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Book Reviews

Marianna Charountaki, **Iran and Turkey: International and Regional Engagement in the Middle East**, London, I.B. Tauris, 2018, 349 pp., (9781838604714).

Marianna Charountaki's *Iran and Turkey* examines the foreign policies of both states, starting with Ottoman-Safavid relations all the way to contemporary policies in the wake of the Syrian civil war. Charountaki seeks to do more than simply offer readers a comparative description and analysis of Turkish and Iranian foreign policy, however. Informed by her "previous extensive work based on a critique of IR [international relations] theories," Charountaki tells readers that:

My intention is to make a further test of the applicability of my theoretical approach by examining international politics using an alternative IR outlook which combines 'multi-dimensional', 'interactional' and 'interrelational' aspects to address important areas that have hitherto been given insufficient attention in the discipline. It therefore embraces the interrelation among politics, IR and foreign policy on the one hand, and, on the other, the interaction between state and non-state actors other than structures and policies. The premise results in an informative model of 'multi-dimensional interrelations' that attempts to bridge the gap between agent and structure, time and space, epistemology and ontology and objectivity and subjectivity." (pp.216-17).

Charountaki thus simultaneously claims that all previous IR theories are inadequate and that her work on Turkey and Iran begins the process of rectifying the problem by offering us a new theoretical approach. She does this without mentioning or grappling with any of the theoretical paradigms, approaches or theories – other than a passing reference to "middle powers theories" (pp.7-8) and a quick dismissal of the concept of "omnibalancing" (p.5) – that IR theorists have produced during the last seventy years. Instead of addressing the myriad IR paradigms, approaches and theories available to inform a comparative discussion of Turkish and Iranian foreign policies, Charountaki seems to use neo-realism (a.k.a. "structural realism") as a stand-in for all IR theory, which is then easy enough to dismiss for not paying attention to domestic politics, non-state actors or ideas and identities. This is unfortunate, as much of her account – which can be very informative, interesting and accurate at times – could benefit from the added theoretical purchase that recent work on neo-classical realism, the English School and constructivism, or older work on omnibalancing (Steven David, 1991) and two-level games (Robert Putnam, 1988), could provide.



None of these IR approaches have a problem with integrating state and non-state actors, different levels of analysis or both “ideational issues” and “material power concerns” into a coherent analysis. The English school, the liberal paradigm and constructivism could all provide some purchase to Charountaki’s observations regarding the limits to Turkish and Iranian competition and conflict in the region, for example, which she ascribes to their shared Islamic identity and economic interdependence. Neo-classical realism, omnibalancing and two-level games, meanwhile, are all about how and when state leaders prioritise domestic or international imperatives and threats. These are not “either/or explanations” as Charountaki incorrectly calls them, thereby dismissing Robert Olson’s 2003 (*Turkey-Iran Relations, 1979-2004*) use of omni-balancing theory to examine the same subject. In all these approaches, the analysis remains sensitive to the circumstances in which a state will sacrifice foreign policy imperatives to prioritise an internal imperative or threat, such as a restive Kurdish population.

Insights from omnibalancing, neo-classical realism and two-level games could thus help explain the moment when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan ceased effectively backing Syrian rebels’ insurgency against the Assad regime and instead deflected them towards fighting Syrian Kurds sympathetic to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). Turkey could have been the patron of Syrian Kurdish groups and made peace with the PKK in 2013, in turn allowing Ankara a better chance at deposing the Assad regime and replacing Iran’s most important ally in the region with a new Turkish ally. Instead of really analysing how and why this Turkish choice happened and highlighting for the reader the occasional serious tensions between domestic political imperatives and foreign policy goals, Charountaki ends up just largely describing the change in policy (pp.186-201). While she notes that Erdoğan “...also had his own issues to deal with as he needed to address pressing domestic concerns such as the Kurdish issue...”, this observation comes divorced from the perfectly good theories that would have explained the whole episode much more clearly – or even predicted it.

Charountaki essentially seems to mistake organised, methodical description (and at times analysis) of everything she believes is relevant to Turkish and Iranian foreign policies for a new theoretical approach to IR:

To answer the book’s main argument, a different kind of approach that reviews all the interconnected elements in order to come up with a reasoned and well-considered analysis is then required. There are increasing scholarly demands for the necessity of ‘a flexible and inclusive theoretical framework,’ that is, one that incorporates the politics of power and influence but also the role of ideas, interests and domestic restraints. No single theory or level of analysis offers a way of exploring satisfactorily the shifting dynamic of international politics or the international politics of the region...considering the behavior of Middle Eastern states in the international system which demands a more...integrated approach as the region defies attempts at generalization and resists explanations derived from Western experience [and thus] there is still a gap in the literature.’ (sic, p.30).

It is perfectly acceptable to argue that everything is important and generalisation is impossible – but one should not claim to offer a new theoretical approach in the process. Not including maps, the book’s two graphic illustrations provide a visual aid for Charountaki’s approach:

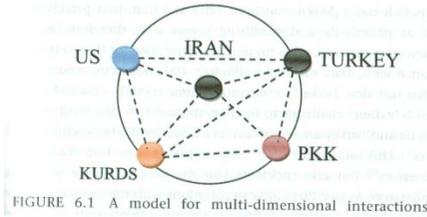


FIGURE 6.1 A model for multi-dimensional interactions

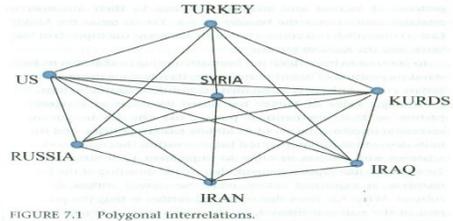


FIGURE 7.1 Polygonal interrelations.

Pictures are not always worth a thousand words. In this case, the two illustrations appear to be worth about six words: “All the various actors interact together.” This is simply not IR theory of any sort.

Given her aversion for IR theories, Charountaki would have done much better to simply tell the readers about Turkey and Iran’s foreign policy and skip roughly 70 pages of theoretical pretension and jargon. Her actual account of both states’ foreign policies over the years stands out as the contribution of the book. Because this reviewer spent too much time getting upset about other matters, only a few of the book’s praiseworthy contributions can now be described.

First among these has to be Chapter 3 of the volume, which struck this reviewer as the strongest chapter. Charountaki convincingly shows how particularly in the case of Turkey, the foreign policies we are witnessing today are not that different from what we saw during the 1970s. For reasons related to both domestic politics and foreign policy imperatives, Turkey after the invasion of Cyprus began improving its relations with the Soviet Union and Iran at the same time as its relations with the West hit an all time low. Too often observers forget such parallels, which Charountaki demonstrates very convincingly.

Second, Charountaki cogently explains how despite their rivalry, Turkey and Iran depend on each other and have clear limits to what they will contemplate against the other. The limits stem from both identity/social bonds and economics mainly (both things that the constructivist approaches and the English School paradigm of IR, unfortunately unmentioned in this book, spend a good deal of time explaining in depth). The Turkish-Islamist synthesis that emerged in Turkey (p.67) brings Turkish views and policies closer to Iran’s than one might otherwise realise. An interesting difference that she highlights, however, comes with the Israel-Palestine question: while post-1979 Iran uses this issue to great effect both domestically and regionally, Turkey limits itself to pro-Palestinian rhetoric while continuing to do active business with Israel (p.20, 90). This would be a perfect example of Putnam’s 2-level games theory, if we were to use such language – Turkey materially benefits from trade with Israel, but domestic political opinion in Turkey necessitated increasingly strident anti-Israeli rhetoric from the government in Ankara. Eventually, this also forced Ankara to abandon its *de facto* military alliance with Israel – contrary to what many could reasonably view as solid Turkish national interests. If she had wanted to use the language of IR constructivists, Charountaki could have described it as “identity produced rhetoric, which forced a material change in Israel-Turkish relations, which then impacted identities in Turkey further – and which could in turn eventually lead to the complete rupture of Turkish-Israeli economic relations.”

Finally, Charountaki does an admirable job of showing how Kurds are not just objects of various states’ foreign policies. They have become actors in their own right, increasingly important in the region and always central to the construction of foreign

policy in Turkey and Iran especially. Throughout most of the book, she insists that one should not prioritise states over non-state actors such as the Kurds. In the conclusion, however, she seems to concede that non-state actors, “whose capacity is limited despite their ability to exert influence on the region’s foreign policies,” appear less central than states (p.243).

In the language of IR classic Realism, one might have repeated something from Thucydides that most Kurdish readers are quite familiar with: “The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”

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Mehmet Kurt, *Kurdish Hizbullah in Turkey: Islamism, Violence and the State.* London, Pluto Press, 2017, 188 pp., (978 0745399348).

This book is an essential contribution to the relatively limited scholarship on Hizbullah in Turkey, especially in the form of ethnographic analysis of primary data produced through interviews with former and current supporters of Hizbullah. There are a handful of works on the group, notably the works including *Deep Hizbullah* (Derin Hizbullah) by Rusen Cakir (Cakir, 2001) and *Political Islam in Turkey* by Gareth Jenkins (Jenkins, 2008). “Developed from the author’s doctoral dissertation” (p. ix), the book sets out to answer the question “What is Hizbullah and how can it be analysed as a form of belonging?” (6).

The book is composed of three chapters. The first, describes the theoretical and methodological framework, as well as engaging in a brief analysis of historical and sociological conditions of the period in which the Hizbullah was founded and developed into one of the most violent illegal organisations in Turkey. The second chapter is composed mainly of references to the interviews with informants, who are former and current members of the Hizbullah. The author clarifies that these informants do not include members of the armed wing of the Hizbullah. Given that the organisation’s primary influence in the recent history of Turkey and the Kurdish issue stems mainly from its use of violence, it is unfortunate that we do not hear from the former or current armed members of the group. Since the organisation is very secretive, with a membership base suspicious of any approaches to their fighters as a potential attempt of spying (65), it is understandable that the author did not have contacts with former or current armed Hizbullah members. This chapter analyses categories such as violence, disengagement, group identity and forms of belonging.

In the third chapter, the author focuses on how social memory is constructed through the stories and novels written by Hizbullah members. The chapter looks into the texts produced by Hizbullah-affiliated individuals and in the framework of social memory investigation, analyses how Hizbullah remember and reconstruct the past, to establish and reinforce group belonging.

The sections that are abundant with references to the interviews with informants, especially the second but also the first chapter, constitutes the book’s most significant contribution to the literature.

In his book’s title, the author refers to Hizbullah as “Kurdish Hizbullah in Turkey.” There is, however, not an elaborate discussion as to why Hizbullah in Turkey is referred to as Kurdish. The group has never referred to itself as a pro-Kurdish group, let alone

as “Kurdish Hizbullah”. Their enemies, especially the dominant left-wing Kurdish nationalism, never regarded Hizbullah as Kurdish. Referring to Rusen Cakir’s book on Hizbullah, the book establishes that Hizbullah never targeted the Turkish state or Turkish nationalism, neither to achieve its revolutionary Islamist objectives or in the name of Kurdishness. Indeed, members of Hizbullah are mostly, if not exclusively, Kurdish. However, it is also true that the target of the group has also been almost exclusively, Kurdish nationalists. If the real identities of the group make it a Kurdish group, the fact that the group exclusively targeted Kurdish nationalism (and not the Turkish nationalism), would surely make it an anti-Kurdish group. In the absence of this discussion, the books’ main title in Turkish, *Türkiye’de Hizbullah: Din, Şiddet ve Aidiyet* (*Hizbullah in Turkey: Religion, Violence and Belonging*) (Kurt, 2016) would have been a more appropriate title. A critical observation by the author on this topic is that the Islamist Hüda-Par’s¹ political sensitivity to the Kurdish issue and increasing references to the rights of Kurds has resulted from the expectations of and demands by their supporter base (109). The author emphasises this point by referring to the statement of one of his informants.

The author engages with his informants about the ways they justify their utilisation of violence. However, the author records in various places that the Hizbullah members are usually silent about that period either describing it as a traumatic one or trying to explain it away by giving superficial answers. It is understandable again that it might be challenging to get into the specifics and push the informants a bit further to understand their motivations and modes of thinking better. In this way, the study clarifies for future researchers that it would be almost impossible to get Hizbullah members to face with their organisation’s violent past if the question of violence is posed in an abstract form.

Hizbullah was established in the late 1970s and waged a campaign of targeted killings, especially between 1991-1996. Former and current Hizbullah members who spoke to the author, justify their utilisation of violence as a form of “self-defence” (89). While it is true that Hizbullah members came under attack by the PKK, Hizbullah’s targets were mostly civilians who were teachers, nurses, lawyers, journalists, politicians and human rights defenders. There were also young children among the group targets. Although mistakenly referred to as “the PKK members” (143), the targets of the groups were mostly civilian public figures, who were perceived to be sympathetic to the PKK. Hizbullah very rarely, if ever, confronted or targeted armed professional members of the PKK.

The book also engages with Hizbullah’s ideological roots, especially by referring to the main ideological influences on the group. According to the author, the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideology, as it is expressed by Hasan Al Banna as well as Said Hawwa, from the Ikhwan’s Syria Branch has a significant influence on Hizbullah (15, 140). The other significant influence is the Iranian Revolution. (141). There are also references, via Hizbullah affiliated websites, that Said-i Nursi also having a strong formative influence on the Hizbullah’s founding leader Hüseyin Velioglu. Author’s informants also report keeping Nursi’s corpus in their houses. This book, however, is not a detailed study of Hizbullah ideology and policies.

Another significant aspect of Hizbullah is its relations with two major regional states, Turkey and Iran. The author discusses Hizbullah’s links with some Turkish state elements. But again, both the former and current Hizbullah members and senior

¹ *Hür Dava Partisi* (The Free Cause Party) is a political party established by the Hizbullah movement in 2012.

members of the Hüda-Par are tight-lipped. The informants demand proof of the alleged links (36), rather than attempt to address questions in the minds of many civilians who lived through the 1990s facing Hizbullah's continuing violence with perceived or real impunity. Hizbullah's relations with Iran is also elaborated in the study, especially in the form of ideological influence of Iran and the training provided to the Hizbullah members by elements of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Hizbullah members who spoke to the author, however, are either not knowledgeable about the extent of these links or again too tight-lipped to reveal any previously unknown information.

The reader leaves the book by having a powerful insight into some aspects of thinking of former and current Hizbullah supporters, including rituals, slogans, categorisations. The book is the result of a significant effort to carry out challenging fieldwork with former and current supporters of a violent and dangerous organisation.

Today, dominant Kurdish leaders and political parties are mostly secular. This is true of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in Iraqi Kurdistan as well as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Northern Syria.

The Kurds, moreover, do not belong to either the Sunni or Shia camp in the region, although Kurdish people across the Middle East are majority Sunni. That is why some maps are drawn to show the influence of Shia and Sunni block, usually have Kurds as a separate category, as if the Kurdishness is not just an ethnonational but also a religious category.

There is arguably great potential, however, for the rise of a movement which could tap on the dynamism of Islam as well as Kurdish nationalism. Hizbullah is not that movement and this kind of a movement, arguably, does not exist in today's Middle East. Hizbullah, however, is a significant example of political Islam being practised in the Kurdish society and used to justify violence. That is why studies, including this one, on Hizbullah, are very significant.

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Bahar Baser, Mari Toivanen, Begum Zorlu, Yasin Duman, eds., **Methodological Approaches in Kurdish studies: Theoretical and Practical Insights from the Field**, *Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2019, 254 pp., (9781498575218)*.

Doing field research in Kurdistan, or among Kurdish communities in diaspora, carries a number of particular risks and challenges. These include methodological challenges, e.g., how to avoid bias or reproducing or legitimising existing strictures of domination or marginalisation; ethical dilemmas concerning the tension between the desire for social engagement and the need for critical distance; and practical questions concerning the safety both of researchers and of the people they work with.

A team of young scholars has now produced a very welcome volume on the methodological, ethical and political challenges of field research in Kurdistan, or among Kurds. The title may be slightly inflated. The volume does not so much provide a general overview of different methodologies for field research among Kurds as largely focus on the theme of the researcher's positionality. Specifically, many of the contributions elaborate on an earlier article by Baser and Toivanen (2018: 2070), which argues that one should not proceed from a reified and static insider-outsider binary, but "look at particular *moments* of insiderness and outsidersness." Thus, they follow the so-called "reflexive turn" in the social sciences, i.e., the attempt to understand the relational context mutually co-constituted by researchers and research participants (xxi). Specifically, the editors suggest moving beyond a reified insider-outsider dichotomy by approaching the problem of positionality from the perspective of power (xx). The contributors, however, do not uniformly or consistently follow up on this suggestion.

The first section contains critical discussions of a number of traditional concepts and approaches. Vera Eccarius-Kelly firmly rejects security studies paradigms and state-endowed histories, instead calling for emancipatory histories and critical ethnography. She enriches her argument with comparative findings contrasting Kurdistan with Central America, where she did her initial field work. Joost Jongerden argues that everyday activities of urbanised Kurdish workers defy any simple classification in terms of "urban" and "rural." For such workers, he argues, "home" is not *simply* the village. Instead of static categories like *city* and *village*, Jongerden proposes more dynamic and flexible notions of action-space and living structure, in which urban and rural mutually co-produce and redefine each other. Against views of space as discrete and discontinuous, he argues that any space is a temporary arena of claims and counterclaims, implying that space is irreducibly temporal and irreducibly discursive. Jowan Mahmud, building on Benedict Anderson's influential argument that print capitalism shapes collective imaginaries, argues that new communication techniques have affected individual and collective everyday experience and identity; as a result, we can no longer rely on notions like authenticity and anonymity. Marc Sinan Winrow discusses the paradigm shift towards global history, and the postcolonial reconceptualisation of historical archives as not simply sources of information but as spaces that both express and are produced by relations of power.

The remaining sections focus on research in conflictual, violent and/or authoritarian settings, and the problem of "positionality," i.e., the researcher's background in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, geography, etc., in interrelation and interaction with the group among which research is conducted; or rather, as the contributors tend to suggest, as it is *negotiated* in the practice of fieldwork. Here, too, questions of power are paramount. In settings as polarised as those obtaining among the Kurds, even such simple practical questions as whether to use Kurdish, Turkish, or another language, let alone whether or not to use a local intermediary, may well shape and frame the interview in unpredictable ways. As linguistic anthropologists like Charles Briggs (2002) have argued, even as basic a field technique as interviewing may involve relations not only of social inequality (e.g., literate versus illiterate, urban versus rural, middle class versus poor, etc.) but also of power. Researchers working in political science and International Relations, by contrast, should equally beware of the opposite risk of a bias towards locally dominant persons and groups, and of reproducing a "Big Man Paradigm," a risk already discussed by Martin van Bruinessen (1992) in his influential *Agha, Shaykh, and State*.

Marlene Schäfers discusses her research among rival civil society organisations in Van, in an environment dominated – and polarised – by party politics. Her remarkable conclusion is that positioning oneself as a neutral outside observer in search of objective knowledge may not only be impossible but undesirable. Polat Alpman is even more pessimistic about the possibility of neutralising or escaping political domination when doing research among subaltern population groups. Echoing Spivak's famous but overstated claim that the subaltern can never speak *as* subaltern, he then proceeds to address the – very real – problem of whether one can bypass the power relation between researcher and subaltern respondent in a community as politically oppressed as the Kurds. Since equality can never be achieved, he concludes, researchers should always situate themselves in their field of inquiry. Demet Arpacık, by contrast, emphasises the fact that researchers do not have full control over their field. Especially in militarized environments under permanent surveillance (as in her own research in the Sur district of Diyarbakir after the 2015 urban warfare and the 2016 coup attempt), she argues, respondents may acquire real agency in shaping the process of data collection.

Some papers in the volume present concrete suggestions for dealing with difficulties encountered in fieldwork. Thus, Francis O'Connor and Semih Çelik suggest that by carrying out their field research jointly, as two different kinds of outsider, they may have avoided some of the difficulties for data collection obtaining in authoritarian and militarised settings. They acknowledge, however, that their experiences may not provide a ready recipe for research: joint fieldwork is not generally feasible, let alone encouraged, for PhD students or early career researchers. Marlies Casier addresses the difficulties encountered when studying a clandestine organisation like the PKK. Delegitimated or criminalised as a terrorist organisation, the PKK is “elusive” or “absent” in so far as respondents are unable to explicate their relation to it/the organisation; but at the same time, and paradoxically, it is almost omnipresent in the lived experience of both researcher and respondents. Yeşim Mutlu, an ethnically Turkish female researcher who has worked among displaced Kurdish families in both Istanbul and Diyarbakir, focuses on her attempts to overcome her sense of guilt by association with repressive state policies, and a sense of loneliness as a relative outsider. Yasemin Gülsüm Acar and Özden Melis Uluğ describe their social-psychological research on conflict dynamics from the perspective of social identity theory, which sees collective (as opposed to individual) self-categorisation as the psychological basis for group behavior. They emphasise the importance of trust between researchers and interviewees.

The contributions by Lana Askari and Thomas Schmidinger also discuss theoretical issues but emphasise the personal dimensions of field research. Schmidinger practically *demand*s that Kurdish studies be controversial (232); he is also virtually the only contributor who critically discusses the risk of overly identifying with any one side, group, or party. Especially suggestive are his comments that nothing really prepares researchers for their first experience of violence. He then movingly describes how interviewing Yezidi survivors of the 2014 genocide in Sinjar made him physically ill, and how he tried to cope with research into traumatic experiences. Askari's narrative starts with an account of failure: at one point she was snubbed by a local informant. She then relates how the difficulties that researchers like her (a young female returnee, who looks like an insider but lacks some of the relevant cultural knowledge) face in dealing with corruption (*gandali*) actually *changed* her positionality in the course of her work.

The appearance of this volume indicates that Kurdish studies are gradually coming of age as an academic subfield. Earlier generations of researchers focused on politics, with many authors having a background in journalism, activism, and/or diplomacy, without much methodological or ethical self-reflection going beyond questioning the taking for granted of the legitimacy of states and the dominance of official languages and cultures. Nowadays, increasing numbers of scholars have a purely or primarily academic formation, and have had their training in new disciplines and paradigms, like media studies, visual anthropology, memory studies, or gender studies. This creates new ethical and other dilemmas, of course, since academic audiences (or should one say academic markets) pose different demands than social activism.

Unfortunately, the volume – which focuses heavily on Southeastern Turkey, or North Kurdistan – contains little if any sustained discussion of how to proceed in settings where Kurds are in power, as in post-1991 Iraqi Kurdistan or post-2012 Syrian Kurdistan or Rojava. Likewise, it includes no contributions on field work among Kurds in Iran, although several scholars have been conducting descriptive-linguistic and social-scientific research there, and increasing numbers of local researchers are publishing their work in international academic media. But perhaps it is difficult to find researchers who are willing and able to reflect on and discuss their work in such exceptionally delicate and precarious settings. More surprisingly, in view of the importance the contributors attach to reflexivity, any discussion of Pierre Bourdieu (2007; 2013) is lacking. Bourdieu was, of course, one of the pioneers of reflexive social theory, in calling for an “objectification of the objectification,” that is, for a sociological analysis and positioning of scientific knowledge. Researchers, Bourdieu argues, are not neutral outside observers, but social actors like any other. In writing about other’s practices, he adds, they reduce the “practical logic” driving everyday action to a “theoretical logic,” that is, to a more systematic, explicit and conscious form of theoretical knowledge. Perhaps Bourdieu was less interested in the ethics, politics or methodology of fieldwork than in developing a general theory of action; but – particularly relevant for the present volume – he conducted his fieldwork in one of the most violent of conflict situations, in Algeria during the war of independence in the 1950s (see in particular Goodman and Silverstein, 2009).

Another name curiously lacking is that of Edward Said, even though his well-known critique of orientalism has perhaps more to increase awareness and critique of the positionality of Western scholars studying the Islamic world. Said, however, worked within the humanities rather than the social sciences. Indeed, the humanities are given rather short shrift in this volume: only one of the contributions, by Marc Sinan Winrow, deals with historiography. One might reply that the volume deals with ethnographic fieldwork and interviews rather than philology, and with the social sciences rather than the text-based humanities; but the traditional distinction between the humanities and the social sciences – which has become blurred over the past decades anyway – is especially problematic in a situation as contested as that of the Kurds. In a region where matters of language, literature, culture and history are so readily politicised and permanently contested, and in a region where literacy and orality interact in complex ways with linguistic domination and marginalisation, ethnographic and philological methods may benefit each other, – if they can be strictly distinguished at all. For example, in the light of the particular (and rapidly changing) relation between oral and literate practices in Kurdistan, and of the public status of poets and other literati in Kurdish society, the study of the production and consumption of literature requires

ethnographic fieldwork as much as methods strictly associated with the humanities (see Hamelink, 2016; Bush, 2017).

One field that would certainly have deserved more attention – and could, in fact, have found an obvious place in a volume on researchers’ positionality – is that of linguistics and sociolinguistics. Much interesting and relevant work has been conducted especially in the latter, including more reflective discussions like Birgül Yılmaz’s recent discussion of her own field work in refugee camps in Greece. Perhaps such criticisms can be rephrased as a more principled point concerning the very distinction between the social sciences and the humanities: the problem of “representing” subaltern groups as oppressed and marginalised as the Kurds, i.e., the question who may legitimately describe their predicament and doing justice to their lived experience, shows that it is impossible to strictly separate social-scientific questions of power and practice from humanities-oriented questions of representation, interpretation and discourse. But perhaps one should not ask too much at once from the very first effort in this direction.

The volume’s usefulness could have been further increased by a more detailed and consistent index. A small number of proper names are included, without any clear criterion for inclusion being apparent; and a large number of theoretical themes, concepts and approaches are omitted. On the whole, however, this collection is a valuable contribution towards the gradual development of work in Kurdish Studies that is methodologically more self-aware and academically more sophisticated.

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