May 2018
Volume: 6, **No**: 1, pp. 155 – 167
ISSN: 2051-4883
e-ISSN: 2051-4891
www.KurdishStudies.net

Book Reviews

Khanna Omarkhali, **The Yezidi Religious Textual Tradition: From Oral to Written. Categories, Transmission, Scripturalisation and Canonisation of the Yezidi Oral Religious Texts**, *Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017, 625 pp. (ISBN 9783447108560).*

The study of Yezidi religion has made major advances in the past two decades, even as the Yezidi communities and their religious traditions have been facing existential threats, not only in the form of genocidal campaigns by the Islamic State and earlier by the Saddam Hussein regime, but also from the less spectacular consequences of modernisation, mass education, migration and assimilation. It is tragic that the recent accumulation of scholarly knowledge of Yezidism reflects and, in a sense, was made possible by the gradual disappearance or transformation of living Yezidi belief and practice.

It was because of a perception that ever fewer religious specialists memorised the orally transmitted sacred texts and that part of this tradition had already been lost that two well-educated Yezidis from religious families requested permission from the highest Yezidi religious authority in Iraq to collect, transcribe and publish these sacred texts. Pîr Khidr Silêman and Sheikh Khelil Jindî (Rashow)'s collection *Êzdiyatî* (Baghdad, 1979) was a landmark that documented and fixated a significant part of the oral tradition for future generations. Both have since continued their efforts to preserve the tradition in written form. In the more secularised environment of Soviet Armenia, Ordîxan and Celîlê Celîl had earlier incorporated some Yezidi sacred texts in their collections of Kurdish oral tradition, *Zargotina Kurda* (Moscow and Yerevan, 1978). Several other important collections of oral material were recorded and published in print or as audio cassettes in Iraqi Kurdistan after the political changes of 2003, as well as among the Yezidi diaspora in Germany.

These texts were first made available to Western scholarship by Philip Kreyenbroek in two path-breaking studies, *Yezidism* (Lewiston, 1995), which contains his analysis and translations of the hymns in Silêman and Jindî's collection, and *God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect*, written in collaboration with Jindî (Rashow) (Wiesbaden, 2005), which carries the analysis further and contains many additional hymns and other texts. We owe another major study to the Hungarian scholar Eszter Spät, who carried out extensive field research among the Yezidi communities of Northern Iraq and analysed much of the same corpus of texts but from a different angle. Her *Late Antique Motifs in Yezidi Oral Tradition* (Piscataway, 2010) focuses specifically on themes that the Yezidi oral tradition shares with Gnosticism, the Jewish and Christian sects of Late Antiquity and the *ghulat* and Sufi traditions of Islam.

Khanna Omarkhali's new book builds on all this but represents a significant step forward in a number of respects. Based on more than a decade of research among Yezidi communities in Armenia, Northern Iraq and Germany, besides the judicious

perusal of all available primary and secondary source materials and studies, this work offers the most systematic and complete inventory and classification of Yezidi sacred texts. Omarkhali inevitably covers much of the same ground as Kreyenbroek (with whom she has co-operated for several years), and her analysis differs from his on minor points only. Her work is, rather, a further elaboration of and complement to Kreyenbroek's work as well as that of Silêman and Jindî (with both of whom she has also worked).

On one level, Omarkhali adds to the available corpus of Yezidi oral religious texts. She has recorded a large body of hymns and other texts herself, some of them not previously published and others variant versions of known ones. She presents the most important of these in transcription and translation, as illustrations of the various poetic and prose genres that she discusses in Chapters 2 and 3. On a second level, she pays more attention to the performance of the sacred texts, the style of reciting or singing (with a melody or *kubrî* specific to each hymn) and the context of the performance, as well as to the processes of memorisation and transmission, and to variation in performances of the same text. To this end, she worked closely with the most respected and knowledgeable reciters (*qewlbêj*). The value of this study is considerably enhanced by the accompanying CD, which contains 16 video and 55 audio recordings of various *qewlbêj* made by herself, which beautifully illustrate her observations of style and variety of performance. The chapter on performers and performance (pp. 137-175) is perhaps the most original contribution she makes. On yet another level, she presents a detailed inventory of all known oral religious texts. Whereas Kreyenbroek and Rashow write that they found a total of 113 hymns (*qewl*), Omarkhali's inventory (pp. 411-525) discusses no less than 168 *qewl* that have been recorded, many of them in several variant versions, besides 46 *beyt* (another poetic form), 60 *du`a* (prayer, invocation) and similar texts, a few *qesîde* in many different versions, 13 *çîrok* (prose narratives, myths), 9 *mishabet* (homilies) and some other minor texts. Where possible she indicates the names of the reciter and collector, and publication details. In a second list (pp. 527-544), she provides details of the subject matter of 139 *qewl*, the occasions at which they are typically recited, their putative authors, and the melodies (*kubrî*) to which they are sung. The work going into the compilation of these inventories must have been enormous, but they make the book useful as a resource for scholars. Fourth, an important part of the book discusses the impact of writing on memorisation and performance practices and other implications of the shift from oral to written – which include changes in religious authority. The desire to be recognised as "People of the Book" instead of pagan Satan-worshippers has been a major motivation behind the scripturalisation of the oral *qewl* tradition. Omarkhali also discusses the debates, in Iraq and Germany, on canonisation and standardisation of the written form of the sacred poetry. She makes some interesting observations on efforts to "purify" the language and "modernise" certain concepts in the process of scripturalisation.

Her detailed study of oral tradition is preceded by a first chapter focusing on older written sacred texts. In her discussion of the "discovery" of the alleged sacred books *Meshefa Reş* and *Jilwa*, the publication of different Arabic and Kurdish versions of these texts, and the question of their authenticity, Omarkhali offers only minor corrections and additions to the earlier accounts (such as those by John S. Guest and Philip Kreyenbroek). But she throws significant new light on another type of written text that was hardly noticed before, the *mişûr*. Manuscripts of this type are rare and typically held by a family of the *pîr* caste. They appear not meant to be read and can only be opened

on special days, after performing an animal sacrifice and other ritual acts. Since there are said to be forty original *pîr* lineages, descending from forty *pîr* appointed by Sheikh Adi, it is believed that there are forty different *mişûr*. Each contains a list of the commoner tribes that are affiliated with their *pîr* lineage, but otherwise they differ considerably from each other. Omarkhali describes nine *mişûr* seen by herself or Pîr Khidr Silêman, and she reproduces one in facsimile with transcription and translation (pp. 377-98); its main part is an ode (*qasida*) attributed to Sheikh Adi. Like most other *mişûr*, it is entirely in Arabic, and I found it to be entirely Islamic in style and content.

Although the sacred poems are all in Kurdish, the vocabulary in many of them is also heavily Arabic and resonates strongly with Islamic, especially Sufi, themes and concepts. Two *beyt* mentioned by Omarkhali in fact appear to be based on poems by the Kurdish Muslim poets Mela Ehmedê Batê and Feqiyê Teyran (p. 90); another poem mentions the famous Sufis Abdulqadir Gilani, Husayn b. Mansur al-Hallaj and Ma`ruf Karkhi (pp. 354-8). The Hymn of the Lord (*Qewlê Padişa*, pp. 298-305) sets out the Yezidi concept of seven angels in otherwise purely Islamic terms. There is a significant difference, as Omarkhali notes, between the sacred poems (*qewl*, *beyt*, etc.), which contain numerous Islamic references, and the oral prose texts (*çîrok*, myths), in which Iranian religious motifs are more in evidence. *Çîrok* narrate the myths to which the more elliptic *qewl* often only allude. Yet unlike the *qewl*, which are carefully guarded and can only be memorised and handed down by members of the religious castes (*qewwal* but also individual sheikhs and pîrs), the *çîrok* are less sacred, are not memorised verbally, and can be recited by commoners as well.

As among the Ahl-i Haqq and Alevis (and, in fact, as among Muslims), there appears to be a considerable difference between the "learned" and "popular" versions of the Yezidi religious tradition. According to Omarkhali, certain earlier studies (which she does not mention by name) misrepresented Yezidi beliefs because their authors depended on informants who held popular beliefs deviating from the learned tradition. Her claim appears to be that the learned tradition is more authentic than the popular version. Her book is definitely an authoritative overview of that learned tradition, based on her close co-operation with the specialists recognised as most knowledgeable. However, I would argue that besides this Yezidism of the learned authorities, the popular tradition deserves serious attention for its own sake. It is probably not just as a poorly informed version of the former but preserves some of the most "heterodox" elements that make Yezidism differ most sharply from Islam and Christianity.

Omarkhali's chief aim appears to have been to provide an exhaustive documentation of the learned tradition and the process of its transition from the oral to the written. She has done this admirably, and that will be the lasting value of this book. I should have liked to see more interpretation and commentary: many of the texts that she presents call for analysis and explanation beyond the mere translations that she provides. Especially the pervasive presence of Islamic themes and formulaic expressions in the sacred poetry raises many questions about the relationship of Yezidism and Islam, which seems to deserve a thorough examination. Khanna Omarkhali's book will be an indispensable resource for this and other future research.

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Parvin Mahmoudveysi, Denise Bailey, Ludwig Paul, and Geoffrey Haig, **The Gorani Language of Gawraǰū, a Village of West Iran: Texts, Grammar, and Lexicon**, *2012, Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 276 pp., (ISBN: 9783895008559).* Mahmoudveysi, Parvin, and Denise Bailey. **The Gorani Language of Zarda, a Village of West Iran: Texts, Grammar, and Lexicon**, *2013, Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 240 pp., (ISBN: 9783895009525).*

Ever since C.J. Rich's 1812 description of the Guran as a distinct race governed by the Baban Kurds in Sulaimaniya area, and since the first scholarly account (Minorsky, 1943), this minority in Kurdistan has spoken to the imagination of Western orientalists, as has its vernacular. Given the dramatic recent history of the region, involving the migration, resettlement, or dispersal of many of the members of these communities, the future of their vernaculars as living languages is in the balance. The publication of these two volumes, fruits of the collaborate efforts of a Germany-based team of scholars, is therefore a very welcome addition to our knowledge.

Indeed, the linguistic and cultural-historical importance of Gorani should be obvious. It is used in both written and oral forms of Ahl-e Haqq or Yaresan sacred hymns; and it has a particular affinity with the Erdelan court, which from early on seems to have encouraged or protected its written use in poetry, even as the court's correspondence and Mastura's court chronicle (cf. Vasilieva, 1984) tended to be written in Persian (cf. Kreyenbroek and Chamanara 2014; Chamanara and Amiri, 2018). Even after the decline of the Erdelan court and the rise of the Baban dynasty, Gorani remained the preferred medium for poetic expression of authors like Mawlana Khalid (d. 1831) and Mewlewî (d. 1882) in the new regional capital, Sulaimaniya. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that Sulaimanî Kurdish, nowadays better known as "Sorani," gained prominence as a medium of written poetic expression; it shows clear traces of Gorani structural influence.

As Kreyenbroek and Chamanara acknowledge (2014: 3), the tern "Gorani" is not common usage among locals; nowadays, it is strictly speaking used only for written varieties, and only on the Iranian side of the border. The first Gorani poets, associated with the Erdelan court, consistently referred to their vernacular as "Kurdî." Around Halabja in Iraq, "Hawrami" is more common as a blanket term; but it is not normally applied to Macho, the vernacular of the Kakais in Kirkuk area, and Shabaki, spoken by the Shabak East of Mosul. In fact, the very term "Gorani" as a generic label for these dialects even on the Iranian side of the border, let alone the wider region, seems a term of art coined by Western orientalists rather than a folk category used or recognised by locals.

The linguistic affinity of these "Gorani" varieties with the spoken vernaculars of religious minorities like the Shabak and (Ibrahimi) Kaka'is or Ahl-e Haqq in Iraq, and further North-West, part of the Alevi community in Turkey, remains to be adequately explained. Religiously, many if not all of these communities seem to be sympathetic to, and to some extent associated with, the popular 'Alid faith among the rural population of the Eastern Anatolian and Northern Mesopotamian plains, which around the turn of the 16th century was effectively mobilised by the Safavid Shah Isma'îl and his Qizilbash warriors. Their linguistic backgrounds, however, are more difficult to account for. MacKenzie speaks of the Gorani speakers as a substratum of "original inhabitants," who, he claims, have been overrun and linguistically assimilated by invading tribes of "Kurds proper" (1961); but this talk of migration, invasion, and assimilation is too close

to Rich's and others' racialised vision of the Goran as a technologically superior but politically powerless subject race.

Perhaps we need research that is rather more descriptive before we can venture into further explanatory hypotheses. Thus far, the Gorani varieties spoken, and written, in Iranian Kurdistan have received rather more attention than the many varieties spoken in Iraqi Kurdistan, like Bajalanî, Shabakî, Macho as spoken by Kaka'îs near Kirkuk, and Zengana. The Northern Gorani, or Hawrami, varieties, in particular those on the Iranian side of the border, have been described on several occasions, notably in a rather sketchy overview of several varieties in Mann/Hadank 1930, and in a fuller analysis of a single dialect (based, in fact, on a single speaker) in MacKenzie (1966).

The present volumes describe the dialects spoken further South, in Gawrajû and Zarda, two villages at a distance of some 100 kilometers from each other in Iranian Kurdistan. Gawrajû, in Dalahu county in Kermanshah province, is mainly inhabited by Ahl-e Haqq or Yaresan, that is, members of an esoteric religious community; but its population is steadily declining. It knows a complex linguistic situation: the locally spoken vernacular is close to the written Gorani koinè used in the sacred texts of the Yaresan; but it is subject to assimilating pressure both from (Southern) Kurdish, the locally dominant spoken *lingua franca*, and from Persian, the sole language used in education and in official literate communication. Zarda, near Qasr-e Shîrîn, is located near a number of major Ahl-e Haqq shrines. In 1979, a number of families emigrated to Kalar in Iraqi Kurdistan; in 1988, Zarda was the target of a chemical attack by the Iraqi air force, which left between 140 and 172 dead. The local dialect, called *Zardayâna* or, more commonly, *Kurdî*, has intensive linguistic contacts with Persian and Kermanshahî Kurdish; recently, the influence of, and interference by, the Central or Sorani Kurdish from Iraqi Kurdistan has increased.

No standard variety of Gorani has emerged, as has happened with both Kurmanji and Sorani. The authors, however, appear to proceed from the assumption that Gorani is a discreet and unitary entity; thus, for no good reason, they refer to the Paveh variety as the Gorani "standard" (2012: 12). They note that there is "considerable variation at all levels, even in individual speakers" (ibid.); but little of this variation can be found back in the actual grammatical description. This leaves unanswered the question of what exactly are the normative assumptions and consequences of the codification of one variety, or register, in an explicit and coherent grammatical description. This grammar, we are told, is based on "native consultants" (p. 9); but it does not specify how many informants were involved, nor are these specified as to age, gender, or – perhaps more directly relevantly – literacy and fluency in either Persian or Central or Southern Kurdish.

Both volumes feature detailed grammatical descriptions and generous dialect samples; they also feature a basic lexicon of Zardayâna, and a rather more elaborate one of Gawrajûyî. The grammatical sketches focus on morphology, treating only the basics of the phoneme systems, and giving rather short shrift to syntax. Particular attention is given to case marking in past-tense transitive verb constructions, a distinctive feature of a number of Western Iranian languages usually – but not always entirely adequately – referred to as "ergativity." In these varieties of Gorani, much as in Sorani, the enclitic pronouns marking the Agent of transitive verbs attach not necessarily to the verb, but to the first constituent of the verbal phrase, typically the direct object. Unlike nearby Sorani, however, the Gorani dialects generally have a case system; the Paveh Hawrami

dialect also distinguishes two grammatical genders. The authors note that the Gorani "ergative" is closest to, but not identical with, that in Sorani.

These commonalities suggest a shared innovation rather than an inheritance from a common ancestor. Neither volume, however, pay much if any systematic attention to borrowing or linguistic interference in these dialects; occurrences of code switching are duly noted, but not elaborated on. Instead, the team members generally appear to have searched for the "purest" forms (see e.g. 2012: 5). In a setting so clearly marked by multilingualism and language contact, however, (not to mention dramatic demographic change and political upheaval) this language-ideological preference seems rather problematic. For this reason, one would have appreciated somewhat more elaborate methodological discussion, e.g., concerning the choice for these particular variants, and concerning the characterization and legitimation of their concept of linguistic purity.

More urgently, one also hopes that further study of the related varieties spoken in Iraq can be conducted before it is too late. The speakers of these varieties, living in the frontier areas between Arab and Kurdish nationalist claims, and having been among the main targets of the 2014 Islamic State offensive, have proved particularly vulnerable to political and other pressures. There is a serious risk that at least some of these groups, and their vernaculars with them, are in the process of disappearing. Should this happen, another element of the cultural and linguistic wealth of Kurdistan will have been lost forever.

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David Gaunt, Naures Atto, and Soner O. Barthoma, **Let Them Not Return: Sayfo – The Genocide against the Assyrian, Syriac and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire**, *New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017, 274 pp., (ISBN: 97817853349869).*

Over the last few years, the study of what increasingly is called (the) "Sayfo" has finally gained some traction, within the community of Syriac, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, and in the wider scholarly community. For a long time, the massacres, expulsions, rape and enslavement that befell these communities during the First World War in the Ottoman Empire and northwestern Iran were well-known among scholars but little was published, and public recognition, distinct from the Armenian genocide that overshadowed what happened to other Christians, was very limited. This changed in 2015, with the 100-year commemorations of the genocide of 1915. These commemorations, new monuments, scholarly conferences and publications built upon work of the preceding decades to which the current volume testifies. This new wave of research had started with the publication of primary sources, which, although some were produced in the period following the First World War, began to be published more widely after a major part of the Syriac Orthodox community had resettled in Europe after leaving Eastern Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s. In Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany these communities found technical possibilities, money and readership for publications dealing with what happened during the First World War. In 2006, David Gaunt, one of the editors of the current volume, published *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press). This was the first full-length monograph devoted to what happened to the West and East Syriac Christians of the Ottoman Empire, as distinct from the Armenians, but as an integral part of the genocidal practices of the Young Turks. In 2014, Florence Hellot-Bellier added a crucial analysis on what happened in the Eastern provinces and especially in Iran: *Chronique de massacres annoncés: Les Assyro-Chaldéens d'Iran et Hakkari face aux ambitions des empires (1896-1920)* (Paris: Geuthner).

The current volume, which publishes essays first presented at a conference organised in 2011, constitutes an important follow-up to these earlier publications which focused on chronicling the events, as to numbers, perpetrators, witnesses, conspirators, victims and consequences. The current volume adds to the documentary and analytic work that is as yet unfinished, as in the articles by Uğur Ümit Üngör, "How Armenian was the 1915 Genocide?", Florence Hellot-Bellier, "The Resistance of Urmia Assyrians to Violence at the beginning of the Twentieth Century", and Jan J. van Ginkel, "Mor Dionysios `Abd an-Nur Aslan: Church Leader during a Genocide". However, its editors have chosen to broaden the topic by including post-genocide history, in the article by Naures Atto and Soner O. Barthoma, "Syriac Orthodox Leadership in the Post-Genocide Period (1918-26) and the Removal of the Patriarchate from Turkey", by discussing intra-Syriac interpretations, by Shabo Talay, "*Sayfo*, *Firman, Qafle*: The First World War from the Perspective of Syriac Christians", Sebastian Brock, "A Historical Note of October 1915 Written in Dayro D-Zafaran (Deyrulzafaran)", and Simon Birol, "Interpretation of the 'Sayfo' in Gallo Shabo's Poem". The volume also includes a discussion of today's ongoing psychological effects by Önver A. Cetrez, "The Psychological Legacy of the Sayfo: An Inter-Generational Transmission of Fear and Distrust", and by examining current political discussions about the genocide, by

Racho Donef, "Sayfo and Denialism: A New Field of Activity for Agents of the Turkish Republic", Abdulmesih BarAbraham, "Turkey's Key Arguments in Denying the Assyrian Genocide", and Christophe Premat, "Who Killed Whom? A Comparison of Political Discussions in France and Sweden about the Genocide of 1915". Most importantly, many of the articles deepen earlier interpretations of what happened, in the context of genocide studies more general, in the Introduction by the editors and in "Sayfo Genocide: The Culmination of an Anatolian Culture of Violence" (Gaunt), and against the background of the Armenian genocide (Üngör).

One of the most important findings of recent research, following up on Gaunt's initial findings, is the great diversity of what happened to the Christians of the Syriac tradition. In some places, they were killed and deported together with the Armenians, in other places some Christians (Catholics, Protestants) were killed and deported, while others (Syriac Orthodox), were left alone. Despite such instances, the overall number of victims (those massacred and those perishing during deportation or immediately afterwards) is estimated to be between 180,000 and 250,000, one average (but with considerable local variation) about half of the total population of Syriac Christians. The largest numbers of Syriac Christians were killed in the Diyarbakir province, whereas the Assyrians of Hakkari, although suffering great losses during military fights as well as during massacres of civilians, survived in slightly higher percentages. However, different from the small surviving Syriac Orthodox communities in Tur ʿAbdin, the Hakkari mountains were completely cleansed of Assyrians.

These different experiences make it difficult to tell a unified story, and even more difficult to pinpoint straightforward causes for what happened. A number of the contributions describe how most of the Syriac Orthodox Christians interpreted the events as grounded in anti-Christian rather than in Turkish (ethno-) nationalist motives (Birol, Talay). This interpretation is still the overriding one in most Syriac and Assyrian communities and to some extent is supported by the fact that in so many places not only Armenians, who were seen as "disloyal" to the state, were killed, but that other Christians were included indiscriminately. The fact that in other places Syriac Christians were spared because of their supposed loyalty to the state indicates that the motives, whether of the Young Turk government, local governors or the Kurdish Hamidiye troops complicit in the massacres, in fact varied widely: from anti-Christian, anti-Armenian or anti-Syriac sentiments to Turkish ethnocentrism, but also including very local rivalries over land and power, or over real or assumed foreign support of Christian communities (Gaunt, Üngör).

This variety of possible motives for the Sayfo is addressed in the editors' Introduction as well as in Gaunt's chapter, but it is here that the limits of the present volume come to the fore. While it provides an excellent introduction to the topic of the Syriac/Assyrian *Sayfo* and successfully widens the perspective by bringing in new topics (which hopefully will encourage new and ongoing research, such as into the specific experience of women, as touched upon in Hellot-Bellier's article), it is its overall analysis that is in particular need of further research. Especially the distinction, as put forward by the editors (p. 16), between synchronic "national", and diachronic "colonial" (in the sense of "targeting native populations") explanatory models, the first focusing on ethnic and national motivations, the second on long-term religious motivations, overlooks important work on Ottoman studies that shows how earlier episodes of genocidal violence that targeted Christians (in Mount Lebanon, Damascus, Aleppo and, indeed, Hakkari) were part of larger geopolitical movements where groups of Christians (or

other so-called "minorities") were targeted because of a complex interplay of religious, local socio-economic and geopolitical factors, something that the *Sayfo* brings out even more clearly than the Armenian genocide. Seen from that perspective, the genocidal violence of the First World War is part of a long history of violence at the intersection of outside (imperial) pressures and inside insecurities and discussions about the nature of the state. Therefore, the genocidal violence in the decades up to as well as during the First World War is perhaps better understood as a combination of diachronic increase of geopolitical and local sectarian tensions, with very local synchronic events that lead to the actual violence playing out in different ways and different forms, despite being part of an overall ideology. Such an approach can do justice to the different interpretations of the causes of those involved (essentialist anti-Christian ideologies in Islamic societies, local rivalries over socio-economic resources, exclusivist ethno-nationalist ideologies, and geopolitical concerns and rivalries) without having to pit one interpretation against another.

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Ahmed Fawaz, **Opportunity, Identity, and Resources in Ethnic Mobilization: The Iraqi Kurds and the Abkhaz of Georgia**, *Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017, 229 pp., (ISBN: 9781498534000).*

The politicisation of ethnicity is a topic which in the past 60 years has garnered a lot of attention from among others political scientists, historians, and anthropologists. In doing so, researchers have attempted to map and understand the rationale behind just how and why different ethnic groups across the world mobilise. It is a question which seems always to find relevance in the modern world. Nationalism and ethnicity are inexplicably bound, and as the world celebrates the 23rd Olympic Winter Games, the salience of ethnic and national identity is at the forefront of our collective thoughts. These same identities, which unite countless peoples, have also led to the emergence of ethnic cleavages. Many of these occurring in states still struggling to manufacture their own national identities. These cleavages challenge the established state structure and can severely undermine the nation-building of those states. It is in this context that Ahmed Fawaz's *Opportunity, Identity, and Resources in Ethnic Mobilization* emerges.

The author seeks to identify and analyse ethnic mobilisation in Abkhazia, Georgia and Iraqi Kurdistan (p. xvii). He chooses to compare these two groups as they were uniquely similar concerning historical trauma and engagement with more substantial regional powers. The states in which these ethnic groups exist have been subject to intervention from major world powers for over a century. The Abkhaz historically at the heel of Russian interests, and the Kurdish via Ottoman, British, and American interventions. For this book, the author focuses specifically on the years 1991-2016 (p. xx). In doing so, Fawaz looks to gear his focus towards contemporary developments in the mobilisation of each group.

Examining ethnic mobilisation, which the author defines as "the process by which groups are recruited to pursue collective action", Fawaz attempts to create a model for explaining how "ethnic entrepreneurs" mobilise ethnicity via several distinct variables to achieve political goals. These variables include political opportunity structure, identity politicisation, and resource mobilisation. "Ethnic entrepreneurs employ the environment surrounding them to pursue ethnic mobilization" (p. xvii). The end goal for these groups being completion of their "national project", i.e., defeating the central

governing authority in their state and carving out some form of autonomy or declaring their independence (p. 192).

To reach these conclusions, the author developed his own theoretical model to describe how the ethnic entrepreneur achieves ethno-political mobilisation. It is essential first to define who the entrepreneur is; for this, Fawaz employs a variety of definitions established by others in the field. In it, he determines that the entrepreneur is a politician who profits from identifying with a particular ethnic group and makes use of symbols related to that group to establish a cohesive identity in order to facilitate mobilisation (p. 15). The author lays out a flow chart showing which variables specifically influence and are manipulated by the ethnic entrepreneur to achieve said mobilisation (p. 14). Environmental variables form the basis by which the entrepreneur seizes his opportunity. These variables include a history of hatred towards the group, a national project, and strong communal identity, amongst others. The entrepreneur will then make use of one of three intermediate variables: political opportunity structure, ethnic identity politicisation, or resource mobilisation to achieve full ethnic mobility. These are the variables by which the author conducts his comparative analysis; "none of them on its own is sufficient to explain ethnic mobilization" the author posits. A "complementary approach" is needed to explain the phenomenon entirely (p. 35). It is through this complementary approach that he seeks to show the similarities in both the Kurdish and the Abkhazian experience.

The different variables which constitute the authors work are not of his own defining but are the products of research by countless individuals, and Fawaz goes to great length to define how he uses each. Chapters one and two spend their entirety focusing on defining explicitly the framework which comprises his model for the mobilisation of ethnicity via the entrepreneur. It is in chapters three through five where the author delves more so into his comparative analysis of both ethnic groups. He naturally divides these chapters by the three intermediate variables. The degree to which the author succeeds in his comparison is questionable.

In the strictly comparative sense, the author is successful in his task. He adequately compares ethnic mobilisation between the Abkhaz and the Iraqi Kurds. The comparison in chapter three of competing national projects (p. 51) and policies of inclusion and exclusion are particularly well made (p. 44). There are other areas where the comparison is not as strong, and at times evidence for one group vastly outnumbers that of the other in both volume and effectiveness (see "The Anarchy of Armed Gangs and the Security Dilemma" p. 120-122).

On the effectiveness of this comparison, the author notes that "these cases seem unlikely comparisons at first;" and this holds true (p. 191). As the book carries on, however, it does become clear that there are similarities in both cases. The larger question at play for the reader is whether or not this is the correct comparison that the author could be making? One has to wonder what led the author to choose the Iraqi element of the Kurdish people solely for his comparison. In the introduction, Fawaz remarks that "the Kurdish leaders used to announce that each group had to resolve its own problems" (p. xx). While that may be so, what makes the Iraqi case better suited to understanding ethnic mobilisation than say, the Turkish Kurds who have faced severe punishments at the hand of their state for similar actions? The exact reasoning behind why he chose the Iraqi Kurds over these other Kurdish groups is something the author does not adequately explain, which leaves the reader questioning if a better comparison remains untapped.

Closer examination of the works consulted has left other questions. Suspiciously absent is a reference to *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization, and Identity* by David Romano (2006). For the last ten years, Romano's work has been one of the fundamental works on nationalism and ethnic mobilization in Kurdistan. The absence of this source becomes even more peculiar when a further examination reveals the structural similarities in Romano's work to that of the author. Both studies use many of the same theoretical concepts (political opportunity, resource mobilisation, and cultural framing) to explain ethnic mobilisation, and Romano's work also features a history of Kurdish ethno-political mobilisation in Iraq in chapter six. Despite this, and for all their similarities, this work is not once cited. This omission brings about another question worth considering, does *Opportunity, Identity, and Resources in Ethnic Mobilization* say anything new? Many researchers have thoroughly examined ethnic mobilisation in Kurdistan, and the phenomenon has been explored in Abkhazia as well in some form (Cornell, 2002); but not to the degree found in this book. Here is where Fawaz makes his contribution.

That Fawaz delivers an extended examination of Abkhazian mobilisation is perhaps the book's most significant strength. He makes use of a wide range of sources, including many in-person interviews with officials who have worked in Georgia and have first-hand knowledge of the situation in Abkhazia.[1] The author makes a valued contribution to the study of the Abkhaz of Georgia in a more thorough manner than has previously been attempted. His theoretical model for understanding how political entrepreneurs utilise ethnicity to achieve mobilisation would serve well as the parameters for further comparative studies in other regions. To this end, the book is worth a read. It would make a useful contribution as reference material for students in classrooms examining ethno-political mobilisation, as it provides a useful enough comparison between two distinct ethnic groups.

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Michael M. Gunter (ed.), **Kurdish Issues: Essays in Honor of Robert Olson**, *2016, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishing, (ISBN: 9781568593104).*

Historian Robert Olson not only has an impressive track record in Middle Eastern studies, and in particular in Kurdish studies; he has also had a long involvement with Mazda Press. It seems fitting, therefore, that a volume in his honour should focus on the Kurds, and appear with this publishing house. The editor, Michael M. Gunter, has brought together a diverse collection of papers by established scholars in the field, including one in French, with a clear focus on political history and contemporary politics. Only one contribution deals with the Kurdish diaspora; none address cultural, linguistic, or economic topics.

[1] See chapter 3 notes beginning on p. 93 for example.

A good many of the contributions on contemporary politics focus on the relations between the different Kurdish political actors (notably the PKK and its offshoot the PYD, and the KDP-dominated Kurdistan Regional Government) and the U.S. government (or more specifically, the Obama administration; the book was published shortly after Trump's surprise election as U.S. president). They also clearly imply, or explicitly state, recommendations for U.S. policy. Thus, Romano and Hussein's paper argues that the KRG is the best U.S. ally in the then-ongoing war against IS, the so-called Islamic State, while Paasche, Ahmed and Gunter's contribution cautiously recommends the PKK and PYD as allies (needless to say, both the Obama and the Trump administrations have since then been running along both tracks). Eva Savelsberg, by contrast, focuses on the PYD's human rights abuses in Rojava, and warns against seeing the PYD, and its military wing, the YPG, and the PKK more generally, as stable military (and, by extension, political) partners. Given Savelsberg's highly critical attitude towards the regional role of the PKK, her contribution contrasts interestingly with the contributions of Cengiz Günes and Joost Jongerden, which show a rather greater sympathy for, and rather less criticism of, PKK actions and ideologies.

Other contributions are more historical in character. Kamal Soleimani discusses a number of Turkish-language articles written by anonymous Kurdish intellectuals for the Ottoman periodical *Tercüman-i Hakikat* in the wake of Shaykh Ubaydullah's 1880 revolt. These writings, he argues, reflect the rising ethnic and nationalist tensions, in particular between Kurds and Armenians, in the late Ottoman Empire. As such, they constitute an early stage in what he calls, following Ruth Wodak, the "discursive construction of a Kurdish national identity". In his contribution on the Kurds in Iraq and Syria between 1920 and 2015, Jordi Tejel criticises the dichotomy of accommodation and resistance that informs many studies of the Kurds in different states, and indeed studies of Middle Eastern minorities more generally. Such a dichotomy, he argues, reflects an "oppositional logic", which overlooks the fact that majorities and minorities need not be permanently opposed to each other, and that relations between them are more dynamic, since ethnic, religious, and other identities are constantly (re-)negotiated, and may be activated and deactivated as the circumstances demand.

There are also a number of more theory-driven contributions. First, Hamit Bozarslan discusses Ibn Khaldun's famous distinction between *badâwa*, or rural society, which is held together and strengthened by tribal solidarity or *asabiyya*, from *hadâra*, or urban civilisation, which is weakened by the luxuries of civilised and affluent existence; he then raises the question to what extent this model of the rise and fall of societies, about which he has also published a book-length study,[2] can be applied to Kurdish history. Finally, the volume is concluded with an essay by Abbas Vali on Kurdish society and politics in *Rojhilat*, or Iranian Kurdistan, an offshoot of an ongoing genealogical study of the Kurds in twentieth-century Iran, which, he states, is informed by a "dialectics of dominance and resistance" (p. 283). It would be interesting to confront this dialectic with Tejel's critique.[3] Somewhat unusually for a genealogical project, Vali's contribution focuses on the role of the Pahlavi state's sovereign power, rather than on non-sovereign and less visible state-related modalities of power; likewise, given his emphasis on tribalism, class structure, and land reforms, his essay appears to discuss

[2] Bozarslan, H. (2014). *Le luxe et la violence: Domination et contestation chez Ibn Khaldun*. Paris: CNRS Éditions.

[3] Of this projected trilogy, only the first volume has thus far appeared: Vali, A. (2011). *Kurds and the State in Iran: The Making of Kurdish Identity*. London: I.B. Tauris.

political economy rather than genealogy in the strict sense. This contribution is also by far the most theoretically oriented of the volume. In part, this is inevitable: Vali himself already indicates the dearth of sources outside Iran, and the difficulties of conducting fieldwork or archival research inside the country.

In all, given its focus on political science and history, this volume presents a broad, though by no means comprehensive, overview of the state of the art in Kurdish studies. As such, it forms a worthy celebration of Robert Olson's career.

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