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Editorial: Kurdish Studies in Seven Volumes

Ibrahim Sirkeci | ORCID: 0000-0002-2334-7424
Professor of Transnational Studies and Director of Regent's Centre for Transnational Business and Management, Regent's University London, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London, NW1 4NS, United Kingdom
sirkecii@regents.ac.uk

I first developed an interest in studying Kurdish demography and population movements in the early 1990s. It was, perhaps, one of the most adverse political periods for Kurdish politics in Turkey and studying anything connected to the Kurds was fraught with danger and indeed a rarity. It was a period marked with waves of Kurds fleeing the country to seek asylum elsewhere, whilst those that remained faced turmoil. For a young social scientist, it seemed to me the obvious choice of topic to study. However, the more I was immersed in this line of research, the more I was intrigued, and perhaps provoked, by the extent of the politically corrupted pseudo-science that dominated the limited existing literature on the Kurds then.

The prevailing political contest at the time was how to practically determine what could be inferred from very limited data sources. For population researchers, studying the Kurds has been like reading coffee grounds due to the "managed scarcity" of data, which has led me, like many others in the field, to read between the lines but without ignoring the actual figures, albeit limited. In such a polarised society, the resulting interpretation of such data is unlikely to please the many factions involved and my own research did not gain me many friends on either side of the fence. Studying the Kurds has almost always been a challenge, not only for those of Kurdish ethnicity but also for anyone who has some interest in issues relevant to Kurdish populations and geographies. There are many who have paid the "price" for their interest and commitment to this subject and the bravery of these researchers is something to applaud and celebrate.

Launching *Kurdish Studies* in 2013, it was essential for our academic integrity that we maintained impartiality and a robust peer review process in the face of a highly contested and politically charged field. I believe that after seven years, we can comfortably say that we have been successful in this pursuit.

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At a conference in Hewlêr, Kurdistan in Northern Iraq in 2012, we held what I believe to be the first ever large editorial meeting for *Kurdish Studies* journal. Just a few years later, the Journal founders organised a conference dedicated to "Kurdish Studies in the 21st Century", hosted at Regent's University London. Migration Conferences in London in 2014, Prague in 2015 and Vienna in 2016 have all featured panels on Kurdish migration, contributing to the development of the Journal and the wider field. We are also proud to have the Journal recognised by the Web of Science and Scopus as well as many other international abstracting and indexing bodies. We thank our authors, reviewers, translators and editors who all contributed selflessly to this effort.

It is important to recognise the voluntary effort that goes into each and every issue produced. We cannot thank Welat enough for what he has done for the Journal and the field in general. Martin, a doyen of the field, in his role as the chief editor has not only shared his wisdom and knowledge but also guided the team at times when we have faced challenges. Of course, there are dozens of others who have been critical to the Journal's success and we thank all of them wholeheartedly.

As one of the three founding editors of *Kurdish Studies*, I have shared the responsibility with Welat as joint managing editor for the entire seven volumes. However, over the last twelve months, mainly due to an increased workload at the university, that I have decided to step down from this role. I do so with a heavy heart, but knowing the high quality of the team who have been running the Journal, and witnessing the obvious enthusiasm and dedication of several new colleagues, is a great reassurance that the Journal is in safe hands. Nevertheless, I will continue to support the Journal however I can, hence, this is in no way a final farewell. I wish everybody involved continued success.

In this issue, we bring you four fresh pieces of research. The first article by Kaveh Ghobadi reflects on the development of Kurdish prose fiction between 1961 and 2002. He also outlines the restraints and inherent limitations within the wider context of Iran. He argues that over time, and more recently, Kurdish fiction writers have moved towards embracing aesthetics along with the political concerns.

The second article by Michiel Leezenberg bridges fiction with nationhood and politics. In this article, Leezenberg explores the role Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* can play in Kurdish nationalism. The central role of the king in this ancient poem is emphasised but more importantly the poem is placed in its historic and rather personal context. Leezenberg argues that the poem was addressed to Xanî's madrasa students rather than to the wider Kurdish public.

Bajalan's article focuses on the period between 1878 and 1913 in search of understanding the complexities of identity politics in the late Ottoman period.

Bajalan examines the attitudes and views of Kurdish activists of the period on the retreat of Ottomans from the Balkan Peninsula. Bajalan argues that most Kurdish activitists, then, regarded the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans as "a profoundly negative political development".

The final article is by one of the Journal's founding editors, Joost Jongerden. Joost is the leading scholar for the history and analysis of the PKK. He does not only bring an intriguing analysis of the PKK's evolution discussed around the concept of *learning from defeat*, but also offers an archival piece with very rich content collected through interviews and personal communications with some key figures. Joost argues that, as opposed to common criticisms in the literature, the transformation of the PKK was substantial in terms of offering a new mindset leading to the PKK's revival.

Acknowledgement

As always, special thanks go to Ergin Öpengin and Aram Rafaat for the translation of the abstracts into Kurmanji and Sorani. This issue features for the first time translations of the abstracts into Zazaki and we are grateful to Mahir Tornap for making this possible. We would also like to thank our copy-editor Naomi Houghton for her meticulous work in editing the articles. Finally, we are pleased to welcome Beja Protner to the editorial team.

London, May 2019

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Kurdish Fiction: from Writing as Resistance to Aestheticised Commitment

Kaveh Ghobadi
Independent scholar, 33 Heraldry Walk, Exeter, Devon, EX2 7QW, United Kingdom
kghobadi81@gmail.com

Abstract

The establishment of modern Iran in 1925 accelerated a centralisation policy, which resulted in the oppression of Iran's national and cultural diversity. Under such unfavourable conditions, Kurdish fiction had a stuttering start with only three works since the publication of the first Kurdish novel in 1961 up until 1991, when the number of Kurdish fictional works produced in Iran began to increase steadily. This article addresses the question of commitment and aesthetics in Kurdish prose fiction by examining a short story collection and three novels published between 1961 and 2002. Whereas the earlier Kurdish writers primarily viewed fiction as a medium for cultural preservation and national liberation, around the turn of the 20th century a generation of Kurdish writers appeared who were as equally concerned with aesthetics as with politics.

Keywords

national liberation – modernism – aesthetics – Kurdish identity – Iranian Kurdistan

Çîroka kurdî: Ji nivîsîna berxwedanê bo pabendiyeke estetîk

Avakirina Îrana modern li sala 1925an lez da siyaseta navendîkirinê, ku bû sebebê fetisandina cihêrengiya neteweyî û çandî ya Îranê. Li jêr şertên wisa xerab, destpêka çîrok

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û romanên kurdî gelek giran bû û bi tenê sê berhem çap bûn di navbera 1961 û 1991ê, dema ku berhemên edebî yên kurdî li Îranê her ku çû zêdetir bûn. Ev gotar berê xwe dide pirsa pabendiya siyasî/îdeolojîk û estetîkê di edebiyata kurdî bi rêya tehlîla berhemeke kurteçîrokan û sê romanên di navbera 1961 û 2003 de çap bûyî. Di demekê de ku nivîskarên kurd yên pêşiyê edebiyat wek amrazeke parastina çandî û azadiya neteweyî didîtin, li werçerxa sedsala 20an nifşekî nivîskarên kurd derhatin ku bi qasî siyasetê xwedanê xem û endîşeyên estetîk jî bûn.

Çîrokî kurdî: Le nûsînî berengarîyewe bo pabendbûnî cuwanînasî

Damezrandinî dewlletî modêrnî Êran le 1925da siyasetî nawedindêtî xêratir kird. Emeş serkutkirdinî freyîy keltûrî û neteweyîy Êranî lêkewtewe. Le sayey em barûdoxe nalebareda, çîrokî kurdî seretayekî piçirr piçirrî hebû, le billawkirdinewey yekem romanî kurdî le sallî 1961 ta sallî 1991 tenha sê berhem billaw kirawetewe û le 1991 berhemî çîrokî kurdî le Êran destî be ziyadbûnî berdewam kird. Em babete kar leser pirsî pabendbûn û cuwaninasî le çîrokî kurdîda dekat le rêgay hellsengandinî koberhemêkî kurteçîrok û sê roman ke le nêwan sallanî 1961 ta 2002da billaw kirawnetewe. Le katêkda cîlî pêşûy nûseranî Kurd be giştî çîrok nûsînyan wek amrazêk bo parastinî keltûr û rizgarîy nîştimanî debînî, le serûbendî hatinî sedey bîstemda neweyek le nûserî kurd peydabûn ke be heman radey siyaset bayexyan be cuwanînasîş deda.

Fîksîyonê kurdkî: Nuştişê xoverrodayoxkî ra ver bi wezîfeya estetîzekerdîye

Awankerdişê Îranê modernî yê serra 1925î bî sebebê sîyasetê merkezîkerdişî. Semedê nê sîyasetê merkezî ra zafrenginîya Îranî ya neteweyî û kulturî ameye bindestkerdene. Binê şertanê winasîyanê bêavantajan de, destpêkê fîksîyonê kurdkî giran bî: mabênê serra 1961î, wexto ke romanê kurdkî yo verên weşanîyabî, û serra 1991î, wexto ke Îran de weşanê eseranê fîksîyonî yê kurdkî hêdî-hêdî aver şîyêne, tena hîrê eserî weşanîyabîyî. Na meqale persê wezîfedarî û estetîkî yê fîksîyonê kurdkî ser o vindena. Seba naye koleksîyonêkê hîkayeyan û hîrê romanê ke mabênê 1961 û 2002î de weşanîyayî, analîz benê. Nuştoxanê kurdkî yê verênan fîksîyon heme çîyan ra ver sey wasîtaya muhafezekerdişê kulturî û xelasa neteweyîye dîyêne. Labelê serê seserra 20. de neslê

nuştoxanê kurdkî yo newe vejîya meydan ke înan giranîya xo hem dayêne sîyasetî hem kî estetîkî ser.

Introduction

This article addresses the question of commitment and aesthetics in Kurdish fiction from Iranian Kurdistan since its emergence in 1961 to the present day by examining a short story and three novels from different periods. In this section, I will discuss the socio-political situation in Iran and its impact on the literary production in Iranian Kurdistan, followed by the theoretical framework informing this paper and a brief introduction of the selected texts.[1]

Kurdish history is notoriously conflict-ridden and abounds with rebellions, failures, and massacres. It is a story that is still unfolding in most parts of Kurdistan. Following the demise of the Ottoman and Persian Empires, Kurds found themselves designated as minorities in the modern nation-states, which showed various levels of hostility and intolerance towards their culture and identity.[2] After the creation of modern Iran in 1925, both Reza Shah (1925–1941) and his son and successor, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1941–1979), undertook a policy of denial and suppression towards the Kurdish language and culture, which resulted in the prohibition or restriction of publication in the Kurdish language. In his attempt to set up a centralized modern national state, Reza Shah implemented "the exclusive use of the Persian language in education, administration, and the mass media" (Hassanpour, 1992: 126). Furthermore, he prohibited the use of the Kurdish language, first at school and then in public in both spoken and written forms. People could be humiliated and tortured on charges of simply speaking in Kurdish (McDowall, 2004: 225; Hassanpour, 1992: 126).

1 I am immensely grateful to Farangis Ghaderi, Marina Williamson, and Jill Christie for their valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also very grateful to the anonymous reviewers and the editors of *Kurdish Studies* for their appropriate and constructive suggestions, which have been very helpful in improving the paper.

2 Iraqi Kurdistan became quasi-independent in 1991 after decades of severe war with different central governments (Yildiz, 2004). Following the establishment of modern Turkey in 1923 the Kurds were bitterly oppressed and their language and culture banned by the Turkish government. This relentless oppression has resulted in nearly four decades of warfare between the central government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). For more information, see Zeydanlıoğlu (2012). In Syria, the power vacuum following the civil war in 2011 provided Kurds with the opportunity to establish a de facto state. Before long they were attacked by ISIS and have ever since been at war with this group, and the future of their quasi-independence hangs in the balance. For more information, see Schmidinger (2018).

The Iranian Kurds' situation slightly improved with the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941. His successor, Mohammad Reza Shah, undertook a less extreme measure against the Kurdish language and culture, especially "whenever the government was weak or threatened" to minimise the risk of rebellion in Kurdish areas (Hassanpour, 1992: 130). His government initiated and sponsored limited and controlled cultural activities, such as the "initiation and expansion of Kurdish broadcasting, limited publication in the Kurdish language," which was mainly a response to developments in Iraq where the Kurdish population enjoyed far more cultural rights (ibid.). That said, none of these activities, as Sheyholislami (2012: 28) points out, enhanced "the status of Kurdish [language]. It was still considered a 'dialect' of Persian, was not taught in schools, and more importantly was not the medium of instruction in the formal school system."

Following the 1979 Iranian revolution, the Kurds hoped to achieve their political and cultural rights. It soon became obvious that the new Islamic regime had not changed in terms of its attitude towards the "multilingual and multicultural nature of Iran" (Hassanpour, 1992: 131). They even refused to implement the limited cultural freedom stipulated in Article 15 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran:

> [T]he official and common language and script of the people of Iran is Persian. Official documents, correspondence and statements, as well as textbooks, shall be written in this language and script, however, the use of local and ethnic languages in the press and mass media is allowed. The teaching of ethnic literature in the school, together with Persian language instruction, is also permitted. (Cited in Hassanpour, 1992: 131)

"The teaching of ethnic literature in the school" never took place in Iranian Kurdistan,[3] but remarkably, publication in Kurdish, both private and state-sponsored increased after the revolution (Hassanpour, 1992: 131; Sheyholislami, 2012: 33). "The rather relaxed policy on the use of Kurdish in broadcast and print media," Hassanpour argues, "can be explained by the political situation prevailing in Kurdistan and the region" (1992: 131). Between the early 1990s and the mid-2000s and especially during the government of the reformist president Khatami (1997–2005) as many as twenty Kurdish periodicals were

3 After a last-minute cancellation of the undergraduate programme in Kurdish Language and Literature at the University of Kurdistan in Sine (Sanandaj) in the academic year of 2003–2004, the module was re-inaugurated in the academic year of 2015–2016 (IRNA, 2015).

published (Sheyholislami, 2012: 33).[4] With the end of Khatami's presidency and Ahmadinejad's coming to power, the relative cultural relaxation gave way to a relentless cultural oppression: most of the Kurdish periodicals, one after another, were shut down either due to "financial difficulties or political restrictions" (ibid.). Under such severe constraints, different genres in Kurdish literature suffered, but it was particularly difficult for Kurdish fiction, which was only born in the early sixties, to flourish and establish itself.[5]

The theoretical framework of this article is informed by Theodor W. Adorno's writings on literature and aesthetics. Before Adorno, Jean-Paul Sartre in his essay, "What is Literature?", addressed the question of commitment in literature. For him, the act of writing is to make a choice: the writer can either choose to make a change or remain indifferent to people's sufferings. The prose writer, says Sartre (2001: 14), is someone who has chosen

> [A] certain method of secondary action which we may call action by disclosure. It is therefore permissible to ask him this second question: 'What aspect of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure?' The 'committed' writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change.

Sartre's concept of *littérature engagée* stands in opposition to that of *l'art pour l'art*. The advocates of the latter view literature merely in aesthetic terms. Alain Robbe-Grillet, an influential theorist as well as the author of *Nouveau Roman*, holds a view of literature quite different from that of Sartre. For him, "art cannot be reduced to the status of a means in the service of a cause which transcends it, even if this cause were the most deserving, the most exalting" (1965: 37).

It appears that Adorno holds to the creed of *l'art pour l'art* when he writes in *Aesthetic Theory*, his famous work published posthumously in 1970, "[i]f any social function can be ascribed to art at all, it is the function to have no function" (1984: 322). However, unlike Robbe-Grillet, he states that works of art stand in an interdependent relationship with society. In his view, *l'art pour l'art* "denies by its absolute claims that ineradicable connection with reality which is the polemical a priori of the attempt to make art autonomous from

4 One can name, among others, Awêne, Aştî, Sîrwan, Rojhellat, Merdum, Aso, Zirêbar, Didgah, Riskan, Peyamî Kurdistan, Mehabad (Mahabad), and Pûşper. See Sheyholislami (2012: 33).

5 The section on Iran's language policy towards its Kurdish population is a slightly modified version of the material in my PhD dissertation (Ghobadi, 2015).

the real" (1980: 178). Adorno (1984: 352) ascribes a dual essence to art: as autonomous product and social phenomenon. His concept of the autonomy of art, as rightly pointed out by James M. Harding (1992: 183), is "double-edged". By this he means that "[o]n the one hand, … socio-historical change makes the separation of art and practical life unavoidable. But on the other, the separation does not denote the irrelevance of art to life."

At the same time, Adorno calls into question Sartre's conception of committed *littérature* as he distinguishes "commitment" from "tendency." "Committed art in the proper sense," he writes, "is not intended to generate ameliorative measures, legislative acts or practical institutions … but to work at the level of fundamental attitudes" (1980: 180). Adorno (1980: 180) further states that art does not necessarily set out alternatives, but only through its form can it go against the course of the world, "which continues to hold a pistol to the heads of human beings." To examine the relationship between politics and aesthetics in Kurdish fiction from Iran, I especially draw on Adorno's perception of art as holding an interdependent relationship with society, of art as an antithesis to society which has to "elevate social criticism to the level of form" if it seeks to be committed without paling into propaganda (1984: 354).

It seems that the burden of commitment has especially affected the literature of the countries and nations who have experienced colonisation or suffered internal despotisms. As an example, one can mention francophone African and Arabic literature. Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célérier (2011) examine the notion of commitment and its transformation in contemporary francophone African literature. They maintain that commitment has been integral to and "continues to haunt" francophone African literature (19). However, the new generation of writers engaged in aesthetic experimentations with polyphony and approached "narratives as performance and re-creation" (181). This diversification of aesthetics has partly "made it possible for the writers to lift the burden of engagement and to shift from an engagée literature to an engaging literature" (137–38). In the same vein, Friederike Pannewick et al. (2015) in an edited volume attempt to revisit the relationship between art and politics in modern Arabic literary history. The volume examines historical and contemporary concepts of commitment and, "therein, how notions of 'writing for a cause' have been shaped, rejected, or re-actualized from the 1940s until today" (Albers et al., 2015: 10). Modern Arabic literary history, they write, has always been political. Yet, the older and younger generations of writers have held different perceptions of literary commitment. "The principal spark kindling controversy," they note, "was the means of this commitment; at issue was not whether literature should be committed to social and political causes but how it was to undertake this mission" (2015: 10).

In the case of Kurds, whose culture and national identity have been in peril, works of art can hardly be apolitical. It does not then come as a surprise that literature and politics have been indissoluble in modern Kurdish literary history. While most of the earlier works of prose fiction written by Iranian Kurds were overtly political, towards the end of the twentieth century a new generation of Kurdish writers in Iranian Kurdistan emerged who paid more attention to form. Yet for most of them, the question was not whether literature should be politically and socially committed or not. Rather, at issue for them was how to bridge politics and aesthetics.

Writing in Kurdish in all parts of Kurdistan, with the exception of Iraqi Kurdistan, is a tremendous challenge which takes a great deal of dedication and hard work. Since Kurdish is neither the language of instruction nor taught in schools in Kurdish-populated areas of Iran, those who can read and write in Kurdish are self-taught.[6] As such, the very act of writing and reading in Kurdish *per se* is a political gesture. Writing and, to a lesser extent, reading in Kurdish could be viewed as resistance, cultural awareness, and national consciousness.

In this article, "Kurdish writer" refers to Iranian Kurdish writers and "Kurdish fiction" to the novels and short stories in the Sorani dialect written by them, unless stated otherwise. Likewise, by "Kurdish society" I mean the Kurdish region in Iran, unless stated otherwise. The selected texts examined in this paper are Rahim Qazi's *Pêşmerge* [*Peshmerga*] (1961), Hassan Qizilji's *Pêkenînî Geda* [*Begger's laugh*] (1972), Fatah Amiri's *Hawarebere* [*A Kurdish melody*] (1991),[7] and Ata Nahaee's *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* [*The Birds Soaring on the Wind*] (2002). I have examined *Pêkenînî Geda* and *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* in more detail than the other two texts because I consider them to be more successful in terms of literary merits. Except for *Pêkenînî Geda*, which is a short story, the other texts are novels. One might ask according to what criteria these texts were selected and why a short story is examined along with three novels. As I will explain in more detail in the next section, up until 1991 there were only two novels and one short story collection published by Kurdish Iranian writers. With such a limited number of works of prose fiction, the choice of texts for this study was rather obvious, and I also decided to include Qizilji's collection of short stories.

6 See footnote 2.

7 "Hawarebere" is the name of a melody which is played by *shimshal*, a Kurdish musical instrument similar to a flute.

The Challenge of Writing in Kurdish: Three Fictional Works over Three Decades

Raheem Qazi's (1926–1991) *Pêşmerge* [*Peshmerga*] was the first work of fiction to be published by an Iranian Kurd. Published in Baghdad in 1961, it was also the first Sorani Kurdish novel.[8] A decade later, in 1972, Hassan Qizilji (1914–1984) also published *Pêkenînî Geda* [*Beggar's Laugh*], a collection of short stories, in Baghdad.[9] It took some 20 years for another fictional work to be produced by an Iranian Kurd. The history of Kurdish fiction in this period is marked by discontinuity and disruption: in a time span of 30 years from 1961 to 1991 only three fictional works were published. In this section I discuss the question of literary form and political concerns in these works.

Pêşmerge is about the oppression of the Kurds by landlords and Reza Shah's regime from 1941 to 1945, which led to the formation of the first Kurdish political party in Iran, *Komeley Jiyanewey Kurdistan* [The Society for the Revival of Kurdistan], popularly known as *JK Society*.[10] The protagonist, Pirot, is the young son of a poor farmer who has suffered tremendously at the hands of the landlord of the village. When his fiancée in the nearby village commits suicide after she was raped by the landlord of that village, Pirot takes revenge by killing her rapist. Following this incident, he has no option but to leave his village and takes refuge in the house of his father's friend, a JK Society member. Inspired

8 The first Kurdish novel, entitled *Şivanê Kurmanca* [*The Kurdish Shepherd*], was in the Kurmanji dialect written by Erebê Şemo (1898–1978), known as Arab Shamilov in the Soviet Union, and published in Yerevan in 1935.

9 Qazi and Qizilji were both members of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) under the leadership of Qazi Mohammad in the Mahabad Republic in 1946. Qazi, along with a number of other students, was sent to the former Soviet Union to continue his studies, where he received a PhD in History. However, due to the fall of the Mahabad Republic he remained in Baku. After the 1979 revolution he returned to Iran and stayed there for a while. Before long he went back to Baku, where he died in 1991. Likewise, Qizilji had to flee to Iraq after the collapse of the Mahabad Republic. He found life in exile extremely harsh, having to work hard for his survival while fearing arrest and being handed to Iranian authorities by the Iraqi security police. Soon after the 1979 revolution, he returned to Iran, where he was arrested and imprisoned in 1983. After ten months in prison, he died for unknown reasons on September 28, 1985. It is believed that he might have faced mistreatment and torture by the Iranian security police. While Iranian Kurds were deprived of their very basic cultural rights during the 1960s and 1970s, the Iraqi Kurds enjoyed a relative cultural freedom, which enabled Qazi and Qizilji to publish their works in Baghdad.

10 Komala, or the JK Society, was established in September 1942 in Mahabad with the ultimate goal of the realization of an independent Kurdish state. It was dissolved in 1945 after the formation of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and its members were absorbed into the new party. For more information, see McDowall (2004: 240).

by his host's speech about the sufferings of the Kurdish nation, Pirot decides to join the JK Society, where he becomes a nationalist hero fighting for the liberation of Kurdistan.

Pêşmerge is a linear and logically ordered narrative in which the events unfold one after another in a cause-and-effect manner. Like 19th-century European realist novels, it is stabilised by the presence of a third person omniscient narrator and a trustworthy perspective (Stevenson: 1992: 25). The narrator's voice, which in effect is the implied author's voice, dominates the novel, and all other voices and conflicts are resolved through their subordination to his voice. The following passage from the novel illustrates its dominating political message:[11]

> This is the map of Kurdistan hanging on the wall. As you can see, the Kurdish homeland is now divided and remains under foreign rule. Our generation has a great responsibility in the 20th century which is a century of emancipation and achieving independence for the nations of the world. Today, despite the fact that Kurds are the most oppressed and deprived nation in the world, the will to liberate and gain independence is deeply rooted in our nation [...] efficiency, bravery, courage, and wisdom are all God-given gifts which Kurds are born with. Our party's duty is to channel these traits to liberate Kurdistan from its occupiers (Qazi, 1981: 105–106).[12]

In this passage and throughout the novel, Qazi romanticises Kurds and Kurdistan and invites all the Kurds to unite and stand up against the oppression of the Iranian government. Such patriotic rhetoric prevails in the novel, making it more like a political party manifesto than a work of art.

Whereas *Pêşmerge* in many passages is reduced to propaganda, *Pêkenînî Geda*'s commitment, to borrow Adorno's words, remains "politically polyvalent" (1996: 188). Before Qizilji, Kurdish satire was predominantly in the form of *hajv* and *hazl* poetry. While the former is a serious satire targeting a person or a group of people in a personal way, the latter refers to a less serious and more

11 All translations are mine, unless stated otherwise.

12 Ew nexşeyey ke debînin bêreda heławesrawe, nexşey Kurdistane, yanî nîştimanî Kurdewarîye ke êsta be çiwar let beş kirawe we le jêr h'ukmatî bêganedaye. Çerxî bîstem ke çerxî rizgarî u serbexoyî wedest hênanî gelanî cîhane, erkêkî zor gewrey le beramber neslî ewrokey netewey kurdda danawe. Ewroke netewey kurd le hemû neteweyêkî dinya lêqewmawtir û paşkewtûtir û beşxurawtire, bełam wêray ewe hest û bîrî rizgarî xwazî u serbestî wedest hênan zor be tundî le nêw netewekey êmeda regajoy kirdûwe [...] xo, bekarî u azayetî u netirsî u leyaqet û mişûrîş ni'metîkî xudadaeye ke le regî kurdanewe serçawe degrê we le şîrî daykamnewe hełdewerê.

humorous type of satire. The Kurdish literary satire's movement from personal attack, moral instruction and punishment, reflects an alternative notion of satire in Kurdish literature, to use Charles A. Knight's words (2004: 14), as "an open and exploratory form, designed to pose questions and raise problems." It appears that, unlike poetry, satire in prose enabled Kurdish writers to reveal critical problems Kurdish society was grappling with, in an indirect, subtle, and ironic manner.[13] Qizilji employs satire to raise questions about Kurdish traditions, Kurdish society, its social structure and hierarchy and the gap between the poor and the rich. However, what distinguishes him from his predecessors is his skilful use of parody and irony, which enables him to escape falling into the domain of propaganda and to avoid direct and overt political messages.

The short stories in *Pêkenînî Geda* begin by the narrator describing a prime character or a place where the story is set. In most of his stories, Qizilji employs a "mediating" narrator, one which has a minimal impact on the narration yet transmits the story to the reader. In "Serfitre",[14] for example, he adopts a more dramatic method in which the reader seems to see and hear the characters act and speak for themselves rather than describing the characters' feelings and actions. So we mainly get to know characters in "Serfitre" and most of the other stories in *Pêkenînî Geda* through their own voices and actions. As the story unfolds, the narrator gradually gives way to dialogue between characters. In the opening passage, the narrator introduces to the reader the main character, Haji,[15] in an ironic tone which is characteristic of Qizilji's style:

> Despite being busy, Haji still managed to say his prayers, not to mention Ramadan fasting. He was a wise man who was well aware of his acts in this world and in the hereafter. How clever of him! He shoots two birds with one stone in Ramadan. While fulfilling his religious duties and keeping God happy, he saves thirty meals at lunch time. God forbid, you don't have to be poor to spend wisely; when you are a businessman you need to keep records. Think about it, regardless of how big your wealth, it has been accumulated penny by penny. Every penny has to be recorded. Thirty lunches for Haji's household; with such big spending on food, this can save him at least 15 Dinars […] He had heard from the Mullah that God increases the wealth of those who are grateful. So every night

13 On this topic, see Ghobadi, "Satire in Kurdish Literature" (forthcoming).

14 *Serfitre* or *zakat al-fitr* in Arabic is a mandatory charity given to the poor at the end of Ramadan. It can be paid in the form of supplying staple foods or it can be calculated in cash and paid in monetary terms. The total amount of *zakat al-fitr* is "equal to the amount it costs to feed a person in need for one day" (Atia, 2013: 13).

15 Haji, also spelled Hadji and Hajji, is an honorific title given to a Muslim who has made the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca.

> when saying his prayers he would thank God until his tongue wore out; and God had fulfilled his prayers by increasing his wealth day after day (Qizilji, 1985: 71).[16]

Nowhere in the above passage does Qizilji openly criticise Haji or his religious beliefs. Instead, he takes on an ironic and satirical tone to lay bare Haji's hypocrisy and debunk the myth that wealth is bestowed by God upon believers who pray for Him.

As the story unfolds, Qizilji skilfully portrays the character of Haji by describing him doing his prayers and breaking his fast, as we can see in the passage below:

> On the evening of the 28th of Ramadan, Haji performed his Maghrib prayer (Sunset prayer) at the mosque and said his other prayers while he was heading home. As soon as he finished the last prayer, said 'in the name of God' and started breaking his fast [...] 'Bon appetite!' This was, after all, earned by the sweat of his brow. As is the custom, he started by swallowing sweets half-chewed. Three or four *baklava* stuck in his throat and nearly choked him. He washed them down with a glass of yogurt water,[17] opening the way for him to gobble other things. He rushed for the plate of *qibooli*.[18] With the help of okra lamb stew, the *qibooli* easily found its way through the hedge of Haji's beard and moustache into his mouth to slide down.
>
> [...] Before long, He had polished his plate and patted his tummy. Then he turned to his wife and said:
>
> – Hurry, bring me a cup of tea, I've got to go to mosque for praying.
>
> – Haji! Did you pay your *serfitre*?

16 H'acî herçend serî zor qał bû, bełam xwa hełnagrê legeł eweş serî biçwaye nwêjî nedeçû. Rojûy remezanîş ewa hîç. Piawêkî wirya u ʿaqił bû, h'isabî dinya u qiyametî xoy baş dezanî. Zor çak lêy dabowe: Remezan hem ziyarete u hem ticaret. Xwaşî lê razî debê u jemî sî nîweroş degerêtewe. Xwa neka, dûr le giyanî H'acî, xo qise lewe niye piyaw her debê rût û nedar bê ta des pêwe bigrê. Piyaw ke bazirgan bû, ehlî bazar bû. bazarîş cêgay defter û h'isabe. Sermaye herçende zorîş bê, ke lêkî deytewe her Fils Filse kewtote ser yek. Hemû Filsêk le deferda cêgay xoy heye. Bo małî H'acî bew mexaric û derçûne zorewe, sî nîwe roje be lanî kemewe deykirde pazde Dînar. [...] Le melay bîstibû her kes şukrane bijêr bê, Xwa boy ziyad dekat. Ca boye hemû şewêk bedem terawêhekewe ewendey zimanî hêzî têda bû şukrî Xway dekird. Xwaş lêy qibûł kirdbû, roj be roj be serîda riştibû.

17 Yogurt water, or mastaw in Kurdish, is a yogurt-based beverage which is popular in the Middle East.

18 *Qibooli* is a Kurdish meal in Mukiriyan, Iranian Kurdistan. Rice is the main ingredient of this meal.

– God bless you wife! Thank heavens you reminded me. Damned Satan is doing every trick to sink our ship. All those years of praying and fasting could be wasted for nothing.[19]

In this passage, the incongruity between Haji's religious beliefs and his morals is well depicted. He devours his food with such a gusto that contradicts the premises underlying Ramadan as a month of fasting and communal prayer, as well as a period of introspection, purifying the soul, and helping the poor (Khan and Watson, 2010: 153).

For Haji, religion is devoid of spirituality. In effect, his relationship with God is a business-like one in the sense that he does all sorts of tricks to keep Him satisfied and secure his place in heaven. This is well depicted towards the end of the story. Haji decides to give his *serfitre* to Mirza, a distant relative who works for him in the shop. Haji informs Mirza, who has paid him a visit, of his decision. The following day in the shop, he asks Mirza to sit down to sort out their business:

> Mirza, surprised by this request, asks: "What business?"
> Haji: "Shouldn't I pay you one Dinar and three quarters?"
> Mirza: "That's true, but why sort this out?"
> Haji: "You talk as if you have just entered into the business. Everything needs to be recorded. Do not confuse business and friendship" (Qizilji, 1985: 76–77).[20]

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19 Êwarey rojî bîst û heştî Remezan H'acî le mizgewt nwêjî şêwanî be cemaʿet kird û bedem rêgawe wired doʿakanî xwênd. Ke geyîşte małewe, demî le axirîn doʿa betał bû, bismîlayêkî kird û destî kird be berbang kirdnewe. Noşî giyanî bê berûbûy rencî şanî xoyetî. Wekû sunnete, le şîrînewe paqlawey be nîwe ciwawî qûtda u rêzî lêgirt sê çiwar şîley paqlawe be gerûyewe lika u henasey siwar bû. Be perdaxêk mastaw şordiyewe u kokeyêkîşî bediwada kird. Rêga bo xwardinî dike be tewawî kirayewe, pelamary dewrî qibûłî da, qibûłîyeke be yarmetî bamiye u goşt baştir xoy ko dekirdewe u be reh'etî be naw perjînî rîş û simêłda xoy dekird be demî H'acîda u away ew dîw debû.

Naw be naw perdaxêk mastawy dexwardewe, (dûr le H'acî u berbangeke) şifteyêkîşî dekirde mezey. Wekû werzêrêkî lêzan bijarêkî başî sînîyekey kird. Destêkî be rîşîda hêna. Elh h'emdulila, xwaye şukirî to. Rûy kirde xêzanî:
A xêrake çayêkim bo têke, ba firyay cemaʿet terawê h'eke bikewim.
H'acî jin – hêşta serpuşî nwêjî şêwanî be serewe bû – piyałeyêk çay bo H'acî hêna:
H'acî! Erê serfitreket qebłandûwe?
Ya Rebî xwa cezay be xêrit bidatewe afret! Ça bû webîrit xistmewe. Hawar be małim! Şeytanî melʿûn be hemû fêłêke xerîke renc bexesarman ka. Wextabû nwêj û rojûekeman be xorayî biçê.

20 Mêrza: H'isabî çî?
Çon h'isabî çî? To dû dînar çarekî kemit lay min heye.

Haji then reminds Mirza that the previous winter he had given him his old boots, which he believes was worth 1 Dinar. He adds to this 200 Fils for a handful of loose tea Mirza spilt the other day,[21] and another 800 Fils for two big wooden shoe boxes Mirza took home to make chairs. Haji concludes that Mirza now owes him 2 Dinars! He continues:

> "I need to give you one Dinar and three quarters for my *serfitre*; now subtract it from 2 Dinars. You owe me 250 Fils. Take it as a gift from me for this Eid."
> Mirza, while grinning: "Why not pay me your next year's *serfitre* with this 250 Fils?"
> Haji: "We do next year's in its time. How could I now let you leave here empty handed so close to Eid?" (77–78).[22]

Qizilji does not reduce fiction to a medium in the service of a cause beyond it. The socially critical dimension in his short stories lies more in its form rather than in its message, enabling him to achieve what Adorno (1984: 354) recommends for art: "If [art] is to live on, it must elevate social criticism to the level of form, de-emphasizing manifestly social content accordingly." In most of his short stories, Qizilji has elevated "social criticism to the level of form" through ironic style and satirical tone.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has neither granted the Kurdish language state recognition, nor permitted its use in official education in Kurdish populated areas. Nonetheless, under its administration, publication in Kurdish, both private and state-sponsored, has increased remarkably. That said, getting a book published in Iran, regardless of its language, is a challenge for all Iranian writers. Iran's strict press law and control of publication has put it among the top ten most censored countries (Freedom House, 2017). In this regard, Saeed Kamali Dehghan (2015) stated that, "The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is in charge of checking books. Anonymous censors … work round-the-clock to

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Başe, îtir eme h'isabî dewê?
To dełêy emro hatûyte bazar̄; çon h'isabî nawê? Hemû şitêk h'isabî dewê. Biraman birayî, kîseman ciyayî.

21 Dinar is the monetary unit used in Iraq, which is comprised of 1000 *fils*. However, inflation rendered the *fils* obsolete after 1990 (Lane, 2008: 310).

22 H'acî: To Dînarêk û h'ewt sed û penca fils parey serfitret lay min heye, ewe le dû Dînareke derke. To rub'êkit dekewête ser. Ewîş cêjnaney em jêjnet bê. Îtir bê h'isab.
Mîrza (be zerdexeneyêkewe): ca boçî bew rub'e Dînare serfitrey sałêkî dîkem lê selem nakey?
H'acî: H'isabî sałêkî dike wextî xoy dekeyn. Êsta çon bê cêjnane u be destî betał dêłim le mih'el derkewî?

examine texts for anything that could be considered obscene, inappropriate or politically unacceptable. They are masters of finding a needle in a haystack yet no one knows who they are." It has to be mentioned that compared with their Persian counterparts, Kurdish writers writing in Kurdish face yet more difficulties in getting their books published. Fatah Amiri (2017), a Kurdish writer, in an interview with *Wishe*, a weekly newspaper based in Iraqi Kurdistan, considers censorship and lack of financial support as two major obstacles Kurdish writers face. Yet the limited number of literary journals published after the revolution did play a significant role in encouraging Kurdish prose and literature in Iranian Kurdistan.[23] Before long, Amiri's novel, titled *Hawarebere*, was published in 1992 as the first work of prose fiction published in Iran.

Amiri (b. 1961) in *Hawarebere* portrays country life in Iranian Kurdistan during the 1970s.[24] The novel is about a young man named Yare, sixteen or seventeen years of age, who has no family. He travels to another village away from his region in search of a job. The village head appoints him as his shepherd and accommodates him in his house. Yare amazes everyone with his great skills and experience despite his young age. Before long he wins the admiration and trust of the headman and the heart of his daughter. As the novel unfolds the two beloveds are united in marriage. At the same time, the novel tells the story of a middle-age man named Mirza. He is a mysterious figure who every now and then visits the village where Yare lives, stays for a few days and disappears. Later in the novel it is revealed that Mirza was a civil servant who had a good life in the city (the novel does not mention which city he comes from), but abandoned his comfortable life to pursue democracy and social justice for the Kurds and other Iranians. The novel ends as Mirza explains to his friends that his whereabouts have been revealed to the Iranian government and he has to leave the village. This marks the beginning of Amiri's second novel, entitled *Mirza*, which is in effect the second volume of *Hawarebere*.

Hawarebere shares many similarities with *Pêşmerge*: it romanticises Kurdistan and propagates the Kurdish cause. Both novels have a linear narration and simple characterisation polarised into good and evil. As was the case with *Pêşmerge*, Amiri in *Hawarebere* does not explore *truth* by counterposing

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23 *Sirwe* [Morning Breeze], a state-backed monthly literary and cultural magazine, was the first periodical in Kurdish to appear after the 1979 revolution with Mohammad Amin Sheikholeslami, the prominent Kurdish poet (better known as Hêmin, 1921–1986), as its editor. At first *Sirwe* was published quarterly, but after a few years it became a monthly magazine. *Sirwe* was closed down in 2010.

24 Amiri was born in a village between Mahabad and Bukan in Iranian Kurdistan. He finished primary school in Mahabad and started working for an electricity company in Bukan. In the final years of Pahlavi regime Amiri was imprisoned for three years from 1976 until1979 under the accusation of being a leftist separatist. He currently lives in Bukan.

different voices and ideologies. *Truth* is already known to him; he only needs to disseminate it. As such, different voices are subsumed into one voice: that of an omniscient narrator. Whereas *Pêkenînî Geda* remains a successful work for its ironic style, satirical tone, and masterful characterisation, *Hawarebere* was rather a step backward to the departure point of Kurdish fiction in Iran in terms of formal features and narrative techniques.

Having said that, *Hawarebere* uses figurative language to convey the beauty of the Kurdish landscape and the passion of romantic love, something which is missing in *Pêşmerge*. Furthermore, Amiri's novel is as concerned with promoting the Kurdish language and culture as it is with raising national consciousness.[25] In other words, the author is well aware of the power of cultural heritage in creating a sense of unity and collective identity. His last novel, *Zindexew* [Nightmare, 2003], however, has a more complex structure, plot, and characterisation than *Hawarebere*, addressing more complex socio-political issues and relationships between the characters who live in city.

Kurdish fiction started to thrive by the 1990s as the Iranian government loosened its grip on cultural production in Kurdish. Furthermore, the establishment of a quasi-independent Kurdish region in Iraq and also the diaspora played a significant role in the development of Kurdish fiction in Iranian Kurdistan. Whereas Kurdish writers in the diaspora produced works of fiction which were overtly political and mostly verged on propaganda,[26] the authors living in Iran started to pay more attention to formal and aesthetic aspects. This new generation of writers subscribed to modern and postmodern literary forms towards the end of the 1990s. Such a rapid shift from literary realism to literary modernism and postmodernism, on the one hand, could be accounted for by the shattering of the Kurdish dream of self-rule in Iran by the late 1980s and the frustration and disappointment that ensued. Soon after the Iranian revolution, in August 1979, Khomeini, the founder and supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, declared "a holy war against the Kurds" (Koohi-Kamali, 1992: 180). This left them with no choice but to resort to armed struggle. Consequently, the clashes between the Kurdish fighters and Iranian

25 A 6-page glossary at the end of the novel shows the significance of the Kurdish language for Amiri and his effort to preserve special words pertaining to farming and animal husbandry. Providing glossaries at the end of literary works was a common practice among poets before Amiri, for the same purpose of promoting and preserving the Kurdish language in the absence of education in Kurdish and inclusive dictionaries. In the past two decades, however, the number of literary works with glossaries at their end has remarkably decreased.

26 For example, one can name Siyamend Shekh Aghayi's novel entitled *Firmesk u Xebat* [Tear and Struggle] (Sweden, 1992) and Teyfur's *Jiyan bedem Ziryanewe* [Life in the Storm] (Stockholm, 1993).

forces escalated, leading to drawn-out war. By 1993 the Kurdish forces had suffered "defeat on the battlefield, internal disarray and assassination" (McDowall, 2004: 277). On the other hand, this shift from literary realism to modernism and postmodernism was made possible by the Kurdish writers' exposure to modernist and postmodernist fiction, mostly through translations of world fiction into Persian as well as modernist and postmodernist Persian texts. They experimented with new forms and innovative techniques in order to depict a fragmented subjectivity in search of meaning and lost values in a society which had turned materialistic. At the same time, a small number of Kurdish writers merely indulged in language games and playful self-reflexive formal games.[27] Ata Nahaee was among the first Kurdish writers who experimented with formal techniques to reflect on the complexities of post-war Kurdish society. The next section examines his *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* [*The Birds Soaring on the Wind*] (2002) as a quintessential Kurdish novel attempting to bridge politics and aesthetics.

Bałindekanî Dem Ba: Aesthetic Experimentation and Fragmented Subjectivity

Ata Nahaee (b. 1960) was one of the first writers who experimented with modernist and postmodernist literary forms.[28] His first novel, *Gułî Şořan* [*Şoran Flower*] (1998), as Hashem Ahmadzadeh (2005: 32) rightly suggests, was a turning point in the Kurdish novel for its complex structure and use of modern narrative techniques. His second novel, *Bałindekanî Dem Ba*, was a successful experimentation with (post)modernism that challenged the conventional perception of fiction and of reality, something that was unprecedented in the short history of Kurdish fiction in Iranian Kurdistan. *Girewî Bextî Hełałe: Diwrojî Jiyanî Bałindeyêkî Koçer* [*Gambling on Halala's Fortune: The Last Days of a Migrant Bird*], published five years later in 2007, was not linguistically and formally as radical as *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* was.

27 Among others, one can mention Seyed Qader Hedayati's novel entitled *Dengi Noxet* [The Sound of Full Stop] (2003) as an apolitical postmodernist text. In the novel, Hedayati teases the reader and parodies the traditional style, characterization, and plot without any reference to socio-political problems in Iranian Kurdistan.

28 Nahaee was born in Baneh, Kurdistan province in Iran. He completed his primary and secondary school education in the same city and later entered a teacher training college at Varamin in Tehran province. After two years he graduated from the college, at the time of the Iranian 1979 revolution, and started to work as a teacher in the villages of Iranian Kurdistan. Three years later he was dismissed under the new regime. Since then, he has been living in his hometown, Bane. Nahaee started his literary career by publishing a collection of short stories entitled *Zirîke* [Scream] (1993/1372).

Bałindekanî Dem Ba tells two stories in parallel: The story of a Kurdish writer, Mihreban, who, in turn, tells the story of Farhad; the former is told in colloquial language while the latter is narrated in a formal and poetic mode.[29] Mihreban is actively involved in protests and demonstrations during the latter months of Pahlavi rule and after the 1979 revolution. Despite the fact that he does not take up arms against the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mihreban is arrested and jailed for a short time during the political turmoil ensuing the early years of revolution. He leaves the country for Europe soon after. However, after two decades or so he returns to his hometown in Iranian Kurdistan to write the story of Farhad, a student at Tehran University, where he participates in political activities against Mohammad Reza Shah's dictatorship. Eventually he is arrested by SAVAK (Organization of National Security and Information) and faces a long-term imprisonment.

The novel uses a traditional trope of exile and return, registering Mihreban's perception of a changed world. However, the political theme of the novel rests on a deeper ontological foundation – that truth/identity is always framed. The author achieves this through employing the techniques of metafiction with such skill that the link between political/philosophical purpose and aesthetics is indissoluble. Nahaee's main concern in writing fiction is to explore his own identity, which might lead to knowing the "other." In an interview, his response to a question about his purpose in writing fiction was: "to me, writing is an attempt to find myself […] What makes fiction outstanding for me is the fact that I can find my identity and the fragmented pieces of my being in it, and nothing else" (Yaqubi, 2009: 101–102). In *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* he attempts to get a better perception of identity by showing the subtle nuances of language which might form or modify not only the protagonist's sense of his "self" and the "other", but that of the reader as well.

Abdolxaleq Yaqubi (2008) in his article, "*Bałindekanî Dem Ba* u Deretanekanî Gêrraneweyêkî Postmodêrnîstî" [Postmodernist Narrative Techniques in *The Birds Soaring on the Wind*], argues that Nahaee's *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* could be classified as a postmodern novel due to its unconventional presentation of time and narration. Yaqubi has examined the narrative techniques in this novel, which distinguishes it from a traditional linear narration, namely, "doubtful narration", "two-layers narration", "multifunctional narration", "flawed narration", and "narration in narration" (135–41). By using these narrative techniques, he argues, Nahaee has produced a text rich with "uncertainty and indeterminacy" (135). However, as I will discuss below, some of the

29 This section in the present paper is a shorter and slightly modified version of a chapter in my PhD dissertation which analyses *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* in more detail.

above narrative techniques mentioned by Yaqubi were in effect primarily used in modern, rather than postmodern, novels. The most salient feature which turns *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* into a postmodern novel, is its use of metafictional technique, something which Yaqubi only mentions in passing.

The novel is deeply grounded in the premise of underlying metafiction – a text highlighting "its own status as a fictional construct by referring to itself" (Nicol, 2009: 16). One of the main themes in the novel is writing a novel. Throughout the novel, Nahaee addresses, among other things, the relationship between the author and characters and his degree of control over them. He also involves the reader in the process of meaning-making.[30] Mihreban, who has started writing his new novel, soon realises that he is a character in someone else's novel. The implied author frequently appears in the novel and discusses different subjects with the protagonist of his novel, Mihreban. As such, the boundaries between different worlds are "violated" in order to destabilize "ontological boundaries" and to challenge the notion of identity as a fixed, unified whole.[31]

The novel's primary narrator, who is also the implied author, has limited control over the characters. He is presented as their creator, yet the moment the characters step onto the pages, they become independent of him. To take an example, in the scene where Mihreban is sick and shivers with cold in his bed, the primary narrator questions the relationship between the novelist and his characters:

> I was scared and worried and didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to help him. I stood up and walked toward the window and opened the curtain. It was morning and the rain had stopped. The sky was clear [...] I wish someone would come. I wish I could ask someone to go to his place or phone somebody to help him. I wish the writer could call on a character in his story. Can't he? (Nahaee, 2006: 323–24).[32]

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30 Writing a novel that foregrounds the very act of writing and lays bare its fictitiousness, however, has been experimented with by European and American writers long before Nahaee. One can name, for example, Muriel Spark's *The Comforters* (1957) and Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985) as the metafictional novels to which *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* bears some similarities.

31 The renowned post-modernist American writer, Paul Auster, in *City of Glass* skilfully plays with names to challenge the notion of identity as a unified and fixed entity and at the same time to blur the boundaries between "self" and "other."

32 Min tirsa bûm. Nîgeran bûm. Nemdezanî debê çî bikem. Nemdezanî debê çon yarmetî bidem. Hestam û ser û xwarêkî jûrekem kird. Çûme ber pencereke u loyêkî perdekem hełdayewe. Çêştengaw bû. Barişteke nemabû. Asman taw û saw bû [...] xozge kesêk dehat.

There are two points that are worth mentioning here: firstly, Nahaee questions the traditional novelistic conventions; and secondly, he reminds readers that they are dealing with a fictional world that is not to be taken as either real or as the only one possible.

Bałindekanî Dem Ba is a type of metafiction, which, borrowing Nicol's words, "actively indulge[s] in … 'frame-breaking', where the frames through which the fictional world is presented to the reader are actually dismantled or shattered" (Nicol, 2009: 37). The frame-breaking in the novel is mainly conducted through dialogues between the primary narrator, as the (implied) author, and the protagonist:

> Mihreban said: "You should have told me that those fragmented memories in my mind belong to a man's past that even he, himself, had forgotten. You should have told me from the very first day." The first day? He meant that day when we met each other, that day we came to know each other. First we were unknown and unfamiliar to one another; two persons from two different worlds, two individuals with two different languages. Two persons with two stories […] I said: "I want to write your story." He was startled and said: "My story?" I said: "Mihreban's story. A man who after years of separation and exile has returned home and …" He didn't let me finish my words. He said: "I have returned to write someone else's story. The story of […]" I had said: "Farhad?" He thought about it. He wished to write Farhad's story for years. He said: "Do you know Farhad?" Then I laughed (Nahaee, 2006: 187).[33]

In the above passage, it is revealed that Mihreban is merely a character in someone else's story. Through "frame-breaking" Nahaee has revealed the strategies and techniques which present the fictional world as real and natural. The aim is to make readers conscious of the ways that narrative conventions are employed in order to shape their perception of themselves and of the world.

Xozge demtwanî bir̲om be şwên kesêkda, yan telefûn bo kesêk bikem. Xozge çîroknûs deytwanî telefûn bo kesêkî çîrokekey bika u bixwazê. Natwanê?

33 Gotibûy [Mihreban]: "To debû be minit bigotaye ew bîrewerye piçir̲ piçir̲ û parçe parçane ke le zeynî minda kełeke bûn, beşêk le rabirdûy pyawêkin ke xoy feramoşî kirdûn. Debû le yekem rojewe be minit bigotaye." Yekem roj? Mebestî ew roje bû ke yektirman dîbû. Ew roje ke le yektir aşkira bûbûyn. Sereta wek dû kesî le yek namo u nenasyaw rûberrpy yektir bûynewe. Dû kes le dû dinyay ciyawaz. Dû kes le dû zemanî cyawaz. Dû kes le dû çîrokî … gotibûm: "min demewê çîrokî to binûsim." Daçiłekîbû. Gotibûy: "çîrokî min?" Gotibûm: "çîrokî mirheban. Pyawêk ke diwa sallanêk xʿorbet û dûrî gerraewtewe w …" Neyhêştibû qisekem tewaw bikem. Gutibûy: "min geir̲awmetewe çîrokî kesêkî tir binûsim. Çîrokî …" Gotibûm: "Ferhad?" Bîrî kirdbûewe. Sałanêk bû h'ezî kirdbû çîrokî Ferhad binûsê. Gutibûy: "to Ferhad denasî?" Ewsa min pêkenîbûm.

Brian McHale (1986) borrows and modifies Roman Jakobson's term "dominant" as a "conceptual tool" to explain the fundamental difference between modernist and postmodernist poetics. In his view, dominant is the "focusing component of a work of art" which "rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components" and "guarantees the integrity of the structure" (6). The "dominant" of *Bałindekanî Dem Ba*, then, is ontological and at the same time epistemological; as such it could be identified with both modernist and postmodernist literature. In other words, it poses questions about the nature of reality (ontological) and how we get to know that reality (epistemological). To foreground the latter, it emphasizes perspective. Nahaee's style in *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* bears resemblance to that of Houshang Golshiri (1937–2000), the prominent Iranian writer, in his most famous novel, *Shazde Ehtejab* [*Prince Ehtejab*] (1968).[34] They both deploy, among other techniques, incomplete, mistaken, or limited points of view in order to try for *truth*.

Bałindekanî Dem Ba does not present a finalised version of characters that are in possession of *coherent* and *autonomous* identities. Neither of the two narrators, the primary narrator and Mihreban in the second story, provides readers with clear-cut information about, for example, characters' personalities or their past lives, or a given account of their behaviour and motivations. Rather, the narrators either offer multiple possibilities for the characters' lives, thoughts, and behaviour or they cast doubt on what has just been mentioned about them. Below are some examples that illustrate Nahaee's relativising approach.

> I [primary narrator] said: "Leyla is a plan that Munîre and your niece, Neşmîl, have hatched for you." He raised his head. He saw me laughing through his cigarette smoke. Probably a mocking laughter and [...] he was not upset (Nahaee, 2006: 206).[35]

34 Houshang Golshiri might be the most important Persian writer to have greatly affected Nahaee's style and thought. His translation of Golshiri's masterpiece, *Shazde Ehtejab*, into Kurdish further proves his significance for Nahaee. Soon after starting his career as a writer, as Hassan Mir'abedini says, Golshiri joined the other Iranian writers who had experimented with the new ideas promoted by The Nouveau Roman movement in France. Under the influence of this movement, Golshiri (cited in Mir'abedini, 2002: 672–673) viewed fiction as a medium through which he could achieve a better understanding of human beings, as he says in an interview: "My main concern in story-writing, given that humans are at the centre of fiction, is to get to know what it is to be 'human.' Despite being aware of the impossibility of knowing 'human being,' through using some techniques and by putting a distance [between the protagonist and reality by way of doubts and uncertainties] the writer still seeks to achieve it – which is doomed to failure."

35 Gutim [primary narrator]: "Leyla xewnêke Munîrey xoşkit û Neşmîlî xoşkezat boyan dîwî." Serî hellbirrî. Le pişt hewrî dûkellî cigerekeyewe min pêdekenîm. Renge pêkenînêkî galltecarryane w ... qells nebû.

…

> The old woman had two married daughters; but she didn't have a son. Didn't she? She might have had a son. She might have had three or four sons who had died of smallpox in their childhood. Or probably one of them had survived smallpox and grown up, but later he might have drowned in a pond. Or he might have fallen off a mountain while he was with his father. Or […] anyway, she was living alone. She has been living alone for several years, her daughters being busy with their lives and not able to take care of her as they should have (260–61).[36]

> He heard the phone ringing again. It startled him. Delighted, he went to pick it up. Delighted? (200).[37]

> He [Mihreban] had seen Leyla at Munîre's house by chance. By chance? It is also possible that their meeting was not accidental (201).[38]

In the above examples the narration is fragmented, unfinished, and indeterminate. First and foremost, Nahaee has avoided finalising the characters and the fictional world presented in the novel. By casting doubt on the reliability of the narrators' and characters' statements he seeks to convey to the reader the message that we no longer live in the world of objectivities and certainties, but are in a new world of subjectivity and radical uncertainties; so much so that the boundaries between fiction and reality are indistinguishable.

This ambiguity leaves the reader wondering which world is real: the world of the novel's primary narrator, that of Mihreban, or Farhad? Moreover, it is not clear whether they are three independent persons or three aspects of one person, which could be any one of them, as we can see in the following passage:

> He [Mihreban] said: "Be careful, otherwise the story gets out of control." I [primary narrator] said: "Which story? Your story or Farhad's?" He thought to himself. He didn't know whether he is at his own home or at

36 Pîrêjin dû kiçî be şûy bû, bełam kurî nebû. Neybwe? Renge bûbêtî. Renge sê çiwar kuṟî bûbê u, le mindałîda be sûrêje mirdbêtin. Renge yekyan le sûrêjeş xelistibê, gewreş bûbê, bełam diwatir le gomêkda xinkabê. Yan legeł bawkî le şaxêk helldêrabin. Yan … herçî bû êsta be tenha dejya. Çend sałêk bû be tenha dejya u kiçekanî be xem û meynetî jyanî xoyanda kewtibûn û, pêyan nedekra be qeder pêwîst lay lêbikenewe.

37 Dîsan zirey telefonekey bîst. Daçiłekî. Be xoşîewe berew pîrî çû. Be xoşîyewe?

38 Ew (Mihreban) Leylay le małî Munîre dîbûwewe. Be rêkewt? Renge rêkewtîş nebûbê.

> Farhad's. He was not sure whether he was living his own life or Farhad's forgotten moments. Probably none of them [...] "Or both of them" [Mihreban says]. He was startled by hearing his own words (206).[39]

When the primary narrator asks "your story or Farhad's?" it is suggested that the author of Farhad's story is himself a character in someone else's story. In the following sentence, however, Mihreban becomes one with Farhad – that is, author and character are one and the same person. In this way, Nahaee has deconstructed the conventional author-text-reality relationship. Elsewhere in the novel when the primary narrator says: "So he [Mihreban] was at Farhad's house. Farhad's house or mine?" (208), it might strike the reader that the primary narrator is either Mihreban or Farhad or both – that is, they are fragmented aspects of each other. One interpretation could be that Farhad is the future Mihreban or the primary narrator, or both. Yet other interpretations are also valid: they could be three independent entities. These compositional strategies together with epistemological and ontological doubts have opened up the possibility of multiple voices and worlds in the novel.

The uncertainty underlying *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* has enabled it to avoid making any final judgements on the characters. Nahaee has not set a given discourse as the embodiment of *truth* dominating other discourses and ideologies. On the contrary, he orchestrates different languages and voices in such a way as to create a polyphonic novel, in the Bakhtinian sense: allowing for "[a] plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness" (Bakhtin, 1984: 6). Like earlier Kurdish writers, Nahaee in *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* expresses socio-political concerns. However, what distinguishes him from most of his predecessors is that he has not reduced his work to the mouthpiece of a given ideology or political party. In other words, he has not compromised literary aesthetics for political commitment.

Being abroad for years, the protagonist-narrator, Mihreban, had not witnessed the social, political, and cultural changes in Iranian Kurdistan. To his surprise, his friends and the whole city have changed dramatically. His friends become distant from their revolutionary ideals and are only concerned with their personal lives:

39 Gutî: "wişyar nebî çîrokeke le girêjne derdeçê." Gutim: "kame çîrok? Çîrokî to yan çîrokî Ferhad?" Têfirkî. Neydezanî le mał û jûrî xoyetî yan le mał û jûrî Ferhad. Satekanî xoy dejî yan sate feramoş bûwekanî Ferhad. Renge hîçyan ... "yan herdûkyan." [Mihreban says]. Lew qisey xoy daçiłekî.

> They [Mihreban's friends] apologised for not coming to see him. Being busy with their lives and jobs and [...] they talked and laughed quietly. They were no longer the same young courageous men he had known. Those young men would not talk about their business and money. They would not talk of their jobs and their progress, of their houses, shops, cars and those of others [...] of their children's future [...] they would not say that you have made a big mistake to return home. You have returned to these people who are so ignorant? How on earth have you returned from Europe, the place for a happy life, to here? [...] he was sure that these men had forgotten the young men, had forgotten their desires, dreams, hopes and even the language of those young men; they had also forgotten him (188–189).[40]

This new society which is separated from its ideals bears some similarities to European modernity reflected in modernist writers' works at the turn of the twentieth century, an era in which the individual, as Jesse Matz (2004: 47) remarks, "came to feel less a part of the social whole, as fiction writers saw it, because the whole had lost touch with its ideals and better values. Social life had gone cold, materialistic, haphazard, and so the decent person could only feel isolated from it."

Mihreban cannot connect with a society devoid of high values and sublime ideals; accordingly, he finds himself in tragic loneliness and alienation. His old comrades and friends are now married and have children to take care of and feed. They are no longer those young men who once dreamed of changing the world: "Since he [Mihreban] has returned or probably since he has left here, everyone has become wise and talks of wise people; Baram and his wife, his sisters, Munîre and Rûnak and their husbands, his old friends and comrades, including Celalî" (189–190). His brother, Baram, mocks his dreams and ideals. He believes that he has ruined his life for nothing:

40 Bo ewey neçûbûne lay daway lêbûrdinyan lê kirdbû. Girftarî ... kêşey kar û jiyan û ... aram û le ser xo diwa bûn û pêkewnîbûn. Hîçyan lew kuṟe genc û cerbezane neçûbû ke ew be cêy hêştibûn. Ew kuṟe gencane basî kar û kasbî u qerz û qołe u çek û sifteyan nedekird. Basî mał û dûkan û maşînî xoyan û xełkî tir ... basî dahatûy mindałekanyan ... neyandegut kiławit ser çûwe geṟawîtewe. Geṟawîtewe bo naw em xełke ke le hîç nagen? Piyaw çon le ewrûpa, le nawendî xoşî u guzeranî xoşewe degeṟêtewe bo êre? Ew diłnya bû ew piyawane kuṟe gencekanyan feramoş kirdbû. Hez û xewn û awat û tenanet şêwey qise kirdnî kuṟe gencekanîşyan feramûş kirdbû. Ewîşyan feramoş kirdbû ...

> Baram, teasing, said: “The passage of time has changed them all. They have forgotten you and many others like you, they think only of money.” He continued: “Among your friends, you and a few others like you were deceived. Encouraged by them, you quit your life, job, and your family and followed a childish dream. Then they turned their backs on you, your dream and your family […]” (200).[41]

Mihreban is repulsed by his brother, his old friends, and the whole society. To Baram and many others in this society, a “wise” man does not ruin his personal life to follow childish dreams of justice, freedom, and democracy.

Bałindekanî Dem Ba presents Kurdish society as materialistic and devoid of sublime values, suggesting that people have lost their desire and enthusiasm for making socio-political changes. Except for Mihreban, all the characters in the novel, who once dreamt of changing the world, have lost their ambitions over time. Mihreban tells his sister, Rûnak, of his sufferings in exile, of the pain of rupture and separation, and of the sorrow of failing to fulfil his dreams. “The suffering of writing. Writing his own sorrows and desires and those of others. The sorrows and desires of women and men who lost their dreams and fantasies. Had lost the game. The game of life and love and …” (284).[42]

Two of Mihreban’s friends, Celalî and Kûriş, for example, are among those who can no longer dream. Under the burden of family responsibilities, they have forgotten their dreams and ideals: “Despite having been married for many years, Celalî says [to Mihreban]: ‘since I can’t dream and fantasize, I feel I’m married and have three children’” (271). Apparently Celalî continued to dream even after his marriage. However, he finally stopped dreaming and became a “wise man.” Kûriş has also lost his capacity to dream. He was from an indigent family who despite all difficulties succeeded in passing the university entrance exam in Iran. However, his future was ruined when the new Islamic government forbade him to register at the university due to his political activities: “we ruined our life for a beautiful and humane dream,” Kûriş says to Mihreban

41 Baram be tîz û tiwancewe deygot: “şeqî zemane hemûyanî goṟîwe. Pare to u sedanî wek toy pê le bîr birdûnetewe”. Deygut: “le naw hemûyanda to kiławit ser çû. To u çend kesêkî wek to. Be qisey ewan waztan le jiyan û kes û kartan hêna u şwên xewnêkî mindałane kewtin. Ewsa ewan piştyan le xotan û kes û kartan kird …”.

42 Lew azarane diwabû ke le ẍorbet kêşabûnî. Azarî dûrî u dabirran. Azarî wedî nehatinî xewn û xeyałekanî. Azarî nûsîn. Nûsînî xem û meraqî xoy û xełkî tir. Xem û meraqî ew jin û piyawane ke xewn û xeyałekanyan doṟandibû. Gemekanyan doṟandibû. Gemey jiyan û xoşewîstî u …

(307).[43] The novel suggests that both Celalî and Kûriş have lost their agency by quitting their dreams under the harsh political, social, and economic circumstances of Iranian Kurdistan after the 1979 revolution. On the other hand, Mihreban is still capable of dreaming, which leads to his alienation in a society abounding with individuals unable to dream.

Conclusion

For much of the twentieth century, the unfavourable socio-political and economic circumstances in Iranian Kurdistan made it difficult for Kurdish prose fiction to establish itself. Under such circumstances it had a stuttering start with only three works in three decades since the publication of *Pêşmerge* in 1961. When the very existence of Kurdish language and culture was in danger, writing and publishing prose fiction, regardless of its literary quality, meant overcoming great adversity. It was within this context that in the first two Kurdish novels, *Pêşmerge* and *Hawarebere*, literature is used as a medium for national awaking and cultural preservation.

Pêşmerge abounds with patriotic rhetoric, calling on all the Kurds to unite to liberate Kurdistan. The novel's overtly political and ideological message makes it more like a political party manifesto than a work of art. Like *Pêşmerge*, *Hawarebere* romanticises Kurdistan and propagates the Kurdish cause. Both novels have a linear narration and simple characterisation polarised into good and evil. Unlike these two novels, it could be argued that Qizilji's *Pêkenînî Geda* is the first work of prose fiction in Iranian Kurdistan which avoids overtly political messages. Qizilji employs satire to raise questions about Kurdish traditions, its social structure and hierarchy, and the exploitation of the poor by the rich. However, what distinguishes him from his predecessors is his skilful use of parody and irony. In most of his short stories, he elevates "social criticism to the level of form" through ironic style and satirical tone.

Over the past two decades or so, however, the number of Kurdish works of prose fiction written by Iranian Kurds has steadily increased. Whereas writing and publishing literary works by Kurdish writers, both prose fiction and poetry, was a huge achievement *per se* before 1990, it is no longer the case: with the possibility of having their works published during the 1990s, though with considerable difficulty, the new generation of Kurdish writers paid unprecedented

43 Êmemaman le pênawî xewnêkî xoş û însanîda awaman be ser hatiwe.

attention to narrative experimentation and formal aesthetics in their works. Unlike most of their predecessors, they abandoned simple realistic narration of the Kurdish people's sufferings, heroism, and romanticising of their homeland. Instead, they experimented with new forms and innovative techniques, some to create a new work of art in order to bridge commitment and aesthetics while a few others merely indulged in language games and playful self-reflexive formal games.

Bałindekanî Dem Ba deals with and, at the same time, engages the reader in both epistemological and ontological questions. To tackle the former, Nahaee employs a fragmented, incomplete, and unreliable narration, some of the defining features of the modernist novel, to show the subjective experience of reality and the fragmented and disrupted socio-political reality of Kurdish society. At the same time, by laying bare the very frame used to present the fictional world, he shows that reality as we experience it is always framed. The self-conscious and self-referential aspect of the novel involves the reader in the process of meaning-making and raises questions about the existence and nature of reality by violating the boundaries between real and fictional worlds. While reflecting on its fictionality and novelistic form, *Bałindekanî Dem Ba* remains politically engaged and deals with the socio-political reality of Kurdish society. In other words, there appears to be an indissoluble link between aesthetics and politics in the novel, each determining the nature of the other.

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Nation, Kingship, and Language: the Ambiguous Politics of Ehmedê Xanî's *Mem û Zîn*

Michiel Leezenberg | ORCID: 0000-0002-2269-2728
Associate professor at the Department of Philosophy, University of Amsterdam, Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen, Oude Turfmarkt 141, 1012 GC Amsterdam, the Netherlands
m.m.leezenberg@uva.nl

Abstract

In this article, I argue that discussions of whether any Kurdish nationalism may be found in Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* proceed from rather anachronistic assumptions. Through an exploration of the language ideology found in this work, I demonstrate that the work's mystical meaning interacts in rather complex ways with its political views. In particular, the king or prince plays a crucial, if ambiguous, political, linguistic, and eschatological role in the poem. Thus, *Mem û Zîn* may be read as a specimen of vernacularisation rather than romantic nationalism.

Keywords

Mem û Zîn – Kurdish literature – Kurdish nationalism – language

Netewe, Padişahî, û Ziman: Siyaseta xumam di Mem û Zîna Ehmedê Xanî de

Di vê gotarê de, îddiaya min ew e ku nîqaşa li ser pirsa hebûna netewegeriya kurdî di Mem û Zîna Xanî de ji pêşferzên pir anakronîstîk têne pêş. Bi rêya veçirandina îdeolojiya zimanî ya di vê berhemê de, ez nîşan didim ku wateya sofîgerane ya berhemê bi çendîn awayan di bîr û boçûnên siyasî de rengê xwe vedibîne. Bi taybetî, padişah an jî mîr roleke – herçend xumam jî be – bingehîn a siyasî, zimanî, û axretî digêre di

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berhemê de. Wisa jî, Mem û Zîn dibe wek nimûneyeke edebî ya bikaranîn û berbelavkirina zimanê xwemalî (vernacularisation) bê dîtin, ne ya netewegeriyeke romantîk.

Netewe, paşayetî û ziman: Siyasetî narrûnî Mem û Zînekey Eḧmedî Xanî

Lem babeteda, min argumêntî ewe dekem ke giftugoy ewey ke aya hîç core nasyûnalîzmêkî kurdî lenaw Mem û Zînî Xanîda heye le grîmaney enekronîstî (mufareqey zemenîyewe) serçawe degrêt. Le miyaney kinekirdinî aydiyolojyay zimanî naw ew berhemey Xanî, min ewe pîşan dedem ke manay mîtolojyayî berhemeke be şêwazêkî alloz karlêk legell cîhanbînîye siyasîyekeyda deken. Betaybetî, padşa yan mîr, eger be narrûnîş bêt, rollêkî serekîy siyasî, zimanewanî we axîretî (îsketolojî) le şî'rekanî da debînêt. Bemcore, Mem û Zîn dekrêt wek nimûney ‘ewamgerayîy zimanî (vernacularisation) nek wek nasyûnalîzmî romansî bibînrêt.

Netewe, Mîreyîye û Ziwan: Polîtîkayê zafmanîdarî yê Mem û Zîna Ehmedê Xanî

Na meqale de ez îdîa kena ke munaqeşeyê “Tirêm eserê Xanî Mem û Zîne de rêçê neteweperwerîye yenê dîyene yan ney?” hîna zaf hîpotezanê anakronîkan ra yenê pêra. Pê kefşkerdişê îdeolojîya ziwanî ya nê eserî, ez nîşan dana ke manaya eserî ya mîstîke hîna zaf bi hewayêko kompleks tesîr kena fikranê ey ê sîyasîyan ser o. Bitaybetî qiral yan kî mîre şîîre de rolêko sîyasîyo ziwannaskîyo eskatolojîko muhîm la nedîyar kay keno. Coka merdim şeno Mem û Zîne sey neteweperwerîya romantîke ney, la hîna zaf sey nimûneyê pêroyîkerdişê ziwanî biwano.

Introduction

Mem û Zîn, the *mathnawî* or courtly romance about two ill-fated lovers, written in Kurmanji Kurdish and completed in 1695 by Ehmedê Xanî (1650–1707), has a well-deserved place of honour in Kurdish literature. From early on, manuscripts circulated in relatively large numbers in the medreses of Northern Kurdistan. Since the late nineteenth century, it has been recognised as the

Kurdish national epic; and despite some efforts in 1930s Soviet Armenia to promote oral epics like *Zembilfroş* to this status, the prominence of Xanî's poem has never been seriously challenged.[1] Unfortunately, this position has hardly been matched by sustained critical attention. In Arabic, Turkish, and Kurdish, numerous works have been published, but few of these have much analytical rigor; the most significant of these being Resûl (2007 [1979]), Khaznadar (2010); and the *şîrove*, or line-by-line commentaries, by Cîhanî (2007), Dost (2010), and Yıldırım (2013).[2] In Western languages, studies of Xanî's epic are still few and far between; earlier discussions (Shakely, 1992; Hassanpour, 1992: 52–7, 83–90 and 2004; van Bruinessen, 2004) largely focus on the question of the presence or absence of Kurdish nationalism in the work, but this preoccupation with nationalism is rather anachronistic.

Instead, I will argue that *Mem û Zîn* forms a clear example of *vernacularisation*, i.e., the new literate and literary use of spoken vernaculars. To substantiate this argument, I propose to focus on the beliefs concerning language and government that may be found in the text. Thus far, the political content of *Mem û Zîn* has often been approached from a historical-materialist perspective, most famously by Izeddîn Resûl (2007) and Amir Hassanpour (1992). Here, I would like to proceed from a slightly different angle, focusing on so-called *language ideologies*, i.e., the largely implicit and unsystematic assumptions about what language is and how it functions socially and politically.[3] Such an approach seems particularly promising when studying the phenomenon of modern nationalism, which makes a central connection between language and polity. I will argue that the language ideology emerging from *Mem û Zîn* is qualitatively different from those of romantic nationalism. Thus, these tools of analysis also allow us to explore assumptions concerning the apparent "modernity" of the national sentiment expressed in *Mem û Zîn*. The articulation of a Kurdish identity and of Kurdish aspirations has baffled many a scholar who supposes that national identities and nationalist sentiments are modern by definition. In fact, there is an obvious model in classical Persian literature for such a premodern sense of "national" identity. I am referring, of course, to Firdawsî's famous *Shâhnâmeh*, where much of the action is triggered by a near-timeless confrontation between Iran and Turan, or between Persians and Turks, that according

1 On the consecration of *Mem û Zîn* as the Kurdish national epic cf. Leezenberg (2018).

2 Ayhan Tek's study of the absence of royal patronage in *Mem û Zîn* (2018) comes to a number of conclusions similar to my own; this work appeared too late, however, for a fuller inclusion of its findings here.

3 Language ideologies were (re-)introduced as a topic of linguistic and anthropological relevance by Michael Silverstein (1979); see also Bauman & Briggs (2003).

to the book goes back to the troubled relation between the two mythical brothers Irâj and Tûr. However, this article will also highlight some significant differences between Ehmedê Xanî and his medieval Persian predecessors.[4]

Nationalism in *Mem û Zîn*?

The storyline of *Mem û Zîn* is probably familiar enough, but merits a brief summary nonetheless. At a Newroz celebration, Mem and his friend Tacdîn, disguised as girls, run into Sitî and Zîn, the sisters of Zeyneddîn, the prince (*mîr*) of Jezîra Botan, who have in turn dressed up as boys. Mem and Zîn instantly fall in love, as do Tacdîn and Sitî. But whereas the latter two soon get married, the former are forbidden to marry due to the scheming of Beko, an evil counsellor to the prince. Following Tacdîn and Sitî's wedding (which gives Xanî the occasion to describe both the festivities and the bridal night with obvious relish), Mem and Zîn gradually waste away as a result of their unfulfilled love. When, in the wake of a game of chess with the prince, Mem is provoked by Beko to publicly profess his love for Zîn, the prince has him imprisoned in a dark pit. Eventually, faced by the threat of rebellion, the prince relents and allows for the two lovers to meet. After a final encounter, Mem dies, soon followed by Zîn. Tacdîn subsequently kills Beko. The latter then grows into a thorny juniper tree between the cypresses growing over the two lovers' tombs, preventing them from uniting even in death.

Mem û Zîn has an immediate appeal as a tragic love story, which is enriched and deepened by the counterpoint provided by the Newroz celebrations, Sitî and Tacdîn's wedding party and bridal night, and by stories of hunting, fighting, and bravery. On another level, explicitly indicated by Xanî himself, the narrative may be read as an allegory of human and divine love, or as he calls

4 A word on the text(s) I have used. The best available printed version of the epic, and in fact the sole genuine critical edition, is still Margaret Rudenko's (1962); next to textual variants, it also gives a Russian translation. In the twenty-first century, new editions and translations have proliferated, but a full discussion of these would take up too much time here. Since Rudenko's edition is no longer in print, I have mostly relied on Jan Dost's more easily available edition (2010), which presents the text in Latin transcription with *bayt* numbering, a modern Kurdish translation and a running commentary (*şîrove*); where necessary, I have used the variant readings provided by Rudenko's edition, and by a 1750 manuscript which was reprinted photographically by Spîrêz publishing house (2009). For the English translations, I have relied on Saadalla's translation (2008), which generally manages to capture the spirit of technical and religious vocabulary quite well. Where I have disagreed with Saadalla, I have supplied an English rendering of my own.

it, "metaphorical" and "literal" love (*bayt* 2). On such a mystical-allegorical reading, all talk of love between humans may be read as really referring to the stages in the human love for God. Moreover, precisely in remaining unfulfilled and unconsummated, Xanî suggests, the love between humans can be purified and transmuted into love for God.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, however, a secular-nationalist reading gained prominence, and indeed seems to have become the predominant interpretation of the epic. This reading interprets the tragic fate of the two lovers as an allegory of the Kurds' inability to unite and liberate themselves.[5] In academic literature too, the secular-nationalist reading seems to have received most attention. The numerous discussions of the alleged nationalism in *Mem û Zîn* overshadow attention to its mystical dimensions, even though the latter appear throughout the work; indeed, rather more prominently so than any political allusions (cf. Shakely, 1992; Hassanpour, 1992 and 2004; van Bruinessen, 2004). With the significant exception of Resûl (2007 [1979]: ch. 20–25), it is only in more recent studies (Mirawdeli, 2010; Bochenska, 2016) that more systematic attention is paid to the work's mystical dimensions. Yet, even when studying the work's politics, one should avoid solely examining the famous introduction or *dîbaçe* (in particular chapters 5 and 6), and endeavour to explore what the other chapters have to say about the Kurds and their legitimate rulers, and about government more generally. A more thorough analysis reveals the relation between the seemingly modern nationalist sentiment and the apparently medieval mysticism expressed in the work to be rather more complex than one might initially imagine. I will argue that in many instances, a mystical reading of the poem problematises or even contradicts its political message.

Oral and Literate Traditions in the Persianate World

I would like to begin by questioning the widely-held assumption that *Mem û Zîn* derives from an allegedly pure and uncontaminated Kurdish folkloric tradition. Not only has this tradition itself arguably been shaped by a wider, Persian-inspired or "Persianate" cosmopolitan culture, Xanî's work is also explicitly indebted to the Persian *written* tradition. Xanî mentions not only several of his predecessors in Kurdish poetry, like Melayê Cizîrî and Feqiyê Teyran, he also alludes to several of the classical Persian poets, most notably, Nizâmî Gandjavî and Abdallah Jâmî:

5 On this changing reception, see Leezenberg (2018).

> Kes nakete mîterê xwe Camî/ Ra na giritin kesek Nizâmî
>
> No one would take Jâmî as a groom/ No one would take Nizâmî as a servant (*bayt* 257)[6]

Works like Nizâmî's *Laylî and Majnûn* (and to a lesser extent the *Haft paykar*), and Jâmî's *Yûsuf and Zulaykha*, have undoubtedly served as models for Xanî's work. The very composition of *Mem û Zîn*, most particularly its lengthy introduction (opening with a praise of and appeal to God, followed by a chapter in praise of the Prophet and some more autobiographical remarks in which the poet speaks of his motives for writing his work), reflects that of works like Nizâmî's *Laylî and Majnûn*. Stylistically, the influence of Nizâmî in particular is noticeable on virtually every page of *Mem û Zîn*, especially in the complex imagery and extensive wordplay. This indebtedness to the Persian literary tradition is by no means unique to *Mem û Zîn*. Written Medieval Armenian and Georgian literature, and oral traditions in various regional languages, have equally been shaped by it.[7] This wider Persianate tradition, undoubtedly one of the great cosmopolitan cultural formations in the literary history of the world, comparable to Latinity in Medieval Western Europe and to the Sanskrit cosmopolitan order on the Indian subcontinent, is only gradually starting to receive the attention it deserves.[8]

It is obvious that Persian culture is far more visible in Xanî's work than anything politically or culturally Ottoman, despite a few allusions to Ottoman policies (notably, the confrontation between Ottomans and Safavids, *bayt* 207, and the Ottoman slaughter of Qizilbash in which Tacdîn and Mem are said to have participated, *bayt* 1165), and despite a few phrases in Ottoman Turkish, most importantly *bilmez kî ne söyleye zebanım*, "my tongue does not know what to say" (*bayt* 1577). Given the much more extensive use of Arabic and

6 In fact, Bozarslan's 1968 edition transcribes these proper names as *camê* and *nizamê*, and translates them as, respectively, "glass" and "order", thus rendering the pun on the names of the poets at the price of not mentioning their names themselves.

7 Thus, to mention but a few examples: Rustaveli's *Vepkhistqaosani* ("The Man in the Panther Skin") explicitly expresses its indebtedness to the New Persian literary tradition; and the Armenian national epic, the oral poem *Sasuntsi Dzurer* ("Daredevils of Sasun"), shows various Persian- or Persianate-inspired characters and motifs. I hope to return to these subjects on another occasion.

8 Cf. Dabashi (2012); Ahmad (2016: ch. 1, esp. 32–38). The latter aptly calls this cosmological order the "Balkans-to-Bengal complex"; the former mistakenly assumes that in this order, only Persian was used for literate purposes, while vernacular languages like Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi and Ossetic were used in exclusively oral traditions (2012: 331).

Persian borrowings in the work, it is clear that the world in which Xanî lived was shaped by Arabic religious learning and Persian literature rather than Ottoman rule or the Turkish language. Hence, it may make more sense to study Xanî's text against a Persianate background (to which he explicitly refers) than in relation to the Ottoman Turkish *mesnevi* tradition, of which no similar traces can be seen in *Mem û Zîn*.

It is not clear whether Xanî was familiar with the written text of Firdawsî's *Shâhnâmeh*, as opposed to oral versions of the same legends. Although *Mem û Zîn* refers or alludes to characters and events from the *Shâhnâmeh* on various occasions, these allusions are mostly made in passing, and are rarely elaborated. Thus, brave and valiant warriors are claimed to be superior to Rostam, perhaps the *Shâhnâmeh*'s most famous hero (*bayts* 219, 374, 1887 and 1958); and the two tragic lovers are compared to, among others, Khosrow and Shirîn, and Bîzhan and Manîzha (*bayts* 58, 1161 and 1373). These references may equally well stem from the oral traditions of the wider Persian cultural area, to which large parts of the Ottoman empire, the Caucasus and parts of South and Central Asia also belonged, as from the text of the *Shâhnâmeh* or any of the classical *mathnawî* poems by Nizâmî, Jâmî, and others.

In fact, two major figures from the *Shâhnâmeh* are conspicuously absent in Xanî's poem: Zahhâk the tyrant (who is explicitly identified as an Arab here) and Kâveh the blacksmith, who leads a revolt against the latter. The story of Zahhâk and Kâveh, moreover, is explicitly linked by Ferdowsî to the origin of the Kurds as a distinct people. For obvious reasons, this story would seem highly relevant to Xanî's concern with Kurdish aspirations; the narrative of Kâveh's revolt against Zahhâk would seem to be even more directly relevant to the politics of *Mem û Zîn*. Given that it occurs quite early in the *Shâhnâmeh*, it is rather unlikely that a Kurdish reader would have overlooked it. Instead, however, Xanî repeats a long-standing self-image of the Kurdish nobles as of pure Arab stock (*bayt* 365). This may be an indication that Xanî was not familiar with the written text of the *Shâhnâmeh*, or at least, not with the text in its entirety; or if he was, that this revolutionary (if such is the correct word) account of the origins and identity of the Kurds was not what he was interested in. We will return to this point below.

I think this rootedness in a wider, cosmopolitan Persianate literary culture, which was both literate and orally transmitted, has not received due attention in the recent literature on *Mem û Zîn*. Although Ala'uddîn Sajjâdî (1952: 189–213) briefly discusses Ehmedê Xanî's background in Persian literature, later studies tend to emphasise its roots in oral Kurdish traditions. Thus, Michael Chyet presents Ehmedê Xanî's epic as derived from an oral tradition which he tacitly assumes to be primordially and purely Kurdish (1991, esp.

ch. 2). Likewise, Ferhad Shakely (1992: 49–51) emphasises the poem's assumed oral background in a purely Kurdish tradition, despite acknowledging some Persian literary influences. Most importantly, perhaps, Kurdish literary historian Marouf Khaznadar rejects the importance of any Persian influences, arguing instead that any Kurdish reference to *Laylî and Majnûn* can and should be traced directly to the Arabic poetic tradition on which Nizâmî's work is also based.[9] The Persianate character of *Mem û Zîn*, however, should be apparent from the large number of Persian lexical borrowings alone, even if one disregards the explicit references to specifically Persian or Persianate mythological figures and literary motifs. Against any reduction to a national Kurdish oral tradition, and against any overstatement of Persian literate influence, I would like to suggest here that the written Persian and the oral local traditions were not autonomous from one another, but have had a long and complex process of interaction. *Mem û Zîn*, in other words, is a prototypical element of the wider cosmopolitan Persianate tradition, which also included works written in vernacular languages with a heavy infusion of Persian loans.

The Language of *Mem û Zîn* and Its Intended Audience

This leads us to the question of the significance of Xanî's self-conscious writing in Kurdish against this wider, cosmopolitan cultural background. Xanî himself describes his use of Kurdish in religious terms, as a kind of *bidʿa* or heretic innovation (*bayt* 237), adding that:

> Înaye nîzam û întîzamê/ Kêşaye cefa jiboyê amê
>
> I have established order and regularity [in the language]/ And have suffered for the masses' sake (*bayt* 239)

Does this mean that Xanî actually wrote his work *for* the masses (*ʿâmma*), intending it to serve as a genuinely national epic or piece of popular literature? Or did he merely indicate that the very act of writing in the language *of* the local *ʿâmma* was in itself a form of heresy? If we take the *bayt* to state the former, then Xanî's attitude is a modern one indeed: but there are good reasons to think he is actually making the more modest claim.

My main thesis here is that the writing of an epic in Kurdish may be seen as a case of *vernacularisation*, i.e., a new literary use of a local language hitherto

9 Khaznadar (2010: 367–450); interview with the author, Erbil, July 2010.

only used in oral communication, and, in that sense, a language of the illiterate *ʿâmma*. Famously, American Sanskrit scholar Sheldon Pollock (2000: 606–7) has argued that vernacularisation involves new uses of written literary texts in a stay-at- home, or local, language, emphasising that these new uses of language are written rather than oral, and literary rather than documentary. He then proceeds to a comparative discussion of the vernacularisations that occurred, on the one hand, in Medieval and early modern Europe developing out of a cosmopolitan Latinity between 1000 and 1500 CE, and, on the other, in South Asia out of a cosmopolitan Sanskrit-based culture, in virtually the same period.

Pushing this analogy slightly further, one might argue that *Mem û Zîn* is itself an example of an early modern Near-Eastern vernacularisation shaped by a cosmopolitan Persianate literary tradition as much as by local oral traditions. This tradition may be more complex than the Latin and Sanskrit ones, in that in the Ottoman empire, at least, it involved not one but three literate languages: Ottoman Turkish for bureaucracy, Arabic for religious learning, and Persian for poetry; if one includes the languages of the empire's Christian and Jewish population groups, the picture becomes even more complex.[10]

There are indeed indications that such a process of vernacularisation occurred in the rural medreses of Northern Kurdistan during the later seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, that Xanî himself was one of the pioneers of this process, and that both Xanî and other actors were well aware of this innovation. Evliya Çelebi, a keen observer of both vernacular languages and provincial cultural life, visited the Kurdish provinces of the Ottoman empire in the 1650s, noting that in the local medreses only works in Arabic and Persian were used.[11] Starting in the late seventeenth century, however, a number of introductory Kurdish-language textbooks were written, and came to have a wide circulation in manuscript form among the rural medreses of the region. In addition to Xanî's *Nûbihara piçûkan* and *Eqîdeya êmanê* (respectively, a rhymed Arabic-Kurdish vocabulary and a rhymed introduction to the principles of the Islamic faith), these textbooks also included works like Elî Teremaxî's *Serfa Kurmancî* or *Tesrîfa Kurmancî*, a prose introduction to *sarf*, or Arabic morphology, which also includes the grammatical basics of Persian and Kurdish; Mela Yûnus Xelqetînî's *Terkîb û Zurûf*, which discusses the basics of

10 On this wider wave of vernacularisations, see Leezenberg (2016). Analogously to the Latin and Sanskrit cases, then, one might argue that in the wider Near-Eastern area, from the tenth century CE onward, New Persian had become something like a cosmopolitan language for literary expression, and Arabic a cosmopolitan language for religious learning.

11 Evliya Çelebi, *Seyâhatnâme* IV/88, 235a13–16.

Arabic syntax; and Mela Xelîlê Sêrtî's *Nehc ul-enâm*, which discusses the foundations of religion.[12] Like Xanî, these authors were generally aware that they were doing something new. Thus Teremaxî writes that "in all languages, the science of *sarf* exists and is practiced; but what is now necessary for us is *sarf* in the Kurdish language."[13]

Pollock (2000: 607) adds that vernacularisation marks a profound historical transformation, not only in literary-cultural practices, but also in practices of political power. If this is correct, it is worth exploring in more detail exactly what happens linguistically and politically in *Mem û Zîn*, rather than discussing to what extent its supposedly nationalist statements match the features of modern romantic nationalism. In fact, Ehmedê Xanî's use of Kurdish rather than Persian, which we have noted he himself characterises in religious terms as *bidʿa*, may be more fruitfully characterised as a case of vernacularisation rather than nationalism; it then remains to be explored what role and status the Kurdish language has in this process.

Although it does not directly address the vast topic of nationalism, Pollock's account also implies that the early modern rise of vernaculars, and their subsequent rearticulation as national languages, cannot be explained in the functionalist and modernist terms of prominent theories of nationalism like Gellner's and Anderson's. Gellner (1983) argues that the development of modern industrialised economies necessitated a shared language as an efficient means of communication; Anderson (1991) suggests that it was particularly through "print capitalism" that vernacular languages became fully-fledged national languages. These theories do not fit the historical realities of the Ottoman Empire, where neither a fully developed industrial economy nor any widespread form of print capitalism emerged early enough to explain the rise of the new vernacular languages, and subsequently of local nationalisms. But quite apart from that, these theories also face conceptual problems: national languages first emerged primarily in the "non-functional" sphere of literary expression and religious learning rather than in the more strictly functional usages that primarily serve to convey factual information, like news reporting and economic communication.

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12 On this vernacularisation process, with a focus on Teremaxî, see Leezenberg (2014). Cf. the short sketch by Mela Mehmûd Bayezîdî, written in 1858 and published in Jaba (1860); see also Zinar (1993). Elî Teremaxî's Kurdish grammar, the *Serfa Kurmancî*, was published in a Latin transcription, based on Marouf Khaznadar's 1971 Arabic-script edition, by Zeynelabidin Zinar (1997). A new edition of Teremaxî's work was recently published by Merdan Newayî (2018).

13 "Ev ʿilmê serfê li hemû kafiyêd lisanan da heye û icra dibe. Ema ê ku niha ji bo me lâzim e zimanê kurmancî ye" (Zinar, 1997: 14).

If this argument holds, we can raise the question why the vernacularisation of Kurdish (or more specifically, of one Northern Kurdish dialect variety) occurred when it did. Thus far, only few authors have addressed this question. Martin van Bruinessen attributes the large number of Kurdish poets in the seventeenth century to the replacement of Persian by Ottoman Turkish; Amir Hassanpour argues, in the opposite direction, that the rise of a Kurdish literature reflects the rise of Kurdish political power, in particular the emergence of Kurdish emirates in the fifteenth and sixteenth century CE.[14] Both authors have a point, but their explanations seem incomplete. Ottoman Turkish initially served exclusively as the language of administration, and only much later became a major language of poetry and learning; and, as we shall see below, Kurdish *mîr*s were not necessarily patrons of the Kurdish language either.

Ehmedê Xanî's categories of the national, the religious, the literary and the political differ from our modern-day concepts and it is important to keep this in mind for a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the kind of nationalism expressed in *Mem û Zîn*. I will try to highlight these differences by focusing on the language ideology emerging from its pages and contrasting it with the readings that were imposed onto the text from the late nineteenth century onward. Generally speaking, romantic nationalism is a nineteenth-century intellectual and political phenomenon that rests on a political ideology of popular sovereignty and national liberation from foreign and/or monarchical rule, and on a linguistic ideology that may be called *expressivist*, in that it sees each nation as endowed with a distinct and indeed unique national spirit (*Volksgeist*); the national language, and national culture more generally, are but the expression of this unique collective inner self.[15]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, various aspiring national groups in the Ottoman Empire consciously set out to create a national culture and a national literary heritage. The Ottoman Greeks had been the first to do so; their work was to some extent made easier by the work of European classical philologists during the preceding centuries, but does not seem to have essentially depended on it.[16] Pioneered by the efforts of Adamantios Korais, the modern Greeks created a secular and even pagan literary tradition for modern national education in a modern form of Greek closer to the spoken dialects, as opposed to the scholastic educational program hitherto dominated by the Church and taught in Koinè Greek. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Arabic-language authors in Egypt and the Levant associated with the

14 Van Bruinessen (2004); Hassanpour (2004); cf. Hassanpour (1992).

15 For a cultural-historical overview of romantic nationalism in Europe, see Leerssen (2006).

16 See, in particular, Kitromilides (1992).

literary Renaissance or *nahda*, created an Arabic national literary heritage or *turâth*, to some extent modelled on the Greek case.

Significant in this development is the creation of an entirely new category of "literature" (Arabic *adabiyya*, Turkish *edebiyat*) as embodying a specifically national heritage. This modern concept implies a romantic ideology of literature, as not so much a form of elite communication but an expression of the soul of a people or *Volk*.[17] This explains the new attention for, and value attached to, folklore and oral literary traditions in the late nineteenth century, even (or especially) in languages that had a long-standing tradition of high literature, such as Armenian. In 1874, the Armenian Karekin Servantsdiants announced the "discovery" of an oral epic, alternatively entitled *Sasuntsi David* and *Sasuntsi Dzurer*, originating from the Mush area; it was soon promoted to the status of a national epic, to the horror of educated urban Armenians who disliked the promotion of a folk epic in a rural dialect to something like a new linguistic and literary standard. Not much later, in the 1890s, authors associated with the *Kurdistan* journal, including Miqdad Midhat Bedir Xan and Hajî Qadir Koyî, promoted *Mem û Zîn* to the status of Kurdish national epic, even though it had only circulated in medrese circles in the Kurmanji-speaking regions of Northern Kurdistan, and had hardly if at all been distributed in the Sorani- speaking regions further South (cf. Leezenberg, 2018). Around the same time, the *Book of Dede Korkut* was reconceptualised as the Turkish national epic. Thus, around the turn of the twentieth century, as is explicitly indicated in Hemzeyê Muksî's 1919 introduction to the first book printing of *Mem û Zîn*, the possession of a literary tradition and a national epic had come to be seen as virtually a *criterion* for nationhood: "every people and nation that wants to preserve its national existence and life must from the start devote a vigorous effort and interest to its literature and to its literary works."[18]

The attitudes to and ideologies of language and literature expressed in *Mem û Zîn* are very different indeed: Xanî's ideology of the societal and political functioning of language that emerges from *Mem û Zîn* hardly, if at all, revolves around the romantic-nationalist notion of *Volk*. Thus, Xanî shows no sense of language as expressing a people's soul or a national character, or of literature as embodying a national heritage. His imagery surrounding the use of Kurdish is not expressivist and psychological (i.e., describing language as the outer form of inner national sprit or character), let alone biological (describing language in organicist terms, for example representing the "mother tongue" as an object

17 Cf. Leerssen (2006: 109–12).

18 "Her gel û neteweyê ku daxwaza hebûn û jîyana xwe ya neteweyî bike, divê ku ji destpêka kar ve girîngîyeka xurt bide edebiyata xwe û eserên xwe yên edebi" (Muksî 1919: 32).

of the speaker's love or affection, as living or dead, or as healthy or sick), but rather economic, and articulated in terms of money and markets:

> Ev pûl-i eger çi bê buhane/ Yekrûne û saf û bêbuhane
>
> Even if these coins are without worth/ They are pure, unmixed and priceless (*bayt* 265)
>
> Kurmancîye sirfe, bê gumane/ Zêr nîne, bi bên "sipîde mane"
>
> It is pure Kurdish without doubt/ It is no gold of which they say "it's pale" (*bayt* 267)

Obviously, the purity of the language to which Ehmedê Xanî alludes here is not of a linguistic order. In fact, the language of *Mem û Zîn* is not at all "pure Kurdish" in any present-day sense of the word, but closer to what modern-day scholars would call a "macaronic" if not a "mixed" language, as it is shot through with lexical borrowings and, to a lesser extent, morphological and syntactic calques from Arabic and Persian.[19] Not surprisingly, a large part of its technical vocabulary of religious and natural-philosophical learning, and of sciences like logic, astronomy, and alchemy, is borrowed from Arabic; but also a good many Persian terms are employed to refer to more everyday objects, for which Kurdish equivalents are readily available. Poetically, of course, this vocabulary expansion by borrowing enhances the richness of the language of the work, allowing the poet to indicate the same thing with an array of synonyms or near-synonyms from Kurdish, Persian and Arabic; but linguistically, it is very significant that romantic-nationalistic ideologies of language purity, which regard only words originating in the vernacular language itself as legitimate, are entirely absent in *Mem û Zîn*.

Hence, what Xanî calls the "purity" of the Kurdish language does not simply exist in the absence, or relative scarcity, of foreign loan words. Instead, the purity of Kurdish he alludes to is of two orders: economic (or if one likes metallurgical) and alchemical. On the one hand, he compares the purity of the language to the purity of the metals used in coins; clearly, what he more specifically means here is that his poem is free of base metals that detract from its value. That is, he imagines the Kurdish language as a kind of currency that is not yet recognised as valuable, unlike the great literate and literary languages

19 On the the use of macaronic language in early modern European literatures, see Burke (2004: 133–8).

of his day; but this kind of recognition is not because the poet's words are made out of worthless material. On the other hand, by writing in Kurdish, Xanî wishes to purify impure matter, as well as his own impure heart. Here, on closer inspection, the imagery turns out to be not so much monetary or economic as alchemical. For him, the precious character of the metals of his words is not a naturally given value, but the result of a purification process out of base materials.

Now the crucial point for Xanî, which is also of political significance, is that both economic and alchemical purity can be brought about only by a ruler: it is the king whose engraved name ensures that a coin is not counterfeit:

> Qirtasîyeya me bê penahan/ Bê derbê qebûlê padişahan
>
> Our pages, without support/ Minted without the consent of princes (*bayt* 272)[20]

Likewise, Xanî continues, it is king Mîrza, described as endowed with alchemical powers, whose very look cleanses both hearts and coins:

> Mîrê ku bi nave Mîrîza ye/ Mehza nezera wî kîmîya ye
> Qelbêd-i zexel diket belorî/ Pûlêd-i dexel diket filorî
>
> The prince named Mîrza/ Whose mere look is alchemy
> He cleanses troubled hearts/ He refines impure coins (*bayt* 275–6)[21]

We are remote from any language of popular sovereignty here: it is not the will of the people but the words and deeds of the ruler by which a national currency (whether linguistic or monetary) is validated, and by which the hearts of the subjects are cleansed. In other words, Xanî sees government as a matter of alchemy as much as politics. It involves the quasi-magical acts that ensure, and indeed performatively create, both material or monetary value and spiritual purity.

Thus, in Xanî's vision, the king's rule has not only a political but also an eschatological function: his justice consists in the very act of governing, in so far as this act is conducive to the individual soul's salvation. This is unmistakably a crucial part of the narrative of *Mem û Zîn* at large. It is the *mîr* of

20 Saadalla's translation is not quite precise here.

21 Rudenko omits *bayt* 276, but it appears in the 1750 Baghdad MS, and I can see no good reason for leaving it out.

Botan himself who forbids the two lovers coming together in this world; and by doing so, he ensures that their love remains pure and can be transmuted from a human into a divine one. Mem and Zîn's love, it is emphatically stated in the chapter describing their secret visit to the prince's garden (chapter 39), becomes all unconsummated; and precisely because of this, it is like Layla and Majnûn's. The love between the two tragic pairs of lovers remains the purer for remaining strictly platonic. Likewise, both Mem and Zîn affirm that their harsh treatment at the hands of the king *is*, in fact, just (respectively, *bayts* 1806–1814; 2086–2087). Thus, the imprisoned Mem acknowledges:

> Heqqê mine, adle, zilm-i nine/ Xasiyyetê agirê evîne
>
> It is what I deserve, it's just and not oppression/ It is specific to the fire of love (*bayt* 1814)

This royal role in the mystical purification of love would seem to suggest that the king's words and deeds are by definition just, or rather, that the king's words and deeds *define* what is to count as just, valid, or legitimate. This is very much in line with the monetary imagery or ideology of language discussed above, where it is the king's name that validates coinage, and in doing so, distinguishes real and counterfeit currency.

The political implications of this are clear: when looked at from a broader cosmic and eschatological perspective, it turns out that all apparent royal injustice in the world may in fact be part of a divine plan, and as such is part of an ultimately just order. In this mystical vision of things, even the story's villain, Bekir, turns out to have a legitimate eschatological role after all: shortly before her death, Zîn praises him as part of the divine plan to keep the love between herself and Mem pure, by his successful efforts to prevent the two lovers from coming together in this life. At a more mundane level, Bekir is characterised as an unpleasant but inevitable feature of government. Repeatedly, Tacdîn warns the prince against using the services of this "unreliable dog" as he calls him, but the *mîr* answers that rulers are like mills, alternatively acting just and tyrannical, and in fact have a need for nasty fellows like Bekir; it is even explicitly stated that the king's appointing Bekir is in accordance with divine requirements (*bi iqtizayê xilqet*) (*bayt* 1127–1128). This suggestion that political injustice is part of a just cosmic order is reflected in the familiar mystical view of the devil, or "the poor and guiltless Iblîs" (*Iblîsê faqîrê bê cinayet*, *bayt* 86), as in reality the most loyal of all God's creatures for refusing to worship anybody but God Himself (cf. Bocheńska, 2016).

It should be clear that this political-mystical vision is profoundly quietist, not to say apolitical. On the one hand, it depicts apparent political injustice as in reality part of a just cosmic and eschatological order; on the other, it presents the king as the main warrant, if not the efficient cause, of his subjects' salvation, whose rule is legitimate almost as a matter of definition. We are far removed here from the seemingly revolutionary character of Kâveh the blacksmith in the *Shâhnâmeh*, who revolts against the tyrannical king Zahhâk. It is also profoundly at odds with the apparent nationalism and the lament at the Kurds' unjust fate expressed in the *dîbaçe*, which explicitly questions the divine justice of the Kurds being subjugated by Ottomans and Safavids (*bayts* 208, 216).

In the most pessimistic reading, then, Xanî might be read as implying that there is no more legitimacy to Kurdish aspirations than the ultimately arbitrary decision of a king to endorse and support it. But despite this apparent political quietism, *Mem û Zîn* displays a far more ambiguous picture of kingship, and displays a rather more critical view of the ruler than this mystical language might suggest. In spite of its superficial message that the king's decisions are wise and just, and in so far as they seem unjust are really part of a just cosmic and eschatological order, Xanî describes the *mîr* of Botan, and rulers in general, in far from uniformly flattering terms. As Roger Lescot (1942: vii) has noted, this makes it rather ironic that it was the Bedir Khan family, descendants of the former *mîr*s of Botan, who started promoting *Mem û Zîn* as the national epic in the 1890s. Despite the initial praise of his rule in chapter 8, prince Zeyneddîn is described as jealous, capricious, and all too easily offended (*bayts* 1684–1685; 1706–1707); and at various points in the poem, his behaviour towards Mem appears impulsive and irrational, not to say profoundly unjust. In fact, the king himself admits as much, even though he thinks Zîn is the one really responsible for Mem's suffering. When telling Zîn that he has decided to end Mem's imprisonment, he tells her:

> Cewr û sîtema ku min li wî kir/ Ew cewr-i te kir, sîtem ewî kir
>
> Although I treated him with oppression and injustice/ You were the one who oppressed, and it was he who was unjust (2001)

Likewise, even though Tacdîn falls short of calling the king unjust or a tyrant, he still describes his revolt against the king, or more precisely his plan for armed struggle to liberate Mem, as a *jihâd* (*bayt* 1895), and calls his death in the fight on Mem's behalf a sacred duty (*farz*) (*bayt* 1921). But such mention,

let alone positive appraisal, of open rebellion is as rare in *Mem û Zîn* as in other premodern works of *adab*.

In this respect, two important differences between *Mem û Zîn* and the *Shâhnâmeh* demand our attention. To begin with, one of the main themes in the latter work is *farr* or royal glory: just and virtuous rulers possess this glory, which warrants their authority and legitimacy to rule. Tyrants and usurpers, by contrast, have no *farr*, and because of this they are eventually overthrown (and indeed, *must* be overthrown). Finally, kings who are about to die, like Jamshîd, are said to lose their *farr*, which thus turns out to be the warrant not merely of the king's rule, but of his very life. In *Mem û Zîn*, the theme of royal glory is almost entirely absent. Apart from the usual praise of rulers, which is as formulaic as it is hyperbolic (and, in the case of the *mîr* of Botan, blatantly false), neither Zeyneddîn, the fictitious prince of Botan, nor Mîrza, the real-life ruler of Hakkârî in Xanî's time, is consistently credited with possessing this *ferr*. Although the term does occur in the poem (e.g., *ferr û ferheng*, *bayt* 1162; *ferrê padişahî*, *bayt* 2073), it is not systematically or even primarily applied to worldly rulers. At one point, it is even stated that Zeyneddîn derives his glory (significantly, not *ferr* but *şuhret û şan*) from Tacdîn (*bayt* 1955–1956).

The easy reply to this is that, unlike the *Shâhnâmeh*, *Mem û Zîn* is simply not about kingship and its legitimation; but this leaves the various remarks about the ruler of Botan, and about rulers in general, unaccounted for. Another, equally facile answer is that *farr* is so to speak an imperial prerogative, and as such applies only to the king or *shâh* of an empire, and not to petty princes or *mîr*s of local fiefdoms; but the problem with this is that in *Mem û Zîn*, neither Ottoman nor Safavid rulers, nor indeed the various mythical rulers from the *Shâhnâmeh*, are credited with *farr*, either. In fact, rather more seems to be at stake here: the text of *Mem û Zîn* does, after all, appear to raise questions about the justice (and perhaps even legitimacy) of the ruler's power.

A second difference is the apparent absence of the theme, prominent in the *Shâhnâmeh*, of the unjust ruler, and the dilemma of what the right course of action is for the just man serving under such an unjust king.[22] But although this dilemma is not very prominent in *Mem û Zîn*, the work does feature repeated warnings against the whims of princes. Thus, the conclusion to chapter 49 states that even princes may err, especially because they tend to be arrogant, unwilling to listen to good advice, and prone to seek bad counsel (*bayt* 1981–1996); and the chapter introducing Bekir ends with a warning in even stronger language against kings, who are "like fire":

22 Cf. Davis (1992: ch. 2).

> Zînhare, bi wan ne kî tu bawer/ Ger bab û pisî û ger birader
> Xasma ku miqerrebêd-i bedxwah/ nêzîkî bibin, ne'ûzu billah
>
> Beware, do not trust them, ever/ Even if they were a father, a cousin, or a brother
> Particularly if bad associates/ Come near them, may God protect us (*bayt* 1193–1194)

Politically, this shift in tone is significant indeed. In fact, compared to earlier courtly romances or *mathnawî* poems like, most importantly, *Laylî and Majnûn* and also to the genre of *nasîhat al-mulûk* or mirrors for princes, a not very emphatic but crucial change of attitude occurs in *Mem û Zîn*: it does not address itself to the ruler with the advice to be wise, just, and virtuous, but rather warns others against associating too much with kings who are stupid, unjust, or vile. But exactly who are these readers warned against bad kings? This question brings us back to the question of *Mem û Zîn*'s intended audience.

Clearly, *Mem û Zîn* is not dependent on either imperial or local patronage, and does not address itself primarily to kings. Unlike the *Shâhnâmeh* and the various works of Nizâmî, it seems not to have been written at royal behest, nor does it extensively sing the praise of any princely patron, apart from a brief mention of the otherwise unknown ruler Mîrza (*bayt* 273–284). And unlike contemporary writings, such as the work described as the first modern Greek novel, Nicholas Mavrocordatos's 1718 *Parerga Philotheou* (*The Leisure of Philotheos*), it does not even pay lip service to the justice and splendor of Ottoman rule.

There is, of course, the brief passage in chapter 6 of the *dîbaçe*, which sings the praise of, and directly addresses itself to, Prince Mîrza; but this passage is significant for the contrast it displays with works like *Laylî and Majnûn*, rather than for any similarities with works written under royal patronage. First, Xanî's appeal to the prince sounds more like reproach than praise. It is not the conventional chapter of hyperbolic praise for some petty local ruler, but only a brief, twelve-*bayt* passage, which, moreover, starts with the reproachful words that Mîrza "has never listened with understanding" (*mesmû'î nekir bi sem'ê idrak*, *bayt* 274). Secondly, and unlike the poets of medieval courtly romances, Xanî does not ask the king for financial support here, but rather for the support of the Kurdish language. His very look or gaze, Xanî asserts, would legitimate and validate the poet's words (*bayt* 281–282). And here, too, Xanî's tone is one of reproach; the king's look is "overly general, and has not given us a special look" (*nezera wî zêde 'âm e/ lew xas-i nezer ji dil neda me*, *bayt* 284). There is a pun here that is almost impossible to translate: the *'âmma* or *ewam* are the illiterate masses, whereas Xanî clearly sees himself as part of the *xâssa* or literate

elite that needs the prince's support in its innovative literate and learned use of Kurdish. Ironically, Xanî himself claims to work on behalf of the masses (*ji boyî ʿâmê*, *bayt* 239) even as he reproaches Mîrza for doing the same thing.

Does Xanî, then, address himself to the Kurdish people at large, that is, to the *ʿâmma* in whose language, or for whose sake, he wrote his work? That seems rather unlikely: the often quite complex imagery and wordplay, the numerous allusions to the written Persianate literary tradition, and even more importantly the elaborate use of technical vocabulary from Sufism and the religious, philosophical and magical sciences, suggest that *Mem û Zîn* was never really intended for the uneducated *ʿâmma*, *khalq*, or *Volk*, at all, but presupposed a level of education in its audience. Not surprisingly, this education was supplied primarily if not exclusively by the local medreses; and as argued above, there is evidence that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these medreses were not only increasing in number, but also elaborating Kurdish as a language of instruction, or even of learning. As noted, Xanî's own *Nûbihara piçûkan*, and *Eqîdeya êmanê*, which, respectively, explain Arabic vocabulary and the basics of the faith to an audience of young Kurdish-speaking medrese pupils, are among the most directly relevant pieces of evidence for this vernacularisation.

But even *Mem û Zîn* itself may be seen as part of this vernacularisation process, enriching as it does the Kurdish language with its first-ever full-length learned *mathnawî* poem. Undoubtedly, it is against the background of this vernacularisation that one should read Xanî's famous proclaimed reason for writing his epic in Kurdish:

> Da xelq-i nabêjitin ko Ekrad/ Bê me'rifet in, bê esl û binyad
>
> So that the people will not say that the Kurds are without learning, without principle or foundation (*bayt* 240).

Here, Xanî explicitly states that his aim for writing in Kurdish is to provide the Kurds with learning in their own vernacular.

In short, it would be misleading and anachronistic to study *Mem û Zîn* for a romantic nationalism based on a political ideology of popular sovereignty and a linguistic ideology of vernacular language as the expression of a people's national soul or identity. What we do find explicitly, however, is a self-conscious vernacularisation of Kurdish that is the promotion of a vernacular language to a medium of literacy, letters, and learning. We also find a mystical-alchemical view of both government and language: it sees both subjects as saved, and coinages and languages as validated, by the king. Thus, the ruler's is not so much a sovereign power that binds his subjects to his laws and decrees, but rather, so

to speak, a power of salvation, which, by the mere fact of being exercised, may performatively purify or transmute both souls and languages.

From all this, I would like to draw the tentative conclusion that the audience Ehmedê Xanî had in mind when writing his epic was neither courts or princes, nor the Kurdish *ʿâmma* or population at large, but rather the advanced medrese students, who could be assumed to be familiar with the learned vocabulary and the literary allusions of the work. Its author intended *Mem û Zîn* to be neither a national epic expressing the aspirations of the commoners nor a piece of courtly literature for the edification or entertainment of kings, but rather, if one may coin a term of art, a specimen of "medrese literature," which addresses itself primarily to an audience of medrese pupils and teachers. It is also my suspicion that the relatively large number of manuscripts of *Mem û Zîn* that have come down to us mostly originate in medreses, rather than in local courts or private libraries. Although this claim may be difficult to verify conclusively, most if not all manuscripts I have seen, or read about, are relatively simple, without elaborate or expensive ornaments or miniatures, unlike, for example, the Bodleian manuscript of Şeref Xan Bidlîsî's *Şerefname* and the various copies of Firdawsî's *Shâhnâmeh* made for local and imperial rulers throughout the Persianate world.

There is also a positive hypothesis emerging from all this: it was the medreses, and not the princely courts, which were the prime location of the Kurdish vernacularisation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and this may to some extent explain their ambivalent attitude to princely power, an ambivalence that appears in *Mem û Zîn*. Although these medreses were generally neither nationalist nor politically active, they did lay the groundwork for later politicised forms of nationalism through their cultivation of Kurdish as a language of education and literature. In short, trying to recover the original context within which *Mem û Zîn* was written may lead us to reappraise the role of both religious education and poetic writing in the development of Kurdish nationalism, and of nationalism more generally.

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Kurdish Responses to Imperial Decline: the Kurdish Movement and the End of Ottoman Rule in the Balkans (1878 to 1913)

Djene Rhys Bajalan
Assistant Professor, Department of History, Missouri State University, 901 S National Ave., Springfield, MO 65897, United States
DRBajalan@MissouriState.edu

Abstract

Focusing on the period between 1878 and 1913, this paper seeks to add to the growing literature highlighting the complexities of identity in the late Ottoman period through an examination of the attitudes of Kurdish political activists towards the specific question of the dissolution of Ottoman rule on the Balkan Peninsula. More precisely, it will be argued that, although it is impossible to identify a single Kurdish response to Ottoman troubles in the Balkans, a survey of contemporaneous publications indicates that many leading Kurdish public figures of the period, including those active within the nascent Kurdish movement, regarded Ottoman imperial collapse as a profoundly negative political development.

Keywords

Kurds – Crete – Balkans – nationalism – Ottoman Empire – the Balkan Wars

Bersivên kurdan bo paşketina împeretoriyê: Tevgera kurdî û dawiya desthilata Osmanî li Balkanan (1878–1913)

Ev gotar berê xwe dide nivîsînên her zêdetir ên li ser tevliheviya nasnameyê di serdema dawî ya Osmaniyan de bi rêya tehlîlkirina helwêstên çalakvanên siyasî yên kurd li

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hember pirsa hilweşîna desthilata Osmanî li Balkanan, bi taybetî di qonaxa ji 1878 heta 1913an. Bi gotineke deqîqtir, gotar wê hizrê dide pêş ku herçend xeyrî mumkîn e ku yek bersiveke kurdan ya bi tenê bê destnîşankirin ji bo kêşeyên Osmaniyan li herêma Balkanan, nirxandineke weşanên hevçerx diyar dike ku gelek kesayetên naskirî yên kurd, ewên ku di tevgera nûzayî ya kurdî de çalak bûn jî di nav de, hilweşîna împeretoriya Osmanî wek geşedaneke gelek negatîv didîtin.

Bersivî Kurd bo pukanewey împirator: Cullanewey Kurdî û kotayî ḧukimrranîy ʿUsmanî le Balkan (1878–1913)

Be terkîz kirdine ser mawey nêwan 1878 ta 1913, em babete hewll dedat îzafeyek bixate ser ew edebiyate rû le ziyadbuwey ke tîşk dexate ser allozîy şunas le kota qonaẍî ʿUsmanîda le rêgey pişkinînî hellwêstî çalakwane siyasîye kurdîyekan le hember pirsêkî diyarîkiraw ke ewîş hellweşandinewey ḧukmî ʿUsmanîyekan le durgey Ballkane. Wirdtir billêyn, argumêntî ewe dekirêt ke herçende destnîşankirdinî yek bersivî Kurdî derheq be kêşekanî ʿUsmanîyekan le Balkan esteme, rûmallkirdinî billawkirawekanî ew serdeme amajey ewe dedat ke zorêk le kesayetîye giştîye diyarekanî kurdî ew kat, be waneşewe ke lenaw bizûtnewe kurdîye sawakeda çalak bûn, heresî împiratorîyetî ʿUsmanîyan be allugorrêkî siyasîy nerênîy qull dadena.

Rijîyayîşê Împeratorîye rê cewabê kurdan: Balkanan de peynîya hukmê Osmanîyan de tevgerê kurdan (1878–1913)

Bi giranîya serranê mabênê 1878 û 1913î, na meqale kena ke dewrê Osmanîyan ê peyênî de edebîyato ke derheqê kompleksîteyanê nasnameyan ê Balkanan de aver şono, ey ser o kemerêke rono. Tede derheqê persê wedarîyayîşêhukmê Osmanîyan ê nêmgirawa Balkanî de qenaetê çalakîkeranê sîyasetmedaranê kurdan ê wextî analîz benê. Hîna biteferuat, îdîa beno ke herçiqas ke mumkîn nîyo ke derheqê problemanê Osmanîyan ê Balkanî de tena yew cewabê kurdan bêro teşxîskerdene, ancîya cigêrayîşê weşanê ê demî musneno ke xeylê şexsîyetanê kurdan ê namdaran yê ê wextî, çalakîkerê tevgerê neteweperwerîya kurdan ya tezîye zî tede, parçebîyayîşê Împeratorîya Osmanîyan sey averşîyayîşêko sîyasîyo xirabin dîyêne.

Introduction

> Today in order to [maintain] the territorial integrity and continued political life of our [Ottoman] state, whatever degree of need exists to keep Rumelia in hand, the region of Kurdistan feels the same degree of seriousness and need.
>
> ABDURRAHMAN BEDIRHAN, *Kürdistan*, 1901[1]

In recent years, the history of the late Ottoman Empire and the role of nationalism in its eventual demise has undergone considerable revisions. In the past, growing "nationalist" sentiment amongst the various subject peoples of the Ottoman Turks was often highlighted as one of the primary factors behind imperial collapse. This tendency is perhaps understandable considering the prevalence of nationalistic historical writing, which often presents the late Ottoman period as a prelude to a series of distinct national histories. Indeed, for some historians the central question of late Ottoman history was not the empire's demise but the fact "that it survived as long as it did" (Ahmad, 2005: 5). In contrast, newer studies have sought to nuance our understanding of the relationship between the growing significance of the national question (or perhaps more accurately national *questions*) in Ottoman affairs and imperial collapse (Reynolds, 2011a; Der Matossian, 2014). This revisionist *élan* is particularly evident in studies that have focused on the predominantly Muslim peoples of the Ottoman Empire (Kayalı, 1997; Gawrych, 2006; Bozarslan, 2016; Provence, 2017). Consequently a more complex historical narrative has emerged, one which recognises that, although the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the appearance of movements seeking to represent the interests of one or other of the empire's "national" communities, growing national consciousness did not *necessarily* imply a rejection of the Ottoman order. It is within the context of these broader historiographical debates that this article seeks to examine the Kurdish response to imperial decline and, more precisely, the degeneration of the Ottoman Empire's hold on its European territories. Chronologically, it focusses on the tumultuous period between the end of the Russo-Ottoman War in 1878 and the conclusion of the Second Balkan War in the summer of 1913, a period which coincided with the development of the first modern forms of Kurdish political activism.

At first glance, examining the reactions of the Kurds to the decline of the Ottoman Empire in Europe might seem a somewhat bizarre undertaking.

1 Abdurrahman Bedirhan, "Hamidiye Süvari Alayları" *Kürdistan* (14th September 1901). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are the author's own.

Although the majority of the Middle East's Kurdish population resided within the Ottoman Empire, their historic homeland Kurdistan[2] lay at the opposite end of the Ottoman imperium, far to the east on the border with Persia. Yet, the gradual disintegration of the Ottoman's once vast European domain and the concurrent establishment of a series of Christian nation-states were developments with implications far beyond South Eastern Europe. Indeed, the changing political order on the Balkan peninsula and the fate of the Ottoman "sickman of Europe" emerged as one of the central questions of nineteenth-century Great Power diplomacy. As might be expected, the gradual collapse of Ottoman rule in South Eastern Europe, a process which culminated in the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, was a subject that also excited great interest amongst members of the Ottoman intellectual and political elite (Anderson, 1966; Kent, 1996; Çiçek; 2010). This included a growing number of public figures of Kurdish origins.

Of course, the Kurdish response to imperial collapse was by no means uniform. Although between 1878 and 1913 Kurdish elites increasingly envisaged the Kurdish community as a "nation", the political implications of this realisation varied greatly. Indeed, it is necessary to emphasise that the Kurdish movement in the late Ottoman period was neither homogeneous in terms of its ideological outlook nor in an organisational sense. There were certainly those who regarded the Kurds' future as lying in an autonomous or even independent Kurdish nation-state, such as the religious scholar and poet, Hacı Kadir-i Koyi, and the Russophile Kurdish aristocrat, Abdürrezzak Bedirhan. However, other Kurdish public figures took a different stance, seeking to advance Kurdish national interests within the framework of the Ottoman system (Klein, 1996; Özoğlu, 2004; Bajalan, 2016). This included those at the forefront of an emergent Kurdish political activism in the Ottoman Empire, such as the founders of the first Kurdish newspaper *Kürdistan* (Kurdistan), published between 1898

2 The term "Kurdistan" here is used as shorthand for those Ottoman provinces in Eastern Anatolia and Mesopotamia with considerable Kurdish populations. It does not imply that the region was exclusively inhabited by Kurds. Those regions claimed by Kurdish nationalists as constituting "Greater Kurdistan" overlap with lands claimed by Armenian nationalists as part of "Armenia". Within the Ottoman context, the term Kurdistan was used as a provincial designation between 1847 and 1867 (*Eyalet-i Kürdistan*). However, the province did not include all Kurdish-populated areas. A considerable Kurdish population resided further to the south in the Ottoman province of Mosul, as well as in areas further to the east under Iranian sovereignty. Nevertheless, the term "Kurdistan" (*Kürdistan*) as well as "Ottoman Kurdistan" (*Kürdistan-ı Osmani*) and "Iranian Kurdistan" (*Kürdistan-ı Acemi*) were used in Ottoman political and administrative discourse as a broader geo-ethnic toponym describing the areas of Kurdish settlement. See Akpınar and Bozkurt (2011).

and 1902, as well as those involved in Kurdish associations such as *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (The Kurdish Society for Mutual Aid and Progress, KSMP), active between 1908 and 1909, and the *Kürd Talebe-Hêvî Cemiyeti* (Kurdish Students' Hope Society, KSHS) active between 1912 and 1914. Consequently, it will be argued here that, through a review of *Kürdistan*, as well as the publications produced by the KSMP and KSHS, it becomes apparent that a small but influential section of the Kurdish intellectual elite, one at the vanguard of Kurdish activism, regarded the breakdown of Ottoman rule in the Balkans not as an opportunity but as a calamity of great magnitude.

Kurdish Nationalists and Imperial Decline

The dissolution of the Ottomans' Balkan empire pre-dates the first glimmerings of Kurdish nationalism in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Indeed, rebellions, inter-communal violence, and European intervention were recurrent themes in Ottoman affairs throughout the century. The outcome, as already noted, was the gradual replacement of Ottoman rule with a series of distinct nation-states, the first of which was Greece which won formal independence in 1829. The path to self-rule for other peoples in the region was somewhat slower, often passing through a stage of autonomy before full independence.

In this regard, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878 was of particular importance with respect to the fate of the Balkans.[3] The Ottoman defeat, confirmed in the Treaty of Berlin (1878), forced the empire to concede the formal independence of Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania. The treaty also created Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia as autonomous provinces under Ottoman suzerainty as well as handing the administration of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Cyprus to Austria-Hungary and Great Britain respectively. Although primarily focused on Europe, the treaty also had direct implications for the Kurds. Russia annexed three strategically important eastern provinces, Batumi, Ardahan and Kars, while Iran was awarded the Kurdish-populated border district of Qotur

3 Following rebellions in Bosnia and Bulgaria as well as a series of failed negotiations, Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire in April 1877. This was followed by offensives in both the Balkans and Eastern Anatolia. Despite dogged Ottoman resistance, most notably at the fortress of Plevna in modern-day Bulgaria, Ottoman forces were soundly defeated. In March 1878, Russia imposed the harsh treaty of San Stefano on the Ottomans. However, following objections from Great Britain, the treaty was scrapped in favor of a new less onerous peace agreement, the Treaty of Berlin, signed in July 1878. See Barry (2012) as well as the volume edited by Yavuz and Sluglett (2011).

(in present-day West Azerbaijan province). In addition, the treaty included an article which provided an international guarantee to protect the region's Armenian population from "Kurdish and Circassian" tribesmen.[4]

The Ottoman defeat in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878 thus provides important context for the first glimmerings of Kurdish nationalism. Although prior to the 1870s separatist nationalism was primarily restricted to Ottoman Christians, the scale of the Ottoman defeat caused some amongst the Ottoman Muslim population to question the future viability of the empire. For instance, in 1878 Albanian patriots established the League of Prizren which developed into a movement for Albanian independence, although it was ultimately suppressed by the Ottoman government in the early 1880s. Significantly, this nationalism was primarily a reaction to Ottoman diplomatic failures at Berlin as well as to Greek, Montenegrin, and Serbian efforts to partition the Albanian homeland rather than any pervading sense of Ottoman-Turkish "oppression" (Skendi, 1953; Gawrych, 2006: 38–71). In a similar vein, the early 1880s witnessed an unsuccessful Kurdish uprising, led by Sheikh Ubeydullah of Nehri, which sought to challenge both Ottoman and Iranian authority over Kurdistan. Although the nationalist credentials of this revolt have been a topic of significant scholarly debate, recent studies on the subject, based on a more extensive review of Ottoman and Kurdish sources, have suggested that the Sheikh's rebellion also contained a nationalist element as his objective seems to have been to create a unified Kurdish state encompassing both Ottoman and Iranian Kurdistan (Ateş, 2014; Soleimani, 2016).

Ultimately, although the Sheikh Ubeydullah revolt did not mark the beginning of a sustained nationalist resistance to Ottoman rule, it did signal the beginning of a new phase in Ottoman Kurdish politics, one that was increasingly shaped by the notion that the Kurds constituted a "nation". However, the gradual growth of Kurdish national consciousness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century did not result in the formation of a unified political movement nor did it imply a unified attitude towards the fate of the Ottoman Empire. From its very beginning, the Kurdish movement contained within it both a separatist-nationalist wing as well as what might be termed an "accommodationalist" wing, namely those who sought to advance Kurdish interests within the framework of the Ottoman polity.

4 Article LXI of the Treaty of Berlin stated: "The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and Kurds. It will periodically make known the steps taken to this effect to the Powers, who will superintend their application." See Hurewitz (1975: 414).

In the immediate aftermath of the rebellion, the regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) adopted policies that sought both to emphasise the Islamic characteristics and heritage of the empire as well as to actively favour powerful Kurdish interests both within the imperial bureaucracy and at a provincial level (Duguid, 1973; Kodaman, 1987; Çetinsaya, 1999; Klein, 2011). To a certain degree, these policies were a success in that they served to foster connections between Kurdish elites and the Ottoman state, personified by the sultan himself. Moreover, the Hamidian regime, drawing parallels with the situation in the Balkans, was also keen to assert the "Kurdish" character of its eastern provinces[5] in the face of a rising tide of nationalism and political agitation amongst the Kurds' predominately Christian neighbours, the Armenians.[6] Indeed, British diplomat Sir Charles Eliot, an astute commentator on Ottoman affairs, observed that "all maps marking any district as Armenistan are confiscated …" and that, despite the fact that "in many parts of Asia Minor the population is mixed … the Turks prefer to call such districts Kurdistan." His conclusions concerning Ottoman suspicions were quite accurate. "Foreigners …", he noted, "were talking of Armenia as they had once talked of Bulgaria. The Turks thought that there was a clear intention to break up what remained of the Ottoman Empire and found an Armenian kingdom" (Eliot, 1900: 383–384 & 401).

Thus, schemes such as the *Hamidiye* light cavalry, a militia established in 1890 which recruited primarily from amongst the Kurdish tribes, served both to secure the loyalty of Kurdish tribal leaders as well as to counterbalance growing Armenian militancy. Indeed, the sultan was willing to indulge

5 Sultan Abdülhamid II drew explicit parallels between Ottoman territorial decline and the fate of Kurdistan. In a memorandum from the palace to the office of the Grand Vizier, he noted that: "Of a certain locality, whose inhabitants are predominantly Kurdish, and whose name came to be known as Kurdistan since ancient times, some malignant mouths have been talking of it as Armenia. Though these ill intentions are cast with the purpose of creating an Armenia, just the way used in earlier formations of the Danube, i.e., a certain principle was established to determine [certain] boundaries; the locality known as Kurdistan is there today, and the Muslim folk inhabiting it are incomparably more numerous than Armenians. Consequently, it is not at all right to change the name of this locality to Armenia, and furthermore, it is not at all possible to draw boundaries that would include all Armenian localities, under the heading 'provinces inhabited by Armenians.'" First Chamberlain to Prime Ministry (1 August 1890) reproduced in Ökte (1989).

6 As early as 1878, the Armenian patriarch, Nerses Varjabedian, had approached the Great Powers in Berlin in order to secure Armenian autonomy in the east and, over the ensuing decades, a number of nationalistic Armenian organisations emerged, including the *Hunchakian* (The Bell) and *Dashnaktsutyun* (The Armenian Revolutionary Federation). Although initially their activities were limited, they gradually developed the capability to wage a low-level guerrilla war against Ottoman authorities.

a significant degree of lawlessness amongst loyal tribes, standing by in the mid-1890s as Kurds, including those enrolled in the *Hamidiye*, engaged in a series of pogroms and land seizures primarily directed against the region's Armenian community (Klein, 2011; Astourian, 2011).

The sultan's patronage and indulgence of powerful Kurdish interests earned him, at least in some quarters, the title of *Bavê Kurdan* ("Father of the Kurds") (van Bruinessen, 1992: 186). However, not all Kurds looked on the regime positively. One such critic was Hacı Kadir-i Koyi (1815–1897), a poet educated in the madrasas of Southern Kurdistan and who later served as a tutor to perhaps the most influential Kurdish family of the late Ottoman period, the Bedirhans.[7] Koyi's poetry is noteworthy as it constitutes an early manifestation of Kurdish political nationalism, namely an articulation of the desire for a Kurdish nation-state (Kurdo, 1985: 18–19; Hakim, 2000: 22–23). Significantly, in a poem entitled *Xakê Cizîra û Bohtan* (The Land of Cizre and Bohtan), a reference to the former fiefdom of the Bedirhans, he writes:

> Just yesterday the people of Sudan stood up like lions,
> Now they are independent, the envy of all the world,
> Bulgarians and Serbs and Greeks, also Armenians and Montenegrins,
> All five do not number as many as the Babans,[8]
> Each one is independent, all and each are states,
> Possessors of army and banners, general staffs and field staffs,
> It is their right, the Armenians; they are with good deeds,
> They are not like us, making claim on each other with swords,
> For the science of war and industry, for the bonding of the nation,
> They send both their young and old to Europe (Koyi, 2004: 85–86).

In short, he looked to the Christian nations of the Balkans as well as Armenians as a source of inspiration, calling on the Kurds to follow their example by

7 The Bedirhans were, until the mid-nineteenth century, the hereditary rulers of the Cizre-Bohtan emirate, one of a number of Kurdish principalities that had been subject to the Ottoman throne since the early sixteenth century. Although more properly known as the Azizan, the family takes its name from Bedirhan Bey who had sought (unsuccessfully) to resist Ottoman centralisation efforts in the 1840s. Bedirhan Bey was ultimately defeated and removed from office in 1846. He was subsequently exiled to Crete before being allowed to move to Damascus where he died in 1868. Despite his exile, Bedirhan was treated with great respect and his sons were integrated into the imperial elite.

8 The Babans were the former ruling clan of the eponymous principality centred on the city of Suleimani. Although the Babans' rule ended in 1851, like the Bedirhans, the family remained a prestigious and influential family within the broader Ottoman elite.

taking control of their own affairs and charting out their own destiny as an independent nation.

Hacı Kadir-i Koyi's nationalism was somewhat of an outlier during the Hamidian period and, as we shall see, even those who admired Koyi's work, such as the founders of *Kürdistan*, Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan and Abdurrahman Bedirhan, rejected the separatist aspect of his message. This is perhaps understandable considering the pro-Kurdish tilt of Sultan Abdülhamid II's Eastern policy. Moreover, despite its inauspicious beginning, the Hamidian regime was largely able to fend off further territorial decline. There were certainly setbacks. In 1881, European pressure forced the empire to cede Thessaly to Greece and, four years later, in 1885, the Ottoman government was unable to halt the unification of Eastern Rumelia with Bulgaria. Indeed, despite scoring an impressive military victory over Greece in 1897, in a war that had been precipitated by ongoing Greek agitation on the island of Crete, European intervention forced the Ottomans to grant the island autonomy. Nevertheless, the regime was able to ward off European efforts to intervene in the internal affairs of Ottoman Macedonia.

Ultimately, Sultan Abdülhamid II's autocratic regime was brought to an end by a military uprising that resulted in the restoration of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876, which the sultan had suspended barely a year after he had consented to its promulgation. Yet, despite the hopes of the revolutionaries, the pace of Ottoman territorial decline in the Balkans quickened following the July 1908 Constitutional Revolution. Within months of the revolution and the restoration of constitutional rule, the Ottoman government faced major diplomatic setbacks with Austria-Hungary's formal annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina on 4 October 1908, followed a day later by the Bulgarian declaration of independence. At the same time, the new administration in Istanbul had to contend with attempts by the Greek-dominated autonomous administration in Crete to enact a union with Greece. However, worse was to come. While the Ottomans were attempting to stave off the Italian invasion of Tripolitania (1911) as well as bring to an end a rebellion in Albania, the Balkan League, an alliance made up of Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Romania, struck. The First Balkan War (1912–1913) proved disastrous for the Ottomans, who were ejected from Albania, Macedonia, and much of Thrace, territorial losses that were confirmed at the Treaty of London signed in May 1913. In the summer of 1913, the Ottomans were able to take advantage of Bulgaria's surprise attack on its former allies to retake the one-time Ottoman capital of Edirne, which had fallen to the Bulgarians in March 1913. Nevertheless, despite this important symbolic victory, the Balkan Wars had reduced Ottoman Europe to

a small enclave around the imperial capital. Moreover, it precipitated a wave of Muslim refugees fleeing territories conquered by the Balkan League, a humanitarian catastrophe that only served to heighten tensions within what remained of the Ottoman imperium (Çetinkaya, 2015).

From the Kurdish perspective, the years between the 1908 Constitutional Revolution and the end of the Second Balkan War in August 1913 also witnessed the emergence of a more significant nationalist challenge to Ottoman rule in the Kurdish-inhabited east. While educated elements of Kurdish society generally favoured the reestablishment of constitutional rule in 1908, the reaction amongst provincial elites, in particular those tribal and religious leaders who had benefited from Sultan Abdulhamid II's patronage, was less enthusiastic. Discontent regarding the intentions of the constitutionalist regime was only heightened by government efforts to centralise provincial administration and to reign in the unruliness of the Kurdish tribes, something the *ancien régime* had conspicuously failed to do (Klein, 2007).

The apparent decrepitude of the Ottoman polity only served to amplify growing Kurdish discontent. Arshak Safrastian, a native of Van in the employ of the British consular service, observed Ottoman difficulties in Europe helped fuel disorder amongst the tribes with "robberies in isolated valleys and out-of-the-way districts and raiding … [increasing] in proportion to the Turkish defeats in the Balkans" (Safrastian, 1948: 72). At the same time, the magnitude of Ottoman defeats in the First Balkan War also led some Kurdish activists to contemplate a post-Ottoman political order. For example, in March 1913, shortly before his death, Hüseyin Pasha Bedirhani[9] informed the British Vice-Consul in Diyarbakır that, should the Ottoman Empire be subject to partition because of its defeats in the Balkans, he would seek to ensure the establishment of an independent Kurdistan.[10]

The potential breakup of the Ottoman Empire in Europe also encouraged more radical Kurdish activists, most notably a group which coalesced under the leadership of another member of the extended Bedirhan clan, Abdürrezzak Bedirhan. Unlike many of his compatriots, including members

9 Hüseyin Pasha Bedirhani (1859/1860–1913) was a son of Bedirhan Bey. He was born on the island of Crete and later served in the Ottoman military during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–78. Following the end of the war, he was involved in an attempt to orchestrate a Kurdish rebellion, alongside his brother, Osman Pasha. Sultan Abdülhamid II's government subsequently exiled him to Syria where he served as a district prefect (*kaymakam*). Following the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, he returned to Kurdistan and became increasingly opposed to the "Young Turk" regime. See Malmîsanij (2000: 154–170).

10 PRO FO 195/2449, Diyarbakır (8 March 1913).

of his own family, Abdürrezzak Bedirhan rejected any compromise with the Ottoman authorities, instead seeking to establish an independent Kurdish state with the support of the empire's old enemy, Russia. Abdürrezzak Bedirhan's career as an anti-Ottoman agitator in the years leading up to the First World War has been explored in detail elsewhere (Bedirhan, 2000; Reynolds, 2011b). Between 1911 and 1914, he was involved in several plots to subvert Ottoman rule over Kurdistan, including the Bitlis Revolt in the spring of 1914, one of the largest instances of anti-Ottoman unrest in the region since the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt of the 1880s.[11]

Consequently, Abdürrezzak Bedirhan was keen to use Ottoman military defeats in the Balkans to his advantage. In a propaganda pamphlet issued in the autumn of 1913, he proclaimed that, following the Ottoman Empire's defeats in the Balkans and North Africa, the European Great Powers were contemplating the partition of the empire's Asiatic territories. As evidence of this, he highlighted the reform package agreed to by the Ottoman government regarding the "Armenian" provinces of the Ottoman Empire, an agreement, which was ultimately ratified in February 1914.[12] He claimed that this European plan for the reorganisation of "six provinces … under the name of Armenia" would result in Armenians being granted "special privileges". Thus he urged his compatriots to establish "their rights and privileges", warning that, if they failed to do so, they would be disarmed and unable "to protect their rights against the rich but immoral Armenians".[13] Thus, the collapse of Ottoman authority in Europe was presented as a harbinger of a broader imperial collapse, one that would, should the Kurds not take action, favour the Christian Armenians.

11 The Bitlis Revolt broke out in the Spring of 1914 when Ottoman authorities attempted to arrest Molla Selim, a local Kurdish religious leader and political agitator with connections to Abdürrezzak Bedirhan. Although Abdürrezzak Bedirhan had been attempting to build support for a Kurdish rebellion in the region, Molla Selim's arrest precipitated the Kurds to rise earlier than expected. The rebellion was crushed in early April and its leader, Molla Selim, was forced to take refuge in the Russian consulate, where he remained until the outbreak of the First World War. See Reynolds (2011a: 78–81).

12 Although the Treaty of Berlin (1878) had "internationalised" the Armenian question, divisions amongst the Great Powers stymied the implementation of the relevant clauses in the treaty. However, in the aftermath of the Second Balkan War and under heavy European pressure, the Ottoman government signed into law (8 February 1914) a major reform package concerning the "Armenian" provinces of the empire. Two European officials, a Dutch colonial administrator, Louis C. Westenenk, and a Norwegian officer, Major Nicolai Hoff, were appointed by the Great Powers as inspector-generals of the "Six Provinces" (Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Harput, and Sivas). The agreement was ultimately abrogated following the outbreak of the First World War. See Davison (1948).

13 PRO FO 195/2458, Van (14 February 1914).

Kürdistan and the Cretan Question

However, not all elements of the Kurdish population viewed the Balkan nations as exemplars as Koyi had, nor did they perceive the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire as an opportunity, as in the case of Abdürrezzak Bedirhan. Indeed, many of the pioneers of Kurdish activism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century also maintained a deep commitment to the continuation of the Ottoman state. This commitment is perhaps best understood through the material relationship between members of an emergent Kurdish intellectual and professional elite, many of whom were also members of prestigious notable families such as the aforementioned Bedirhan clan. This new "intelligentsia", a social group often associated with the rise of nationalism, was relatively well integrated into Ottoman society, being educated within the empire's modernised school system and finding employment within the Ottoman bureaucracy. Moreover, as already noted, during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, the regime actively favoured members of the Kurdish elite for governmental positions, most notably in the case of the Bedirhans. Indeed, it might be argued that the Bedirhan clan's ability to play such a prominent role in the early Kurdish movement was, in part, facilitated by the patronage they received from the Ottoman state.[14] Consequently, the Kurdish intelligentsia's political posture towards the empire's territorial decline differed from that displayed by figures such as Koyi and Abdürrezzak Bedirhan. This is evident in the earliest example of Kurdish journalism, the bi-lingual (Kurdish-Turkish) newspaper *Kürdistan* (Kurdistan), published between 1898 and 1902.

Kurdish nationalists and their sympathisers have long regarded the foundation of *Kürdistan* by two brothers and members of the Bedirhan clan, Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan and Abdurrahman Bedirhan, in 1898 as representative of their "crystallized desire for emancipation" (Blau, 1963: 30). Significantly, *Kürdistan* was founded in exile, being first published in British-administered Egypt and later in Switzerland and Great Britain, and took a hostile editorial line towards the autocratic regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II. However, while the newspaper can certainly be regarded as a manifestation of growing "national consciousness" in a general sense, it was far from being a

14 The Bedirhans' close relationship with the sultan was widely remarked upon at the time. Sir Charles Eliot observed that: "Here [in Istanbul] they behaved much as they did in the wilds of Asia Minor, holding themselves above all law, and defying the representatives of the Government. If they ever obeyed the orders of anyone less than the Sultan, it was merely from diplomacy and politeness" (Eliot, 1900: 406). For a detailed history of the Bedirhans and their careers in Ottoman politics see Malmîsanij (2000).

"nationalist" publication in the sense of advocating the formation of a Kurdish nation-state. Indeed, considering the favour with which the Hamidian regime treated the Kurds (or perhaps more accurately, influential sections of the Kurdish nobility), the notion that this particular manifestation of Kurdish national consciousness developed as a direct response to a pervasive sense of "national oppression" seems unlikely.

In a certain respect, *Kürdistan* can be regarded as a vehicle through which the Bedirhan brothers sought to advance their own familial interests in an attempt to present themselves as the traditional leaders of the Kurdish "nation" and so an appropriate interface between the imperial state and broader Kurdish society. However, it can also be seen as part of the constitutionalist opposition that emerged in response to the sultan's suspension of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876. Indeed, a number of individuals of Kurdish origin, including *Kürdistan*'s editors, played important roles in the development of the "constitutionalist" opposition to the regime, better known in Europe at the time as the "Young Turks" (Klein, 2017).

Despite this moniker, the "Young Turk" movement was in fact made up of Ottomans from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Moreover, while some elements within the movement did display a propensity towards Turkish nationalist politics, the fundamental goals of the so-called "Young Turks" remained to replace the autocratic regime of the sultan with a system of constitutional monarchy based upon the short-lived 1876 Constitution. This, they believed, would provide a basis for social and political solidarity among all Ottoman subjects, regardless of their ethnic or religious backgrounds, and thus serve to arrest the empire's apparent decline (Hanioğlu, 1995; 2001). This "Ottomanist" political platform proved extremely attractive to elements amongst the Kurdish community alienated by the Hamidian autocracy. In fact, two Kurds, Abdullah Cevdet and İshak Sükuti, were amongst the founders of the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, CUP), the largest and most successful faction of the constitutionalist opposition. Moreover, *Kürdistan* itself was published with the support of the CUP (Malmîsanij, 1986: 15). Ergo, it might be thought of as representing a "Kurdist" trend within the broader constitutionalist movement.

Consequently, whilst *Kürdistan* focused on Kurdish affairs, it approached them from a pro-Ottoman perspective. It highlighted the general need for constitutional government and its critiques of Ottoman policies in Kurdistan focused on the actions of the sultan, which in its view, had brought about conflict and mistrust between the Muslim Kurds and the Christian Armenians in the region. Indeed, in discussing the anti-Armenian pogroms of the mid-1890s,

Abdurrahman Bedirhan even conceded that: "In the conflict between Kurds and Armenians, I know that Kurds killed many innocent Armenians."[15]

The editorial line of *Kürdistan* towards Christian-Muslim relations is significant. The newspaper's editors sought to foster cordial relations between the Kurds and Armenians and to this end the Bedirhans achieved a certain degree of success with the Armenian revolutionary press praising the brothers' efforts (Sarkisian, 1994). For the writers contributing to *Kürdistan*, the solution to Kurdish-Armenian and in a broader sense Muslim-Christian tensions was to be found in inter-communal solidarity or, in Ottoman terms, the "unity of ethnic and religious elements" (*ittihad-i anasar*). As one article succinctly put it: "Whether they are Armenians or Kurds, if they wish to be liberated from these circumstances and these oppressions, they can [only] achieve success through unity and alliance."[16] In other words, a common form of Ottoman patriotism was to frame such an alliance.

However, while endeavouring to build good relations with the Armenians, *Kürdistan* displayed great sympathy for the plight of Ottoman Muslims residing in regions far from the Kurdish homeland. Indeed, the newspaper took the government to task for what it perceived as a failure in protecting Muslim interests. This sympathy towards the situation of Ottoman Muslims is nowhere more apparent than in the newspaper's treatment of the Cretan question. To a certain extent, *Kürdistan*'s focus on Crete might partially be understood in familial terms, with Mikdat Midhat Bedirhan being born there during his father's exile on the island. Still, *Kürdistan* was outspoken in its criticism of the Hamidian regime's weakness in face of a growing threat to imperial sovereignty over the island presented by Greek nationalism and European intervention.

For example, the paper published an article from Bahriyeli Rıza, a leading member of the constitutionalist opposition in Egypt, in which the author condemned the Hamidian regime for losing "the island of Crete which is the most important part of our homeland." The article continued by offering a narration of events on the island which, while being highly critical of the palace, showed considerable sympathy with broader Ottoman interests. It noted that:

> The Greek government sent troops to our borders and attacked. Our commander there reported the state of affairs [to the palace] and asked how to respond. The answer that came was to abstain from any aggressive

15 Abdurrahman Bedirhan, "Hel Yestewî'llezîne Ye'lemûnewe'llezîne la Ye'lemûne" (1 December 1900).

16 Anonymous, "Kürdler ve Ermeniler" *Kürdistan* (14 December 1900).

> action until the final order [from the palace] was given. Two or three days passed and there was no word of a final order [from the palace]. However, [in the meantime] the enemy captured a few places on the border. Our soldiers who were prisoners of inaction to the 'final order' [from the palace], the patience of those brave and patriotic lions of ours now ran out. Breaking the bonds of the 'final order' they attacked the enemies; by showing themselves as being immune to the treacherous and criminal orders of the palace, they prove to the world that they are still the Ottomans of old.[17]

Bahriyeli Rıza's sentiments were echoed in other articles as well. In a Kurdish-language piece published in November 1898, the author mourned the state of the Muslims on the island and censured the government for its inaction. It complained that the European states were supporting Cretan Christians, while the Ottoman administration had left the Muslims to their fate. Indeed, the newspaper used highly emotive language in describing the conditions facing Cretan Muslims, writing:

> The circumstances of the Muslims of Crete are extremely bad … Muslims have become ruined and defenceless. Many of their men have been killed. Their wives and children have been violated and left hungry. Their houses have been burned. Infidels took their property and daughters. Their wives become widows to serve infidels.

Significantly, the article concluded by urging Kurds to pay heed to the situation in Crete for "one day this situation may befall you as well! Now, wouldn't it be a shame for Kurds to see their wives and children in the hands of Russian soldiers!"[18]

In summation, in face of direct assaults on Ottoman sovereignty and territorial integrity, from both the European Great Powers and Greek nationalists, *Kürdistan* identified with the Ottoman cause, although it made a distinction between the regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II and the Ottoman polity in a more abstract sense. This perspective was reinforced by the perception that should Christian separatists meet with success in one part of the empire such as Crete, not only would Ottoman Muslim interests be hurt, it could set a precedent for developments in Kurdistan. Thus, not only was the paper unsympathetic to separatist movements, but it also advocated their suppression going so far as

17 Bahriyeli Rıza, "İdare-i Maslahat ve İşar-ı Ahir" *Kürdistan* (1st February 1900).

18 Abdurrahman Bedirhan, "Welat-Vatan" *Kürdistan* (4th November 1898).

to condemn the Hamidian regime for failing to take active enough measures to counter them.

The Constitutional Revolution, Kurdish Civil Society, and the End of Empire in the Balkans

In many ways, the disposition of *Kürdistan* towards the Cretan question prefigured that of later associations and periodicals. In July 1908, a military rebellion launched by CUP-affiliated officers stationed in the Balkans precipitated the collapse of the Hamidian autocracy. The 1908 Constitutional Revolution was an important landmark in not only the history of the late Ottoman Empire in a general sense, but also in the development and evolution of the Kurdish movement. The restoration of constitutional rule after over thirty years of sultanic despotism opened the way for the emergence of a vibrant civil society. This included a host of organisations seeking to represent the interests of the various ethnic communities residing in the empire, including the Kurds. At the forefront of this new phase of Kurdish activism was a cadre of Kurdish notables, intellectuals, and later, students based in Istanbul, who took the lead in establishing a succession of Kurdish journals and associations.

The first such association was the KSMP established in the imperial capital during the autumn of 1908. The organisation remained active for less than a year, attempting to advance and protect Kurdish interests. Amongst its objectives, outlined in its constitution, were commitments to work towards ending tribal infighting, to propagandise in favour of constitutional government, to encourage education and to promote the material and spiritual well-being of the Kurds. In short, like *Kürdistan*, the KSMP approached the Kurdish question from an Ottomanist perspective. Indeed, the primary difference between the two was their attitudes towards the existing imperial regime. Whereas *Kürdistan* had been critical of the Hamidian regime, the KSMP and its bulletin regarded the new constitutionalist regime in a positive light. Indeed, a number of the KSMP's members maintained close relations with the CUP, including the organisation's president Sheikh Abdülkadir Efendi (the son of Sheikh Ubeydullah), who had been a part of the CUP during years in opposition, and Babanzade İsmail Hakkı Bey, who was elected to the Ottoman parliament as the CUP-backed deputy for Baghdad (Malmîsanij, 1999; Ünal, 2008; Kutlay, 2009; Bajalan, 2016).

Consequently, although still displaying considerable interest in the fate of the Ottoman Balkans, the tone adopted by the KSMP's bulletin was more optimistic than that adopted by *Kürdistan* a decade earlier. For example, in an

article examining the situation in Ottoman Macedonia, published in its first issue, the author wrote:

> Four months ago [i.e. before the revolution] *our* foreign policy (*siyaset-i hariciyemiz*) was a game of European ambitions and interests. We could only secure a position within that clash of interests. Discussions amongst the Great Powers had even begun with regards to separating off, under the name of the "Three Provinces" (*Vilayat-i Selase*), the three provinces of Rumelia, namely the provinces of Salonika, Kosovo, and Manastır (Bitola), and placing them under international observation and an autonomous administration, because of *our* tardiness in doing the necessary things for the interests and needs of the country. Rumelia's current political situation has … undergone a significant change … [due to the revolution and implementation of the constitution].[19]

Clearly, it was believed that such a change would herald a new era for Rumelia as the new government would be more active in implementing necessary reforms. At the same time, the author identified the Kurds, through the use of terms such as "our foreign policy" and "our tardiness", with the Ottoman state in its entirety.

Unfortunately, from the Ottoman perspective, the revolution did not terminate the empire's troubles in Europe. The Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Bulgarian declaration of independence were particularly humiliating blows. These two acts triggered a wave of popular protest amongst Ottoman Muslims, which took the form of a boycott of Austrian and Bulgarian goods, orchestrated by the CUP.[20] The KSMP wholeheartedly embraced the campaign, commending Istanbul's Kurdish community for participating in the protest.[21] The association also supported efforts to prevent Greece from seizing control of the island of Crete. In a "special article" entitled *Girid Meselesi* (The Cretan Question), accompanied by a photograph of the Cretan town of Hanye (Chania), the author pointed out that Bulgaria's declaration of independence and the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina had "upset this great [Ottoman] nation with the deepest hurtful memories." However, "this time …", the author continued:

19 E. A., "Siyasiyat" *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908) [Emphasis added].

20 One of the principal goods the movement boycotted were Austrian-made fezzes, leading to the movement often being known as the "fez boycott". See Çetinkaya (2010: 47–107).

21 See Anonymous, "Tahrim" *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908); Anonymous, "Dahili", *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (12 December 1908).

> Greece's annexation policy towards Crete has awoken holy feelings and righteousness in every upstanding Ottoman. Hence, in order to protest against Greece, a demonstration was held, and everyone took an oath in the name of God, their honour and their conscience that they would sacrifice their lives in this cause [of Muslim Crete].[22]

The article was followed by the text of a speech given in the name of the KSMP at the demonstration.[23] The KSMP's Ottoman patriotism is unambiguous. Although the organisation was Kurdish-oriented, it identified Kurdish interests with those of the Muslim Ottoman polity as a whole. As Babanzade Ismail Hakkı Bey succinctly put it, the Kurdish identity was "before everything Islamic."[24]

Despite the hopes of the revolutionaries that constitutional rule would stabilise the empire, the new regime was faced not only with ongoing troubles in the Balkans, but also growing internal discord. In spring 1909, discontent with the new government and its CUP backers exploded in open revolt. In April, troops stationed in Istanbul mutinied against their officers and with the support of anti-CUP elements, both liberal and conservative, forced the CUP out of the capital city. This "counter-revolution" was soon put down by troops sympathetic to the CUP. However, the liberal phase of the revolution was over. The Ottoman government adopted a host of new laws and regulations restricting the civil liberties of Ottoman subjects. This included the adoption of a "Law on Associations" which, although not banning "national associations" outright, forbade them from engaging with "political questions" (Toprak, 1985: 206–207; Arslan, 2010: 57–70). Consequently, those Kurdish associations founded after 1909, most notably the KSHS, generally sought to remain within the letter of the law. In practice this meant focusing primarily on social and educational issues, while avoiding politically sensitive issues of high politics (Malmîsanij, 2002; Bajalan, 2013).

Nevertheless, the outbreak of the First Balkan War in autumn 1913 was of great significance to imperial politics and impacted deeply upon the Kurds. Numerous individuals of Kurdish origin were drafted into the Ottoman military. Indeed, the government deployed the predominantly Kurdish *Hamidiye* regiments, which had been reconstituted as the "Tribal Light Cavalry" (*Aşiret Hafif*

22 Anonymous, "Makale-i Mahsuse" *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (9 January 1909).

23 Süleymaniyeli Hüseyin Paşazade Süleyman Beyefendi, "Suret-i Nutuk" *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (9 January 1909).

24 Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, "Kürdler ve Kürdistan" *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* (5 December 1908).

Süvari) in 1910, to the European front in 1912 (Klein, 2011: 111). In February 1912, former KSMP president and Ottoman Senator, Sheikh Abdülkadir Efendi, even issued a proclamation calling on Kurds to join the Ottoman military.[25] Hence the Balkan War, far from being seen as a distant conflict, was one in which many individuals of Kurdish origins actively participated. This is reflected in some of the articles found in the Ottoman Kurdish press. For example, the KSHS publication, *Rojê Kurd* (Kurdish Day), carried an article describing the heroic service rendered by Kurdish soldiers in the Balkan Wars.[26] Another article, an obituary for Hüseyin Pasha Bedirhani, noted with appreciation his (unsuccessful) efforts to raise a 40,000 strong volunteer force from amongst the Kurds to fight in Europe.[27] The wives and daughters of Kurdish elites in Istanbul also mobilised to support the war effort. Some wrote more generally about the severe economic and social problems of Muslim refugees fleeing the warzone. However, they also offered a "Kurdish" perspective on events. For example, one Kurdish writer in the journal *Kadınlar Dünyası* (Women's World), Fato Nali, penned an article on the unfortunate fate of a Kurdish veteran of the war who had, after a period in enemy captivity, suffered severe health problems (Kutlar, 2010: 66–68).

Perhaps one of the most interesting insights into the attitudes of Kurdish intellectuals to the Balkan War can be found in a short pamphlet entitled *Edirne Sukûtunun İç Yüzü* (The Inside Story of the Fall of Edirne). The piece was published by Celadet Ali and Kamuran Bedirhan and contained a foreword from Dr. Abdullah Cevdet, by this stage a well-respected member of the Ottoman Kurdish community in the capital. It opened in the most dramatic of terms:

> From the Balkans smoke and flames arose. Our heads turned and our eyes were struck by the smoke and flames in front of us. The bayonets of the Bulgarians were directed towards Çatalca, [those of the] Serbs towards Üsküp, [those of the] Greeks towards Salonika and [those of the] Montenegrins towards the stones of İşkodra. *We awoke. We suffered 500,000 casualties* [and] one in five died from bullet wounds. 500,000 Rumelians (*Rumelili*) were made refugees (Bedirhan & Bedirhan, 2009: 20) [Emphasis added].

25 PRO FO 195/2449, Pera (24 February 1913).

26 Abu Rewşan, "Kürdlüğün Menakib-i Hamasetinden İki Semasi Besalet" *Rojê Kurd* (12 September 1913).

27 Rojê Kurd, "Hayat-i Meşahir: Bedirhanî Hüseyin Paşa" *Rojê Kurd* (14 August 1913).

The introduction continued by laying the blame for the defeat at the feet of not only the government but all Ottomans who had ignored the situation in the Balkans. It concluded by proclaiming: "We appeal to all coreligionist and compatriots who would read these lines of ours. For the love of homeland, in the name of the spirit of belief … may they recite with enmity and revenge in their hearts, 'the Ottoman order shall remain, and Islam shall endure'" (Bedirhan & Bedirhan, 2009: 24).

The text, completed in July 1913, implicitly took the CUP-led government to task for its conduct in the First Balkan War and, more specifically, its failure to protect the former Ottoman capital of Edirne. Yet, while written in a critical spirit, it was also an unequivocal demonstration of the deeply held commitment to the continuation of the Ottoman polity by elements of the Ottoman Kurdish elite. Indeed, the brothers had a strong personal connection to the war due to the fact that their older brother, Ahmed Süreyya Bedirhan, an Ottoman military officer, had been captured by the Greeks (Kutlar, 2010: 68). In summation, the Ottoman Empire's military defeats and the end of its once vast European empire, far from being a source of inspiration, was a development to be mourned.

Conclusion

As outlined in the introduction to this article, it would be a mistake to assume that the collapse of Ottoman rule in Europe elicited a uniform response amongst the Kurds. However, perhaps more significantly, it will also hopefully be evident that the relationship between the nascent Kurdish movement and imperial collapse was not quite as straightforward as might first be expected. While some elements within Ottoman Kurdish society evidently regarded the collapse of Ottoman control in Europe as being a potential opportunity for Kurdish emancipation from "Turkish" rule, others, including most significantly those at the forefront of the Kurdish movement, regarded the Kurds' interests as being inextricably linked to the fate of the Ottoman polity as a whole. This realisation should attune us to the fact that the growth of national consciousness does not automatically translate into demands for a nation-state and the political appeal of being a member of a broader multi-ethnic polity was not as weak as it is often portrayed. It should also call into question the "nationalistic" logic of much historical writing as well as political punditry within the Middle Eastern context.

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Learning from Defeat: Development and Contestation of the "New Paradigm" within the Kurdistan Workers' Party of Turkey (PKK)

Joost Jongerden | ORCID: 0000-0002-0076-732X
Assistant Professor, Centre for Space, Place and Society, Wageningen University, Hollandseweg 1, 6706KN Wageningen, The Netherlands;
Project professor Asian Platform for Global Sustainability & Transcultural Studies at Kyoto University, Japan
joost.jongerden@wur.nl

Abstract

The ideological reorientation and political reorganisation of the PKK has been a subject of debate. While some authors recognise that significant changes occurred within the PKK, others have dismissed the PKK's transformation as a communication strategy and window-dressing. Based on interviews with key informants, this article reconstructs debates and developments within the party at the beginning of the 2000s. A main conclusion is that the transformation of the PKK was more than a reorientation involving organisational adjustment; it was no less than the development of a new mindset, one that involved the questioning of historically entrenched gender hierarchies and deeply held political axioms. In the process of this major change, the PKK lost a substantial number of long-time activists and cadres. Although at times it looked as if the movement might fall apart, the result was a transformation that gave the PKK a new impetus.

Keywords

PKK – Kurdistan – politics – ideological change – reorganisation – internal struggle

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Fêrbûna ji têkçûnê: Pêşketin û dijberiya "paradîgmaya nû" di nava Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê ya Tirkiyeyê (PKK) de

Guherîna îdeolojîk û jinûve rêkxistina siyasî ya PKKyê gelek bûye babeta nîqaşan. Hindek lêkoler qebûl dikin ku guherînên girîng çêbûn di nava PKKyê de, lê hindek lêkolerên din girîngiyeke wisa nedane veguherîna PKKyê û ew bêtir wek stratejiyeke ragihandinê û rûberekê dîtine. Li ser bingeha hevpeyvînên bi agahîderên xwedan rol û girîngî re, ev gotar nîqaş û geşedanên di nava partiyê de yên li serê salên 2000an digihîne hev û vesaz dike. Encameke serekî ku gotar digihê ew e ku veguherîna PKKyê gelek zêdetir bûye ji guherîneke arasteyê û lêanînên rêxistinî; berevajî vê yekê, pêşketina zihniyeteke nû bû, zihniyetek ku hiyerarşiyên dîrokî yên cinsiyetan û bingehên siyasî yên kûr dixistine jêr pirsyaran. Di pêvajoya vê guherîna bingehîn de, PKKyê hejmareke girîng a çalakvan û berpirsên xwe yên kevn ji dest dan. Herçend carinan wisa xuya bûbe ku tevger dibe ku ji hev bikeve, encam bû veguherînek ku lez û dînamîzmeke nû da PKKyê.

Fêrbûn le şikist: Geşekirdin û rikaberîkirdinî "paradaymî nwê" lenaw Partî Krêkaranî Kurdistanî Turkiya (PKK)

Arastekirdinewey aydiyolojî û rêkxistinewey siyasîy PKK buwete babetî miştumirr. Lekatêkda hendêk nûser dan beweda denên ke gorrankarîy gewre lenaw PKKda rûydawe, hendêkî tir werçerxanî PKK ret dekenewe û be corêk le stratîjîy rageyandin û perdepoşî dadenên. Le ser binemay çawpêkewtin legell hewallgire serekîyekanda, em babete miştumirr û allugorrîyekanî naw PKK le sallanî 2000ekanda daderrêjêtewe. Encamgîrîy serekî eweye werçerxanî PKK le arayîşdanewey peywest be hemwarkirdinî rêkxiraweyî ziyatire, le geşekirdinî cîhanbînîyekî tazeş kemtir nebû, wek ewey ke peyweste be xistine jêr pirsyarî heremeyî cênderî ke cêkewteyekî mêjuyîy heye legell bellge newîste siyasîye rîşe dakutawekan. Le prosey em allugorre serekîyeda, PKK jimareyekî berçawî çalakwan û kadîre dêrînekanî ledest da. Herçende hendêk kat wa derdekewt ke ew cullaneweye renge heres bênêt, derencam werçerxanêk bû ke gurr u tînî tazey daye PKK.

Mexlûbîyet ra dersegirewtiş: averşîyayîş û werenayîşê "paradîgmaya newîye" ya zereyê Partîya Karkeran a Kurdîstanî ya Tirkîya (PKK) de

Newe ra oryantasyono îdeolojîk û rêxistinbîyayîşê PKK bîyî babetê munaqeşeyan. Herçiqas ke tayê nuştoxî qebul kenê ke zereyê PKK de vurîyayîşê girîngî qewimîyayî, tayê bînî nê vurîyayîşî sey stratejîya komunîkasyonî û xoxemilnayîşêkê zurayinî nîşan danê. Pê roportajanê ke bi melumatdaranê sermîyanan ameyê kerdene, na meqale munaqeşe û averşîyayîşê ke sereyê serranê 2000an de ca girewtê, înan reyna ana ra çiman ver. Yew netîceyo bingeyên o yo ke vurîyayîşê PKK tena qandê başêrkerdişê rêxistine oryantasyono newe ney, la bi xo averşîyayîşê hişmendîyêka newîye bî. Na hişmendî hîyerarşîyê cinsîyetan ê tradîsyonelî û rastîyê sîyasîyê xorînî fîştî ra gumanî ver. Prosesê nê vurîyayîşê girsî de PKK hûmarêka girînge ya çalakîker û kadroyanê kanan kerde vîndî. Herçiqas wextêk ge-gane wina asayêne ke tevger do parçe bibo, netîce de no vurîyayîş seba PKK bîbî teşwîqêko teze.

Introduction

In its 1978 manifesto, the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK) declared the establishment of an independent state to be the only correct political goal of a national liberation movement. Around the turn of the millennium, following a critique and self-critique on the character of national liberation struggles and "real existing socialism",[1] the party started to question whether independence really ought to be conceptualised and practiced in the form of nation-state construction (Jongerden, 2016). Taking the concept of state-construction from the principle of national self-determination, the PKK developed an ideological and political architecture on the basis of the idea of self-government as a stateless society. The PKK refers to this development of a new "alternative institutional framework to the current state system in the Middle East" (Güneş, 2012) as a paradigm change. While some authors recognise that significant changes occurred within the PKK (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2012; Güneş, 2012; Güneş and Zeydanlıoğlu, 2013; Yeğen, 2016), in many texts on the subject the PKK's transformation has rather been downplayed and

1 A catch phrase to refer to the Soviet Union-style of state-bureaucratic planning, which was regarded as one of the stages towards communism.

disqualified. By emphasising so-called authoritarian continuities, the shift in the PKK position has been presented merely as a communication strategy undertaken in response to its listing as a terrorist organisation and hence as superficial or in contradiction to its alleged and essentialised being. Savelsberg (2014: 103; 2016: 227) depicts the practise of collective self-administration from below as window-dressing for authoritarianism. Leezenberg (2016: 15) sees Leninist continuities in a direction that "contradicts the anarchist element in Bookchin's and Öcalan's theoretical writings." In a similar vein, Muhammad (2018: 799) suggests that Bookchin as the "theorist of choice may not be an entirely suitable one", since "the PKK has been unable to chart a non-nationalist course", and argues, moreover, that "[s]cholars of the Kurdish question have so far let Bookchin's seeming unsuitability go unnoticed," mainly because his ideas are not well known. De Jong (2016) furthermore suggests that the embrace of Bookchin and the new paradigm was not the result of a collective process of deliberation, but one imposed by the leadership of the PKK on the basis of directives by Öcalan. This article contests such views. It shows that the paradigm change indeed came with profound discussions, reorientation and reorganisation and almost resulted in the crumbling and collapse of the party.

Methodologically, this article is the product of an approach that seeks to understand the PKK's outlook and actions and in particular how these make sense for those involved (Jongerden, 2016b). By listening to what those people active in the organisation have to say for themselves, by engaging with how they explain the ideological and political changes within their organisation and what they themselves refer to as the process towards a "paradigm change", it becomes clear that the changes have been experienced as disruptive and that the organisation did indeed undergo a radical transformation in the mid-2000s. Unfortunately, the intensity of the debates and changes has been overlooked in most of the literature on the subject, a redress of which is the primary aim here. This article will mainly deal with the internal discussions and contestation, therefore, focusing on the profound and destabilising impact that the paradigm change had on the party, eventually resulting in a re-establishment (PKK, 2005). Data to sustain this argument has been collected by means of interviews with people who have been involved in or witnessed the discussions within the PKK and the turmoil the party experienced in the beginning of the 2000s.[2]

2 Unless otherwise stated, all interviews and translations in this article were carried out by the author.

Learning from Defeat

Initially without a formal structure or program, what was to become the PKK in 1978 started off as a grouping of dedicated people in search of a new perspective after the 1971 coup and crackdown on the revolutionary left in Turkey.[3] The group did not engage in a sectarian battle over the right path to follow, that of Russia, China, or Albania. The *Kürdistan Devrimcileri* (Kurdistan Revolutionaries), the name of the group before it turned into the PKK, did not bother much about who represented the true form of socialism and were more concerned with understanding the socialist struggle under the conditions in which they lived, which implied the development of their understanding of the reality in Turkey and Kurdistan (Cemil Bayık, personal communication, October 30, 2014; Rıza Altun, personal communication, October 30, 2014). This history of the PKK and the related paradigm change can be written from various perspectives, one of them is to consider the history as a process of "learning from defeat". In this article, I distinguish three defeats. The first defeat the Kurdistan Revolutionaries learned from was the defeat of the revolutionary left in Turkey after the 1971 coup. At the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s, the revolutionary left and Kurdish organisations in Turkey had gained momentum, getting morale and inspiration from revolutionary struggles elsewhere in the world: from Cuba to Vietnam, Laos to Angola, Mozambique to Guinea, and Algeria to Palestine. Against the background of the growth of an assertive left and emerging Kurdish political sphere, the military presented a memorandum to Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel on March 12, 1971 in which the general staff demanded a strong government that would put an end to what they referred to as social unrest and carry out reforms in a Kemalist spirit (Zürcher, 2004: 257). This coup was followed by a crackdown on the left and Kurdish organisations. In the three years following the 1971 coup, the military empowered the state against civil society and installed special courts to deal with dissent quickly and ruthlessly, among others. A ban on meetings and gatherings and criminalisation of strikes and lockouts, along with the closure of organisations and the arrest and killing of its leaders, resulted in a collapse of the organised left (Ahmad, 1993: 156; Jongerden, 2017). This particular defeat had a profound impact on the establishment and development of the Kurdistan revolutionaries. Öcalan argued that the main reason for this defeat

3 The PKK was formally established on 26–27 November 1978, yet assumed its name in April 1979 and announced its existence in July 1979 with an attack on the leader of the Kurdish Bucak clan, considered to be a symbol of an oppressive landlord and collaborator with the state (Akkaya, 2016).

was that the revoluationaries had entered into a direct confrontation with the state while they were still too weak. Following this insight, the group around Öcalan decided to organise itself thoroughly before entering into such a confrontation again (Sayın, 1997: 71–83; Jongerden and Akkaya, 2011). The second defeat for the PKK, namely the military setbacks it suffered from the beginning of the 1990s, came when it shifted towards positional warfare at a time the Turkish military started to use guerilla-tactics. This resulted in heavy losses for the PKK. In this period, many young people were joining the PKK, including a considerable number of women. The commanders, mostly men, considered the women unfit for military duties and sent them back to work on the political front in Turkey after a month of training. Many of the women would be arrested upon their return. Fatma, a member of KJA (*Kongreya Jinen Azad*), an umbrella organisation for women in the Kurdistan Region in Turkey, inspired by the teachings of Öcalan, says:

> What we experienced in 1991, 1992, 1993, the big rise in women joining the revolution, was at the same time a period when there was a big chaos within the organisation. What came out of this chaos? This came out: for example, there was this, Amed's [Diyarbakır] commander Şemdin Sakık. He said, "There will be no women left in the army, I am sending them all away. They can go to the cities, nobody can turn the women into candidates for the guerrilla. Because women spoil men, he said, and war is a man's business." (Fatma, personal communication, 27 July, 2016)

Against this background, Abdullah Öcalan started to problematise domination by men as a negative side of the movement and praise the dedication and perseverance of women fighters, symbolised by the actions of Berîtan (Gülnaz Karataş), linked to the formation of a women's army (*ordulaşma*), and Zîlan (Zeynep Kınacı) and Sema Yüce, related to the formation of a women's party (*partileşme*).[4] Though other liberation movements mobilised women too, the PKK began to regard gender relations as a key issue in its analyses, challenging patriarchal relations, both in society generally as well as within the

4 Berîtan was the commander of a PKK unit. In 1992 Turkish forces, supported by the *Partîya Demokrat a Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Democratic Party, KDP) peshmerga, started a military offensive against the PKK in the Kurdistan region in Iraq. When Berîtan's unit was about to be surrounded by KDP forces, she kept them at a distance so her unit could escape. When she ran out of ammunition, she threw herself from a mountain rock, preferring death to captivity. Zîlan used her body as a weapon in an attack on the Turkish military in Dersîm (Tunceli), in 1996. In 1998, Sema Yüce poured eau-de-cologne over herself and set herself on fire in protest against Turkey's policies towards the Kurds.

party itself. Gender inequalities were not seen as a side issue to the revolution, but as a key challenge (Tax, 2016). Analysing the history of state formation as a history of the emergence of the "dominant male", Öcalan turned the thesis of Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Claudia von Werlhof (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Werlhof 1988) of "women, the last colony" on its head. Öcalan (2013) argued that social inequalities and cultural injustices started with the emergence of gender hierarchies and the identification of women with the domestic sphere ("housewifisation") in the Neolithic era.[5] He referred to women as "the first colony". The "dominant male", Öcalan argues, was constitutive for a process of state formation. Consequently, stateless democracy and gender equality became key dimensions of the PKK's new paradigm (Güneş, 2012: 141–3).

The third defeat for the PKK, the capture of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 and his imprisonment in Turkey, was a major shock for the party but ultimately eventuated in a recreation of the party's ideology and organisation. This recreation took place against the much broader background of the dissolution of state socialism and what Paul Virilio refers to as a failure of a type of social experimentation (Conley, 2012: 93), which gave way to the idea of a non-statist democracy. It is in the context of this third defeat that I will discuss the paradigm change within the PKK.

Paradigm Change

On 16 February, 1999, then Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit announced that PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan had been captured in Kenya and brought to Turkey a

5 Marie Mies, Veronica Bennholdt-Thomsen and Claudia von Werlhof make a distinction between external colonies and internal colonies. External colonies are colonised peoples and land elsewhere, while the internal colony is a process of housewifisation at home. Locating the process of housewifisation in the era of capitalist modernity, they argue that housewifisation is a process of extension of exploitation to the domestic sphere (see also Mies, 1986: 110). Öcalan argues the other way around, saying that the nation-state and capitalism are contingent on the institutionalisation of the dominant male. This institutionalisation of the dominant male takes place around two "sexual ruptures". The first rupture was that of "religionisation" around the idea of the strong man in the Neolithic era, dated at some 4,000 years ago. This institutionalised a single voiced masculine social culture and a silencing and "housewifisation" of women. The second "sexual rupture" is referred to as the intensification of patriarchy through monotheistic religions. In the previous world of multiple gods, women were attributed creative powers, but in the narrative of the monotheistic religions, the position of women shifted from the creator to the created, symbolised in the claim that woman was created from a man's rib (Öcalan, 2017).

day before. Across the world, PKK militants and sympathisers reacted furiously with demonstrations, riots and occupations. The shock of his arrest was quickly followed by another shock. In his defense, Öcalan did not take the assumed position expected by his followers and Kurdish communities. Rejecting claims for an independent state, Öcalan instead proposed a new, "truly" democratic republic, and a project he referred to as democratic confederalism, democratic autonomy, and democratic nation. He was quickly accused of selling out, yet in his defense Öcalan indicated that he did not retreat from the struggle, but searched for a re-establishment of the liberation struggle. "In my defense", he argued, "I did not revert to either a classical Kurdish nationalist line or a leftist interpretation of a similar tendency. Developments went beyond [both tendencies]" (Öcalan, 1999b: 10). Öcalan started to elaborate on an earlier formulated critique of the state, including the socialist experiments, arguing that liberation cannot be achieved by means of nation-state building, but rather by the deepening of self-organisation. This was referred to as radical democracy, radical in the sense that it tries to develop the concept of democracy beyond nation and state (Karasu, 2009).

After his imprisonment on an island jail (İmralı) and facing court proceedings on multiple charges, primarily of treason against the state of Turkey, Abdullah Öcalan started preparations for his legal defence. The right to organise his own defence gave him access to literature, and resulted in an extensive reading of political and social theory, philosophy, and history. This study resulted not in a legalistic defence, but a political one. Over the years, Öcalan committed himself to a thorough rethinking of the history of socialism, the PKK and the development of a new political project (Akkaya, 2016). This new political project, referred to as "democratic confederalism", "democratic autonomy" and the "democratic nation", is positioned by Öcalan within the historical context of non-state civilisation. In *Liberating Life*, a compilation of translations from several of his books, Öcalan (2013: 55) writes that the struggle "entails creating political formations aiming to achieve a society that is democratic, gender equal, eco-friendly and *where state is not the pivotal element*" (emphasis added). A theory of the emergence and role of the state is central to the second paradigm change within the PKK.

At the time of the formation of the PKK in the 1970s, the PKK took revolutionary struggles elsewhere as a relevant horizon for its own orientation. The October Revolution in Russia, the revolution in China, the resistances in Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Eritrea, and other countries and regions around the world were all looked upon as part of a common heritage of the oppressed. Yet the socialist and liberation movements did not fulfill their promise and, towards the end of the 1980s, the self-declared socialist alternative, the Soviet

Union, collapsed. This formed an important background for a re-examination of the idea of socialism and liberation struggle, eventually resulting in a critique of the state:

> [The PKK] examined all the national liberation struggles. They liberated, waged big battles, millions were martyred, and eventually they won, but the gains were minimal. They reached their targets but could not realise their principles … Adding to that the collapse of socialism, they [the Soviets] positioned themselves as alternative. The Soviets had believed that they would only come to an end when the world came to an end, and this affected their mentality. We started a re-examination. When we were established, we took our inspiration more from struggles elsewhere than from the resistance movements in recent Kurdish history, which had all ended in defeat, thus affecting PKK thinking. I mean, we took them [the national liberation movements] as examples, we were affected by these movements when we started our struggle, but these struggles did not bring what they should have brought. In fact, they went backwards and accepted what they had previously refused. So you see, there had to be something wrong. This demanded a re-examination. The emergence of a new paradigm [within the PKK] is very much influenced by this. (Duran Kalkan, personal communication, 28 October, 2014)

This critical re-examination of liberation struggles resulted in a critique on the state, referred to by Nietzsche as "the coldest of cold monsters" (Merrifield, 2006: 157) and by Öcalan as the institution that does not stand for democracy, freedom, and human rights, but their denial (Öcalan, 2010: 193). Thus, Öcalan began to reject state formation as an objective of political struggle that aims at liberation, and proposed a new model (Jongerden, 2016).

The beginning of this rethinking of politics started in the mid-1980s.

> The first strong critique on real existing socialism was made at a meeting of the central committee in 1984. […] He [Öcalan] argued that real existing socialism did not have much to do with socialism. The state was supposed to disappear, but instead became more powerful. (Cemil Bayık, personal communication, 30 October, 2014)

According to Akkaya (2016), this critique of real existing socialism can also be traced back to Öcalan's speeches devoted to socialism (most delivered on the occasion of May 1) in the 1980s, in which Öcalan argued that the development

of a "bureaucratic state" under "real existing socialism" had resulted in alienation and subjugation (Öcalan, 1999a: 13–14). Furthermore, Akkaya argues, notably referring to the PKK's 1993 congress (Öcalan, 1993), that Öcalan's critique of the Soviet Union did not come with a turn to dogmatism or liberalism, but with a search for a new form of socialism (Akkaya, 2016: 311). The rethinking of socialism through a state critique became a recurrent theme. At the 5th congress too, Öcalan voiced his critique of the contradictory relation between state and socialism (Öcalan, 1995). By the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, Öcalan was already proposing a "new socialism" based on a societal transformation coming from below. Öcalan would return to this critique and develop a new political vision following his imprisonment in 1999.

Development and Contestation of the Paradigm Change

Although Öcalan was in contact with his lawyers, he spent most of his time in isolation, reading, developing his ideas, and writing. Within the restrictions he faced, however, Öcalan desired some kind of intellectual exchange. His legal team played an important role in this exchange. According to Oliver Kontny, one of the people working with the legal defence team, Öcalan was looking for i) people he could engage with in order to test and further develop his ideas, and ii) information about other movements in the world working with similar agendas:

> He was basically alone in his prison cell and turning upside down half of his belief system and more than half of the belief system of his followers. [...] And of course, one can start to doubt and think, "maybe I'm just losing it." So he needed some kind of feedback from somebody who was not his follower, not his supporter, from people who might be involved in their own struggles, or in their own process of thinking. (Oliver Kontny, personal communication, 29 November, 2015)

One of the attempts to engage in discussion with intellectuals and activists outside the movement took place in the context of a translation of what would later be published in English as *Prison Writings: The Roots of Civilisation* (Öcalan, 2007). The London-based publishing house Pluto Press was interested in the manuscript, since it was placed in a radical socialist frame and dealt with critical perspectives on capitalism and colonialism:

> As a publisher, I was always interested in the books of people who are struggling to resist what they felt was some form of domination. […] Öcalan obviously was a major leader of the Kurdish resistance […] but we were not involved in the dynamics or the politics. (Roger van Zwanenberg, personal communication 27 June, 2016)

The manuscript was sent out for review to Susan Pollock, an archaeologist interested in political economy and feminist approaches to the study of pre- and early historic Mesopotamian societies, and Reinhard Bernbeck, who had an interest in the economic organisation of ancient societies and ancient imperialism in relation to its manifestations today. Pollock had published on ancient Mesopotamia (Pollock, 1999) and together, Pollock and Bernbeck had co-edited a work discussing, among others, social life in Neolithic villages (Pollock and Bernbeck, 2004; Starzmann, Pollock, and Bernbeck, 2008). Pollock and Bernbeck both had received parts of the translation of the manuscript, had read through it and had given comments in a back and forth exchange with Oliver Kontny, the translator of the manuscript:

> When reading the text, I was really impressed by the sort of detail [and] knowledge. […] Overall I found it very interesting. It [was] a kind of appropriate analysis made by someone with limited access to a library. (Reinhard Bernbeck, personal communication, 22 June, 2016)

Against the idea of ancient Mesopotamia as a wonderful civilisation from where we can see a history of progress, Öcalan made an argument about the existence of "primitive socialism" in the Neolithic era, emphasizing the emergence of gender hierarchies, class division, and social exploitation:

> I did not fully understand his analysis of the Neolithic revolution, and what he said of the pre-urban period and the comparison to the Enlightenment. Is capitalism the Enlightenment derailed, or was the Enlightenment already the first step in the wrong direction? Was the Neolithic revolution derailed, or was it such a first step in the wrong direction? There were other things, but then I have to look closely back, I don't remember, since it is probably something between a dozen and 15 years ago we had these discussions. […] One can probably pinpoint the first production of surplus more precisely in time and space than he [Öcalan] does, but obviously, why should he? It's somewhere there. He is not wrong by putting it between the early Neolithic and urban society and

> state emergence in Mesopotamia. (Reinhard Bernbeck, personal communication, 22 June, 2016)

On the basis of his exchange with the reviewers of the manuscript, Oliver Kontny wrote to Öcalan:

> I wrote this very long letter. His lawyers didn't want to give this letter to him, because they thought it was rude. After some months, I pushed them into giving it, and I received a response by fax. Öcalan obviously sat down to write a hand-written letter, and he had the prison authorities fax it to his lawyers. […] He was saying, "Yes, I am not an academic, I am not claiming to be one, so please correct whatever you think is wrong, but let's discuss this, let's think this through for what it can mean for humanity, because if you also agree that it's something new then let's develop this together." […] People were thinking it was improper, they were actually trying to stop me from writing again, and they effectively stopped me from implementing what he said in his letter. Because in his letter to me he said, "Look, I want you to form a group of people and to update my book so it will be on par with the level of discussion in Europe, and if there are any mistakes, factual mistakes, just tacitly correct them […] But what is important is that you don't dilute my ideas, my political and philosophical ideas. I'm confident you understand them and be very careful not to alter them, but all the rest just feel free, make it a good text in an editorial way." This is what he was saying in a letter with his own signature to a translator and a publisher. If I was a PKK person, this would be sacred, right? This was Öcalan's. … It was his will, his written, expressed will, and they stopped us. It didn't happen. (Oliver Kontny, personal communication, 29 November, 2015)

As this exchange around the manuscript came to an end, a parallel process of contact with intellectuals emerged, the most important being Murray Bookchin, who was contacted by Reimar Heider and Uta Schneiderbanger of the International Initiative/Peace in Kurdistan. Born in New York to Russian Jewish immigrants, Murray Bookchin (1921–2006) was active in the youth movement of the communist party in the USA in his teens but broke with it at the end of the 1930s. Initially he aligned himself with the Trotskyites and the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), but he had considerable difficulties with their hierarchical and centralist outlook and started to consider himself a libertarian socialist from the 1950s onwards (Jongerden and Akkaya, 2013).

Öcalan had emphasised the value of Bookchin's ideas, and referred to him as his teacher and himself his pupil (Reimar Heider, personal communication, 24 December, 2015).[6]

In his writings, Öcalan recommends Bookchin on several occasions. "The world view for which I stand," Öcalan explained in a meeting with his lawyers on December 1, 2004, "is close to that of Bookchin," and he advised his supporters to read Bookchin's work:

> On this subject, you can make use of the books, *Urbanisation without Cities* and *Remaking Society*. Read these two books. My worldview is close to those ideas [of] Wallerstein and Bookchin. (Öcalan, 2004)

Earlier that year, on October 27, he had done the same:

> We will solve the Kurdish issue through local authorities. [...] For the municipalities, I suggested that Bookchin must be read and his ideas are practiced. (Öcalan, 2004)

On December 11, 2004, Murray Bookchin's companion and author Janet Biehl, wrote:

> It is thrilling to learn that Murray Bookchin's remarks were read to the second general assembly of the Kurdistan People's Congress last summer, and it is gratifying to know that many Kurdish people now view his ideas favorably. (Letter by Janet Biehl to Uta Schneiderbanger and Reimar Heider, 11 December, 2004)

Biehl was writing in response to a letter from Reimar Heider and Uta Schneiderbanger, which had stated:

6 Following the work of Murray Bookchin, Abdullah Öcalan had initiated debates on democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism. This followed a critique of the state and the relation between self-determination and state formation. "Stalin approached the national problem as that of establishing a state. This approach affected all socialist systems and national liberation movements. Lenin also accepted this right of nations to self-determination and its reduction to state formation", Öcalan had argued. "A separate state became the sacred principle of the socialist credo. To be a socialist and to give support for the establishment of a state by oppressed and colonised nations were considered one and the same. If you thought differently, you were not a socialist" (Öcalan, 2012: 271–2). Öcalan became convinced that state formation must not be mistaken for independence and self-determination. On the contrary, statecraft had corroded the political domain and had resulted in civic degradation, a vision Öcalan shared with Bookchin.

> We would like to inform you that your kind letter with your positive remarks about Mr. Öcalan has meanwhile been read at the second General Asssembly of the Kurdistan People's Congress,[7] which took place in the Kurdish mountains this summer, and has been much applauded. (Letter to Janet Biehl and Murray Bookchin, dated 12 October, 2004)[8]

The second General Assembly of the Kurdistan People's Congress (*Kongra-Gel Kurdistan*) was held between May 16 and May 26, 2004, in Qandil, the rugged and mountainous area in the eastern part of Kurdistan where the PKK has bases. But the reading of the letter had been a close call and the reference to applause belies a complex political process. Oliver Kontny recounts the details:

> I was in a hotel in Jordan on my way to Qandil and checked my emails and then there was this response from Bookchin. The letter was like an encouraging address really. So I printed it out and kept it in my pocket. When I arrived in Qandil […] I told the people, "Look we have this brand new message from Bookchin, it just arrived by email yesterday. Do you want to read it out at the conference tomorrow?" What happened then was quite interesting. […] The chair, Abdullah Hijab, a Kurdish liberal nationalist, said, "Look, we have much more powerful friends in the USA. Sorry, but who cares about some marginal anarchist with 50 followers?" So he was basically mocking this thing. He was saying it was not going to happen. (Oliver Kontny, personal communication, 29 November, 2015)

The congress, however, was co-chaired by Abdullah Hijab and Asya Deniz, as Kontny noted:

> But at that time they already had the system of co-chairing, and the co-chair, Asya Deniz, she was saying, "Look, sorry, but you know Bookchin is quite important for our leader, and if we get a message from him we should read it and I'm going to do it." She took my letter and she made a translation. She then read it out herself at the conference, and they could not stop her. So, that was quite a great moment, because people were standing up, there was this standing ovation, and people were really excited about this. So you could see a lot of delegates in the room who

7 The Kurdistan People's Congress or *Kongra-Gel Kurdistan* was the name the PKK assumed in the period 2003–2005.

8 The letter is unsigned but was apparently written by Schneiderbanger and Heider.

> actually thought this was very, very important, historic. (Oliver Kontny, personal communication, 29 November, 2015)

Clearly, this was a key moment, not just at the congress, but for the future direction of the movement as a whole, the shape the future struggle would take:

> At the time there wasn't really space for intellectual discussion. There was this split in the leadership. Osman Öcalan and Nizamettin Taş, who were top-commanders, had broken away. They disagreed with the new emerging paradigm. They just said, "No, we need a national state, we want to have an independent Kurdistan, this is the time to do it and we want to realise this together with the USA." Since they were quite high-ranking, they could assert their agenda on behalf of the movement. But a critical portion of the rank and file and some of the leadership fiercely opposed them and wanted them ousted. […] The situation was quite tense. And of course, what do people with a background in Marxism and military leadership do? They were saying this is not a time to discuss. Some younger people were much more open to this whole alternative anarchist, feminist, ecological thinking, and they felt they were being marginalised in the process.
>
> The leadership of the party had very different concerns at the time, but all these contributed more to a closure than an opening of a discussion about the ideas of Öcalan. Murat Karayılan was basically interested in keeping the movement together. Duran Kalkan had an open attitude, but as a convinced Marxist he had his own reservations about anarchism and they weren't all wrong. For Cemil Bayık, the main thing was to create an atmosphere that was not polarising, and would include the right wing or nationalist opposition as well. Not to antagonise them, that was his main thing. Yes, democratisation, that's good, but democratisation should not mean we go for more radical leftist thought, but do something which will include people who were nationalist, liberals, since we need national unity at this time, that was his position. (Oliver Kontny, personal communication, 29 November, 2015)

Yet in this period in the beginning of the 2000s, there was a back and forth between accommodating the group around Osman Öcalan and Nizamettin Taş and ostracising them. Some thought they should stay part of the movement, thinking that things could be worse if they would leave and work against the party, while others thought that their stay within the party would further obstruct the transformation process. In August 2004, two months after the

second General Assembly, Osman Öcalan, as member of the Presidential Council of the PKK, announced the establishment of a new political party, *Partîya Welatparêzên Demokrat ên Kurdistan* (Patriotic Democratic Party of Kurdistan, PWD). He was joined by Nizamettin Taş, another member of the Presidential Council, along with other PKK cadres, such as the former representative of the PKK in Europe, Kani Yılmaz,[9] and a large number of fighters. The PWD rejected the new paradigm of non-statist self-organisation, holding to the establishment of an independent state as the ultimate aim of the struggle. Abdullah Öcalan disqualified this as "primitive nationalism".

The conflict that centred around the PKK's new political outlook had been preceded by another, but somehow related conflict, involving some of the key actors who would later establish the PWD. Following the arrest and imprisonment of Abdullah Öcalan, his status in the PKK had become an issue. Should Öcalan remain the political leader of the party, with effective competences over the organisation and giving direction to the movement as a whole, or should he be considered a symbolic leader, without the practical power to influence the party's tactical and strategic politics, as Osman Öcalan and his fellows thought? Discussions on the subject became entwined with the position of women's organisations. Against Öcalan's argument for the need for women to build their own structures of democratic politics, attempts were made to bring the PKK-affiliated women's movement under the control of the (mainly male) party leadership. However, this was countered by fierce opposition from women in the organisation, who successfully defended their independence and autonomous decision-making powers. KJK member Malatyalı Dîlan explains what occurred thus:

> A tendency emerged saying, "The leadership[10] is imprisoned in İmralı and the women's movement is now left to our mercy, so from now on you have to get our approval for all decisions you take." Of course, the women's movement did not accept this. There was an uprising. We made a now famous uprising. Whatever happens, no way will men make decisions about us. Our uprising was about this. All the women cut their hair. […] It was a way to show that we did not accept [what was happening]. It created a shock: "What's happening within the PKK movement?" This was the beginning of an insurgency. If the women do this today, other things

9 Kani Yılmaz and Sabri Tori, who had also defected from the PKK, were killed in a car bomb explosion in Suleymania in 2006. The PKK is widely believed to be responsible, but never claimed responsibility.

10 In the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan is also referred to as "the leadership".

> may happen tomorrow. Everywhere we have hundreds of women fighters and we are organised. […] Because of these actions, our male friends had to give up on what they had insisted on. […] These actions took place in the process towards the 7th Congress, in 2000. (Malatyalı Dîlan, personal communication, 29 October, 2014)

By turning Abdullah Öcalan into a symbolic leader, and taking his mandate, a move had been made to centralise decision-making powers, and to subordinate the women's movement to the presidential council of the PKK (men). The women's movement disputed the validity of the decision to turn Öcalan into a "honorary leader" and by doing so successfully defended their independence and autonomous decision-making powers.

The PWD did not manage to become much more than a name and a website, and the party passed into history shortly after its establishment, but the split was a sign of the huge turmoil the paradigm change had created within the party and among its militants. It is estimated that about 1,500 militants left the organisation between 2003 and 2005, when confrontations were at their height between those who wanted to adhere to the statist paradigm and a classical political party with its leadership in command and those who wanted to move with Abdullah Öcalan towards a post-statist and post-patriarchal (beyond the state and dominant male) understanding of politics. Fearing a collapse, Abdullah Öcalan initiated a further reorganisation of the PKK.

First, he called for the formation of a "Preparatory Committee for a Reconstruction"[11] (of the PKK), concerned with the re-founding of the PKK as an ideological power grouping (PKK, 2005). This was to be mainly concerned with the education of cadres to give direction to the movement, not through "order-words" demanding obedience and docility (Conley, 2012: 102), but by internalising an ideological orientation (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2011). Of course, theory without practice is sterile, and the ideological reorientation had to be enacted, so that the party was not the apex from which everything trickled down but part of a broader network of organisationally independent structures. Further to the women's party, organisational differentiation was advanced with the establishment of separate civil and military structures, political parties and self-defence forces, for the organisation of the struggle in Iraq, in Iran and in Syria:

11 In Turkish "Hazırlık Amaçlı Yeniden İnşa Komitesi".

> It was a brilliant move of Öcalan to start this differentiation, like the people in Rojava need their own political party, and the people in East Kurdistan need their own political party. At the time people did not understand that. They said, "What the hell, we want our PKK!" In the long term, you see how important this was. To have specialisations for some things, better knowledge, for example, people started to pull out the knowledge about Iranian history. The general movement did not know so much about Iranian history. They would not know that much about Syrian history. They would know something about the Kurdish history and the history of Turkey. So this differentiation turned out to be pretty important. (Reimar Heider, personal communication, 24 December, 2015)

Indeed, the first attempts to implement the new ideas did create problems. The decentralisation and dissolution of hierarchies resulted in a fragmentation and loss of coherence:

> In 2005 everything fell apart, they barely kept the stuff together. Like, in retrospective you can say, ok, a lot of controversy was reduced by the right wing leaving the party, or what I would call the right wing. […] That really helped to reunify thinking and practice. And then you had the thing with people saying, "Yes, well isn't this all about decentralisation and empowerment of the base?" And then they set up dozens of committees for all kinds of work in the movement and later they said, well, "It doesn't work. Everyone is just doing their own thing and there's no … well, we said something about collaboration and coordination and there is no coordination anymore. Everybody is just doing their own thing and that doesn't work". […] And then luckily stuff worked in Rojava. […] It was trial and error. (Reimar Heider, personal communication, 24 December, 2015)

Thus, the re-founding of the PKK as an ideological party was to usher in a new coordination mechanism, provided by the Association of Communities in Kurdistan (*Koma Civakên Kurdistan*, KCK).[12] With the congress, Kongra-Gel, as its assembly, the KCK comprised a network of village, city, and regional councils, functioning as an organisation to provide an ideological orientation for structures and institutions that were oriented to the idea of democracy, ecology, and gender equality. The dialectic between an organisation giving ideological

12 The KCK was actually a continuation of the Association of Associations in Kurdistan (*Koma Komalên Kurdistan*, KKK), established at the 2005 congress and renamed in 2007.

orientation and autonomous institutions taking their own decisions did not work well from the beginning, however, and it was not until further developments, south of the Turkish-Syrian border, in Rojava, that the difficult process of reinvention started to bear fruit (Knapp, Flach, and Ayboga, 2014; Güneş and Lowe, 2015).

Discussion and Conclusion

Putting the developments at the beginning of the 2000s in a broader context, we may argue that the PKK and the paradigm change emerged from a learning process as a *learning from defeat*. In the history of the PKK, I have distinguished three moments of defeat. The first was the defeat of the revolutionary left in Turkey at the beginning of the 1970s, which shaped the process of group formation leading to the establishment of the PKK in 1978 (Jongerden and Akkaya, 2011). The defeat of the revolutionary left shortly after the Kurdistan Revolutionaries' formation at the beginning of the 1970s had a profound impact on the development of the group. Öcalan evaluated this defeat of the left as a valuable lesson through which to consider regrouping and rethinking strategy (Sayın, 1997: 71–83), arguing that the main reason for the defeat was that the revolutionary left in Turkey had entered into a direct confrontation with the state while it was still weak. With this insight, the group around Öcalan decided to organise itself thoroughly before entering into such a confrontation again (Sayın, 1997: 71–83; Jongerden and Akkaya, 2011). The second defeat comprised the military setbacks the PKK encountered from the beginning of the 1990s, which coincided with and eventually resulted in the institutionalisation of a women's movement. The third was the capture and imprisonment of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. This capture of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 and his imprisonment in Turkey was a major shock for the party but ultimately resulted in the revision and reorientation leading to the party's present ideology and organisation.

The profound ideological reorientation and political reorganisation of the PKK, here referred to as a paradigm change, from a political party oriented towards the construction of a state to a network aiming at the development of self-government, was an extended and uneven process. The transformation was more than a reorientation involving organisational adjustment; it was no less than the development of a new mindset, one that involved the questioning of historically entrenched gender hierarchies and deeply held political axioms. In the process of this major shift in direction, the PKK lost a substantial number of long-time activists and cadres. However, although at times it looked as

if the movement might fall apart, the result was a transformation that gave it a new impetus, enabling the PKK not only to survive and move with the times but also, one may claim, to spearhead a new political development and realisation of democracy in the Middle East. This transformation of the PKK involved a critique of primitive nationalism and the state, which developed in relation to an analysis of gender inequalities.

In the work of Murray Bookchin, Öcalan found the ideas through which he could give a positive systematic to his critique of the way socialist and national liberation movements generally had tried to develop their alternatives. He must have recognised his own preferences in the approach of Bookchin, who did not limit himself to critical analysis and deconstruction but imagined and developed political perspectives for a radical societal transformation. According to Bookchin (1991: 3), "[p]erhaps the greatest single failing of movements for social reconstruction" – referring in particular to the left and organisations that claim to speak for the oppressed – "is their lack of a politics that will carry people beyond the limits established by the status quo." Öcalan's main drive is precisely to go beyond the status quo and deal with socio-economic and socio-cultural injustice. His thought offers a perspective to imagine liberation, or the project of emancipation, beyond the state, through an empowering of society. However, Öcalan's thinking does not provide a blueprint of any sort and rather leaves those who feel inspired by his ideas to find out for themselves how to develop their own working practices.

The centrality of Öcalan in this transformation cannot be contested. However, data presented in this research makes three things clear. First, Öcalan's ideas were initially met with confusion and reservation. Confusion arose over the question of the extent to which his ideas implied an abandonment and thus a step back in the struggle for liberation or else a moving beyond the state, giving the struggle for liberation new directions and dynamics. When more and more people within the PKK became convinced the latter was the case, a rethinking of the liberation struggle as concerned with the creation of new political formations beyond the state, then the question of its "workability" came to the fore. Was it viable? This was connected to another issue, namely the balance between self-organisation and coordination. Too much of one could result in fragmentation and a falling apart, a serious risk the PKK faced in the mid-2000s, while too much of the other could lead to the formation of a centralised bureaucracy, which was already one of the prime objects of Öcalan's state critique. Third, there was also the issue of directionality and agency. Who was in charge? Though it was Öcalan who, for example, mobilised militants in the struggle against what was called "the dominant male", it was the women in the PKK who mobilised Öcalan in order to defend their organisational

independence. These three issues, i) confusion and reservation within the movement, ii) the question of the relationship between self-organisation and coordination, and iii) the leader who mobilises but also was mobilised against centralising tendencies within the party at the beginning of the 2000s, and the conflicts related to them, show that the paradigm shift was not simply engineered from above nor window-dressing, but an impetuous process of change. To date, the transformation has been a difficult and a cautious process, with the PKK leadership trying and failing to keep the party together. However, it is also the resulting fissure that has enabled success, since it made it possible to move forward and create an internal ideological consistency. Internal divide on the question of the state and the position of the women's movement had created a turmoil that resulted not so much in ambiguity as paralysis. Yet, the PKK has been able to reinvent itself after, or rather through, defeat. By dwelling on setbacks and analysing failures, by looking at the "bad side", the PKK was able to (continue to) develop and organically "reinvent" itself as a movement that makes history. As Marx had argued in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, "[i]t is the bad side that produces the movement which makes history" (Balibar, 2014: 98).

List of Interviews

Rıza Altun, member of the leadership of the PKK, date of interview: October 30, 2014. The interview took place in Qandil.

Cemil Bayık, member of the leadership of the PKK, date of interview: October 30, 2014. The interview took place in Qandil.

Reinhard Bernbeck, date of interview: June 22, 2016. The interview took place through skype.

Malatyalı Dîlan, member of the KJA (Kongreya Jinen Azad), data of interview July 24, 2017. The interview took place in Diyarbakır.

Fatma, member of the KJK women's movement, date of interview: October 29, 2014. The interview took place in Qandil.

Reimar Heider, date of interview: December 24, 2015. The interview took place at Wageningen University.

Duran Kalkan, member of the leadership of the PKK, date of interview: October 28, 2014. The interview took place in Qandil.

Oliver Kontny, date of interview: November 29, 2015. The interview took place through Skype.

Roger van Zwanenberg, publisher at Pluto Press between 1987 and 2011, date of interview: June 27, 2016. The interview took place through Skype.

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Book Reviews

Sebastian Maisel, ed., *The Kurds: an Encyclopedia of Life, Culture, and Society*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2018, 376 pp., (ISBN: 978-1-4408-4256-6).

Reference works available on Kurdish history, culture, geography, language and society lacked, until recently, a comprehensive coverage and rather focused on overlapping but different cultural and geographical categories, for example the Islamic World, Middle East, or Arab World. Many of those works study the Kurds mostly from a political perspective and few address the social and cultural aspects. Furthermore, misconceptions about the Kurds dominate public opinion despite their wide media coverage in the West. International interest has grown as the Kurds in the Middle East have become politically more prominent and visible during the last two or three decades. Sebastian Maisel's *The Kurds* comes out as a response to this increasing interest.

General history books on the Kurds have been available since the appearance of Şerefxan Bidlisi's *Şerefname*, a chronical of Kurdish dynasties, in 1596–97. The tradition of writing articles and books that contain general information on the Kurds continued into the twentieth century. Among these works one can include the book length encyclopedia entry on the Kurds by V. Minorsky written for the first edition of *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1913–36), Basile Nikitine's book *Les Kurdes: Étude Sociologique et Historique* [*The Kurds: Sociological and Historical Study*] (Paris, 1956) and Thomas Bois's *Connaisance des Kurdes* [*Knowing the Kurds*] (Beirut, 1965). Meanwhile, dictionaries on Kurdish personalities appeared in Persian, Arabic and Kurdish. Mihemed Emîn Zekî's two volumes *Mashahir al-Kurd wa Kurdistan fi al-Dawr al-Islami* [*Famous Kurds and Kurdistan during Islamic Period*] (Baghdad and Cairo, 1945–1947), Baba Mardukh-i Ruhani's three volumes *Tarikh-i Mashahir-i Kurd* [*History of Prominent Kurds*] (Tehran, 1364–66/1985–1987) and Muhammad Ali al-Harki al-Kurdi's eight volumes *al-Mawsu'ah al-Kubra li-Mashahir al-Kurd 'abra al-Tarikh* [*The Great Encyclopedia of the Prominent Kurds through the History*]

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(Beirut, 2008–2013) are some of major works on Kurdish notables, including scholars, poets, politicians, and literati.

The Kurds were largely ignored in most of the latter half of the twentieth century, in great part due to the denial of their existence by authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. By the end of the century, an increase in political activity in the region led to a surge of interest in the Western world. Dictionaries, encyclopedias and handbooks have appeared in major Western languages, such as Boris James and Jordi Tejel Gorgas's *Les Kurdes en 100 Questions* [*The Kurds in 100 Questions*] (Paris, 2018) and Michael M. Gunter's *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds* (Lanham, MD, 2004). Maisel's encyclopedic work on the Kurds is the latest of such works, combined with the long tradition of reference works covering Kurdish society, culture, politics and history. Compared with other reference works, this book has an unconventional approach towards the subject because it addresses various topics in varying formats. It does not offer conventional A to Z short encyclopedia entries. An expert for a given topic writes a short essay on a theme and the themes vary. They include diverse topics such as food culture, Kurdish diaspora in a Western country or translation of an original document on Kurdish history. This collaborative work features 25 contributors, most of them new generation scholars.

The work is divided into three parts. The first part covers thematic essays on various topics from geography, politics, religion, language, and history to education, literature, gender, media, food, dress, music, and cinema. The section "Origins and History", although somewhat incomplete for the Ottoman period, offers a concise historical background. The twentieth century, especially the period after the First World War, is mostly covered in the sections of "Conflicts and Issues" and "Political Systems and Parties." These three sections comprise political history. This work distinguishes itself due to the excellent historical overviews provided for a wide range of topics on geography, religion, education, literature, settlement, media, and cinema. Under "Geography", social, historical, political and human geography is discussed alongside physical geography. Kurdish tribal structure dominates the section on "Social Organization and Family Life". Non-tribal Kurds are mentioned shortly here whereas urban Kurdish population is mostly covered under "Housing and Settlements". In general, the essays in this part are well written, informative and comprehensive.

The Kurds are dispersed among several Middle Eastern as well as Western countries. The second part is focused on the profile of these Kurdish communities. The populations in Middle Eastern countries are treated as indigenous minority groups, while those in the West are presented as diaspora immigrants. Iran, Iraq, and Syria are well known, besides Turkey, for centuries-old residing Kurdish populations. Less known groups in Russia, Caucasus,

Israel, and Lebanon are also covered. Western countries such as Germany, Sweden, France, the United States and Russia, that hold a significant part of Kurdish diaspora, are also treated in individual essays. These essays, depending on the character of the Kurdish population in each country, focus on the historical formation of diaspora and native communities, political parties, prominent individuals, cultural organisations, and their involvement in local and national politics.

Certain important historical and modern documents are translated in the last part of the reference work, organised chronologically and accompanied with an introduction, sources and further reading. Documents range from excerpts from the classical poetry of Ahmed-i Khani to article 140 of the new Iraqi constitution. No work, to my knowledge, brings together such documents on Kurdish history, literature, religion, and politics.

The book successfully combines earlier and current research. The essays are easy to follow, each structured with subtitles. Information boxes on various interesting topics, such as a movie, a musical instrument or certain personalities, can be found throughout the book. The list of suggested reading helps students and researchers deepen research and knowledge on a given topic. However, one may consider that a fourth part, with biographical essays on political, literary, female and historical personalities, could have been added. The part on historical documents could have included more documents. The photos and maps are not sufficient: there is only one demographic map indicating where the majority of Kurdish population exists. More maps could have been added on Kurdish historical, linguistic, religious, tribal, and ethnic diversity. More images on historical architecture, artifacts, as well as drawings from Kurdish artists could have been used. The book's bibliography is inadequate and the sources are not classified according to disciplines or area studies. The glossary of Kurdish words is kept short, spelled out in English orthography but not in modern Kurdish. Nevertheless, this is a very useful reference book for researchers on the Kurds and a sourcebook for undergraduate courses on the Middle East.

Metin Atmaca | ORCID: 0000-0002-4792-9592
Social Sciences University of Ankara, Turkey
metinatmaca@gmail.com

Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş, eds., *Non-State Armed Actors in the Middle East: Geopolitics, Ideology, Strategy*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 278 pp., (ISBN: 978-3-319-55287-3).

Non-State Armed Actors in the Middle East: Geopolitics, Ideology, Strategy is an edited volume focussing mainly on the rise and role of the Islamic State (IS), the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the People's Protection Units (YPG), as well as, to a lesser extent, Al-Hashd al-Shaabi in Syria and Iraq. The two editors and most of the contributors are faculty staff and researchers of the International Relations department at Sakarya University in Turkey. The editors place the significance of the book against a background of a pervasion of the international landscape by non-state armed actors (NSAAs). Defined as an armed group with the capacity to exercise control over a territory in order to achieve a political goal, NSAAs are regarded here as having emerged in the context of inter-state and proxy conflict, this being related to a decline of state structures and the parallel emergence of cross-border ethnic loyalties. In their conclusions to the book, the editors make a plea for strong collaborations between regional states in order to deal with the threats posed by NSAAs and their international supporters.

In the chapter "The Transformation of the Regional Order and Non-State Armed Actors", Şaban Kardaş argues that the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is facing a restructuring characterised by sectarianism, ethnic mobilisation, social fragmentation and the militarisation of politics. Due to the weakening of states in the region, NSAAs have assumed critical roles, moving beyond the role of proxies and pursuing their own agenda. A main concern of the book is the development of the PYD/YPG into a significant NSAA in the region. In the chapter "Understanding the 'foreign policy' of the PYD/YPG as a Non-State Actor in Syria and Beyond", Berkan Ögür and Zana Baykal try to explain the rise of the PYD/YPG as an exceptional non-state actor in the region. The authors relate the rise of the PYD/YPG to the symbolisation of Kobani for the purpose of developing foreign relations. Moreover, the fight against IS not only yielded foreign ties, but also forged stronger relations between Kurds. In the chapter by Galip Dalay titled "The Kurdish Fight against IS: Realizing the Virtual Kurdistan through Factionalized Politics in a Fragmented Homeland", the author argues that "historically speaking" it was difficult to talk about a common Kurdish public sphere, but that recent years have witnessed a growing tendency towards trans-border cooperation and unity. This has become possible as a result of the rise of IS, which operated as the Kurds' constitutive other. Tuncay Kardaş and Murat Yeşiltaş continue

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this theme in their chapter "Global Politics of Image and the Making of a Legitimate Non-State Armed Actor: Syrian Kurds and 'the secular West' in Kobane". They also argue that in IS, the Kurds have found a new constitutive other through which to define their political identity and which has given rise to a new geopolitical imagination associated with nationhood. Through the construction of the IS-PYD pairing as a barbarism-reason dichotomy, the PYD has been able to shift the security agenda of the United States and the West in their favour.

In the chapter "Path to Become a State", Ömer Behram Özdemir and Recep Tayyip Gürler discuss the evolution from Jama'at Al-Tawhid Wal-Jihad to IS. This is partly attributed to the incorporation of a Ba'athist corps, the "Fedayeen Saddam", and the emergence of a civil war in Syria creating new operational opportunities. The IS insurgency is defined as the sixth revolt in the following chapter by Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş, "The New Middle East, ISIL and the 6th revolt against the West". The concept of a "revolt against the West" is borrowed from Hedley Bull's *The Expansion of International Society* (1985). The authors summarise Bull's description of the five phases in the revolt against the west's domination of the world as follows: a struggle for equal sovereignty (legal struggle), an anti-colonial struggle (political struggle), a struggle against white supremacy (racial struggle), a struggle against exploitation and global capitalism (economic struggle) and liberal values and conceptions of human rights (cultural struggle). The authors analyse IS insurgency as a sixth revolt, defined as a "challenging experiment in state making" (161).

Bilgay Duman and Göktuğ Sönmez discuss the Al-Hasd Al-Shaabi in "An Influential Non-State Actor in the Iraqi Context", arguing that, fighting on the side of the Iraqi Armed Forces as an important actor in the armed struggle against IS, the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs) effectively seized a portion of the state's area of control. In "Operationalizing the Vision of Building a New Caliphate" by Farhad Rezaei, the IS conception of a coming apocalypse is linked to its desire to gain access to weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear and radiological arms. Tuncay Kardaş and Ömer Behram Özdemir discuss "The Making of European Foreign Fighters" and the role of internet-enabled networks, arguing that for a fight against IS both off-line and online measures are needed. In "What the ISIS Crisis Means for the Middle East", Burak Kadercan asserts that the rise of IS was an embarrassment for the security community. Stating that the threat IS poses can only be dealt with by taking into consideration the broader crisis in the region, Kadercan argues that the issue should be seen in terms not only of how to fight IS but also of how to deal with that crisis. In their final chapter, the editors of the book start to

answer this question with the development of security collaboration between the states in the region.

The book contains some minor inconsistencies, for example in the spelling of names (for example Kobani and Kobane) and the use of abbreviations (NSAA, ANSA, NSA to refer to non-state armed actors) that could have been prevented by a thorough copy-editing. Other inconsistencies are related to contradictory claims or assumptions about NSAAs as both a recent phenomenon and one that has been around for many decades. Furthermore, the geographical focus of the book is much narrower than its title suggests. Concentrating almost exclusively on Syria and Iraq leaves many NSAAs in the Middle East undiscussed. For example, the book does not include a discussion of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the PLO, Hamas, the Mujahideen-e Khalq or, surprisingly, the KDP, PUK and PKK. The limitation of the book is not just geographical, moreover, since it hardly discusses paramilitary militias aligned with the state, with the exception of Al-Hashd al-Shaabi. The lack of coverage of the militias fighting in Syria alongside Assad or supported by Turkey, for example, is an obvious omission.

In fact, *Non-State Armed Actors in the Middle East* is written from a Turkish security agenda perspective. Its main concern is the PYD/YPG. Though some of the contributions discuss the genealogy and rise of IS, the main focus is on how IS allegedly helped to create international legitimacy for the PYD/YPG and a common Kurdish political sphere. An important claim is that the emergence of IS helped "the Kurds" to develop a self-image as secular and democratic. This, it is argued, opened up international support for further ethnic mobilisation, resulting in a weakening of the states in the region. The authors attest that the emergence of IS had a unifying effect on the Kurds, contributing to the emergence of a fragile, though common Kurdish politics. It is against this context of a weakening of the existing state system and the alleged emergence of a common Kurdish political sphere that the editors call for an extraterritorial working system of collective security provisioning in the region. Stronger collaboration between the states in the region, the editors suggest, may counter great power interventions and weaken trans-border loyalties between the Kurds. As such, *Non-State Armed Actors in the Middle East* reads as a political textbook on how to combat the PYD/YPG.

Joost Jongerden | ORCID: 0000-0002-0076-732X
Wageningen University, The Netherlands
joost.jongerden@wur.nl

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Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes*. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2018, 756 pp., (ISBN: 9783863095512).

The Bedirxani family has long been a staple name in the politics of Northern Kurdistan due to their contributions to the maintenance of an elite-driven Kurdish nationalist agenda as well as the high visibility of some of their family members. Yet, until recently we lacked academic monographs dedicated to this important family's multi-faceted histories. In addition to the politics of studying the Kurds in Turkey, the family's sheer size and tumultuous history, as well as the multi-sited and multi-language archival research its study requires, posited a colossal task for any researcher. In her recently published doctoral dissertation, Barbara Henning has taken on this challenge. Leaving the story of Bedirxan himself to other scholars, Henning's narrative covers *mir* Bedirxan's numerous progeny and follows them to a number of places including but not limited to Istanbul, Damascus, Beirut, France, Germany, and the mandate Syria.

Despite the relatively short period of four years that went into its making, Henning's multifaceted *Narratives* delivers some impressive results. While her research in the Ottoman archives is limited, in other places she uncovered invaluable documents, including Müveddet Gönensay's memoirs, Abdurrezak Bedirxan's biography in the Georgian National Archives, and the files of Safder, Süreyya, Kamuran, and Celadet in both Ludwig Maimullianus Universitat and the French archives. Following their complicated stories and webbed connections from the 1870s to 1940, Henning analyses how the members of a cosmopolitan Ottoman bureaucratic elite family – one that was also Kurdish – weathered the storm that brought the end of the Ottoman Empire and birthed the ethno-nationalist Turkish Republic (and the mandate Syria). Henning carefully demonstrates that members of the same family took varying paths and claimed different kinds of identities. This focus also serves as her core argument: the Bedirxanis were an Ottoman family that lived and operated within Ottoman frameworks and networks. On the one hand, this argument provides a much-needed break from the singular take that the Bedirxanis were the harbingers of Kurdish nationalism, on the other hand, in making this novel argument, Henning does not adequately situate their story within broader historical developments in Kurdistan. She also makes the unsupported claim that the Bedirxanis were not prominent before 1820. A cursory look into the Ottoman archives proves otherwise.

Central to the Bedirxani story are two tragic confrontations with the Ottoman state. First, the 1847 defeat of Bedirxan and the permanent banishment of his

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family from its ancestral land of Bohtan. Second, the 1906 murder of the prefect of Istanbul, Rıdvan Pasha, which brought the family to ruin and deprived the Kurds of leadership that might have altered the post-World War I order they found themselves in. Prior to 1906, the Ottoman government carefully managed the family, allowing many of its members to serve as imperial bureaucrats while prohibiting their return to Bohtan due to the fear that they would emerge as a rallying point for the Kurdish population. Following the murder of Rıdvan Pasha, the family's fortunes declined. Bedirxani's twelve sons, for example, were expelled from Galatasaray *Mekteb-i* Sultanisi (Galatasaray High School) and exiled from Istanbul with the rest of the family members who held high positions. In the anti-Kurdish campaign that followed, many other Kurds also lost their jobs and were forced from the city. Following the 1908 coup d'etat, most of the family returned to Istanbul, but it never recovered its powerful position. Nevertheless, pinning their hopes to the idea of an all-inclusive empire, many Bedirxanis joined the Ottoman war efforts; thirty-two of them lost their lives in the process.

Meticulously analysing the lives of a large number of Bedirxanis, including women and children, Henning effectively shows the very different identity choices made by members of the same family, and the strategies employed to negotiate those choices. Drawing on these case studies, and using a theoretical framework based on memory studies, theories of ethnicity and identity, and qualitative network analysis, Hemming is interested in how self-construction (*ich-konstruktionen*) is contingent and capable of changing conjecturally. She argues that identity is not fixed and that ethnicity is not the most useful concept in understanding social and political behavior at the turn of the century. There was not a uniform Bedirxani, or even Kurdish, identity.

Given the fact that Bedirxan left behind about forty children, this should not come as a surprise. However, Henning argues that it does come as a surprise because of a self-serving aura created by certain members of the family, especially the brothers Celadet, Süreyya, and Kamuran, who have exaggerated their family's role in early Kurdish uprisings and their subsequent persecution. She is right that not all members of the Bedirxani family suffered the same fate. It is also true that the story of Bedirxani family is larger than that of the Celadet-Kamuran-Sureyya trio, and even of Bedirxan himself. Some (like Cemal Kutay or Vasıf Çınar) successfully assimilated or integrated into the Turkish republic, and even claimed the mantle of Turkish nationalism. They were not persecuted but rather emerged as republican elites. Others married into elite families in Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Turkey and integrated into those societies. Intent on demystifying Bedirxani accounts of their formative role in

the formation of Kurdish nationalism, Henning carefully demonstrates that the family's story is larger than the parts that have been privileged by Kurdish nationalist historiography.

Hemming's published dissertation makes immense contributions to late Ottoman, early republican, and Kurdish historiographies. However, situated in the German tradition of publishing long dissertations, its 756 pages are not for the faint-hearted nor for the non-specialist. With careful editing and perhaps a year or two of revision, the book could have lost some unnecessary weight while gaining in clarity and accuracy. Given the innumerable names, places, etc., mentioned in the book, it would have benefited from an index. Similarly, a family tree and some family photographs would have helped the reader grasp the myriad connections Henning traces. The outdated numerical system used to divide chapters and sub-sections, and the lack of proper introductions and conclusions, makes it difficult at times to follow the lines of argument. An editor versed in Kurdish historiography and a more careful reading of some of the bibliographic sources could have prevented numerous avoidable mistakes. For example, Wadie Jwadieh is listed a Kurdish activist-cum-historian (he was from an Iraqi Christian family); Seyyid Taha II is listed as a younger brother of Seyyid Abdulkadir (he was his nephew); Sheikh Ubeydullah is listed as a relative of Seyyid Abdulqadir (he was his father); Izzedin Şir is listed as both a relative and the son of Mir Sevdin; Sherif Pasha's Baban origins are not mentioned and he is classified as one of those who "discovered" his Kurdish origins; Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji, who led an important resistance against the British, is slighted as "Mahmud Barzani" who "instigated, a local anti-British rebellion in 1919." Aside from these serious factual errors, several of Henning's arguments, like the ones about 1843 and 1847, and her conclusions about the trio of brothers would definitely raise some serious eyebrows. But this is what a dissertation should be: bold and argumentative.

With its invaluable data on numerous Bedirxanis, Henning's book, among many other things, can be read as a set of stories about statelessness and its dire consequences. It shows that what most of their counterparts do with a sense of freedom and pride, Kurdish intellectuals had to do in secrecy, poverty, and exile, constantly fearing persecution and financial and familial ruin. Many were left without even a place to be buried in peace. They were, and most still are, hostages, as Süreyya Bedirxan noted.

Sabri Ateş | ORCID: 0009-0001-4054-9992
Southern Methodist University, USA
sates@smu.edu

Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef, eds., *The Kurdish Question Revisited*. London: C Hurst & Co., 2017, 712 pp., (ISBN-10: 0190687185; ISBN-13: 978-0190687182).

At the time of writing (February 2019), the Kurdish led Syrian Defence Forces' (SDF) battle against ISIS is coming to an end. ISIS' few remaining fighters are surrounded in the Syrian desert town of Baghouz and the demise of its so-called Islamic state is imminent. It should be a moment of unrestrained celebration for the Kurdish people, yet as one threat is close to resolution, ongoing and new ones appear on the horizon: the conflict in the Turkish ruled part of Kurdistan is as entrenched as ever, Afrin remains under Turkish-led occupation and the Turkish government has been openly menacing the other cantons in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria with invasion. The Kurdish region in Iraq remains characterised by economic mismanagement and increasing authoritarianism, while the Kurds in Iran have continued their struggle to little discernible effect, unacknowledged by the international public. The optimism of just a few years ago, with the consolidation of autonomous rule in Rojava, the territorial gains of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq and the peace process in Turkey has been greatly diminished. These tumultuous recent years have unexpectedly catapulted the Kurdish people into the international limelight, capturing the popular attention of audiences largely uninformed or misinformed of their history and the complexity of the region's political challenges. Accordingly, Stansfield and Shareef's brilliant volume is most timely and will serve as a future guide for all parties interested in understanding contemporary Kurdish politics, history and culture.

To review a book of such size (35 chapters and more than 700 pages) and range is challenging. It is simply not feasible, as is common in many academic reviews of edited books, to summarise all the chapters and reflect on their individual strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, as an anthology of such dimensions will be sought out by readers with very different interests and expectations; my thoughts on it as a reviewer, also naturally reflect my own interests and varying levels of (in)expertise. With that in mind, it is worth stating that my own research has focused on the Kurdish mobilisation since the 1970s in Turkey and my familiarity with the other Kurdish regions and relevant disciplines is relatively speaking, less developed. Nevertheless, it is clear that this volume makes a remarkable contribution to our field. It is written in an accessible style throughout, rendering it the perfect departure point for audiences less familiar with Kurdish issues, yet the depth of the book also makes it a key text for scholars working in the field. It glistens with some of the most

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prominent scholars of Kurdish studies, encompassing disciplines as diverse as history (and historiography), religious studies, musicology, literary criticism and political science. I have no doubt, that it will be among the first listed books on future Middle East politics syllabi and will become a key book for scholars and academics, policy makers and the curious public alike, for the foreseeable future.

The book's first general section is very well put together. Tejel's chapter (*New Perspectives on Writing the History of the Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey: A History and State of the Art Assessment*) provides a concise overview of the evolution of Kurdish studies. The chapter only deals with the discipline of history, but similar discipline specific assessments in linguistics, political science, political economy and anthropology would potentially have also been substantial contributions to the volume. Reflecting my own research interests, I immediately sought out David Romano's chapter (*Social Movement Theory and Political Mobilization in Kurdistan*), in which he outlines the use of social movement theories in the field and lists a number of mostly less experienced scholars (myself included) who have applied these methods. Curiously, he also proceeds to use the chapter to offer a defensive review of his own book. This is a little unexpected as his book at the time of writing was more than ten years old (Romano, 2006), and although it has been critiqued to different extents, it is deservedly recognised as a pioneering work and has been extensively cited. It would have been more interesting to hear his views on how the burgeoning social movement literature on violence in the interim (Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner, 2014; della Porta, 2013, inter alios), could potentially enhance our understandings of contemporary conflict dynamics in Kurdistan.

Although, the book is orthodox in structure divided into country specific sections, a hugely satisfying aspect of the volume is that many of the pieces emphasise the continuities and transnational elements of Kurdistan's culture, politics and history. As anticipated, Bengio's chapter (*Separated but Connected: The Synergic Effects in the Kurdistan Sub-System*) focuses precisely on these linkages, but other chapters such as Leezenberg's (*Religion Among the Kurds: Between Naqshbandi Sufism and IS Salafism*), Lowe and Kaya's chapter (*The Curious Question of the PYD-PKK Relationship*) and Klein's historical chapter (*Journalism Beyond Borders: The Bedirkhans and the First Kurdish Gazette, 1898–1902*) also unravel the threads binding various facets of the Kurdish experience across externally imposed boundaries. That contributions related to general Kurdish issues and not simply those related to explicitly transnational Kurdish ones (for e.g. diaspora and migration research) have moved beyond the strictures of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002) is surely a positive indication of the consolidation of Kurdish studies as a field.

A less satisfying aspect of the volume is that although its genesis was at a workshop at the University of Exeter, thereafter, there appears to have been little dialogue between the chapters. While it may neither be practical nor necessary to share all 35 chapters with all the contributors, it would have likely made for a more coherent read if at least some of the chapters engaged with one another. To give a concrete example: in Posch's chapter (*Fellow Arians and Muslim Brothers: Iranian Narratives on the Kurds*) he argues that PJAK (*Kurdistan Free Life Party*) forces withdrew from Iran in 2011 because of an accord reached after the senior PKK figure Murat Karayılan was captured by Iranian forces (349). In Grojean's chapter in the same section (326), he explained that PJAK's ceasefire came about because of the PKK's urgent need to support the Kurdish movements after the outbreak of the war in Syria (footnote on page 608). Naturally, there is no obligation to provide a definitive explanation, but the existence of two contradictory explanations for the same event with no acknowledgement of one another, is not ideal.

The section dealing with Kurds in Iran is, simply put, rather weak. It includes only three chapters, two of which, Posch's and Entessar's (*The Kurdish Conundrum and the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979–2003*) cover relatively similar ground. Although, the editors openly acknowledge this weakness (xxix), it skews the balance of the book. Albeit not comparable in quantity to the other Kurdish regions, interesting research is being done on Kurds in Iran (Tezcür and Asadzade, 2018), building upon existing works (Ahmadzadeh and Stansfield, 2010; Yildiz and Tayşi, 2007; Vali, 2014). While this limited focus on Kurds in Iran is common in the field (see Baser et al., 2018), it seems that their marginalisation here is a further opportunity lost. Finally, the section's three authors all use different transliterations of the Kurdish leader Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou's name; Qasimlu (Grojean) Ghassemlou (Entessar) Qasemlou (Posch). This could have been avoided by standardising transliteration of names and places throughout the volume or at least clarifying in a footnote for less familiar readers, that all these names refer to a single individual.

The section concerned with Kurds in Iraq is the largest, numbering 11 chapters. It opens with an excellent account of recent developments related to the disputed territories around Kirkuk and the impact the battle against ISIS has had on the Kurdish region in Iraq (KRI). The other chapters in this section are certainly interesting, albeit somewhat eclectic including very specialised contributions on a gendered perspective of education in the KRI, the role of water management and peace education. In general, this section reads somewhat apolitically. In contrast, in the lamentably short section on Kurds in Syria, Kaya and Lowe openly address the hugely contentious question of the relationship between the PYD and the PKK. Similarly in the section on Kurds in Turkey, Jongerden directly addresses the changing ideology of the PKK (*The Kurdistan*

Workers' Party (PKK)*: Radical Democracy and the Right to Self-Determination Beyond the Nation-State*) and Gunes (*Mobilisation of Kurds in Turkey during the 1980s and the 1990s*) looks at PKK and its armed campaign since the 1980s, both highly controversial politicised topics. Yet, in the section on Iraqi Kurds analogously sensitive topics are not covered. There is only passing mention (most explicitly in the chapters by Fischer-Tahrir and Watts) to the bloody civil war between the forces of the KDP (*Kurdistan Democratic Party*) and PUK (*Patriotic Union of Kurdistan*), and little space is dedicated to how they both fought the PKK at different stages. The Gorran party which has challenged them in recent years also receives similarly limited attention. As somebody with only passing familiarity with academic work on the KRI, it is unclear whether the selected chapters reflect a more practically oriented research field there or if in light of ongoing conflict dynamics, local researchers prioritise less contentious topics? It was also notable that in Isakhan's chapter (*The Iraqi Kurdish Response to the "Islamic State": Political Leverage in Times of Crisis*), the critical role of PKK affiliated forces in the operation to reclaim Sinjar mountain went unacknowledged. Regrettably, the contribution by Mohammed Ihsan (*Arabization as Genocide: The Case of the Disputed Territories of Iraq*) lapses into essentialist language when he states that "For both Shia and Sunnis, the idea of society is strongly linked to religion; and this isolates them from the vision that the Kurds have of society, which must be democratic and, most importantly secular" (387). The casual use of such "ethnic common sense" (Brubaker, 2002) does not reflect the high standards found elsewhere in the book.

In light of the vast heterogeneity of peoples in what is commonly understood as Kurdistan, it would have been interesting if some space had been set aside to address the situation of local non-Kurds. This is particularly relevant in light of the more inclusive discourses inherent in the project of Democratic Confederalism advanced to varying extents by the PKK and PYD (*Democratic Union Party*), as well as the HDP (*Peoples' Democratic Party*), and to a lesser extent also by the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq. Although, Zagros' chapter on Yezidis in Armenia (*Kurdish Music in Armenia: The Music of the Yezidis*) is fascinating, the implicit premise in the chapter's title that Yezidis view themselves as Kurdish would be itself worthy of further elaboration. As indeed would some discussion of Kurdish-Armenian and Kurdish-Syriac relations before, during and after the genocides of the early 20th century.

In the introduction, the editors declare their objective to be the creation of a single volume "that attempts to present a comprehensive overview of the multi-faceted Kurdish question, bringing together expertise in an attempt to cover the entirety of the Kurdish-populated areas of the Middle East, and

to bring scholars and specialists from a range of disciplinary backgrounds to provide a snapshot not only of the contemporary situation of the Kurds and Kurdistan, but also to present a state-of-the-art collection of chapters that show the strength of the field of Kurdish studies, broadly defined, today" (xxviii). As is similar with many edited volumes, their endeavour has been extremely successful in some regards, particularly in terms of its inter-disciplinarity and the sheer quality of many of the pieces. It was truly a pleasure to read absolute gems of chapters on topics as varied as the cultural politics of the Kurdish movement by Clémence Scalbert-Yücel to the contestation of memory in Halabja by Nicole Watts, amongst many others which covered material wholly unfamiliar to me. On the other hand, its much less successful in covering "the entirety of the Kurdish-populated areas of the Middle East"; the balance between chapters covering Kurds in Iraq and Turkey simply dwarves those on Kurds in Syria and Iran.

There have been a plethora of edited volumes on Kurdish studies in the last ten years or so (Gunes and Zeydanlıoğlu, 2013; Romano and Gurses, 2014; Tugdar and Al, 2018; Gunter and Ahmed, 2007, inter alios). Davis and Blossey have argued that in an emerging field edited volumes can provide valuable guidance for scholars but that in developed fields "scarcity of literature [...] is seldom a problem" and that "additional edited volumes risk providing the field with little but more stuff to read, unless there is value added in a novel synthesis" (Davis and Blossey, 2011: 247–48). If one reflects on the consolidation of Kurdish studies since Meho's summary of it (1997), the field has truly blossomed, in no small part also because of the contributions of the aforementioned edited volumes. The question that arises for those of us working in the field is should we still consider Kurdish Studies an emerging field? And what role should future edited volumes play in the development of that field? A potential solution is the reinforcement of an existing tendency, the encouragement of volumes with very distinct theoretical approaches and specific questions such as the volume on methodologies of field research (Baser et al., 2018) and the emphasis on spatial dynamics in Kurdish politics (Gambetti and Jongerden, 2015).

Francis O'Connor | ORCID: 0000-0002-6891-770X
Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Germany
Francis.oconnor@eui.eu

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Abbas Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History, New Haven, London: Yale University Press*, 2017, pp. 1000, (ISBN-10: 0300112548, ISBN-13: 978-0300112542).

Abbas Amanat's new book, *Iran: A Modern History*, is a meticulous analysis of the history of Iran, particularly since the emergence of the Shiʿi Safavid Empire (1501–1722). Compared to other respected histories of Iran, Amanat's book distinguishes itself for several reasons. Firstly, the book contains detailed accounts of a range of historical events, shedding light on significant political, cultural, social and economic transformations. For this reason, the book is around 1,200 pages long, painstakingly creating a wide scope for the reader to engage with its ideas and premises, and is written in beautiful and compelling prose. Secondly, *Iran: A Modern History* can be regarded as the most recent historical account of Iran since the early modern times based on previous histories and interdisciplinary research on Iran. It presents a fresh history, raising the bar for further historical research on Iran. Last but not the least, is Amanat's detailed analysis of post-World War II Iran and the era of the White Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s in particular, followed by an engaging assessment of four decades of the Islamic Republic.

The book revolves around Amanat's portrayal of "a delicate sociocultural balance between religion and state" or "socioreligious fabric" shaped by history and preserved by successful ruling dynasties such as the Qajars (1792–1925), ever since the Safavids. For example, Amanat explains, "The Qajar supremacy in the last decades of the eighteenth century endured in part because of favourable internal and international circumstances, but also because loyalty to Shiʿism contributed to preservation of Iran's socioreligious fabric and the Qajars' reinvented sense of national unity" (32). However, the secular modernity and modernisation pursued by the Pahlavis throughout the twentieth century, as a consequence of which politicised Islam emerged and ended the Pahlavi rule in 1979, dealt a severe blow to that balance (see Epilogue). All this being said, I now present a brief critical reading of some distinguishing aspects of the book, and an assessment of the book's inclusion and exclusion of the Kurds.

In his engaging introduction, Amanat sketches a historical background to Iran until the ascendency of the Safavids, identifying factors which, according to him, contributed to the preservation of the name and the culture of Iran since the tenth century. The memories of an ancient past endured, after Iran during antiquity was recognised by its neighbouring powers as a political community: "Both Greek and Hebrew portrayals represented ancient Iran as an alternative space, as the land of the Other, which should be dealt with on

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its own terms" (4). In addition to referring to "Iranshahr as a physical space" (10–15) (i.e. the geographical delineation of the boundaries of ancient Iran), Amanat explained the existence of the centre and peripheries as an old characteristic of Iran:

> Even when the structural deficiencies in the Persian model of government were to be overcome by the ruler or his ministers, there were marginal forces outside the state's immediate reach [...] The expediency of coming to terms with peripheral powers, the rooks [chess pieces] of Hafez's [the fourteenth-century lyricist] verse, was generally acknowledged by the Persian central government, which, instead of costly and often ineffective methods of direct rule, resorted to granting khans of the periphery a semiautonomous status (8–9).

However, "Iranians shared distinct cultural memories and religious beliefs, which gave them a degree of communal identity long before the ideologies of nationalism," the most evident of which was "the tenacity of the Persian language as an enduring and yet adaptable means of communication, source of literary efflorescence, and repository of collective memories and shared symbols" (19). Following these claims is a brief overview of the evolution of Persian throughout centuries by various genres, among them the *Shahnameh*s, which "memorialized a national myth" (21), and poetry epitomised by likes of Ferdowsi, Rudaki, Jalal al-Din Rumi, Saʿdi and Hafez, which "occupied a prominent place in the Persian collective memory" (Ibid).

However, despite providing this myriad of evidence, Amanat does not *explicitly* discuss the relation between power and the Persian language. The "Persian cultural renaissance" beginning in the tenth century continued through the medieval period, until the rise in the early modern times of the "gunpowder Empires", a term Amanat borrows from Marshall Hudgson. The Mugal, Safavid and Ottoman Empires of the early modern times, which were in fact, as Amanat points out, Persianate Empires, marked profound changes. Ferdowsi and Rudaki emerged from the ninth to the eleventh centuries during the powerful Samanid dynasty, which the book presents as the vanguard of the cultural renaissance. This is important, because it is precisely the relation with power which made Persian not only a lingua franca in pre-modern times, but also enabled it to become Iran's national and, then, official language during the formation of modern Iranian nation-state. Ignoring the relation between language and power has historically served the cultural hegemony of Persian in relation to other Iranian cultures, including Kurdish, which are trivialised as "local", and which have literary histories which are considered as

less illustrious. Indeed, the duality of official versus local in modern Iran rests on this historical relation between language and power, which also explains, despite the existence of a relatively tenacious Kurdish langue, the political inferiority of Kurdish.

The book's discussion of the Safavid Empire is of particular importance. The Safavids shaped the structures of today's Iran, determining the role of state and religion and the relationship between them. From this perspective, modernity and the modern state entailed a fundamental crisis between the two entities. According to Amanat, "Despite staging an earnest liberal movement with urban support, the Iranian constitutionalists never really succeeded in defining the relationship between the religious and the political spheres" (383). There were hostile forces, including the great powers, the Qajar regime and the affiliated clerical conservatives: "The all-embracing assault of these hostile forces demonstrates why the experience of modernity in Iran, and the rest of the Middle East, proved lopsided and inconsistent, and why Iran would witness two other major political upheavals in the course of the twentieth century" (ibid). "Constitutionalists insisted that reforms to the institutions of the state would in no way interfere with Islamic principals [sic] and the requirements of the shariʿa, and they repeatedly claimed that *mashruteh* [constitution] was concomitant with the teachings of Islam and its true spirit" (381–2).[1] Despite the Revolution's achievements, however,

> there was little effort in earnest to articulate theoretical boundaries of liberal democracy. In other words, Islam as a comprehensive divine order with claims over the individual, the government, and the community was never seriously dealt with in the constitutional period, nor was an effort made to spell out a workable compromise (382).

According to Amanat (Ibid), "A notable exception, however, was Mohammad Hosain Na'ini (1860–1936), a high-ranking jurist then residing in Najaf", who argued in his book that "Constitutionalism is compatible with the teaching of Shiʿi Islam."

While Iran experienced a series of major political events culminating in the military *coup d'etat* against the government of Muhammad Musaddeq in 1953 over the nationalisation of the oil industry, the 1960s and 1970s are truly significant in the story of the socio-economic, political and cultural transformations of Iran. In this regard the book does not disappoint its readers, and

1 As Amanat explains (334), "The coinage *mashruteh* in fact meant 'conditional,' denoting the setting of conditions on the power of the sovereign."

distinguishes itself from hitherto written histories of Iran by presenting a detailed, gripping analysis of the era of the White Revolution. It covers social, economic, political and cultural aspects of change, and deals with the transformation of the gender order, and the emergence of a culture of dissent in the music and film industries amid the expansion of audio-visual means of communication (see chapters Ten and Eleven). These chapters also deal with the causes of the 1979 Revolution, reviewing the events which resulted in the consolidation of the new Islamic Regime.

Unlike many histories of Iran, the events in revolutionary Kurdistan, the onslaught of the new regime to quell the Kurdish autonomy movement, and the waves of executions of Kurdish activists in the summer of 1979, are discussed at some length in *Iran: A Modern History*. Although the book's account of the events in this period is useful, revolutionary Kurdistan does not achieve its deserved place in such a valuable history of modern Iran. One of the main reasons for this is the dearth of research on Kurdistan during the Revolution, resulting in the false view that the Kurdish movement was "effectively distinguished" (817) by the quelling of the opposition in Iran by late 1983. In later parts of the book, this extends to ignoring the quests of Iran's ethnicities for alternative identity. In this regard, a perfect example is the book's analysis of the 2009 Green Movement. Defying the Iranian state's systematic efforts to construct an Islamic image, "a tenacious quest for alternative identity motivates a vast sector of Iranians, especially urban youth" (906–7). Although this can apply also to the Kurdish urban youth, the overall effort of an ethnic people such as the Iranian Kurds is ignored, and any discussion of why the state has been unable to solve ethnic problems in Iran is avoided. Furthermore, in a discussion of the political organisation the Fada'iyan (founded 1966), the book regrettably claims that "Their advocacy of autonomy for Iran's ethnicities – mostly in the realm of imagination – was theoretically luring but politically *dangerous*, giving an ominous green light to Kurdish, Azarbaijani, Turkmen, Arab, and other dormant *cessation* tendencies" (659. *My emphasis*). In this vague claim, the Kurdish movement is in fact trivialised, being defined as separatist, which has negative connotations in the politics of modern Iran. Represented by different organisations, the Feda'iyan movement, in both theory and practice, has remained an ardent advocate of the Kurds' cultural and political rights.

As Amanat's otherwise excellent book demonstrates, modern histories of Iran do not sufficiently include the histories of the Kurds in that country for methodological and chronological reasons. An Irano-centric approach does not concern itself with detailed analysis of ethnic communities in Iran, while a static political chronology of events is usually reiterated and followed. Research on the period between the fall of the Kurdish Republic of 1946 and the

1979 Revolution, a period which witnessed the impact of the era of the White Revolution on the Kurdistan region in Iran and a profound socio-economic and cultural transformation of Kurdish society, is extremely limited. Moreover, the post-Revolution Kurdish movement in Iran, which went on vigorously for the next decade, crucially defines, alongside the Iran-Iraq war, the Iran of the 1980s. This re-emerged movement was based on previous experiences, and had been shaped by the social change and transformation of the preceding decades which assume such a central space in Amanat's book. Therefore, the first steps towards a greater inclusion of the Kurds, their society and political and cultural movements, is for the histories of Iran to deal with such methodological and chronological shortcomings, which requires their authors' gaining acquaintance with the Kurdish language.

As a conclusionary remark, *Iran: A Modern History* stands out as a dedicated scholarly effort to present a new modern history of a country the socio-economic, political, cultural and ethnic structures of which continue to attract great scholarly attention. It is an extremely valuable book, which every scholar of Iranian and Kurdish studies should actively engage with. Nevertheless, the relationship between language and power, the central roles of ethnic peoples (including the Kurds) in shaping modern Iran, and their endeavours of the past along with their quests for the future, should be among the most important topics for modern histories of Iran. The inclusion of Iran's Kurdish society, its past and present, contributes to the transformation of perspectives on "Iran" as a historical idea or concept, revealing that as an entity Iran has historically experienced a dynamic, not a static, history, continuously experiencing change and transformation. The "Iran" of the Sasanid Empire (224–651) was not the Iran of today, although both historical facts and myths refer to "peripheries" as a continuous characteristic of Iran. Nor should the Iran of tomorrow remain a centralising, conservative entity with no regard for democratic, non-violent alternatives which are usually dismissed as "separatism" in the politics of modern Iran.

Through the consideration of these factors, Kurdish society is more likely to assume the place it deserves in relevant historical, cultural and political analyses of Iran.

Marouf Cabi | ORCID: 0000-0001-7259-4504
University of St Andrews, Scotland, UK
maroufcabi@gmail.com

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