turkish nationalist ideology, has marked the minority-state relationship” (p. 95). Taking into consideration the meticulous inspection of private sphere penetrating policies, her argument finds validation. Throughout this chapter, she demonstrates a wide range of aggressive policies of assimilation: top-down language policies, restrictions on certain surnames, renaming of places/cities, reinvention of history, elimination of religious, social, and traditional structures, as well as forced resettlement of minorities. At this point one might question why seemingly the focal point of this study, although the title reads “minorities”, is the Kurds. However, raising such critique is unsubstantiated, as the Kurds constitute the largest minority in Turkey, if not a parallel unrecognised nation.

Derya Bayır’s vast legal experience becomes most visible in the second part of the book (chapters four, five, and six). In chapter four for instance, Bayır applies the *Savigny method* (grammatical, systematical, historical, and teleological interpretation) of identifying who the judiciary and legislation regards as a Turk. In doing so one comprehends why “Turkey does not give official recognition to ethnic, or to some religious minorities. It claims that ethno-cultural or religious identities and their expressions are regarded as an individual’s choice and are private, but not relevant at state level” (p. 144).

The *status quo* maintenance of the Constitutional Court of a non-inclusive sociopolitical environment of the “other” is critically portrayed in chapter five. Bayır reviews a wide array of case law with a special focus on the “political party closure cases” pursuant to article 69 of the Turkish Constitution. In doing

so, her attentive selection of case law rendered by the Constitutional Court is in absolute favour of her critical line of argument. Probably, this chapter guarantees the most involuntary headshakes to the reader. Particularly, she addresses case law of the Constitutional Court according to which: “demands for minority status and recognition of differences to be associating with impairing social peace” (p. 206); “seeking minority status and recognition [...] creates hate and animosity among the people” (p. 206); “promoting the existence of minorities and feelings of differentiation among some citizens as provocative and destructive” (p. 207); and lastly the ruling that “a minority is an artificial formation [emphasis added] and something that might be formed by politics in line with the view of Turkish legislators” (p. 207). Bayır’s critique on the unwillingness of the Constitutional Court to foster an embracing judicial interpretation of the other, the different, is underlined by her terminology. Though the author regards the Constitutional Court to promote activism – which the reviewer deems as a decisive instrument to promote checks and balances in a functioning rule of law state – she further rightfully accuses the Constitutional Court of “selective activism” (p. 188). Thus, the Constitutional Court can be criticised to have “ruled in favour of the *status quo* as opposed to human rights and freedoms” (p. 188).

Lastly, chapter six reviews case law of the Court of Cassation (the last instance), as well as concepts of equality before the law, non-discrimination, and hate speech. This last chapter portrays how legislation and the judiciary were endeavoured to protect the majority from the minority instead of vice versa. Particularly in this regard, Bayır provides insight into how insulting the Turkish nation is an integral criminal act according to the Turkish Criminal Code (p. 246). Yet, on the other hand, the legislative and judiciary proactively neglects to protect the identities of non-Turkish and non-Muslim people (p. 244). In this chapter Bayır exemplifies a wide range of grotesque and human dignity violating samples of daily life mistreatment. For instance, the refusal of a dead body into a hospital morgue because of the political views of the deceased (p. 231) as opposed to a human rights professor who publicly calls for birth rate controls of Kurds and remains without indictment (p. 233).

Derya Bayır’s experience as an attorney who litigated landmark cases before the ECHR is transmitted in many aspects throughout the whole book. Her attention to detail is most apparent in the vast quantity of sources used in this important study. At times her arguments are not merely supported by codes and case law, but also by parliamentary discussions and explanatory notes. This attribute makes the reading at times breath-taking and astonishing, at times shocking and provocative. The extent of legal scrutiny of this subject

remains unprecedented. Hopefully, future policymakers will analyse with due diligence *Minorities and Nationalism in Turkish Law*. In doing so, they will understand that changing the binomial nomenclature of the red fox *Vulpes vulpes kurdistanica* into *Vulpes vulpes* on the grounds that it threatens Turkey's unity (p. 108) amounts to *ad absurdum*.

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ISBN 978-90-04-70652-1



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