

Book Reviews

David L. Phillips, **The Kurdish Spring: A New Map of the Middle East**, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2015. 268 pp., (ISBN-13: 978-1412856805).

The Kurdish Spring: A New Map of the Middle East is an insightful account of the Kurds' ongoing journey into statehood. The book traces how Kurds were divided into four countries, Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq, after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century. It then explains their various struggles for human rights, cultural rights, semi-autonomy, independence, and statehood. The author David L. Phillips takes a sympathetic position; he explicates subjugation of and state-led violence towards Kurds, and also argues for their right for an independent state. Thanks to the author's years of experience in the region and sound scholarship, the book provides ample information to build a fair and critical perspective regarding the quite complex dynamics for a possible Kurdish state in the context of four countries. However, this focus on statehood does not leave adequate space for the crucial questions of de-militarisation and how to foster a culture of human rights within Kurdish society, which could perhaps be the topic of a follow up project.

The Kurdish Spring is divided into four self-explanatory sections. In the first part, "Betrayal", Phillips summarises the period from Sykes-Picot to Lausanne Treaties when Kurdistan was divided into four territories. In a brief historical account, he argues that the drawing of the borders in the Middle East and formation of new nation states were contingent upon the colonial interests of Britain and France. Even though Kurds lacked "good leadership and national vision", the author maintains that they had equal rights to establish their own state.

The second section, "Abuse", follows Kurdish history as it unfolded in four states, Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran. In Iraq, Mustafa Barzani's struggles and the Anfal campaign; in Turkey, Sheikh Said and the Dersim massacres, emergence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and the state terror during 1990s; in Syria struggles of the Xoybun movement, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the establishment of Emergency Law, and the recent uprooting of masses; in Iran the short-lived Mahabad Republic, Komala's and the Free Life Party's (PJAK) struggles constitute the highlights of Phillip's account of the Kurdish history in the 20th century. This account of the intensity, continuity, and cost of the violence Kurds have been subjected to is striking and informative. Yet, Kurds do not come out of this narrative as "absolute victims" mainly thanks to the author's meticulous analysis of ups and downs of various Kurdish movements. Thereby we also see the limits of Kurds' agency in the context of complex international politics.

The third section, "Progress", chronicles more recent episodes of Kurdish struggles for statehood. The progress in Iraq is explained as the constitution of unity and stronger



will for self-rule starting with the first elections for Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and Kurdish National Assembly (KNA) in 1992. In Turkey, Phillips emphasises the Imrali peace process as progress, which became possible due to Turkey's European Union accession processes, Justice and Development Party's (AKP) strategies to build its hegemony, and mainly the major transformation in the Kurdish movement. Here he cites the articulation of "democratic autonomy", change of PKK's position from "offense" to "defense", and the struggles to participate in the national legal political systems, i.e. parliament and local governances. In Syria, Kurds' lives changed radically after the Day of Rage in 2011 and especially with the "Rojava Revolution" that established an autonomous region within a dissolving Syria. The author does a good job to craft a fair and clear analysis of the Kurds' relationship with the Assad regime and oppositional Syrian National Council (SNC). Finally, in Iran, the author refers to Rouhani's presidential term as a "Second Revolution" but accepts that Kurds' lives have not significantly altered in that period. Instead he argues that Kurds suffered from "factionalism" (p. 178), and their failure to unite has impeded to take up the opportunities in the new period.

Before moving to the last sections, it needs to be stated that the part on "Progress" could benefit from two additional dimensions. First, it could integrate the sources of aspirations other than state building, i.e. gender equality, democratisation of the respective countries, and ecological concerns. According to Phillips the main drive in the Kurdish movement is building independence, however that neglects serious critical discussions about the ideology of statehood that take place especially among Kurds in Turkey. One of my human rights activist friends said in Diyarbakır: "Well, if the Kurdish security forces will beat me up when we have a state, I would prefer the Turkish security forces rather than seeing Kurds beating up each other". Second, and as a complementary point, Phillips is right to point out several times throughout the book that the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) in Iraq renewed hopes for statehood among all Kurds in the region and this leads him to praise KRG as a leading power in that respect. However, this is questionable given the mutually pragmatic relations between the Turkish state and the KRG and the tension between the latter and the PKK. Instead, the Rojava Revolution seems to have stirred stronger excitement and sense of unity among Kurds; almost all of the political activists I talked to in Diyarbakır during my research had been to Suruç (Turkey) border in summer of 2014 to protect and oversee the border with their bodies in order to provide their support to the Kobani (Syria) resistance. While the KRG has the power to develop a real state apparatus that would nominally become an internationally recognised state, Rojava is emotionally and ideologically a better example of what some of the Kurds expect from a "state".

The Kurdish Spring concludes with "Peril and Opportunity", a section that is composed of three parts on the very recent developments in the region. In "the End of Iraq", he explains the fall of Iraq after the US invasion and how in that context Iraqi Kurds talk more openly about "self-determination". The author, supporting this position, situates IS and Iraqi Kurds as opposing forces in terms of civilisation, democracy and human rights. The next section "International Response" delineates several countries' (USA, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iran, Lebanon, and Israel) positions vis-à-vis a possible Kurdish state. In the final section, "Path to Independence", Phillips criticises US policies of initial non-involvement in the IS issue and therefore allowing the strengthening of the terrorist organisation in the region. While he depicts KRG's willingness to remain in a united Iraq, he also sees them

justified in their search for independence given the IS threats and Iraqi state's inability to foster a more inclusive governance. At that point, he finds US's insistence on Iraqi unity as irrelevant and another form of betrayal of the Kurds.

The last sections definitely address the nation-states in which Kurds reside as well as the US audiences. In order to eliminate the fears of dissolution and chaos, he states, "Like letting steam out of the kettle, practical cooperation in the Kurdish neighborhood would diminish threats to territorial integrity rather than exacerbate differences between states where Kurds reside. Democratic development of Iraqi Kurdistan would serve as an inspiration to Kurds in the region, as well as a model for states" (p. 234). Additionally, for those who question the relevance of another nation-state, he argues, "Independence is not just a political state. It is a state of being. Independence would right a historical injustice, manifesting the pride of Kurds and fulfilling their destiny as a people. Kurds believe that independence is the only credible guarantor of security. Only Kurds can protect Kurds" (p. 227).

To wrap up, I would like to iterate that *The Kurdish Spring* is a rich and detailed guide for those who want to introduce themselves to the Kurdish struggles and who want an update on the very fast developments in the region. Furthermore, the book also presents a thorough analytical perspective grounded in adequate historical knowledge to help comprehend the current stakes and actors. The author references historical documents, newspaper articles, a few academic accounts and his own observations; thus his text stands somewhere between an academic work and an investigative journalistic account. The book focuses on the issue of independence and statehood at the expense of giving further insights on the bottom up, critical, and democratic movements, yet as indicated above, this could be the focus of a follow up project. Clearly written from a human rights perspective, *The Kurdish Spring* stands as a most-needed and refreshing guide for anybody politically and academically interested in this precarious moment for Kurds, peoples of the Middle East, and elsewhere.

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Bedross Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Stanford, California : Stanford University Press, 2014, 264 pp., (ISBN: 9780804791472).

This book is about an important issue of modern Ottoman history. Bedross Der Matossian has analysed the short time period between the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 and the counterrevolution in April 1909. His focus lays on the "nondominant" actors in the Ottoman sphere : the Jews, the Arabs and the Armenians. The essence of his research is that these three peoples were able to discuss and, to some extent, create their own role within the Ottoman framework between the two revolutions. The "dreams" of better political representation in the capital, harmony among the religions, and justice with the reinstatement of a constitution were "shattered" in spring 1909, when the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, CUP) showed its nationalistic vision of Ottomanism.

The book begins with the Young Turk Revolution and its impact on Ottoman society. An important observation is the role of print media and the creation of a public sphere in this important political movement. Matossian stresses the necessity of a public sphere, because it allowed discussions between and inside ethnic groups of the

Ottoman Empire in a way only the intellectuals in exile were able to engage in before 1908. The revolution triggered a major and complex debate over constitutional issues. Intra- and interethnic relationships had to be newly defined. Der Matossian offers new insights into changes and disputes inside Armenian, Jewish, and Arab communities. But not only did the multiethnic aspect of the Ottoman Empire define the discussions, but so did its multilingual and geographical components. For example, the traditional power of the notables in Damascus was in danger due to demands of change by the CUP, and therefore, local actors reacted differently to the news in July 1908 than did those in the capital and furthermore the ones based in Jerusalem (p. 28).

The diverse ethnic groups in the multilingual empire faced a transformation of internal structures and new positioning towards a reborn central government. Der Matossian focuses on Arabs, Armenians and Jews. With Kurds and Kurdish organisations he deals only marginally, mostly in relation to the Armenians. The Young Turk Revolution reactivated constitutional discussions and reanimated various demands concerning a new reality that emerged from the end of the reign of Abdulhamid. He writes: “The euphoria that followed the Revolution of 1908 raised the ethnic groups’ expectations of proportional representation, increased fairness, democracy, and equality in the electoral process” (p. 98).

Jews, for example, saw the opportunity to enforce Zionist projects and to strengthen the political voice of Jerusalem. The author explores print media sources and political speeches in Salonica and Jerusalem in his analysis of the Jews’ roles in and responses to the revolution. The international framework concerning the postrevolutionary discussion is important, since central ideas and concepts came from the active “exilic public spheres.” The strength of *Shattered Dreams of Revolution* is the connection between micro- and macro-history.

The question of political representation in the parliament and the situation in Eastern Anatolia dominated the Ottoman Armenian discourse. Concerning electoral confrontation among the empire’s ethnic groups, proportional representation was the key concept. The elections in the different sancaks in the winter after the revolution cover a great deal of the book. As for the Greek and Armenian communities, expectations concerning the election results were too high. The Arab press on the other side expressed satisfaction. Der Matossian shows that the elections offered a platform for the various discussions and visions of the political future among and between the empire’s ethnic groups. On the other hand, the CUP as the central actor of the postrevolutionary order put itself more and more against the major claims of non-Turkish ethnic groups’ political platforms. The CUP followed a different version of Ottomanism and proclaimed its ideals of centralisation. The author characterises the elections as a “negotiation process” (p. 119) with reference to administrative decentralisation, ethno-religious privileges, national education, and proportional representation. The 1908 Ottoman elections “represented one of the first organized, mass political performances in the Middle East” (p. 119).

After the election, parliamentary politics became an important dimension in the public sphere. According to the author, the politics of the street and the politics of the Parliament went hand in hand. In his fifth and next-to-last chapter “From the Ballots to the Parliament”, he explains the “degeneration” from the dream of a constitutional assembly towards the “reality of a one-party dictatorship” of the CUP (p. 124). The Macedonian Question demonstrates the complexity of the issues treated in the new parliament. Der Matossian emphasises that frictions in parliamentary discussions were

marked by intrareligious and interethnic issues. For these, a hitherto under-researched “perspective of ecclesiastical politics” played a major role. “In fact, ecclesiastical politics was one of the key factors in defining inter- and intraethnic relationships in the empire” (p. 128).

Der Matossian follows the chronology of the events that took place after the 1908 revolution while focusing on internal changes of the empire. After different examples of local political problems in diverse areas of the empire, he briefly refers to the Baghdad railway as an example of European entanglement in the Ottoman Empire. Apart from remarks on the influence of exilic ideas and the role model of France in the constitutional discussion, he does not mention further the role of foreign powers in the shape of the events during the Ottoman cataclysm. One could argue that the author should mention ideas of Ottoman modernity and the role of the military, which were strongly influenced by Europe at that time. Furthermore, a description of the reaction of the non-Ottoman-world towards the shift of power and ideals in 1908 could be fruitful for providing a fuller picture. The Russian role concerning the Ottoman Armenians and with regard to Eastern Anatolia is not part of this study.

In his final chapter, “The Counterrevolution and the ‘Second Revolution’”, Der Matossian introduces the term, “Second Revolution”, which becomes central to his analysis designating a counter-revolution and a counter-movement from forces within the Ottoman state that were the results of the first revolution in 1908. While the first revolution allowed “dreams” about constitutionalist harmony of all Ottoman subjects, the second revolution “shattered” those ambitions and hopes. In the author’s words: “In short, the Counterrevolution led to the demise of the Ottoman dream that the Revolution had promised to fulfill” (p. 149). The events in April 1909 unleashed fears inside the three nondominant groups of falling “back into the abyss of absolutism and the ancien régime” (p. 149).

The culmination of despair and mistrust were the Adana massacres in April 1909. The author outlines in detail the escalation and how the Armenians turned, once again, into victims. The ambivalent role of the CUP and the tensions afterwards between the Armenian revolutionary parties and the central government followed the opposite path, when compared to the ideas of fall 1908. As a reaction, they finally “resorted to mobilizing international powers to exert pressure on the Ottoman government” (p. 178).

The development was not the same for the Jews who were able to mobilise own troops to fight along with the Action Army against the Counter-revolutionaries in Istanbul. The reaction of different ethnic groups to the Second Revolution depended on geography and composition of the population. Against general belief, Der Matossian argues that the Counterrevolution was less about religious fanaticism than a multi-actor event against the power shifts and new values of the first revolution (pp. 151-152). Contradiction and ambiguity pervaded that revolutionary era. He concludes that Ottomanism fell victim to the rise of nationalisms. The two revolutions were turning points for the Jews, Armenians, and Arabs. The latter’s perception that the “dark history of the empire” (p. 176) would be over, was seriously shattered, even before the Ottoman cataclysm of the 1910s was unleashed.

Shattered Dreams of Revolution explores ecclesiastical politics that previously had found little interest among historians. It is a well focused, well written and innovative comparative contribution to the field of the Second Constitutional Period in late-Ottoman Turkey. All those interested in the question why the first attempt to achieve

democratic constitutionalism failed in the Middle East a hundred years ago will greatly profit from this fine study.

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Yaniv Voller, **The Kurdish Liberation Movement in Iraq: From Insurgency to Statehood**, *Oxon: Routledge, 2014, 190 pp., (ISBN: 978-0-415-70724-4).*

This book is a welcome overview of the transformation of the Kurdish question in Iraq between 1990 and 2013. The author calls this transformation a change from “national insurgency and guerrilla struggle” to tactics of “state building”. This transformation, according to the author, is a new stage in the Kurdish struggle of liberation. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq is the major factor in this transformation.

In the Introduction and the first chapter of *The Kurdish Liberation Movement in Iraq*, Yaniv Voller outlines the theoretical approach of the book. The main theoretical assumption is that the KRG is a de facto state and it works, thinks and approaches the outside world as a de facto state. This new reality has changed the nature of the Kurdish struggle dramatically and brought a new kind of interaction between the Kurdish liberation movement and the international community. Accordingly, this interaction changes the behaviour and policies of the KRG as a de facto state. The author argues that: “the status, or reality, of de facto statehood is essential for understanding the development, conduct and policies of KRG, at both the foreign and the domestic levels” (p. 3). As for the facto state, the book defines it as “a political entity whose leadership has wide autonomy in both its domestic and foreign policies, has established government institutions, and which perceives itself as deserving full legal and institutional independence” (p. 4). According to the author, the KRG has all the features: a defined territory; symbols of sovereignty, such as a flag, anthem, security forces and a functional government. This de facto state lacks international recognition, but this lack does not impede the KRG’s efforts to act as a state.

The international context in which the KRG acts stimulates this kind of behaviour. The author sees this context as a composition of “Post-Cold War developments”, “the environment that emerged from the attacks of September 11” and “the War on Terror” in which “normative shifts” have taken place. Prior to these new developments Kurdish secessionist aspirations were seen as “potential causes of instability” and perceived by the “international community with antipathy and even hostility” (p. 20). But the new context has changed the international norms and practices of recognition. Something like a “Kosovo and Montenegro effect” has emerged, which encouraged de facto states, including the KRG, to claim legitimacy.

The second chapter tells a short history of the Kurdish liberation movement in Iraq and its development towards statehood. The liberation struggle starts with the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the Kurds as minority within the newly established states of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. The rise of nationalist aspirations and the struggle for self-determination has since then been the red line that goes through this history. The years 1990 and 1991 are important in this history, since in 1990 Saddam

Hussein occupied Kuwait and his defeat in the war that followed opened new opportunities for the Iraqi Kurds. During the uprisings of 1991 Iraqi Kurds brought considerable Kurdish areas under their control. The counter attacks of the Saddam Hussein regime and the defeat of the uprising led to the formation of the “no fly zone” in Kurdish regions to protect Kurdish refugees from Saddam’s army. Subsequently, the Iraqi state withdrew its institutions from the Kurdish provinces, opening up the path of the gradual integration of Iraqi Kurds as a de facto state in the international system.

The third, fourth and fifth chapters are the most important chapters of this book. In these chapters the author studies different aspects of the development of the KRG’s statehood. Chapter three deals with the KRG’s practices of statehood from 1991 to 2001. According to the author, in this period the first steps towards liberalisation and democratisation took place and the Kurdish leadership saw these democratisation steps as “the key to express, and thus guarantee and expand, its earned sovereignty in the region” (p. 68). The Kurdish political parties, especially the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Massoud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani took on greater leadership roles. The Kurdish diaspora soon joined the parties in the formation of this new political experience. According to the author, the formation of the KRG has huge consequences on different levels, especially as it has changed the nature of the conflict with Baghdad as the KRG started to act as a sovereign state and developed its independent institutions. It has also changed Kurdish interaction with international and transnational actors (p. 68). The development towards statehood was seriously interrupted in 1994 when the civil war started between the two leading parties, the KDP and PUK. The regional states started to intervene actively in the Kurdish region by siding with either of the parties. Iran and Syria supported the PUK and Iraq and Turkey backed the KDP. The internal war lasted for four years and stopped officially in 1998. As a result of the civil war the KRG was divided into two separate entities each under the control of one of the two dominant parties. According to the author, the civil war and the division of the KRG between the two parties did not stop the process of state-building; towards the end of the nineties and the beginning of 2000s, when the process of reunification started, the process of state-building “was back on track” (p. 89).

Chapters four and five of the book are reserved for the details of the KRG’s “successful” story of consolidating a real de facto state in the context of September 11 and the War on Terror. In this context Iraq became one of the main targets of America’s global War on Terror and the consequences were immense: the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein, the creation of a new Iraqi constitution in which the regional autonomy of the KRG was legalised, the reunification of the KRG administration in 2005 and the intensification of the KRG’s regional and internal contacts. For example, chapter four sheds light on the KRG’s foreign policy in which the KRG developed new strategies for its claim of sovereignty. Besides emphasising democratisation and liberalisation, the KRG underlined also economic viability, law and order, and the ability to contribute to regional stability and security (p. 94). The KRG’s public diplomacy changed from focusing on the “democratic experiment” of the 1990s to talking about “the other Iraq” (p. 105), which was represented as prosper, stable and safe.

The fifth and the last chapter analyses the effects of the successful foreign policy of KRG on its domestic policies and evolution. The author analyses the manner with which the KRG deals with its natural resources, especially oil, as an important

instrument to enhance its sovereignty, especially vis-à-vis Baghdad, and also to build a better relationship with the regional powers, especially Turkey. This chapter also deals with some domestic issues, among them organising elections, campaigns for democratic reforms, the granting of freedom of the media, protecting women and combating gender related violence against them, the KRG's engagement with its critics and being approachable to international organisations such as Amnesty International and human rights and UN organisations. In short, this chapter shows the transition of the KRG "from being a government dominated by warlords with no democratic transitions, into a more democratic government, willing to engage in a dialogue about its socio-political policies and amend at least some of its domestic policies" (p. 130).

Two major weaknesses in the book should be mentioned. The first one concerns the simple assumption regarding the reunification of the KRG's administration. The author takes the official discourse of the KRG on reunification too seriously and does not pay enough attention to the serious internal antagonism and fragmentation of the KRG and Kurdish politics in Iraq and the region. It is remarkable also how the author downplays the serious effects of the internal division of the region through citing some Kurdish experts who claim that the civil war and the internal division of the KRG even had "important positive effects". For example, the author cites Stansfield, who says that this catastrophic division of the KRG "had some advantages for the process of state-building. In spite of its demoralizing effect, the division provided the Kurdish leadership with an opportunity for reorganizing their governance and re-stabilizing the parts under their control" (p. 84). This argument dismisses the serious structural damages the internal divisions have created in Kurdish politics and society. It is not the "demoralising effect" of the division which is most fundamental, but the institutionalisation of the division to the extent that it impedes the development of a basic national framework in the military, police apparatus, and security forces, not to mention the economy, bureaucracy and media.

It is of course true that by the end of 2005 most ministries were officially unified, but the region is in fact still deeply divided between the two dominant parties. Behind the mask of an artificial unity lay still huge and deep structural fragmentations. In Iraqi Kurdistan Massoud Barzani, as the president of the region, does not have any power in the PUK area and nor do PUK officials in the KDP zones. The power-sharing arrangement in the KRG still follows the logic of feudal fiefdoms instead of a unified state. The major institutions of army, security and media are still in the hands of the parties or in the hands of rival wings within the party and the ruling families, and each party has its own foreign relations policies. The fragmentations are so widely present that even small political disputes can lead to a hot media war between different parties in the same language and style of the earlier civil war in Kurdistan. In the last few years these divisions have become even more dangerous as the KDP has aligned with Turkey and the PUK with Iran. Further, the division created a hugely corrupt and dysfunctional bureaucratic system that was based on loyalty to one of the two parties or even to the different members of the politburo of the parties or to the specific individuals within the ruling family. This massive machine of almost one million "bureaucrats" out of a population of only about 4 million not only costs the lion's share of the KRG's budget, but also hinders the KRG from functioning as a unified state.

The second and more serious weakness of the book is the author's dismissal of the authoritarian structures of the KRG. Not only is political, security and military power under the control of small numbers of individuals and families, but the same families

and their cronies also dominate the KRG's economy. As in other authoritarian experiments in the region or elsewhere, in the KRG it is very difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the political elite who rules the country and the economic elite who runs the economy. Both forms of power are concentrated in the hands of the same individuals. Further, the rentier character of the KRG economy strengthens this dangerous link between politics and the economy. Moreover, both parties run most of the media and control the judiciary. Important sectors of Kurdish civil-society organisations are dominated by the parties and a small number of the members of the ruling elite. There are of course some undeniable democratic elements in the Kurdistan region, there are elections, small segments of independent media and a multi-party political system, but those elements function within wider and more powerful authoritarian structures. The theoretical literature on authoritarianism in the Arab World, especially the "authoritarian upgrading" theses, can offer extra tools to see the deeper authoritarian structures of the KRG, beyond what the KRG officials claim.

Despite these two points of criticism this book is worth reading; it gives detailed and valuable information about different aspects of the development of the KRG from the beginning of the 1990s, especially how the KRG presents its image to the outside world. This book can serve students of social science and humanities in general, but it is especially useful to the students of the Middle Eastern and Kurdish studies. The book services also a general public who is interested in the further developments of the Kurdish question in the Middle East.

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Özlem Galip, *Imagining Kurdistan: Identity, Culture and Society*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015, 311 pp., (ISBN: 978 1 78453 016 7).

Özlem Galip's book is of high relevance to all those interested in Kurdish literature and culture. Given the scarcity and the difficulties of Kurdish literary scholarship in Western languages (see Ghaderi, 2015), Galip's accomplishment represents a valuable contribution, especially for the breadth of the corpus examined (for other comprehensive works on the subject see Ahmadzadeh, 2003; Bocheńska, 2011; Scalbert-Yücel, 2014).

In *Imagining Kurdistan* Galip discusses one-hundred novels, written in, according to the geographical terminology used by the author, Turkish Kurdistan and in diaspora between 1984 and 2010. Her study has three main delimitations: it tackles only one literary genre: the novel; it is limited to the production of authors based in or hailing from Turkish Kurdistan and writing in Kurmanji, thus excluding Kurdish writers writing in Turkish; it has a temporal limitation that goes from the rise of the PKK insurgency to 2010. Notwithstanding such limitations, the corpus taken into account by Galip is remarkable. Although this work does not offer an in-depth discussion of each and every novel, it focuses on the overarching novelistic discourse concerning Kurdistan as it surfaces from such a vast number of works. The number of passages from novels originally translated by the author from Kurmanji into English contributes to making this book an important source for the international audience who seeks a more accessible path to Kurdish literature.

The study is informed by a recent and fecund stream of literary criticism focusing on notions of space and place (for an overview see Tally, 2013). Central concepts of

space, place, homeland, territory, and identity in fact prove to be extremely useful in addressing the literature of a people whose geography is fragmented, continuously questioned, and even denied. As the title clearly confesses, Benedict Anderson's notions of "imagined community" and of literacy as a key tool of the imaginative nationalising process are crucial to Galip's understanding of her corpus.

The book starts with a preliminary discussion of the concept of "homeland" in the Kurdish context. It overviews the foundational myths and historical developments of the Kurdish sense of ethno-national community in relation to the geographical territory. In a rapid-yet-exhaustive overview, it goes from the Medes to the rise of a "modern" nationalist movement in opposition to the assimilative policies of the Turkish state. In Chapter Two, the author conducts an "Overview of Kurdish Politics" informed by a vast scholarship. It focuses on Kurdish revolts in the late Ottoman Empire, early Turkish Republic, and in the last section on "the emergence of a Kurdish Socialist Movement in the 1960s, and the Hegemony of the PKK" (p. 58). This chapter condenses dates and events well known to scholars working in Kurdish studies, but that function as necessary buttresses for readers coming from other research fields.

With Chapter Three we get to the heart of the matter, as Galip discusses the development of "Kurdish literary production" (p. 67), retracing the significant evolutions of literary creation and consumption in Turkish Kurdistan: "from oral literature to digital media". While giving some basic information on the history of Kurdish "traditional" literary practices, the chapter focuses more strictly on the "emergence of the Kurdish novel" (p. 71), especially after the easing of restrictions on the use of Kurdish language in Turkey in the early 1990s. A section is dedicated to the role of media such as magazines, newspapers, and TV-channels (from *Hawar* to *Med Nûçe TV*) in constructing the Kurdish imagined community and in opening up a distinct Kurdish literary field in Turkey and in the Kurdish diaspora. Perhaps a deeper discussion of the genre limitation given to the book would have been appropriate here. In fact, little is said on the reasons why the novel represents a better analytical instrument to study Kurdish geographical imagination, as compared for example to poetry or short stories.

The following two chapters serve as the proper analytical chapters on literature. In Chapter Four, Galip addresses the Kurdish novelistic discourse produced in diaspora and how it articulates concepts of "homeland" and "identity". As Galip notes, novelists of the Kurdish diaspora (Firat Cewerî, Bûbê Eser, Hesenê Metê, Mehmed Uzun, Mezher Bozan and Lokman Polat, among many others) are often pushed towards literary expression by the personal traumatic memory of their experiences under the oppressive rule of the Turkish state. For Galip, sharing individual experiences through the medium of the novel allows for the creation of a collective memory in which the visualisation of the homeland and the perception of a shared identity are mainly structured in response to social traumas.

However, for Galip, the response to traumatic legacy differentiates along the lines of political convictions and affiliations. She employs the pro-PKK or anti-PKK stance of the writers as a fundamental line of demarcation. The use of geographical markers, such as the names of the Kurdish regions in accordance to the recognised national borders or according to the imagined geography of Greater Kurdistan, stems from and accounts for the writer's political inclination. In general, Galip notes that "most – diasporic – authors do not challenge Turkish national borders or the sovereignty of the nation states of the countries located in other Kurdish regions" (p. 107). Furthermore,

“as the majority of the diaspora novels follow the line of the anti-PKK fraction, they do not accept the notion of ‘Greater Kurdistan’” (p. 111). Diasporic authors condemn through their works the lack of national awareness among Kurds and see submissiveness to language assimilation as forgoing a fundamental national duty. According to the author, writers from diaspora tend to have a critical approach towards their homeland, which is generally not “romanticized or idealized” (p. 121). Yet, the diasporic distance brings about a sort of crystallisation of the image of the homeland; as Galip puts it: “it is also true that the illusory plays a prominent part in the diasporic construction of homeland because, as time passes, the place of origin remains stagnant in the memory of the migrant while in reality it has evolved” (p. 134).

Chapter Five conducts the same analytical operation for the novelistic discourse produced in Turkish Kurdistan up to 2010. Analysing thirty-six novels, Galip detects temporal and geographical structures that sustain the imaginary construction of the Kurdish “homeland”. On the temporal line, we have an “idealized-idyllic” past constructed through a “patriotic attitude”, a present in which the homeland is “torn to pieces by the impact of Turkey’s provocative interventions” and a future that is the realm of “optimistic imaginary conceptions” (p. 136).

On the geographical level, Galip studies how the novelistic discourse helps in mapping and delimiting, in a word imagining, Kurdistan’s territoriality in the effort “to create the organic link between Kurds as nation and Kurdistan as their homeland” (p. 138). At the intersection of the temporal and the territorial narratives, Kurdistan emerges as “emotional space”. At times depicted as a beloved-woman, at times a “place for longing and yearning” (p. 173), the Kurdish homeland as reflected by Kurdish novels that Galip considers (by Şener Özmen, İbrahim Seydo Aydoğan, Ramezan Alan, Yağob Tilermenî, among many others), seems to find its primary location in the realm of the imagination. In this respect, the dispossession of the lived environment, caused by Turkey’s social, spatial and military policies, equates the diasporic and the local writer inasmuch as they perceive the homeland as something to be dreamed of, or, in other words, something that needs to be constructed through imagination. Nonetheless, the attitude of the writers from Turkish Kurdistan as analysed by Galip is generally less critical when compared to diasporic writers and far more optimistic on the future possibilities of achieving the imagined correspondence between space and identity.

A critical study of a vast literary corpus does not allow for nuanced accounts of each work or each writer. The author necessitates a certain degree of generalisation in order to highlight recurring narrative patterns that contribute to a broader, yet debated, idea of Kurdistan. The clear-cut distinction between pro-PKK or anti-PKK political leaning used by Galip, although highly relevant and worth being explored, does not consider more nuanced positions or account for potential developments internal to the literary career of a particular writer. Repetitions of arguments and at times a lack of clarity in the exposition weaken the book to a certain extent. Nonetheless, *Imagining Kurdistan: Identity, Culture and Society*, (the words “literature” and “novel” could have featured in the title), is a relevant book for scholars and general readers alike who want to deepen their knowledge of the Kurdish contemporary literary field in Kurmanji. The positive recent developments, one might call it a little “renaissance” or a spring (Erbay, 2012), of the Kurdish letters clearly deserve such kind of contextualised analytical explorations. Galip’s accomplishment helps the reader manage a burgeoning production, inspect its fundamental themes, and establish correlations with the social and political environments in which this literature was produced. *Imagining Kurdistan* is

a must-read for scholars working on Kurdish literature and a positive contribution from a literary perspective for scholars working on various disciplines of Kurdish studies.

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Mahir A. Aziz, **The Kurds of Iraq: Nationalism and Identity in Iraqi Kurdistan**, *London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2015, 163 pp., (ISBN: 978-1-78453-273-4)*.

Aziz's sociological study assesses the development of ethno-national identities amongst a new generation of Kurds in the post-1990 era of Iraq. *The Kurds of Iraq* aptly traces how memory and identity in the Kurdish north have evolved away from the centralising force of Iraqi state hegemony. Aziz comprehensively traces the ways in which Kurdish youth balance competing, but ultimately complimentary, national, regional and ethnic forms of belonging. The introduction clearly outlines the main research questions, which address identity as a sociological model of inquiry, how and why Kurdish and Iraqi identities might differ, and to what extent Kurdish identity is dependent upon territorially specific mappings of individual and communal histories.

Aziz approaches the development of identity as organic, allowing for fluidity within the process of remembering and reconstructing new identities. Kurdistanism is not static in this sense, lending credence to the success of the Kurds in keeping alive their autonomy in the wake of repressive nationalising Ba'athist schemes. Tribal affiliations play an important role in advancing kinship systems of marriage and family alliance, helping the Kurds to maintain closely-knit communities that resist the hegemonic weight of the state to conform. The author discusses the rise of a new generational shift in nationalism, *Kurdistanîyeti*, born of the lived experiences of the "youth" through the brutality of the Ba'ath autocracy followed by a decade of de-Baathification. Aziz also complicates the relationship between the developing sense of *Kurdistanîyeti* nationalism following the devastating impacts of the Gulf War defeat and the increasingly urgent attempts by the Ba'ath to reign in autonomy in the Kurdish north. The "failure of these regimes to instill a normative sense of Iraqiness in the Kurdish people" (p. 161) is the

success of ethnic, territorial, and traditional forms of belonging that bind together an imagined nation within the broader boundaries of the Iraqi nation-state.

The book transitions somewhat awkwardly from a theoretical first section to the remainder of the monograph that discusses empirical data from student questionnaires disseminated across three campuses in Kurdistan. The first part of the book is especially frustrating because these short and choppy chapters frequently become repetitious, and remain disconnected from the research findings. Understandably, a discussion of nationalism(s) requires a discussion of theoretical lineages; however, it might make for a more interesting overview if these lineages were put into conversation with each other. Perhaps a more historically oriented approach might be useful in addressing how discussions of nationalism and ethno-nationalism germinate over time. An entire chapter on Anthony Smith's theoretical model and its applicability in this monograph felt excessive, since an additional chapter on history and the developments of the Kurdish region within the broader history of the Iraqi state may have been more helpful to students of the region.

In the second part of the book, Aziz provides a rich statistical analysis of how identity can at once be segmented but overlapping, highlighting the way in which *Kurdistanîyete* identity incorporates local, regional, and national systems of belonging. At times, the text felt cluttered by demographic information that might be best included as an appendix to the book. The statistical data suggests that the segmentation of "Iraqi" and "Kurd" is problematic as this new generation embraces a more nuanced ethno-political identity. One element that Aziz does not address in great detail is how we define "Iraqi" identity in the post-1990 period. Eric Davis's *Memories of State* interrogates the subjugation of ethnic and religious history memory to the force of the Ba'ath "Project for the Rewriting of History". Forcing all Iraqis to align behind a myth of collective past has distorted the communal narratives of all Iraqis, but especially those born into the post-1990s period. In this sense, putting this study in conversation with a burgeoning body of literature on Iraqis in diaspora helps us to understand one of the many responses to the repressive measures of the state on ethno-national groups in Iraq.

Despite the enduring force of Kurdishness amongst the peoples of northern Iraq, Aziz concludes his evocative work with a prognosis that due to the lack of a fully developed civil society, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is not yet ready to emerge as a political state. As this new generation moves closer to a civic-oriented society, Aziz believes it is possible that statehood could be achieved in the future. Throughout the book, Aziz promotes the successes of Kurdish students and scholars, whom he believes will go on to pave a way towards peace and cooperation in Iraq. Perhaps the message to garner from his research is that Iraq cannot afford to lose the Kurds and jeopardise the chance of collaboration in its precarious future.

Aziz attempts to break with the familiar research pattern of accessing political elites and tracing their development as a representative microcosm of change and continuity. He instead draws upon groups of university-aged students who have been shaped by a distinctly Kurdish historical, cultural and political narrative. This group is portrayed in the book as the future of Kurdish identity and nationalism: the future of the region within the state, and the future of co-existence within the broader region. The strength of the book lies in Aziz's native knowledge of the region, but also his ability to communicate ideas and ask questions in both Kurdish and Arabic. Many historians and political scientists interested in the region try to capture its identity politics, and complex

and often fractured nationalisms without the benefit of advanced local, cultural and linguistic capability. The cultural sensitivity and ethnographic tools Aziz brings to this study make the book a compelling interpretation of how the next generation of Kurds in Iraq will lead the charge in rethinking the role of the modern nation-state for Iraqis.

The reverse of his fortunate position as a researcher with an accessible pool of participants is the inherent danger in not addressing the power dynamics present in this relationship. These highly educated and politically conscious graduate-student participants are also aware of how and why their answers are important to the ongoing struggle for an independent Kurdish state. Had a similar survey been conducted with young adults from different educational backgrounds, it would have been interesting to see if the premise of research terms in the questionnaire would have resonated in the same way. Moreover, the questionnaire as it was administered in Kurdish (or Arabic) would have been a welcome addition to the appendices of the book.

This empirically rich study engages a new generation as they emerge into a new political and social reality for Iraq. In the midst of the current instability, Kurds are a critical element to the rebuilding of the nation and have a crucial part to play in the future of Iraq. As research participants, they also offer an essential window into the dynamics of national and ethno-national negotiation in an unofficial state-building process. The book is accessible on a number of levels – it is detailed enough to be of value to undergraduate and graduate students, and all manner of specialists interested in Iraq, the Kurds, nationalism, identity, and regionalism. It is both well written and executed, since the detailed mapping provided in the introduction is carried forth throughout the book, making it accessible despite the level of statistical detail.

Though current geopolitical realities stand in the way of Kurdish independence, Aziz believes this could eventually be a reality if a democratic federal Iraq can cooperate with the northern region. Kurdistan straddles important oil and water resources that make it essential that stability be returned to the region – not only on a national level, but also to the benefit of the U.S., Turkey, and states in the neighbouring region. Kurdish nationalism will thus shape the future relationships between this region, its resources, and its allies. The work is a wonderful contribution to the growing body of literature that has expanded upon studies of nationalism to explore aspects of transnationalism and identity in the context of a global diaspora. Though this pivotal contribution is set within national borders, it provides an important basis from which to engage with Kurdish state-building activism within the diaspora. The intersections of nationalism, identity and regionalism coalesce in this monograph to support future developments of ethno-nationalisms and layered identities. An understanding of identity and nationalism in a new generation of Kurds is an essential tool not only for those in the academy, but much further afield in areas of diplomacy, foreign policy, and international development.

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