

Editorial

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The recent developments in Syria, Iraq and Turkey have brought the Kurds to the headlines and on prime time television as major actors on the Middle Eastern scene. Not since the dramatic exodus from Iraqi Kurdistan in the spring of 1991 had there been so much media coverage of the Kurds and Kurdistan. At that earlier time, the Kurds were primarily represented as victims, who had no choice but fleeing from Saddam's murderous regime; their plight led to an international humanitarian intervention to create a "safe haven" and ultimately to a self-governing Kurdish region in Northern Iraq protected by a no-fly zone. This time around, the image of the Kurds is that of guardians of moderation and stability, the only force in the region willing and able to take on the so-called Islamic State (IS). The Kurdish region in Iraq has been the only stable and peaceful part of that country, and it has provided a safe haven to hundreds of thousands of Christians, Yezidis, Turcomans, and Arabs fleeing the onslaught of IS and communal conflict elsewhere. In Syria, the three Kurdish enclaves were, until the September offensive against Kobani, the parts of the country least affected by the civil war. Press coverage of the KRG's taking control of Kirkuk and the participation of PKK guerrillas in the defence of Kobani has been remarkably sympathetic.

Kurdish Studies has no intention to regularly cover and comment on recent events. However, we are definitely interested in publishing studies, based on serious research and critical reflection, that provide important background or new insights relevant to understanding these events. We would specifically encourage colleagues who could contribute to deepening our understanding of the developments in Syria (or, for that matter, developments affecting the Kurds of Iran, who rarely if ever hit the headlines and who are the most seriously under-studied part of Kurdish society).

This may raise again the question of how this journal defines the subject of Kurdish studies and what are the criteria for deciding what sort of contributions "fit" the journal. *Kurdish Studies* wishes to be a medium of communication for all scholars in the humanities and social sciences whose work focuses on Kurdish society, history, and culture in the broadest sense. This includes studies of minorities in Kurdistan as well as the Kurdish diaspora; studies of the political economy of Kurdistan and social and political movements past and present, as well as those of literary or religious texts, of dialect variation or

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the politics of language. Some of our contributions will appeal more to the newspaper reader than others; but all should be informed by dispassionate academic reflection.

This special issue of *Kurdish Studies* is dedicated to studies of the Kurdish language, the oldest branch of Kurdish studies, and the first to find a degree of academic institutionalisation. Compared to other major Middle Eastern languages, Kurdish has received relatively little serious investigation, but there is a gradually growing corpus of empirical and theoretical research, of which the guest editors give a useful overview in the introduction. Although there is no unambiguous correlation between language and ethnicity, the Kurdish language has been the most important marker of Kurdish identity, and linguistic studies have often been vitally important to identity politics. We find the works of academic linguists quoted approvingly or fiercely contested in polemics concerning Kurdish nationhood, its demarcation from other peoples, and the inclusion of certain groups in that nation or their claims to be different. The most passionately contested issue no doubt concerns the relationship of Zazaki and Kurdish – the guest editors give a careful overview of this politically charged field – but other questions of demarcation and inclusion (Laki, Lori, and of course the various dialects described as Gurani) have also major implications outside linguistics. The contributions in this issue address questions that are less politically contentious, but certainly also of interest to others than linguists alone. We thank our guest editors, Geoffrey Haig and Ergin Öpengin, for putting together an interesting collection of papers and providing an insightful introduction.

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Editors' acknowledgment

We are delighted to publish the first special issue of *Kurdish Studies* dedicated to the study of the Kurdish language, which we believe will make a solid contribution to the field of linguistics and stimulate further scholarly debate. We would like to thank our guest editors Geoffrey Haig and Ergin Öpengin, the authors as well as the anonymous reviewers for producing this special issue. As always, we are grateful to our colleagues on the editorial board and all those scholars passionate about Kurdish studies who continue to contribute, support and promote the field and our journal. Special thanks go also to Ergin Öpengin and Fateh Saeidi who kindly translated all the abstracts into Kurmanji and Sorani. We would also like to take this opportunity to welcome on board our new assistant editor Wendelmoet Hamelink.

Welat Zeydanhoğlu, Ibrahim Sirkeci, Joost Jongerden, Janet Klein

Associate Editors of Kurdish Studies