

BOOK REVIEWS

Thomas Schmidinger, **Krieg und Revolution in Syrisch-Kurdistan: Analysen und Stimmen aus Rojava**, Wien: Mandelbaum, 2014, 262 pp., (ISBN: 978-3-85476-636-0).

For a long time, the districts that are now commonly known as Rojava, Western Kurdistan, were among the least known and least studied parts of Kurdistan. Since the end of the French mandate, much less was written about the Kurds of Syria than those of Turkey, Iraq or even Iran, and it was as if their existence, the specific problems they faced, and the political mobilisation among them were mainly by-products of developments in Turkish and Iraqi Kurdistan. In general overviews of Kurdish history we may find something about Kurdish nationalist activities of the mandate period, Arabisation policies of the 1960s, and the denial of citizen's rights to a large number of Syrian Kurds, but otherwise they received little attention. This has changed dramatically in the past two years: Syrian Kurds have held the limelight and gained tremendous international sympathy for the Kurdish cause through the heroic defence of Kobanî, by coming to the rescue of the Yezidis of Sinjar in neighbouring Iraq, and by what is billed as an experiment in grassroots democracy, incorporating ethnic and religious minorities on equal terms. In spite of all the press attention, it remains difficult to assess what is really going on in the three Kurdish cantons that together constitute Rojava. Thomas Schmidinger's new book is a helpful aid in making sense of the news.

Schmidinger is an Austrian political scientist and anthropologist as well as an activist working for one of the few foreign NGOs that carry out small relief projects inside Syrian Kurdistan. His involvement with Syrian Kurds in exile goes back several years, but the parts that make the book especially worth reading are based on two recent research trips to Rojava, in January 2013 and February 2014. On the first trip, he was accompanied by a Syrian Kurdish friend living in Austria, whose relatives and acquaintances were affiliated with one of the Kurdish parties hostile to the PYD; the second trip was arranged in co-ordination with the PYD, which also provided guides, giving him exposure to the official PYD vision but nonetheless also allowing him to speak with groups and individuals critical of the official line. Schmidinger's narrative and analysis of the political developments are complemented by a series of interviews with prominent Kurdish and Christian personalities that take up almost half the book.

In the first part of the book Schmidinger provides the German reader with a good summary of the existing literature on the sociology and history of Syria's Kurds, acknowledging especially the most significant recent studies, Jordi Tejel's *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society* (Routledge 2009) and Harriet Allsopp's *The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East* (I.B.Tauris 2014; reviewed in *Kurdish Studies* 2/2). He describes the complex ethnic and religious composition of the population of the three main regions of Rojava and sketches the history of Syria's Kurds, from the time of the French mandate through the various phases Arab nationalist rule, with their shifting but consistently repressive policies. His description of the extremely fissiparous Syrian Kurdish parties – the original Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria, established in 1957, split into some fifteen parties and factions, as shown in an informative chart at the end of the book – is summary but offers some explanations for these parties' division and relative ineffectiveness. He does not appear to endorse Allsopp's view that the parties had been losing relevance and that the strengthening of nationalist sentiment among the population took place outside and in spite of these

parties, but like Allsopp he emphasises the very different character of two more recently established parties that have no historical connection with the KDP-S: the PKK-inspired Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Dêموكرat*, PYD) and the Kurdish Future Movement (*Şepêla Pêşerojê ya Kurdî*). The latter favoured close cooperation with Arab opposition groups to bring down the regime and has been the only Kurdish grouping represented in the Syrian National Council. It was especially strong in Qamishli, the main city of Cezîre, but lost much of its strength after its charismatic leader, Mish'al Temo, was assassinated in 2011. The PYD distinguishes itself as the best organised and most disciplined of the parties, with the strongest armed wing People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG), which enabled it to establish de facto rule over the three regions of Rojava when the regime quietly reduced its presence there.

Of the three Kurdish-inhabited regions of Syria, Cezîre was long the heartland of the Kurdish movement; with the exception of the PYD, all Kurdish parties (including the Future Movement) have their core support there and virtually all of their leaders are from Cezîre. Before Abdullah Öcalan's expulsion from Syria in 1998, the PKK had found local support mainly among the Kurds of Efrîn and Kobanî, and it was in these two zones that the PYD, established in 2003, initially had its strongest support. On the basis of his interviews, Schmidinger traces the beginnings of the current Kurdish uprising to anti-regime demonstrations in Amûde and other towns of Cezîre in April 2011, which were a direct response to the first Arab protests in Deraa and elsewhere. Several of the Kurdish parties have a historically strong presence in Amûde (which unlike ethnically mixed Qamishli is almost entirely Kurdish), but they played no significant part in these demonstrations, which were the work of small groups of young men that called themselves "Co-ordination Committees" and only in retrospect received some party backing. Schmidinger's narrative guides the reader through the developments until mid-2014, attempting to do justice to the often contradictory visions of his various interviewees, especially concerning the role of the PYD, which has become the ruling party in all three cantons.

Schmidinger registers complaints and criticisms of rival parties and human rights organisations that accuse the PYD of dictatorial tendencies, torture, imprisonment and summary executions of opponents, secret collaboration with the regime, and forced recruitment of (child) soldiers, but he also notes that the parties united in the Kurdish National Council (sponsored by Massoud Barzani in neighbouring Iraq) as well as the Kurdish Future Movement have themselves refused to take part in the canton administration. He also observes that the PYD has made a significant and partially successful effort to include the non-Kurdish population in the administration. He also gives an impression of the difficult balancing act the PYD must be carrying out in Cezîre, where even parts of the city of Qamishli are still under direct government control or inhabited by (Arab and Armenian) regime loyalists, while ISIS also has active supporters among one Arab tribal group in the canton.

One thing the reader would like to understand better is how the PYD's confederal democratic autonomy, the canton administration, works in practice and to what extent it allows ordinary people, members as well as non-members of the ruling party, to take part in decisions concerning their lives. The war conditions and the relatively short duration of his stays did not enable the author to actually observe council meetings but his interviews bring out how much everything is in flux. The PYD has very much changed the realities on the ground, with an inevitable impact on the perceptions, actions and discourse of the other political actors and communities. The transcribed interviews at the end of the book, with leading personalities across the politi-

cal spectrum, present a complex mosaic of social and political forces, interests, ideological positions and aspirations. Schmidinger attempts to engage his interlocutors with critical questions, with varying degrees of success.

The empowerment of women is another important theme in PYD's discourse, and three of the interviews are with women in leading political and military positions (the PYD co-chair, the prime minister of Efrîn canton, and a military commander). Unfortunately, these women were even less willing than the male interviewees to say anything beyond standard party propaganda. Not surprisingly, interlocutors without official positions are more forthcoming, and the significance of the change that the PYD represents for women is brought out more clearly in one of the more sympathetic and relaxed interviews in the book, with the chair of a women's NGO in Amûde that emerged as part of the 2011 uprising.

The author's rendering of conflicting narratives without choosing his own truth is an adequate and, no doubt, deliberate way of presenting the complex and rapidly changing realities in Syria's Kurdish regions. It makes this little book preferable to most journalistic accounts that attempt to make sense of the Rojava revolution by reducing it to a single narrative. It will remain an informative resource even when the realities have further changed.

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Bahar Baser, *Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts: A Comparative Perspective.* Farnham: Ashgate, 2015, 302 pp., (ISBN-10: 1472425626).

Building on a growing field of studies on Kurdish transnational political activism, Bahar Baser's *Diaspora and Homeland Conflicts* provides us with new insights into the engagements of people from Kurdish and Turkish descent with the ongoing conflict in Turkey. The book focusses particularly on the second generations' engagement in diaspora nationalism, comparing young Kurdish and Turkish activists' perceptions and experiences in Sweden and Germany.

Baser attempts to explain the puzzle as to why it is that second-generation Kurdish and Turkish "migrants" share an interest and a devotion to a political context that they have never experienced at first-hand. Yet, different from the works of Alinia (2004), Khayati (2008) and Eliassi (2013), her work doesn't focus on the question of belonging or the particular identity quests of young European Kurds (or Turks). Instead, Baser looks at how the Turkish-Kurdish conflict affects the interactions between the Turkish and Kurdish diasporas in Sweden and Germany; tries to assess how contentions are "inherited" and "reinterpreted" by the second generation, and what the impact of the hostlands' policies and politics is on the interactions between these diaspora groups.

Baser conducted ethnographic research in both countries, by means of interviews with the politically active German and Swedish Kurds and Turks, as well as participating in the activities of Turkish and Kurdish associational life in both Germany and Sweden. This was combined with an extensive literature review.

Sweden and Germany provide interesting cases, given the countries' differing integration policies, the constellations of their Kurdish and Turkish (immigrant) populations, as well as the divergence in openness vis-à-vis transnational political activism by ethnic minorities. Whereas Sweden has provided a refuge for many intellectually and politically engaged Kurds (from Turkey, but also Iraq, Iran and Syria or the different parts of "Kurdistan"), who entered the country as asylum seekers, and whereas Sweden is home to a relatively small Turkish community (from a working class back-

ground), Germany has a very mixed and large population of mainly Turkish and to a lesser extent Kurdish people who settled as labour migrants from the 1960s onwards. This was followed by an influx of Kurdish asylum seekers in the 1980s and 1990s. Approximately 80,000 to 100,000 people (including the second generation) from Turkey are living in Sweden, of which more than half is assumed to be Kurdish. In Germany the number of people from Turkey is estimated to be around 1.6 million. There are no statistics as to the ethnic background of Germany's immigrants from Turkey but Kurds are thought to make up one fourth of the population.

Whereas many second generation Kurds in Sweden were born into politically and/or culturally active families, in Germany many Kurds and Turks were born in apolitical working class families. Some of the young people born into these families became politicised over the course of the armed conflict between Turkey and the *Kurdistan Worker's Party* (PKK), as they lost relatives, saw the arrival of Kurdish refugees and/or were mobilised by (revolutionary) Turkish and Kurdish political parties such as the PKK. In addition to the politicised offspring of the first generation of labor migrants, second generation Kurds (and Turks) 'inherited' the political activism of their parents who sought political asylum in Germany.

Sweden and Germany, Baser shows, are marked by different power asymmetries between the Kurdish and Turkish diasporas. Sweden's multicultural policies allowed Kurdish immigrants to organise themselves politically along ethnic lines, strengthening their culture and language and integrating themselves into different Swedish political parties. This while downplaying the ideological differences amongst themselves, and acting in a more unified way. This is felt threatening for those Swedish Turks who identify strongly with their homeland and believe that Swedish politics are biased towards Turkey's Kurdish question. Indeed, some second generation Turks became politically active in response to the Kurdish diaspora politics in Sweden.

In Germany, Kurdish activists complained of the German authorities' compliance with the Turkish state due to the countries' economic interdependency and they face more difficulties in gaining recognition for their cause. Also, whereas Swedish Kurds assert their Kurdish identity, German Kurds, even those who are politically active, often downplay their Kurdishness in order not to obstruct the economic and societal relations with German Turks. Indeed, Germany is – just like Turkey - characterised by interdependency between people from Turkish and Kurdish descent. Consequently there is also room for joint initiatives, intermarriages and business amongst the two groups.

In Sweden the boundaries between both ethnic groups are drawn much sharper and reconfirmed through the discourses and the behavior of both Turks and Kurds. Thus while the homeland's minority-majority asymmetry is mirrored in the relationships between Kurds and Turks in Germany, it looks as if it has been reversed, in the Swedish case. One important reason for this is the multicultural policy of Sweden, which strengthens the ethnic identities, consequently leading Turks and Kurds to construct their own "ethnic fortresses" (p.263). Indeed, Sweden encourages the organisation of migrants along ethnic lines, allowing the main migrant organisations to become powerful interest groups (e.g. delivering block votes for political parties), and penetrate the "hostland's" political system more successfully. In Germany, where no such multicultural policies exist, migrant organisations pursue their own agendas and organise mostly around ideological differences rather than ethnicity. Swedish organisations obtain financial support based on the number of members and youth projects, and are encouraged to cooperate with other groups from the same ethnic background. Consequently they take a softer political tone so as to ensure as many followers as

possible and thus increased government support. German organizations do not have such an incentive to pursue a politics-free agenda. The main fault lines between Turks and Kurds in Germany continue to be much more ideological than ethnic, and the mobilisation of groups also reflects the ideological discourses of the homeland political parties active in Germany.

The PKK's mobilisation is meaningful in that regard, as it has refrained from racism vis-à-vis the Turks as such, targeting the Turkish authorities and (para)military instead. That the politicised Kurdish youth in Germany defines itself as *Apoçu* or followers of Abdullah Öcalan, rather than Kurdish nationalists, is probably most telling as to the difference between Swedish and German politically active Kurds. Baser also found active members of the Kurdish movement (in Germany) to have many Turkish friends and to identify themselves still as "Turkiyeli", meaning "from Turkey". The second generation interviewees testified of a strong internalisation of the contemporary discourse of HDP's democratic resolution (within the borders of Turkey) and they were found to synchronise their discourses, demands and expectations with the declarations of the PKK, HDP and Öcalan (p. 232). They "tolerate" or "ignore" Turks when they make nationalist comments because they believe Turks "not to be aware of the situation" or "blinded by nationalist ideology" or "ignorant about politics" (p. 234), contrary to the more radical stance of Swedish Kurds vis-à-vis Turkish nationalists.

Baser remarks that "although 50 years have passed and two or three new generations have followed, the Kurds are still perceived by the Turks in Germany as *subjects of the Turkish state*; therefore any demands they make to the German authorities – such as education in the Kurdish language, the right of association, or even matters involving the organisation of festivals – are not well-received by the majority of the Turkish community" (p. 241). They may even be perceived, so she notes, as "separatist acts", while on German territory (p. 241). Kurdish respondents do not feel to be on "equal terms" with Turkish diaspora members, even though they are outside of the homeland. The majority-minority dynamics continue to play and it is Kurds who complain about the lack of "discursive opportunities" in Germany (like Turks do in Sweden).

An important factor in the perceived limitations for successful lobbying in Germany is the criminalisation of the Kurdish movement, where the Kurdish issue is perceived from a security angle rather than a human rights one, a point that has been most convincingly demonstrated in the work of Olivier Grojean on the differences in perception of the Kurdish movements' activism in Germany and France (Grojean, 2008). 1990s violent attacks by the PKK contributed to this reading of the conflict and the consequent limitation of PKK's space for (legal) political activities in Germany.

Interestingly the size of the Kurdish population in Germany and Sweden does not seem to determine the effectiveness of Kurds' transnational political activism. More concretely, the substantially high number of Kurds in Germany does not translate into more political leverage, whereas in Sweden a relatively small group has managed to set the political agenda. Previous research on Kurdish transnational activism in Belgium, which counts a small number of an estimated 40,000 Kurds, lead to similar conclusions, showing a strong solidarity of Flemish politicians with the Kurdish cause, irrespective of the size of the Kurdish migrant population (Casier, 2011).

Baser argues that in spite of the assumptions that homeland politics is related to unemployment and a lack of integration, it is the more integrated segments of diaspora groups, be they Turkish or Kurdish, that engage in lobbying and persuasion activities. Most of Baser's interviewees in Sweden do not feel discriminated against or al-

iated by the Swedish society. Yet, it is unclear to which extent we can generalise this finding to all Swedish Kurdish youth: the interviewees in Barzoo Eliassi's research on Kurdish youth in Sweden for example showed discontent vis-à-vis the Swedish society (Eliassi, 2013). From a postcolonial perspective, Eliassi argued that we should understand diaspora nationalism in the light of contemporary racist and nationalist discourses in European countries. His hypothesis might also be relevant in understanding German Turks and Kurds, as both Eliassi's and Baser's study, show that interviewees experienced some form of discrimination and did not feel part of German society.

Baser's book is a welcome publication, as the political worlds of second generation Kurds and Turks in Europe, and the second generation's political activism more generally, deserve much more academic attention. The monograph is informative and provides food for thought. The title might be somewhat misleading though, as it does not reveal that Turkish and Kurdish diasporas are at the core of this book. Also, whereas Baser recognises that the shifting political situation in the homeland might affect the second generation differently from the first (p.266), her work does not elaborate consistently on the relationship between the transformations of politics in Turkey (and the region) and the political engagements of second generation Turks and Kurds. Indeed, the political developments and events in Turkey (and the war in Syria and Iraq) that spark the feelings of indignation could be more thoroughly integrated in the analysis. Regardless of these shortcomings, this book is a must read for anyone studying Kurdish and Turkish transnational political activism.

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Bryan R. Gibson, *Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War*, New York: Palgrave, 2015, 284 pp., (ISBN: 978-1137487117).

Contemporary scholars, policy analysts, and foreign policy officials on Middle Eastern politics still seek to better comprehend how Iraq and Syria have turned into failed states and fragmented nations along sectarian identities. Perhaps one of the most uttered historical accounts has been the post-Ottoman scramble of the region at the hands of British and French colonial powers, particularly via the infamous 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement. Bryan R. Gibson's book brings a more recent historical narrative to our attention by unpacking how the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union shaped the domestic politics of Iraq on the one hand and

influenced the international relations of the Middle East in general on the other. Even though the book focuses on the US foreign policy toward Iraq between the years of 1958 and 1975 within the global context of the Cold War and it does not necessarily intend to explain the current regional instabilities, Gibson's detailed analysis of the Cold War rivalry in and over Iraq sheds light on our understanding of global and regional dimensions in the current Iraqi and Syrian crises.

The major argument of the book is that "whenever US officials in Washington believed that Baghdad was developing closer relations with Moscow, they took steps to counter Soviet influence, often relying on covert interventions" (p. xiv) and in this context "the United States moved from being an unsophisticated observer of events in 1958-59 to becoming a direct protagonist in Iraq during 1972-75 through its own covert program to support Iraq's Kurdish rebels" (p. xiii). Gibson illustrates his argument through a comprehensive historical analysis of each US administration's approach to Iraq between 1958 and 1975. During the Eisenhower administration, the Iraqi revolution which overthrew the Hashemite monarchy in 1958 led to fears that the new regime under Abd al-Karim Qasim would become a pro-Soviet ally since Qasim did not hesitate to make alliance with the Iraqi Communist Party (IPC). Thus, pan-Arab nationalism under the leadership of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser was tentatively seen as a regional counterforce against the potential spread of Soviet communism. However, interestingly, Britain approached the Qasim regime in Iraq as a potential alternative to Nasser since Nasser's anti-colonial and anti-British discourse was against the British national interests in the region, especially via the economic significance of the Suez Canal as Britain's major oil route. In this way, Gibson also shows how American containment policy against the Soviet Union and British national interests in the region contradicted each other in certain periods. This was also the case with Iran under the rule of pro-Western Shah and Israel as both were antagonistic to the pan-Arabist agenda of Nasser.

During the Kennedy administration, Gibson argues that the US came to the point of supporting the first short-lived Ba'th regime (February-November 1963), its purge of communist party members, and its ruthless war against the Soviet-backed Kurds. As the Iraqi Kurds were pursuing autonomy from Baghdad, the Soviet military and financial assistance to the Kurds was a political move against the Ba'th attack on the Iraqi communists. However, the main principle of the US in the Kurdish question was primarily non-intervention since it was seen as an internal issue of Iraq. According to Gibson, this is because it took some time until the United States realized that the Kurdish question was another of the Cold War's political and military conflict zones, as the primary focus of the US was on other proxy zones of struggle with the USSR such as Cuba, Vietnam, and Laos. Thus, Gibson argues that the US missed the earlier opportunities of making the Kurds one of its major allies in the region until 1972.

Under the rule of Arab nationalist and anti-communist Arif brothers and later al-Bazzaz (1963-1968), the Johnson administration had friendly relations with Baghdad. As Gibson argues, "although Britain, Israel, and Iran all saw the new Arif regime as too cozy with Nasser, whom each despised for their own reason, the United States was content with Arif's friendly relationship with Nasser, so long as Iraq maintained a neutralist stance in the Cold War and was committed to anticommunist policies domestically" (p. 101). During the second Ba'th rule after 1968, the US began to believe that Baghdad was becoming a Soviet orbit, especially after the 1972 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR, which led to the Nixon administration's Kurdish intervention. Gibson states that "the CIA operation to finance and arm the Kurds

is a perfect example of a superpower intervention; the United States was actively encouraging a rebellion in order to bring about a change in Iraqi policy and advance its own interests" (p. 144). Accordingly, Gibson claims that the Kurdish War in 1974-75 was a significant Cold War conflict within which two superpowers got directly involved.

In general, Gibson exhibits a historiography of modern Iraq from the US foreign policy perspective within the context of the Cold War which he considers this foreign policy mostly reactive, rather than proactive, to the real and imagined Soviet threats as they arose. His argument is situated within the idea that Third World interventions during the Cold War played a major role in undermining the later political order and economic progress in the Middle East. Most particularly, as Gibson puts, "America's competition with the Soviet Union over Iraq and the broader Middle East would contribute to Saddam Hussein's rise to power and, ultimately, the destabilization of Iraqi politics today" (p. 199).

There are two major strengths of this book. First, it is able to draw a larger picture by connecting the issues of the Cold War, American foreign policy, the Middle East, Arab nationalism and the Kurdish question together. Second, it offers a rich historical account supported by declassified primary materials and interviews. However, the book remains limited in four particular ways. First, Gibson does not particularly explain his logic of periodisation which ends in 1975. However, the Cold War ended and the Iraqi Kurds achieved de-facto autonomy from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein with the US-led establishment of no-fly zone in 1991. The narrative of the book would be much more comprehensive if the analysis could be at least extended until the end of the Cold War. Second, while the book takes Iran and Israel into account for the Cold War's Kurdish question within the context of American foreign policy, it pays relatively less attention to the role played by Turkey as a member of NATO, a close ally of the US and a country with a large Kurdish population. Third, the book mostly takes the Cold War as a static era which neglects certain implications of détente between the late 1960s and 70s in the Soviet-US competition over Iraq. If détente did not have any influence on the superpowers' rivalry in Iraq, then the question of why that would be the case needs to be explained as well. And finally, while the book successfully reflects how and under what conditions the US approached Iraq and the Kurds; it fails to give any agency to the Kurds in their politics of ally-making. Instead, they are depicted as another Cold War card to be played in the hands of superpower state actors.

Despite these shortcomings, it is a well-written book which sheds light on the recent history of Iraq and the Kurds within the context of the Cold War.

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Alex Danilovich, ***Iraqi Federalism and the Kurds: Learning to Live Together***, Farnham, Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, 181 pp., (ISBN: 9781409451112).

Ten years ago Iraq embarked on a federal path. The author of this book, Alex Danilovich, who teaches political science at University of Kurdistan Hewlêr, Iraq, approaches it as a large-scale ongoing social experiment. Not least because the Kurds in Iraq have been persecuted by successive Iraqi regimes, it is of great importance to explore this specific case as it is unfolding so history will not repeat itself. If it turns out well, federalism may prove to be a promising democratic arrangement to manage conflicts and end sectarian and ethnic violence without changing international borders in non-Western multi-ethnic states, especially in Middle Eastern states currently raged

by social turmoil and war. Can a Western constitutional framework hold in a deeply divided society where politics is largely identity-based and revolves around ethnic, tribal and sectarian allegiance? More specifically, can Islamic principles successfully sit with Western liberalism within one constitutional system? In addition to these two questions of concern to many social scientists, the author asks one country-specific question: Is Iraqi federalism a solution to the problem of the country's severe disunity or is it just a temporary solution for the Kurds while they bide their time for declaring independence? Here the book seeks to contribute theoretically to the academic literature on "the paradox of federalism": Does federalism offer a mechanism for maintaining international borders in deeply divided states, or does it rather promote separatism for ethnic groups/federal units as they develop institutions and mobilise resources?

The book, which consists of six chapters, starts out with a literature review on comparative federalism to construct a theoretical framework of crucial issues relevant when analysing Iraq's first ten years' as federal state. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the Iraqi federal system, setting the scene for the book's empirical focus on four controversial features discussed in chapter 3 to 6. Chapter 3 analyses the role of Kurdistan's regional security forces, the *Peshmerga*, within Iraqi federation. Chapter 4 discusses Kurdistan Region's international activities. Chapter 5 discusses conflicts around federalisation of Iraq's natural resources. Chapter 6 investigates how the cohabitation of the principles of Islam and liberal constitutionalism in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution is played out and impacts Iraqi federalism.

The book's outline is pedagogically structured as most chapters include continuous references to main arguments and explanatory frameworks and most issues are elaborated in relation to: (1) other federal states and units' constitutional arrangements and practical politics over time (e.g. Quebec in Canada, Belgium's two regions, Nigeria and Brazil); (2) the Iraqi Constitution; and (3) Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) actions and intentions with reference to practical policies, official statements in media and a few interviews for the book.

The author argues that *Peshmerga* does not necessarily pose a threat to Iraqi unity. First, *Peshmerga* was established a long time ago under circumstances when Kurdish identity was under severe threat which is no longer the case. Second, the legacy of the current form of *Peshmerga* derives from distrust between the two main Kurdish parties. Third, the KRG has seriously considered partial transfer of *Peshmerga* control of the federal army, not least for financial reasons. The institutional design too provides for such collaboration. In regard to KRG's agenda in the international arena, the author finds a similar cultural and linguistic driving force behind these activities as in the cases of Quebec in Canada and Catalonia in Spain, which has more to do with *paradiplomacy* (through which political sub-units promote their economic, political and cultural interests) than the more aggressive form of *protodiplomacy* (through which sub-units seek to assert claims to sovereign status). In addition, KRG's offices abroad are remnants from the 1990s, still fueled by inter-Kurdish problems between the KDP and PUK and not directed against the federal government, and therefore also in accordance with the 2005 Constitution. Kurdish ministers confirm that KRG only implements foreign policy formulated in Baghdad, without pursuing own independent foreign policy. These conclusions seem important since many experts and the commentators have voiced suspicions that the Kurds have a hidden agenda to break away from Iraq in the long run without reason.

For different reasons the controversial issues focused on in chapter 5 and 6 do not appear as well scrutinised as those in chapter 3 and 4. Despite the fact that the

author(s) have stayed several years in the Kurdistan Region, no first hand interviews have been conducted either with officials and advisors present at the time the Constitution was negotiated in Baghdad nor officials handling every day political issues. While other researchers are referred to, facts and arguments in general seem to be based on media sources. Consequently, not much new light is shed on the issue of federalisation of natural resources other than what is initially stated: relevant constitutional provisions remain ambiguous and are interpreted selectively by both Erbil and Baghdad. This is disappointing since, as the author(s) points out, this was one of the toughest areas to negotiate. Chapter 5 finds the current federal system providing different political elites a framework within which they nurture their own financial interests by using political stalemates. Chapter 6 concludes that it is too early to tell whether Iraqi constitutionalism will side with Islam or liberal human rights. The territorial/federal chamber of the federal parliament intended to mediate Article 2 in the Constitution has not yet been set up and the only possible umpire of federal relations remains the Federal Supreme Court which is dominated by political nominations and remains salient.

Writing in 2013 Alex Danilovich concludes that while the Iraqi federal system remains unstable, it is overall ongoing and promising as major disputes between Erbil and Baghdad are resolved by negotiations rather than force. Iraq's ethnic federation has brought peace to the divided society and created conditions in which Iraq's constituent groups may eventually learn to live together as federal partners. As federal relationships in both Canada and Belgium indicated, the relationship between Baghdad and Erbil must necessarily be adjusted and reshaped over time. Federal relations in Iraq will need time to root and function smoothly. Judicial mechanisms to attune the relationship between Baghdad and Erbil are not yet in place. The implementation of the concept of constitutionalism and federalism is unthinkable without an active role of the judiciary. Erbil's activism also escalates when there is perception of the federal government's inefficiency, deliberate punishment policies, limited resources and lack of expertise and experts. Erbil complains publicly about these issues and is willing to address them. In 2013 the author notes in a footnote that the KRG so far only implements foreign policy formulated in Baghdad, it has clearly expressed sympathy for Syria's uprising while Baghdad supports the Syrian regime. Since the war with ISIS, new geopolitical issues have appeared that may change the post-sovereign political order which the author somehow uses as a point of reference when analysing Iraqi federalism. Since summer 2014, the entire Middle East and North Africa is going through dramatic political and social changes. Many issues are at stake. Will Iraqi federalism and the desire to live together survive the current turmoil? How long will the Kurds be able to be part of nominal federation if the political order is challenged by other groups than the Kurds? What would the Kurds do if federalism turns out to be yet another round of state-building failure in Iraq?

This book contributes with a case study to academic literature on both federalism and constitutionalism. Researchers interested in these theoretical issues will find a thorough presentation and analytical discussion of some core issues in the Iraqi Federal Constitution which has not been highlighted earlier. The book will also find its circle of readers among academics and students focusing on the Kurdish cause. It is generally well written and pedagogically structured.

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Sherko Kirmanj, **Identity and Nation in Iraq**, Boulder Colorado and London: Lynne Rienner, 2013, xviii + 321 pp., (ISBN: 978-1-58826-885-3).

This book represents an ambitious effort to offer a more inclusive and balanced account of formations and contestations of Iraqi national identity. Sherko Kirmanj examines Kurdish and Shiite perspectives on national identity, which he argues are generally overlooked in scholarship on the Iraqi state. He does so by tracing the “enduring conflicts” between Sunni Arabs, Shiites, and Kurds from the creation of the state in 1921 through 2012. His book synthesises much of the historical and political science literature on Iraq, drawing heavily from classics like Hanna Batatu’s *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, as well as from a variety of Kurdish and Arabic language sources that provide insights about the experiences of Kurdish and Shiite communities. Kirmanj’s thesis is that the absence of shared “collective identity or attachment to a single homeland” (p. 321) is primarily to blame for the inability of successive regimes to forge a lasting Iraqi national identity.

Identity and Nation in Iraq succeeds in offering a relatively concise, chronological narrative of the Iraqi state and national identity. Chapter 1 contextualises identities in Iraq with a brief historical, geographical, and cultural overview. Kirmanj introduces the reader to the ethnic and religious diversity of Iraq, although the experiences of minorities he mentions, such as Turkmen, Yazidis, or Mandaeans, are beyond the scope of the book’s almost exclusive focus on Kurdish and Shiite communities. The author’s examination of these communities is a deliberate response to three trends in the literature on the Iraqi state: First, Kirmanj rejects the primordialist notion that before the formation of the state “Iraq was already a nation” (p. 10) whose communities have demonstrated a consistent desire to remain united. Conversely, Kirmanj also finds unsatisfactory the interpretation that “each group tends to think primarily in terms of its own ethnic or confessional community and identity” (p. 11). Third, the author gently critiques scholarship that attributes the rise in sectarian violence in Iraq solely to the failures of the British administration’s state-making during the Mandate period or to the Coalition Provisional Authority during the early years of the Iraq War (2003–2011). Instead, Kirmanj evaluates episodes of sectarian conflict throughout the history of Iraq, noting the multiple forms of identity and political ideologies at play.

In his conceptualisation of identity and nation, Kirmanj is strongly influenced by Anthony D. Smith. He builds upon Smith’s theorisation of the “ethnic origin of nations” to suggest that nation-formation requires three conditions: “(1) a memory of a common past; (2) linguistic or cultural ties that enable a higher degree of social communication within the group...; and (3) a conception of equality between members of the group that is organized as a civil society.” If a population does not possess all three conditions, then its members will struggle to “bond as a nation.” The author also lists seven measures for assessing “national integration,” the most important of which is “recognition” by other groups and by the state. Throughout the book, three types of actors appear, although the author does not always clearly delineate them: “state and/or elites,” “ethnic or religious groups,” and “influential individuals” (p. 15). Finally, three “competing nationalisms” are considered in the study: “Iraqi patriotism,” “Arab nationalism” or “pan-Arabism,” and “Kurdish nationalism.”

Following Chapter 1, the book proceeds formulaically in its assessment of historical evidence and some recent political events against the three postulates described above. Chapter 2 discusses the “fragmented nature” and “complexity” of Iraqi society during the British Mandate period. Chapter 3, “Faisal and the Dream of a Nation,” reviews the efforts of Iraq’s first king to unify the country and assesses the British role

in shaping Iraq, a theme that continues in Chapter 4. Kirmanj reminds the reader that national integration during the monarchical era was not total; various uprisings during the early and mid-20th century “stopped at ethnic or religious boundaries” and faced opposition from other ethnic or sectarian groups (p. 101). Whereas the first half of the book portrays Iraq as mostly “integrated” through the monarchy, urbanisation, and modernisation, the latter describes the “failure of national integration.” Chapters 6 and 7 detail the rise of the Baath Party and how Saddam Hussein appealed to “tribalism” and religion to maintain power. Chapter 7 also includes brief summaries of Kurdish political parties and the push for Kurdish autonomy. In Chapters 6 and 7, Kirmanj points to many examples of sectarian conflict prior to the United States-led invasion, which is the subject of Chapter 8.

In the final chapter, “The Paradoxes of Nation Formation in Iraq,” the author concludes that Iraq lacks “a common memory” and “shared destiny” that are essential to producing an enduring national identity (p. 252). Without multilateral coalitions that span ethnic and sectarian interests, Kirmanj argues, “any hope of a united Iraq or overarching Iraqi identity is mere wishful thinking” (p. 253). Kirmanj maintains that the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was the “only political party that attracted members from all ethnic and sectarian communities” (p. 149). Furthermore, he critiques the idea that a common enemy produces national integration. For example, he demonstrates that “the surge of Iraqi nationalism” during the Iran-Iraq war was a “myth” by noting how many people deserted and how Kurdish factions supported one another’s enemies rather than forming a unified front (p. 144). In the final pages of the book, Kirmanj suggests that Iraq does not need to be “rebuilt” but “built” on the basis of mutual “recognition” of the diverse identities comprising the state. To accomplish this, Kirmanj recommends that “past injustices” must be acknowledged; that “recognition of the right to self-determination of the Kurds” must be granted; and that “consensus” must be achieved to safeguard against “return to minority or dictatorial rule” (p. 253). Through what political arrangements or “core values” (p. 122) these conditions will be achieved, the author does not say.

At times, the book’s terminology is a bit inconsistent and the thread of the argument subsequently lost, which is, perhaps, an oversight of the publisher: Although the first chapter clearly defines “nation,” “nation-state,” and “state,” there is a good deal of slippage or fuzziness between these terms throughout the remaining chapters. For instance, there are allusions to the “Iraqi nation-state,” which at other times seems to be used synonymously with the terms “Iraqi nation” or “state.” Second, there is a minor problem with organisation: While there are helpful summaries at the end of chapters, the book as a whole lacks cohesion in its overall argument; it needs a section in the final chapter that specifically revisits the three postulates and seven criteria for nation-building outlined in the first chapter. As it is, the reader is left wondering how the criteria introduced in the first chapter are to be applied in the final analysis.

The primary strength of *Identity and Nation in Iraq* lies in its incorporation of Shiite and Kurdish perspectives, which the author accomplishes by analysing contested symbols of the state and minority groups, particularly in the Iraqi education system. For example, Kirmanj notes at which times and in which environments various communities displayed different flags (p. 31, 112) or sang different “national” anthems (p. 29). While most of the book relies on standard secondary sources, such as well-known histories of Iraq, the author offers some original and insightful analysis of Iraqi identities by examining dozens of Arabic and Kurdish language materials. For instance, Kirmanj examines Sati al-Husri’s writings (p. 51); efforts to establish a Kurdish education directorate (p. 101-103); Shiite youth centers (p. 119); Baathist education pro-

grams (p. 136, 141, 143); and school textbooks across successive regimes in Iraqi history, including recently revised Kurdish language textbooks commissioned by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Kirmanj's analysis of identities as represented and contested in the education system is a less-studied perspective on Iraqi identities, one which I hope he will continue to pursue. Likewise, the author mentions that he conducted some informal interviews with individuals, which is also a valuable yet understudied approach to the topic. This more inclusive, book length treatment of a worthy subject is a welcome addition to the scholarship on Iraqi identities.

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Cenk Saraçoğlu, **Kurds of Modern Turkey: Migration, Neoliberalism and Exclusion in Turkish Society**, London : IB Tauris, 2011, 228 pp., (ISBN: 978-1-84885-468-0).

Cenk Saraçoğlu's book is a valuable contribution not only to Kurdish studies, but also to urban studies as it is devoted to the understanding of Kurdish migrants' living conditions in the urban context and their relationship with the local population. In the Foreword, Saraçoğlu states that the general subject of the book is "the recent increase in popular anti-Kurdish sentiments in Turkey". To grasp this subject, he conducted a year-long field study among the middle-class in İzmir, the third largest city of Turkey situated in the Aegean coast and infamous with nationalistic incidents and demonstrations mainly directed towards the Kurds. The author aptly and meticulously defines his subject and object of study, builds up a new analytical tool ("exclusive recognition") and demarcates the similarities and divergences of the new concept from the widely used concepts such as nationalism, racism and fascism. Moreover, he positions the whole evaluation in a three-layered context of, neoliberalism, the armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army and the Kurdish immigration into the western cities. This positioning makes the research even more valuable for it not only makes a micro-level analysis of the İzmir's middle-class sentiments towards the Kurdish migrants in the city in particular and the Kurds in Turkey in general, but also relates finely to the macro-level issues.

The book is organised around eleven chapters. After the Introduction, Chapter 2 is devoted to the clarification of the object and introduces the concept of exclusive recognition. In this short yet dense chapter, Saraçoğlu first carefully states what the book does not do: it does not take the Kurds as a homogeneous group but examines "the processes through which middle-class people in İzmir construct the migrants from Eastern Anatolia as 'Kurds' and 'ethnic others'" (p. 9). Thus, the aim of the book is to reveal the components and the process of the "ethnicisation" of the Kurds. To do this, the author defines in length, in the first place, "the subjects of the ethnicisation, middle-class İzmirlis", in the second place, "the object of the ethnicisation: Kurdish migrants of post-1980s", and in the third place, "the content of the ethnicisation", that is, the main common stereotypes that are used to identify the Kurds. Saraçoğlu draws five main stereotypes from the interviews he conducted with 90 middle-class residents of İzmir: (1) ignorant and cultureless, (2) benefit scroungers, (3) disrupters of urban life, (4) invaders, and (5) separatists.

Chapter 3 details the field-work conducted with the middle-class members in İzmir while Chapter 4 makes a rich discussion about the specificity of "exclusive recognition" and its novelty in comparison to the state's nationalist and assimilationist policies towards the Kurds. As the whole book is organised around this concept and the sentiment that it denotes, it is necessary to develop it in this review. Saraçoğlu

states that this is a collective sentiment, a “social phenomenon” (p. 35), which is not a direct extension of the long-standing nationalistic discourses of the state, that of denial and assimilation. Rather, it emanates from the encounter of the middle-class İzmirli with the Kurdish migrants in the urban context. Hence, they recognise the existence of Kurds as a specific ethnic group, but they have an exclusionary discourse about them and the book is rich of quotations from the interviewees repeating over and over the five stigmatising stereotypes stated above. Saraçoğlu convincingly builds up and historicises his concept, still, one cannot but ask whether this sentiment is really a “recognition”? That is to say, recognition by definition denotes an act of accepting, but the whole argument lies in the fact that the interviewees do not accept the Kurdish migrants as such, but make a new construction of them based on their stereotypes. This act, or sentiment, is closer to a “misrecognition” in the Bourdieusian sense, particularly when it leads to exclusion. Saraçoğlu very well underlines that the sentiment is a consequence of an encounter in the urban environment between the middle-class urbanites and the (mostly informal) working-class Kurds, but it is hardly believable that the middle-class people, in İzmir or elsewhere, had no previous pre-established sentiments vis-à-vis the Kurds. Especially, the class difference accentuated by the sentiment of superiority widespread among the well-educated Turkish citizens in western Turkey (akin to colonial arrogance) seem to have paved the way for the ethnicisation and humiliation of Kurdish migrants, identifying them as ignorant, rude, pre-modern, cultureless and gradually as disrupters of urban life and separatists.

Chapter 5 deals with the locus of exclusive recognition and analyses the historical transformation of urban social life in İzmir to demonstrate how this sentiment is “re-produced and rationalised through the experiences of the middle-class in urban social life” (p. 63). Chapter 6 links to this analysis by adding the contemporary elements shaping urban social life, particularly neoliberalism and migration. Thus, the author aptly links the fieldwork to macro-level phenomena, underlining the relationality of the İzmir case, arriving gradually to the conclusion that the sentiment of exclusive recognition is a novelty structured by the processes in the urban social life through which Kurdish migrants are recognised as a distinctive and homogeneous ethnic group in İzmir (chapter 7), they have been discursively excluded through certain stereotypes and labels that are attached to “Kurdishness” (Chapter 8), and exclusive recognition has been reinforced and reproduced by some factors that are external to urban life in İzmir, namely the recent political developments in the Middle East (Chapter 9). This minute analysis of these processes in shaping the exclusive recognition contributes greatly to our understanding of the encounter between different ethnic groups positioned in different classes and different social milieus.

The last chapter before the overall conclusion is a very important one that engages a unique theoretical debate in which Saraçoğlu puts his concept of exclusive recognition in a vivid discussion with the concept of ideology in its Marxist sense and shows that exclusive recognition is an ideological form of consciousness. Finally, in the conclusion, he evaluates this concept in light of three predominant concepts that are used in sociology to designate and qualify the sentiments and processes that construct and qualify ethnic others that he had deliberately avoided to employ throughout the book: nationalist, fascist and racist. His choice to avoid these terms in order to construct his own concept to depict a particular social phenomenon in a particular locus giving way to the creation of a very powerful and courageous book. The book, which is opening new paths of comprehension and discussion of Kurdish migration to Turkish metropolises, is to be recommended not only to students of the Kurdish question in

Turkey, but also to those who are dealing with urban studies in general, and with ethnic encounters in the urban environment in particular.

A small note about the title of the book, *Kurds of Modern Turkey: Migration, Neoliberalism and Exclusion in Turkish Society*. I think this is quite misleading as it focuses on the case of İzmir metropolitan context and does not aim to provide a full picture of the Kurdish question in contemporary Turkey. Though the writer states that “its findings and arguments...are still significant in understanding the current state and future of the Kurdish question in Turkey and are useful in shedding light on the recent debates over increasing anti-Kurdish sentiments” (p. xiii), the conceptual framework developed in this study needs to be tested in other contexts.

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Tatort Kurdistan. **Demokratische Autonomie in Nordkurdistan, Rätbewegung, Geschlechterbefreiung und Ökologie in der Praxis.** *Hamburg: Tatort Kurdistan/Informationsstelle Kurdistan, 2012, 183 pp., (ISBN: 978-3-941012-60-8).*

Anja Flach, Ercan Ayboğa and Michael Knapp, **Revolution in Rojava, Frauenbewegung und Kommunalismus zwischen Krieg und Embargo,** *Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 2015, 352 pp., (ISBN: 978-3-89965-665-7).*

After a long period of struggle aimed at the establishment of an independent state, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK*) has changed course and set its sights on a project of radical democracy. In its 1978 manifesto, the PKK declared an independent state as the only correct political goal, like other national liberation movements at the time. However, following a critique and self-critique on the character of national liberation struggles, the PKK began to question whether independence should be conceptualised and practised as a state/nation-state construction. This resulted in a redefinition of its political strategy. Though adhering to the idea of self-determination, the PKK no longer ties itself to the idea of a state, but rather to developing people's capacities to govern themselves. Referred to by and within the PKK as a paradigm shift, this is the subject of two new works, *Demokratischer Autonomie in Nordkurdistan*, written by a collective of authors under the name of Tatort Kurdistan, and *Revolution in Rojava*, written by Anja Flach, Ercan Ayboğa and Michael Knapp.

Several authors have discussed the PKK's changing understanding of politics as it evolved in the 2000s, concentrating the debate on the emergence of a communal form of politics that evolved around the projects of democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism. This communal politics is regarded as standing in a tradition of a political counter-current that found expression in the Paris Commune of 1871, the initial councils (soviets) that emerged in the springtime of the revolution in Russia in 1917, and in the Spanish Revolution of 1936-39. Yet, few have written about the issue on the basis of observation and fieldwork in Kurdistan, wherein lies the value of these books.

Demokratischer Autonomie in Nordkurdistan is a report written by a delegation of 10 people who travelled through the region in September, 2011, visiting Diyarbakir, Batman, Viranşehir, Dersim, Hakkari, Yüksekova, and Van. The book sets out with a brief introduction on the changing character of the PKK's national liberation struggle and its reflection on and critique of the nation-state, followed by a brief discussion of the ideas of democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism. This is followed by six chapters based on transcribed interviews and observations on the ground. The

first chapter discusses the development of the councils, which are at the heart of a networked (confederal) system of self-government (autonomy). The interviews here extend beyond those involved with the city councils to incorporate also people working with and for the district and village councils and the women's councils. This is followed by a brief chapter on the Kurdish youth-movement and chapters on gender-relations, ecology, and education.

The main value of this book is the wide range of issues discussed and the many voices heard. The book is, as the authors state, a snapshot of a struggle and a process, and therefore more about future-oriented ideas, rather than a statement of what actually is. This makes the book a rich sourcebook for those who want to study this struggle. The obvious weakness of a snapshot, of course, is the difficulty of a critical engagement with the initiatives reported. An example is the focus on the "Ax û Av" cooperative in Viranşehir, about which the book contains a long interview in the chapter on democratic alternatives. Here we learn that the cooperative has provided people with housing and livelihoods although in a way that is very different from the communal idea out of which it started. Further insights into, for example, the gap between ideology and practice, might have been most rewarding here. Indeed, what is missing in the book is some sort of a conclusion or an afterword, in which the authors could have brought together and reflected on their main findings.

Revolution in Rojava discusses the issue of communal democracy and the women's movement in Rojava. The book is the product of extensive fieldwork in the region and offers a comprehensive discussion of developments in Rojava since the revolution started in Kobani, on 19 July, 2012, and cities in the region were freed from regime control. The book starts along a space-time axis, explaining the geography of Rojava and presenting a brief history, including overviews of the Assad dynasty and the neo-liberal turn after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is followed by a chapter on the multi-cultural composition of Rojava. The book systematically unfolds in chapters on the liberation of Rojava, the project of democratic autonomy in Syria and the Middle East, the role of women, the development of council democracy and communes and the role of civil society, the defence and legal system in Rojava, education, healthcare, ecology, and economy, and then a chapter on the revolution in Rojava in the context of a wider geo-political context.

One of the merits of this book is the in-depth discussion of the council system and how it is organised and working in practice, including a detailed consideration of the commune as basic unit of the council system. The authors historicise council or communal democracy, arguing that the councils were the main institutions in the revolutionary movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in particular in the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the German uprisings of 1918, when workers' and soldiers' councils were established as a socialist revolutionary project. They further investigate the establishment and functioning of the council system in Rojava, from the communes, which are the councils at village and street level, through the district and city councils to the confederal structure at canton level and in Aleppo. The book's in-depth discussion of this system is of importance, dismissing the often heard suggestion of this attempt to build another polity as mere ideology. Overall, one may say that *Revolution in Rojava* is the most comprehensive and systematic account of socio-political developments in the region since 2012, if not the only one, which makes it a must-read for all those interested in serious discussions of the Kurdish struggle and unfolding politics of the region.

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