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## BOOK REVIEWS

Uğur Ümit Üngör, **The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950**, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 352 pp. (ISBN: 9780199603602).

If it has been difficult for Turks to come to terms with the violence surrounding the Turkish Republic's formation, Uğur Ümit Üngör's book, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia*, will muddle that process further. And yet it is, I believe, necessary reading for Turkish citizens who wish to confront their country's past.

Üngör's book offers a detailed examination of the attempts by the Young Turk regime to transform eastern Anatolia, which had been largely populated by Kurds and Armenians, into an ethnically homogenous Turkish space largely through a series of population policies that unfolded largely from 1913 to 1950, the year the radical faction of Young Turks came to power and the year that ended the one-party dictatorship in Turkey, respectively. While Üngör's work, which is based on rich archival sources in multiple languages, treats larger themes of state and nation formation, mass violence, and the role of population politics in these processes, his choice to focus primarily on the province of Diyarbakir allows the reader to view these wider dynamics in great detail on the local level.

While careful to dispel both depictions of Ottoman society as either one in which the ethnic diversity doomed it to failure or one in which all elements enjoyed a blissful brotherhood, Üngör's work tackles the shift from a rather inclusive brand of Ottoman patriotism to a much more exclusive Turkish nationalism. Humiliating territorial losses and the linkage of Ottoman Christians with these losses prompted many Young Turks to disidentify with non-Muslims, and then later with non-Turkish Muslims. Although the Young Turks in power officially promoted the principle of "Unity of the Elements," their internal discourse was developing in another direction. Indeed, before the First World War, the Young Turks' embrace of chauvinist nationalism became more public and unapologetic.

The social sciences served as the intellectual foundation for the Young Turks' social engineering projects to combat the heterogeneity of Ottoman society. Young Turk intellectuals researched and implemented techniques of internal colonisation and spent great efforts to prove that the eastern provinces were Turkish in ethnicity, history, and architecture. As threats (real or perceived) to the territorial integrity of the empire in the eastern provinces mounted, they intensified efforts to manipulate not just the demographics but the social character of these regions. The fear of impending territorial losses combined with more humiliation and rage during the Balkan Wars. Streams of Muslim refugees from the Balkans poured into Anatolia with the stories of the terrors they had suffered in ethnic cleansing campaigns, and the loss of the Balkans "bolstered the myth of the Christian 'stab in the back'...as part of a general discourse of non-Muslim treason and disloyalty" (p. 44). Finally, in 1914, a European-sponsored plan to reform the eastern provinces and oversee Armenian affairs would



propel Young Turk population policies in a more violent and conclusive direction, which the author treats in the remaining chapters.

While much of the ground on the Armenian genocide offered by Üngör has been covered before, Üngör's analysis complements the work of Taner Akçam, for one, in its focus on how the sense of victimisation can affect social groups and prompt mass violence, particularly the concept of vengeance. With Üngör's intensive focus on genocide in the Diyarbekir province, he is further able to illustrate the importance of local dynamics and the roles that local elites can play in either intensifying or resisting violence. Indeed, Üngör's findings support the general observation that "occupational and colonial regimes can only be efficient when they enjoy support from indigenous collaborators... This may explain why the Armenian genocide was, in the words of one expert, a 'completely successful genocide in its own nationalist terms,' but the anti-Kurdish campaigns were not as effective, for by that time the local elites were themselves targeted by the regime" (p. 259).

The main motives for engaging in large-scale deportations of Kurds were political, economic, and nationalist assimilation—the same aims that drove the destruction of the Armenians. Of key importance was the principle that no more than 5-10% of the population of a given area be non-Turkish. Both Armenian and Kurdish properties were given to Turks, who were prompted to settle in eastern Anatolia. The process of relocation was frequently traumatic for both parties, but the state made great efforts to make sure that the Turkish settlers were economically stable and had access to schools and other amenities. Kurds did not enjoy these benefits. Furthermore, throughout the 1920s, authorities acted on reform plans that were explicitly envisioned as a kind of internal colonisation. Kurds who remained in their homes were to be disarmed (while Turkish settlers could have legal access to weapons) and it was decreed that Kurds could not be state officials, no matter how low the office. Üngör points out that so thorough was the attack on Kurds and Kurdishness that even Kurds who had been loyal to the Kemalists were included in these measures, and often deported. The Kemalists were open about their agenda, and its ideological underpinnings. According to Üngör, "posited as a scientific theory [their] notion of social evolution was used to support and justify policies of population control, not unlike European colonialism. Combined together, both these ideological constructs revolved around a specific notion of time that the Kemalists had ethnicised: the past was Ottoman, the future would be Turkish. In other words, Turkish culture would be the pinnacle of social evolution" (p. 139). Security issues seemed less pressing, but population engineering was of utmost importance. In the end, these policies did not "solve" the Kurdish "question." Instead, "they were counterproductive, disrupting the local economies and shifting power relations in the East in favour of local families who had stayed aloof during the deportations... and had now become even more powerful." Furthermore, "the Young Turk attack on the Kurdish intelligentsia deepened existing grievances and accentuated conflicts across generations" (p. 169). Indeed descendants of deportee families were among the founders of the PKK.

Educational and cultural policies and projects were explicitly designed to eradicate Kurdishness and to Turkify all citizens, but particularly those in the Kurdish east. Although schools and "People's Houses" multiplied, here too Kemalist policies ended up backfiring on some level. State elites envisioned Kurds as "wild" and "savage" raw materials to be moulded into "civilised" Turkish citizens through institutions such as boarding schools, which had "authoritarian and militaristic" environments, such as the notorious boarding schools, where, ironically, they emerged with a stronger sense of Kurdishness. As Üngör writes, one might suggest that "Young Turk nation for-

mation in the eastern provinces largely failed, not because it was Turkish, but because it was totalitarian and violent” (p. 216).

Citizens of Turkey whose families had not experienced these traumas have embraced manufactured national memories, memories that Kemalist elites attempted to create in their process of constructing national identity. Armenian life had all but disappeared from Turkey but their traces were too visible. As such, the Kemalist regime proceeded to erase these vestiges by defacing churches, razing cemeteries, and other such measures. Armenian accounts of the genocide were destroyed or banned. Kurdish deportees were not allowed to visit the graves of their dead, any expression of Kurdish language and culture was outlawed, and place names were changed. Along with *destruction*, which is an essential part of national identity building, Üngör also emphasises the *construction* that played an equal role of this process. As the Ottoman, Armenian, and Kurdish pasts were destroyed, hegemonic paradigms of nationalist “mythistory” were propagated. Üngör’s close lens on Diyarbakir is helpful for understanding this process. Kemalist productions of Diyarbakir’s history made specific efforts to erase non-Turkish peoples from the region’s past; even Diyarbakir’s multi-ethnic architecture and economy were presented as timelessly Turkish in these narratives. Diyarbakir became Diyarbakır, along with a myth to support the “Turkishness” of this new pronunciation. Many Kemalists missed the irony that although “Turks” were said to have founded Diyarbakir in the ancient past, they still needed to “reconquer” and “civilise” it in the 1930s.

Many such paradoxes of Young Turk nation building have not been lost on the millions of families who have preserved memories that stand as a powerful alternative to the official narratives, which persist. But for those in Turkey who have had little access to anything but the Kemalist account of the making of modern Turkey, Üngör’s book will surprise and challenge them, hopefully with a move towards a more inclusive vision of national identity, which would necessarily involve a reckoning with its construction to date.

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Mohammed M. A. Ahmed, ***Iraqi Kurds and Nation-Building***. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 294 pp., (ISBN: 978-1-137-03407-6), (paper).

Mohammed Ahmed’s *Iraqi Kurds and Nation-Building* offers readers a detailed accounting of the key issues facing Iraqi Kurdistan today. Although he provides some historical background to the region’s emergence, the book very much focuses on developments since 2003, and especially the most recent events of 2007-2012.

Readers should understand what this book is and is not. It is not a theoretical analysis relying on theories from political science, sociology or international relations academic literature. Those wishing to read an analysis that directly relates the Iraqi Kurds’ experience to Weberian notions of state building, social movement understandings of networks, framing and institutions, or comparative federalism, for example, should look elsewhere. Readers with an interest in the Kurds or Iraq, however, will find a wealth of very up to date material with extensive details on developments of the last few years. Relying mostly on English and Kurdish media sources to build his account, Mohammed Ahmed delivers a very readable “blow by blow” synopsis of the key issues and recent events.

In the process, Mr. Ahmed's account appears both objective and biased at the same time. It is objective in the sense that it displays no detectable favouritism towards one Kurdish political party or another. In terms of political projects, the only clear preference in the text seems to be in favour of self-determination (however it looks in practice), stability and prosperity for Kurdistan – which most people would consider understandable preferences on the part of any author dealing with this topic. I especially liked Mr. Ahmed's treatment of the difficult questions regarding democratisation and corruption in Iraqi Kurdistan. While most accounts of these issues cast the region as either a paragon of democracy and governance in a troubled region or a cesspool of authoritarianism and corruption, Ahmed does an admirable job of examining the issues in context while refusing to whitewash Kurdish political leaders' misdeeds, from harassing critical journalists with endless lawsuits to serious levels of nepotism. He does this by providing both the accusations against Kurdish leaders and their responses, followed by a considered appraisal of his own. His appraisal draws a picture of a democratising, economically expanding region with serious shortcomings and challenges to overcome.

Mr. Ahmed's account is biased in the sense that it focuses on the trials, constraints, motivations and points of view of the Iraqi Kurds. In doing so, other actors' constraints, points of view and motivations for making the choices they do get short shrift. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, for instance, is cast as an Arab nationalist (or a "radical Arab nationalist" on page 129) who simply does not wish to let the Kurds have Kurdish territories like Kirkuk, Kalar and Khanequin. The real political constraints, fears and dilemmas making it almost impossible for Maliki and other Arab leaders to accede to Kurdish demands regarding Article 140 of the 2005 Constitution get almost no attention, however. Similarly, domestic political factors forcing Turkish leaders to launch military raids against Kurdistan Workers' Party bases in Iraqi Kurdistan seem to be ignored. Instead, the image is one of a Turkish state almost happy to bomb the Kurds to the south, at least until they improved their relations after 2009. While there are a plethora of "radical Arab nationalists," "radical Turkmen," and "radical Islamists" in such an accounting, I saw no mention of "radical Kurdish nationalists" anywhere. The Americans as well are largely cast as being in thrall to Turkey and the Arabs, doing everything they want for them. It seems a bit unfair to describe U.S. ambassador to Iraq James Jeffrey, as having "praised and admired Mustafa Kemal Atatürk for creating an exclusive ethnic Turkish state, which had denied its Kurdish population of its fundamental rights" (p.127). Mr. Jeffrey may admire Atatürk but, most likely, for other reasons.

While the citations in the book are generally very good, some issues such as Khanequin's "85% Kurdish population" need a reference. I do not think a reference exists for such a claim, however, given the lack of a census in Iraq. Other issues, such as battles over changes to Iraqi parliamentary laws, could use more background information for readers less familiar with the intricacies of the political contests occurring in Baghdad. Finally, I found there was too much "he said, she said" when it came to diplomatic visits and foreign relations of the Kurdistan Regional Government. For instance, it is probably quite unnecessary to quote Ambassador Jeffrey's statement in August 2010: "I was delighted today to meet President Talabani and to present my diplomatic credentials." The account of KRG President Massoud Barzani's many visits abroad in particular was full of such quotations ("I was delighted to meet x, who is a great friend to the Kurds;" or "They said their meeting was very useful") and accounts of the superficial ("Before leaving for Jordan, Barzani received a telephone call from US vice president Joseph Biden, wishing him success on his shuttle diplomacy in

the Middle East” (p. 57). Readers would probably benefit more from additional analysis of what these meetings and phone calls were truly about.

On the whole, however, readers with a keen interest in the latest events regarding Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan will find much to appreciate in Mr. Ahmed’s book. Especially those who do not read Kurdish will benefit from Mr. Ahmed’s extensive use and citations of Kurdish media sources, making his work indispensable for research on the area.

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Ofra Bengio, **The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State within a State**. Boulder, CO and London, UK: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012, xiv + 346 pp., (ISBN 978-1-58826-836-5), (hardcover).

There are now a number of credible scholarly analyses of the Kurds of Iraq, but Ofra Bengio, a first-class Israeli scholar, may well have written the single best one to date. This is not particularly surprising given her many years of studying the question and proven ability to draw upon a wealth of rich source materials to trace and analyse “the profound vicissitudes of [Iraqi] Kurdish fortunes over the last half-century” (p. 1).

After a thoroughly documented, wide-ranging introductory analysis of the evolution of Kurdish nationalism, Bengio divides her reader-friendly, fast-paced treatise into four parts. (1) The Kurds and the Iraqi State, 1968-1980. (2) Caught in the Cross-fire, 1980-1998. (3) A Kurdish Entity in the Making, 1998-2010. (4) Conclusion in which she reconsiders the old adage concerning the Kurds, “No friends but the mountains.” Thus, Bengio, grippingly explains how the Iraqi Kurds “had long been branded as the losers of the twentieth century. . . like the phoenix, rose out of the ashes of the wars and civil strife . . . to establish a self-governing Kurdish entity” (p. ix), the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

To do so, Bengio addresses some of the following important questions. How did Kurdish-Iraqi state dynamics lead to the ultimate collapse of the centralised Baathi state and the rise of the KRG? What were the internal and external obstacles to building the KRG? To what extent have the Iraqi Kurds succeeded in these tasks? What caused the differences between the KRG and the remainder of Iraq as well as the differences between the KRG and the Kurdish communities in the contiguous states? Maybe most importantly, how profound has been the impact of the KRG’s rise upon the geostrategic map of the entire region, “the sea changes in the regional and international arena that took place at the end of the twentieth century” (p. 7) as she so aptly puts it. Indeed, in the more than two years since Bengio’s 2010 cut-off date, this changing geostrategic situation brought on by the rise of the Kurds has come to profoundly affect not only the future of Iraq, but also surprisingly Syria and of course Turkey. So far, however, Iran seems to be the odd man out in this historical process.

In her trenchant analysis of the making of the KRG, the author characterises “the process of Kurdish nation building as a continuum” (p. 274) and lists the following factors that propelled the Kurdish national project: “The steady decline of the Baathi regime and the resulting weakening of the Iraqi state; the end of the Kurdish civil war [1994-1998] and the slow normalisation process that followed close on its heels; the

convergence of interests, for the first time in modern history, between a superpower, the United States, and the Kurds; a gradual change in the international community's position on the sanctity of borders after the collapse of the Soviet Union; and, most importantly, the demise of the Baath state in 2003" (p. 273).

Bengio notes that although KRG president Mas'ud Barzani has specifically declared that the post-Saddam Iraqi federation "leaves only foreign policy, national defence, and financial affairs in the hands of the central government" (p. 245), the KRG still proceeded to take upon itself authority in these very matters. Tellingly, Bengio then observes that "the classic definition of an [independent] state includes the capacity to enter into relations with other states" (Ibid.) and this, of course, is exactly what the KRG has been increasingly doing since its inception in 1992 and especially since the fall of Saddam in 2003. "Indeed, one of the . . . unintended . . . consequences of the Kurdish civil war [was] . . . that it helped upgrade relations with outside powers. . . . In other words, the KRG established foreign relations inch by inch, using mediation as a springboard (p. 246). "In time, the Kurds, who were first viewed as a moral burden on the United States, became allies of sorts" (p. 260). Although this US role has remained all important, ironically "Turkey could be depicted as the reluctant builder of Iraqi Kurdistan" (p. 252).

The author adds that "generally speaking, the existence of a large Kurdish diaspora in Europe . . . and the United States . . . served as a catalyst for internationalising the Kurdish issue" (p. 281). "The horrors of the Halabja and Anfal massacres, from which almost no Kurdish family was spared [and with which the author compares the Holocaust in helping create Israel], were the final catalyst for the crystallisation of a Kurdish identity and entity" (p. 280). The author also notes that "the most dangerous domestic enemies were the various Kurdish Islamist groups" (p. 277), while adding that continuing tribalism was "the enemy from within" (p. 279).

Bengio, of course, covers the broad contours and specifics that all who study the saga of the Kurds of Iraq are already familiar with, so the main strength of her book is her cogent, at times even brilliant, interpretations of events. Her superb analysis also stands as a testimony to excellent, reader-friendly prose that will serve very well both the scholarly community, practitioners, and intelligent lay public, while at the same time put to shame those other scholars who continue to hide what they may or may not have to say behind mind-boggling jargon. Her book also includes a short list of acronyms, two useful maps, a wide-ranging bibliography, and thorough index complete with useful sub-entries.

Of course, fast-moving events since this book's 2010 cut-off date, will call for the author to consider a second edition or maybe even a follow up book analysing the KRG's subsequent struggles against Baghdad over oil and territory that may well lead it to eventual independence. In addition, the Iraqi Kurds' role in the Syrian civil war that has been raging since March 2011 and continuing development of the all-important economic and now increasing political links to Turkey also demand close attention. At the same time the role of the United States, while still important, has been lessening and is now viewed as less supportive than what the Kurds have come to expect.

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Cengiz Gunes, **The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey, from Protest to Resistance**, London: Routledge, 2012, 256 pp., (ISBN: 978-0-415—68047-9).

Academic work in the political sciences on Kurdish identity and the Kurdish national movement generally revolves around two positions. The first takes identity and nation as pre-given and may be referred to as essentialist; in this approach, neither identity nor nation needs explanation, since they always have been there. The second takes objective conditions as a point of departure, and questions the existence and nature of Kurdish identity and nationhood because these conditions are not fully met. This, in brief, is the argument presented by Cengiz Gunes in his book on Kurdish identity and the Kurdish national movement in Turkey since the 1960s and forms the background against which the author positions himself. Rejecting the allegedly dominant essentialist and objectivist approach, Gunes argues for a constructivist position, claiming that identity and nation are contingent and developed through discourse.

In the constructivist approach, nation and identity have to be explained by the social processes in which they are produced. The modern idea of the nation carries connotations of a community shaped by common descent, culture, language, aspirations and history. This provides a particular form of collective identity in which people, despite their routine lack of physical contact, consider themselves bound together, because they share customs and internalised memories of a history that is lived in the present through such practices as commemoration and education. However, it is not sufficient just to say that nation and identity are socially constructed: it is necessary also to explain how this construction occurs. This is what *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey* aspires to do: to explain the production of Kurdistan and Kurdish identity in relation to political discourses of various political actors, with an emphasis on the Kurdistan Worker's Party, the PKK.

To analyse the social construction of Kurdish identity and nationhood, Gunes analyses political practices, defined as struggles that seek to challenge and transform the social and society in the name of an ideal or principle. Using discourse analysis, the book shows how the discursive construction of Kurdistan as an (international) colony produced important political effects. The author explains how political practices developed by a variety of political actors constituting the 'Kurdish national movement' de-naturalised the Kemalist discourse and how the movement created a new construction of the world, with Turkey as a colonial power, Kurdistan as an international colony, the Kurdish landlord as comprador, and so redefined the character of political struggle.

Gunes develops his argument in eight chapters. In the first two chapters, he discusses the treatment of Kurdish identity and Kurdish nationalism in academic discourses, explains his approach and methodological framework for the analysis of identity formation and political practices. In the next two chapters, Kurdish political activism in the 1960s and the emergence of a Kurdish socialist movement are discussed, with the fifth and sixth chapters focusing on the construction of discourses of national liberation and of Kurdish subjectivity. Gunes shows how the discourse of national liberation not only constructed antagonistic relations with Kemalism and the state, but also with the Kurdish feudal elite.

The author also differentiates between two political positions. One was advocated by the Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan (TKSP) and the Revolutionary Democratic Cultural Associations DDKD/KIP, which emphasised close cooperation between the socialist movement in Turkey and the Kurdish national liberation struggle. The other was adhered to by organisations such as the PKK, Rizgarî, Ala Rizgarî and Ka-

wa, which stressed the need for separate organisation and equivalence. In the final two chapters, Gunes discusses the PKK's turn to democracy, which he dates back to the early 1990s, and the way in which Kurdish demands became equated with democratic demands, and the transformation of the political struggle, from the development of the idea of democratic confederalism (institutionalised in the KCK), the democratic republic and democratic autonomy to electoral strategies at the local and national levels.

The concepts of chain of equivalence and chain of difference offer a fresh and interesting perspective on political practices and the success of the PKK. These concepts were developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) in relation to the expression of political demands and the creation of antagonisms. Social demands become equivalent when they are articulated with other demands. One can talk of chain of equivalence when various demands are seen as part of a totality. In the 1970s and 1980s, the discourse of the PKK demands for social justice and freedom were seen as part of the totality of national liberation. This totality is referred to as an "empty signifier", meaning it represents the concrete demands symbolically. Moreover, the PKK's discourse of national liberation came to symbolise cultural myths, like *Nezîr*, and concrete practices, like the resistance in prisons, fierce political defence in court and guerrilla strategy. Later, radical democracy (or, as it is now referred to, democratic nation) became the "empty signifier" or totality, symbolising the struggle for freedom, peace and rights. Importantly, the discourses of national liberation and radical democracy came to signify a series of demands and coherent practices. Although the PKK organised the struggle for national liberation and later radical democracy separately from the left in Turkey, it was able to align itself with the left, in which the struggle for national liberation and the struggle for socialism emerged as the shared signifiers of a chain of equivalence of demands, with the representation of the struggle for socialism perhaps even becoming dependent that of the national liberation struggle in Kurdistan.

The political practice and discourse of the PKK is contrasted with the political strategy and discourse of the TKSP. The TKSP decided to cooperate with parties on the left in Turkey on the basis of anti-fascism and anti-imperialism, yet in this setting (within this discourse) the TKSP was unable to articulate demands for Kurdish rights. Importantly, the parties on the left did not consider the Kurdish problem to be central, but rather one subordinate to the main struggle for socialism. While the parties on the left did not consider it necessary to put the Kurdish issue on the political agenda, the TKSP defended a coalition with the Turkish left. TKSP experienced difficulties in linking this coalition strategy with the left to the experiences and the politics of the everyday in its constituency, creating a vagueness and ambivalence. Gunes finds a striking example of this vagueness and ambivalence in the 1985 political program of the TKSP, which states that historical developments present a solution to the Kurdish issue in two forms: either the "Kurdish nation (...) starts its national liberation war" or a "revolutionary movement led by the working class of Turkey" would establish a democratic rule of the people and the right of the Kurdish people to self-determination (p.93).

An important issue which is touched upon in the book is that of inter-party violence, a topic which has been under studied. It has become common place to ascribe tendencies to use violence against other Kurdish and leftist parties to the PKK; however, the use of violence by other parties was commonplace among the left generally in Turkey, and several militants and cadres of the PKK fell victim to this too. The



author mentions the killing of Aydın Gül by the Maoist party Halkın Kurtuluşu (People's Liberation) and Haki Karer by Stêrka Sor (and not Tekoşin).

To the merit of *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey* is its attempt to understand how subjectivation takes place and political actors give meaning to the world and themselves. In this sense, the book is a sharp and welcome turn away from analyses in which the PKK, or for that matter any political party, is treated as an expression of something else. The author is also among the first to have observed the articulation of Kurdish demands into a discourse of radical democracy and the profound importance of this for a development of the political struggle for self-determination and rights. On a critical note, although considerable attention is given to the concepts of chain of equivalence and chain of difference, further elaboration would have been useful. The book focuses on the PKK and TKSP, and while an extension to parties like the DDKD/KIP, Kawa, Rizgarî and Ala Rizgarî, along with others such as Tekoşin would have further contributed to an understanding of Kurdish politics in the 1970s, this would be difficult to cover in a single work (and indeed, sounds more like a research program). Overall, *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey* is a well thought out and welcome contribution to the study and understanding of identity politics and political struggle and a much needed textbook for students in Kurdish Studies.

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Aygen, Gülsat, ***Kurmanjî Kurdish. Languages of the World/Materials 468***, München: Lincom Europa, 2007, 92 pp., (ISBN: 9783895860706), (paper).

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The literature on the Kurdish language includes instructional textbooks in various languages and several articles on the classification of Kurdish languages. However, there are very few resources to be used as a reference for grammar or descriptive grammar of Kurdish written in English. The book *Kurmanjî Kurdish* by Gülsat Aygen is a concise descriptive grammar of Kurmanjî, a northern dialect of the Kurdish language, which belongs to the Northwest group of Iranian languages of the Indo-European languages (see, MacKenzie, 1961 for a different classification of Iranian languages). This dialect is spoken by the Kurds of Turkey, Eastern Syria, the Caucasus, and in parts of Iran. It makes use of material on Kurmanjî published in languages other than English, as well as presenting data the author elicited from native speakers. It is important to note that grammar books or teaching material produced on Kurmanjî Kurdish are attempts to provide a prescriptive grammar of this language which has never been a standard language of any nation state in history. Written by non-linguists in languages other than English, they could not serve the purpose of introducing Kurmanjî to an audience of English speaking linguists. Aygen's book has a different aim: it is not a prescriptive but a descriptive grammar written for an audience of linguists.

A linguistic study of any given language is expected to include the major components of grammar, namely: phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. The phonological component refers to the individual sounds as well as the sound systems; the morphological component refers to the form and meaning correspondences in that language; syntax refers to the word order properties and sentence structure; and finally semantics refers to meaning both at the sentence level and also within discourse. *Kurmanjî Kurdish* is structured to include all these components expected in any good

descriptive grammar, and it is divided into five chapters: introductory remarks, phonology, morphology, syntax, sample texts, and a dialogue to exemplify the grammatical features given in previous chapters. The introductory remarks give a list of the areas where Kurmanjî as well as other dialects of Kurdish are spoken in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

The chapter on phonology outlines the articulatory features of vowels and consonants, common phonological processes such as metathesis, vowel and consonant deletion and gemination, syllable structure and stress pattern of Kurmanjî. Although the major reference of this chapter is Bedir Xan and Lescot (2005), Aygen also gives the IPA symbols of the sounds in Kurmanjî. In a brief overview, this chapter is quite informative and gives a general picture of the sound system of Kurmanjî. Kurmanjî has 8 vowels (3 short, 5 long vowels) and 23 consonants. The unique property of this chapter is that it lists region-specific phonological processes as well as general phonological processes. For instance, in Eruh and Serhed regions, /b/ may alternate with /v/ in word-initial and word-final positions: *bi - vi* “by, with”, *cevab - cewav* “answer” (ex. 9, p. 6). For phoneticians and phonologists, as well as dialectologists, such detailed information is significant.

The chapter on morphology, being the central chapter, discusses nominal morphology including (in)definiteness/referentiality, number, and gender. It also gives a detailed description of the case system of Kurmanjî: the absolute and oblique cases and the ergative system in Kurmanjî. It continues with a description of possessive structures (the *izafe* construction), the pronominal system (personal and interrogative pronouns, reflexives and reciprocals, and diminutives), the numeral system, derivation of comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. It also describes temporal adverbs. As to verbal morphology, the chapter discusses complex verbs, passives and causatives, verbal agreement, the Tense/Aspect/Modality system, negation, among others, in Kurmanjî. The indefinite morpheme in Kurmanjî occurs either as a suffix (*-ek*), derived from *yek* “one”: *mizgef-tek* “a mosque”, *şêv-ek* “an apple” (ex. 32, p. 14). Moreover, although Kurmanjî has a plural marker for nouns (*-en*), this morpheme cannot occur on nouns in their absolute form. In such cases, agreement marker on the predicate shows whether the noun is plural: *xanî hat* “the police (officer) came”, *xanî hatin* “the police officers came” (ex. 34, p. 15). Being a split ergative language, Kurmanjî has absolutive/nominative, oblique and ergative cases.

Absolutive/Nominative Case is phonologically null and appears on the Subject on intransitive sentences:

1. Hesp-Ø hat  
horse-abs come-past  
“The horse (masc.) came.”  
(p. 19, ex. 47)

The oblique Case appears on the Object of transitive verbs in all tenses except the past tense:

2. Şîrîn-Ø mirov-î di-bîn-e.  
Şîrîn-abs man-obl prog-see-3s  
“Şîrîn is seeing the man.”  
(p. 20, ex. 50)

The Object of transitive verbs in the past tense bears absolutive case:

3. Şîrîn-ê mirov-Ø dît.  
Şîrîn-obl man-abs see-past

“Şîrîn saw the man.”  
(p. 20, ex. 51)

The chapter on syntax provides a description of the word order of Kurmanjî, discusses the morphosyntax of verbal and copular clauses, subordinate sentences, coordination, adverbial clauses and modifiers, exclamatives and interrogatives (intonation-syntax interface). From a typological perspective, Kurmanjî is interesting in that it has passive structures although it has a split-ergative case system. This property requires a deeper analysis by typologists and experts on ergativity.

The last chapter gives sample texts recorded from a native speaker's narrative of jokes, independent sentences elicited from native speakers, as well as a dialogue from Rizgar (2005) with English glosses. Such authentic material at the discourse level is extremely useful for linguists who need original data at the sentence and discourse level to study the morpho-syntactic, semantic and pragmatic properties of the language.

Overall this book presents a concise account of the features of Kurmanjî with respect to phonology, morphology and syntax. Previous to this book, the only reference material on Kurmanji for English readers was restricted to Soane (1913) and Thackston (2006). Aygen's *Kurmanjî Kurdish* is a very important pioneering work in that (i) it is the first descriptive grammar of Kurmanji in English in print written by a (theoretical) linguist and for linguists, and that (ii) it describes the morpho-syntactic and syntactic aspects of Kurmanji within the generative terminology and gives phonetic transcriptions in IPA symbols, which makes it valuable for a wide group of researchers. For instance, Aygen gives a very good description of ergativity in Kurmanjî, a task that can be accomplished only by a theoretical linguist. In other words, this book is an excellent source for linguists who would like to work on Kurmanjî, or any learner of Kurmanji as a foreign language who is literate in grammatical terms to use as a reference book.

Aygen makes other works on Kurmanji grammar published in other languages, particularly Turkish, accessible to the English reader by quoting from them and also including a bibliography of similar works (e.g. Rizgar, 2005; Bedir Khan and Lescot, 1970). She also adds novel data elicited from native speakers. This book also adds the perspective of a theoretical linguist to the current works on Kurmanji. She presents it all in a more “linguistics reader” friendly way by (i) using the IPA symbols in the phonology chapter and (ii) giving more detailed glosses. She also checked the data she quoted from previous works with native speakers, which is a much admired practice in descriptive linguistics since linguists are most interested in living language rather than frozen prescriptive forms. Another distinguishing feature of this book, which is an excellent practice in descriptive linguistics, is that it gives sample texts and a dialogue in the last chapter, providing the reader with the opportunity to see the language in actual use.

One shortcoming of this book is that it leaves the reader asking for more data and analysis. *The Languages of the World Series* that published this book restricts the manuscripts to 90-120 pages, which might explain the concise nature of this work. Secondly, it would be useful to know which examples in other original works that were not attested by the author through elicited data. Such information could be valuable to researchers who study the difference between prescriptive and descriptive grammars, and give further insight into the living Kurmanji in regions where the data was elicited from.

All in all, the book is a great achievement by Aygen, and a major contribution to

the field of linguistics. This book invites further and more detailed work on Kurmanji, a less-studied dialect of Kurdish. This book is a must read for any researcher in linguistics, but particularly for those working on morphology, syntax, and typology, as well as researchers in other fields related to Kurdish studies, and learners of Kurdish as a foreign/second language.

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Barzoo Eliassi, **Contesting Kurdish Identities in Sweden: Quest for Belonging among Middle Eastern Youth**, Oxford: New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 234 pp. (ISBN: 9781137282071).

What does it mean to be Kurdish in (a stateless) diaspora? This question lies at the heart of *Contesting Kurdish Identities in Sweden. Quest for Belonging among Middle Eastern Youth*. In his book Eliassi examines the ways structural, political, economic and cultural inequalities and constraints impinge on the lives and identity formations of young people. More than that, Eliassi investigates the ways young people respond to their structural positions in Sweden and the Middle East as Kurds, minoritised subjects, immigrants, Muslims, Middle Easterners, and a stateless people. Postcolonial theory is the basis of Eliassi's analysis of how young people construct their sense of belonging in relation to the dominant power structures and identities in Sweden and the Middle East.

By drawing on the insights of postcolonial theory, Eliassi advances the need to understand diaspora nationalism in the light of contemporary racist and nationalist discourses in European countries. Nationalist discourses in Europe are about defending territory, home, and space against immigrants. The increased production of cultural and political boundaries in many Western countries has made immigrants aware that they are either not desired or cannot be fully accepted in the countries where they are currently living (p. 61). The diasporic projects are consequently not just reflections of a collective suffering from the past: while past experiences in the country of origin are of paramount importance, they cannot be detached from contemporary political

and economic experiences of diasporic groups. Indeed, through postcolonial theory, Eliassi takes the study of identity formation and belonging to a new level, compared to previous studies where the focus centred on the experiences of loss and suffering of first generation immigrants of Kurdish origin, in relation to their countries of origin (e.g. Alinia, 2004; Whalbeck, 1999). Eliassi's work also goes beyond studies that have confined the elaboration of the European political context wherein (Kurdish) immigrants live to a discussion of the *formally* existing citizenship regimes within the different countries of settlement (e.g. Emanuelsson, 2005; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2004; Nell, 2004; Koopmans et al, 2005), in contrast to the *lived* structural inequalities.

For this in-depth qualitative study of identity formation amongst the so-called "second generation" Kurdish immigrants, 50 young Kurdish men and women residing in different Swedish cities were interviewed. The majority of the research participants were Swedish citizens who have lived in Sweden for a substantial part or all of their lives. Their parents originate from Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, most of whom immigrated for political reasons.

The study shows that, while Kurds are subjected to orientalism and colonial ideology in the Middle East, with their histories, languages and cultures being denied, suppressed and minoritised in the name of over overarching national narratives, Kurds again occupy a minoritised position as Kurds and as gendered and racialised categories (such as non-white immigrants, Muslims and Middle Easterners) in Sweden/Europe. The majority of the interviewees in Eliassi's study do not feel accepted as Swedes. They are being defined as immigrants even when they were born in Sweden and have spent all their lives there. Being defined as an immigrant means they are not being recognised as equal in social interactions with the dominant members of the society. At the same time there is "formal belonging" and "informal exclusion". There are informal criteria about who belongs and does not belong to a Swedish identity, of which the question "Where are you from?" is most exemplary. Appearance and place of origin function as conditions for acceptance as a "real" Swede, and thus it seems that blood bonds are the defining marker of Swedishness, despite the claims of Sweden being a civic state with civic-oriented citizenship policies in contrast to a country like Germany (p. 103). The young Kurdish interviewees confirm the fact that "immigrant" denotes a racialised position, meaning a dark-skinned and dark-haired person who is not European. Consequently European immigrants such as British, French or Germans are not being considered as "immigrants", whereas people originating from the Middle East are. The lack of full recognition has consequences for the interviewees social and material lives, richly illustrated throughout the book (p. 101).

In many ways the discrimination Kurds face as "immigrants" is at work in most, if not all European states, and is also valid for other minoritised groups. "Sweden" could easily be replaced by Belgium, the Netherlands, or the United Kingdom, as comparative research is likely to show very similar experiences of "immigrants" and Muslims in other European countries. Indeed, as much as this study makes an important contribution to contemporary Kurdish studies, it is a must read for social and political scientists studying migration, diaspora and (trans)nationalism.

Exemplary of the contemporary exclusionary practices vis-à-vis Kurds is the public discourse on honour killings in Sweden. Kurdish men and women in Sweden are struggling with the persistent image of honour-related violence as an assumed inherent characteristic of Kurdish culture. This image, the study shows, builds a climate of suspicion towards Kurds in Sweden and makes Kurds feel that they must prove their innocence or prove they do not belong to the families who committed such crimes. The young Kurdish women in Eliassi's study reject the victim position that is project-

ed upon them, but it is present in their lives and it affects the way they are treated by teachers and peers. Here, the value of a postcolonial approach stands out: it allows Eliassi to demonstrate how the discourse on honour killing enables the construction of different types of masculinity. While a Kurdish masculinity is constructed as violent, oppressive and murderous on the one hand, the dominant Swedish masculinity can be constructed as protective, caring and benevolent, prepared to help minoritised women, on the other.

More generally the debate on honour killings illustrates the orientalised of Muslim immigrants as “traditional” and “backward” compared to the “modern” subjects, and in particular modern (read “Western”) women, who are assumed sovereign subjects, in contrast to Oriental women, who are assumed to be trapped in the cage of traditionalism that encircles their subjectivity. Consequently the “liberation” of Oriental women from their culture, oppressive families, and men are framed as facilitating their entrance into modernity (p. 142). In relation to these gender positions, the men and women belonging to the dominant (Swedish) society can uphold a privileged position to assess and degrade minoritised cultures and identities and draw exclusionary boundaries between “us” and “them” (p. 143). Oppression is assumed to be confined within immigrants’ families and cultures and original homelands, drawing attention away from the political context of the Swedish society, which is assumed to have nothing to do with their subordinated position (p. 190). The basic assumption is that Muslim immigrants have imported a deviant cultural order blighted by gender inequality into a society wherein harmonious gender relations prevail. Consequently, gender practices or identities are used to draw a boundary between “us” and “them”.

The study of Kurdish “immigrants” is consequently as much about Kurds in Sweden as it is about the Swedish imaginary, or the white European imaginary as a whole. It is for this reason that this study excels many contemporary studies of identity and belonging among “immigrant” populations in Europe, as well as previous studies on the formation of Kurdish identities in European countries (e.g. Leggewie, 1996; Wahlbeck, 1999; Emanuelsson, 2005; Khayati, 2008; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2004). Indeed, many studies do not elaborate the powerful mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at work and the ways in which the imagination of the other (“the immigrant”, “Muslim”) allows constructions of the self (as an assumed homogenous body of “modern” subjects). Yet, the instrumentality of “honour crimes” has been thoroughly elaborated in the work of Lila Abu-Lughod (2002; 2011) and has been the object of analysis in Katherine Pratt Ewing’s research on the stigmatisation of Muslim immigrants from Turkey in Germany (2008). Also, similar dynamics are at work in the countries of origin of Kurds, in particular in Turkey, where the public discourse on honour crimes as a supposedly Kurdish custom is instrumental to the governance of the Kurdish minority (Koğacıoğlu, 2011).

Confronted with these dominant discourses, Eliassi finds young Kurdish men and women develop different strategies. While some try to undo the binary oppositions (e.g. pointing to the existence of violence within Swedish families), others resist through silence. Again others hide their Kurdish identities and do not disclose being Kurdish to members of the dominant society. Yet, other young Kurds actively seek to restore (assumed) authentic cultural values of the Kurds, for example trying to extricate Kurdish culture from Arabic and Islamic influences, invoking Zoroastrianism as the “original” Kurdish religion, with gender equality as an assumed part of it. In this invocation of Zoroastrianism, Islam is often presented as an obstruction to Kurdish identity and culture. An anti-Islamic discourse is also being used by young Kurds to oppose the faced stereotypes about honour killings, by portraying honour killings as

Islamic and thus non-Kurdish. These efforts to distinguish Kurdishness from (assumed ideas about) Islam bare testimony to young Kurdish people's internalisation of the dominant discourse on Islam in Sweden/Europe as a religion that is equated with gender oppression. In their imagination of a "modern" Kurdish culture, but also in young people's ideas about potential marriage partners, this research reveals how internalised racism makes minoritised groups look at themselves and their identities and histories through the grammar and the interpretative prism of the dominant white group (p. 162).

Confronted with discrimination, Kurdistan becomes the only self-evident homeland for some of the young Kurdish men and women. Kurdistan is believed to be the only real place that would provide Kurds with a peaceful life, where all questions about where they belong or do not belong would be answered (p. 117). The sense of belonging to a homeland undergoes transformation though new meanings being assigned to it. The imagination of Kurdistan is inserted with nostalgia and upon visiting the imagined homeland, young Kurds may realise that it is not the self-evident home but a place they feel obliged to be long to.

Eliassi concludes with a call for inclusive citizenship in Sweden. Identifying how the boundaries of the nation or the dominant group are constructed, should enable us to dismantle those boundaries and show the possibility of drawing new group boundaries that are not exclusive and rigid but more flexible and responsive to the changes and the dynamics of the population and the political balance in multi-ethnic societies (p. 185). This, he continues, is a process that entails a renegotiation of citizenship, and a decolonisation of the ideologies and ideas embedded in European social structures that exclude non-white immigrants. As long as dominant subjects do not question their naturalised privileges it is difficult to alter the discriminatory structures that present themselves as antiracist in rhetoric but are exclusionary in their practices (p. 186). Such a call is indeed needed, both in Europe, and in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq, where Kurds face continued minoritisation and a politics of subordination vis-à-vis the dominant societies and their nationalist imaginaries. More comparative research, both on the European continent as well as in the Middle East might contribute to this goal.

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