BOOK REVIEWS

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Adem Uzun, **"Living Freedom": The Evolution of the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey and the Efforts to Resolve it.** *Berghof Transitions Series No. 11. Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 2014. 48 pp., (ISBN: 978-3-941514-16-4).*

With more than 25 years of experience in the Kurdish liberation movement in Turkey and currently a leading member of the Administrative Council of the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK), Adem Uzun has authored a succinct report "to explain the emergence and internal evolution of the PKK [*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* or Kurdistan Workers' Party] within the Kurdish struggle for freedom and democracy against the repressive and nationalist policies of the Turkish state" (p. 9). His report has three main parts: 1.) An examination of Kurdish history and the post-World-War-II bipolar world in which the present Kurdish movement developed; 2.) The global changes involving the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s and their impact on the Kurdish movement; and 3.) The current era which began with the Oslo meetings between Turkey and the PKK in 2007 and presently involves the peace process since 2013 on Imrali island where Abdullah Öcalan, the founder and current leader of the PKK, has been imprisoned since his capture in 1999. Given his qualifications and dedication to a peaceful approach, Adem Uzun is particularly well suited to analyse these subjects, both the development of the PKK and particularly the currently stalled peace process.

In his opening section Uzun offers an upper limit estimate of the worldwide Kurdish population: "Unofficially, 20 million Kurds live in Northern Kurdistan (Turkey), 10 million in Eastern Kurdistan (Iran), 7 million in Southern Kurdistan (Iraq) and 2.5million in Western Kurdistan (Syria)—with approximately 2 million Kurds more scattered across the globe. This means that there are almost 40 million Kurds worldwide" (p. 10). In his second section Uzun somewhat confusingly tells his reader about "the establishment of the PKK in 1973" (p. 13), but then a few lines later states that "the PKK was officially founded on 27 November 1978, largely because its cadres believed that all legal ways of organising a national movement had been exhausted" (*ibid.*). However, what Uzun clearly means is simply that the PKK's immediate roots go back to the earlier date.

The main part of Uzun's report deals with the current pursuit of a peace process, which he traces to the beginning of the PKK's transition from an armed independence movement to the presently much more socially and politically sophisticated and broadly constructed organisation that began with the 1993 cease-fire during the last days of the Turkish president Turgut Özal. The implication is clear; if Özal had not suddenly died on 17 April 1993, the current peace process that only began in 2013 might have started two decades earlier. The enormous costs and sacrifices thus suffered over this dismal period might not have occurred. Alternative histories, however, are not reality, but only lost shades of what might have been.

Claiming that "forces in Turkey that were hostile to peace killed President Özal to reignite the war" (p. 17) Uzun describes the subsequent renewal of military struggle and 7 more unsuccessful PKK cease-fires in 1995, 1998, 1999, 2005, 2006, 2009, and 2010. "Unfortunately . . . the Turkish state viewed them [the cease-fires] as signs of weakness and responded to them with conspiracies and provocations" (*ibid.*).

As many other Kurdish nationalists do, Uzun then describes what he calls "an international conspiracy to capture Öcalan. . . . The world had united to conspire against Öcalan" (pp. 17 and 19). Uzun is probably referring to declarations made by governments such as the European Union (EU), the United States and Israel that could indicate that they were involved in Öcalan's arrest. However, true or false, in an ironic development and specific example of the law of unintended consequences, Öcalan and the PKK turned what seemed their death knell with Öcalan's capture in 1999 into a new Kurdish empowerment. Adem Uzun's report is strongest in explaining how these developments occurred.

Initially, "the Turkish state continued its efforts to annihilate the PKK . . . and wanted to exploit the international conjuncture dominated by the post-11-September 2001 'war-on-terrorism' rhetoric" (p. 20). In short order, the EU and the US joined Turkey in placing the PKK on their respective terrorist lists, actions that "dealt a massive blow to peace efforts" (*ibid.*). This is because "the AKP government, who had just come to power in Turkey, interpreted the EU decision to list the PKK as a terrorist organization as international support for taking a violent approach to the Kurdish issue" (*ibid.*).

However, the PKK more sensibly and unexpectedly responded with a "transformation and . . . new paradigm" by which it "was reconstructed with a new identity . . . based on a democratic, ecological and gender-emancipatory system, and switched from being a party to a congressional system" (p. 21). After going through a number of name changes that reflected this paradigm renewal, the PKK became "the ideological centre of the new system" (*ibid.*) termed the *Koma Civakȇn Kurdistan* (KCK) or Kurdistan Communities' Union. "Kongra-Gel became the legislative assembly of the system" (p. 21), while the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) sought to "incarnate the moral unity of the Kurdish nation" (p. 23). In addition, Öcalan identified the women's struggle for liberation as "the fundamental contradiction preventing societal freedom and championed women's liberation as the only way to bring about social enlightenment, democratic change and an emancipatory mentality" (*ibid.*). Indeed, even the most casual observer can readily see how uniquely important women are in the PKK as contrasted to any other movements in the Middle East.

Encompassing this new paradigm, "democratic autonomy was developed for Turkish Kurdistan: a voluntary joint existence that did not require changing the borders of the current nation-state or demanding a separate state was desirable" (p. 22). While clearly praising these paradigm alterations, Uzun admits that "it was not easy for an organization that for so long had aspired to and struggled for an 'independent, united and democratic' Kurdistan to change its aspirations" (*ibid.*). On the other side, however, these reviewers find that the PKK's ability to transform itself according to internal and external changes and then communicate these alterations to ordinary people is exactly what empowers the organization and the Kurdish liberation movement as such.

With this background, Uzun's report then enters the current Imrali peace process in which the still imprisoned KCK/PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan nevertheless declared on 21 March 2013, "the start of a new era. . . . He called upon the KCK to declare a ceasefire and withdraw its armed units from North Kurdistan. He also made detailed suggestions to the government, noting the necessary legislative amendments and steps required to advance the process" (p. 31). However, Uzun finds that "the Turkish state's mentality prevents even the most basic laws being passed to support the peace process" (p. 33) and thus argues that "it is incumbent upon the EU to persuade Turkey to adopt a principled paradigm shift" (*ibid.*) to correct this negative situation.

Uzun concludes that his "paper has sought to show that the Kurdish people have sought to solve the Kurdish question through peaceful dialogue and negotiation, while the Turkish state's approach has used policies of assimilation, delay and oppression" (p. 34). Admirably, however, he still believes "that only negotiations will lead to a solution" (*ibid.*).

In addition to its main sections, Uzun's report contains a limited bibliography consisting mostly of online sources, but missing most of the now voluminous scholarly literature of the past two decades. He does have a useful list of very apropos Kurdish acronyms, which are sometimes difficult to find defined elsewhere and four annexes. The first annex is a letter written in October 2011 by Murat Karayilan - the then president of the KCK Administrative Council - criticizing the Turkish state's approach for "imprisoning the very people who are the political force behind the solution as members of the KCK" (p. 39), and concluding that 'it is now clearly evident that the opposing forces cannot eradicate one or the other through war" (p. 40).

The second annex analyzes the current revolutionary situation in Syria and Western /Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava), an on-going conflagration that also impacts the current peace process in Turkey. Here Uzun argues that "the Turkish state secretly supports Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, both logistically and militarily" (p. 41). On this point, Uzun has been verified by such prestigious sources as the British news magazine *The Economist* in October 2013, among many other sources. Given the extremist conduct of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) - actions in Syria and now Iraq that challenge secular Turkey's very existence - Turkey has clearly come to regret its earlier clandestine actions.

As for the Kurds in Syria, Uzun accurately insists that "they prefer peaceful methods for solving the current problems, and refuse to side with either the regime or the opposition, because neither recognises the Kurdish people's natural and democratic rights" (*ibid.*). He also notes how on 21 January 2014, the vast majority of the Kurds in Syria "declared the Kurdish cantons - inspired by the Swiss model - to be autonomous" (p. 43). Uzun's second annex also contains a map that details relevant cities in Rojava. Following a useful lengthy chronological list of relevant events from 1973-2013 that runs for more than four pages, another map shows the much larger pan-Kurdish area of the Middle East and lists numerous cities in all four stares that contain Kurdistan.

According to the prestigious scholarly publisher Berghof, Uzun's most enlightening report "is one of a series produced by participants in a Berghof research project on transitions from violence to peace" (p. 8). The purpose of Berghof's scholarly project "was to learn from the experience of those in resistance or liberation movements who have used violence in their struggle but have also engaged politically during the conflict and in any peace process" (*ibid.*). The publisher further explains that "we believe these case-studies are significant because they reflect important voices which are usually excluded or devalued in the analysis of conflict" and that "we are convinced that these opinions and perspectives urgently need to be heard in order to broaden our understanding of peacemaking" (*ibid.*). The present reviewers strongly feel that Berghof is right on with this intention. Adem Uzun's report will richly reward the reader and is highly recommended to policy makers, academics, and the lay public.

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Ebru Sönmez, **Idris-i Bidlisi: Ottoman Kurdistan and Islamic Legitimacy**, *Libra Kitap, Istanbul, 2012, 190 pp., (ISBN: 978-605-4326-56-3).*

It is not an easy endeavour to sketch out the political and cultural landscape of the moment when Ottoman power met Kurdistan during its struggle with the Safavid Empire for imperial expansion. The first difficulty emerges from the limits of available sources which reduce the history of the region to a mere political/administrative account. The second is the state-centred methodology which has long guided/structured existing historiography on the subject. By placing the key intellectual and political figure of the time, İdris-i Bidlisi (d. 1520), at the centre of her narrative, Ebru Sönmez in this study adopts a rather original methodology. With her focus on the sources written by Bidlisi, Sönmez guides the reader through the complex cultural and political universe of this historical moment. In doing so, she also describes the historical landscape of the period which produced Bidlisi as a statesman and intellectual. As the author is attuned to both to the wider history of the time and to the history of the individual, she skilfully draws out the autobiographical elements in the works of Bidlisi such as his *Selimshahname*, *Kanun-i Shahanshahi* and *magnum opus* the *Hasht Bihisht.* These sources are combined with Hoca Sa'adeddin's *Tâc'üt-Tevârih*, the local history of Şerafeddin Khan Bidlisî*, Sharafname* and İdris-i Bidlisi's letters to Ottoman sultans. Thus, Sönmez puts into dialogue not only the sources but also the worlds of *'Ajam* and *Rum*, which came into contact at the turn of the 16th century.

The first part of the book centres on the biography of Bidlisi and opens up a window on the cultural and intellectual atmosphere of the *'Ajam* world. As the son of the learned mystic Husam al-Din Bidlisi (d. 1495) who served as the divan secretary of the Akkoyunlu court, İdris-i Bidlisi was born in the village of Suliqan in Rayy, near the Akkoyunlu capital, Tabriz. Against this background, Sönmez details the spiritual conglomerate of the region composed of different Sufi sects. Bidlisi served Yakup Khan (d. 1490) as chancellor at his court and after the annexation of the Akkoyunlu state by the Shi'ite Safavid power, he made his way to the world of *Rum*, during the reign of Bayezid II (d.1512). In her description of this part of Bildisi's life, the author stresses the intellectual conflicts that he faced during his stay at the Ottoman court. One interesting incident concerns the Ottoman elite's reactions against *Hasht Bihisht*, a work on Ottoman dynastic history that Bidlisi wrote in Persian at the request of the sultan. Sönmez argues that such reaction should be taken as the symptom of the constitution of an Ottoman cultural identity distinct from that of the *'Ajam* (p. 45-48). After this event, Bidlisi left the Ottoman court and settled in Mecca, under the protection of the Mamluk sultan, Qansu Gawri. The first part of the book ends with the re-invitation of Bidlisi to the Ottoman court by the new sultan Selim I (d. 1520).

The second part concentrates on the political history of the Sunnite (Ottoman-Kurdish) alliance against the Safavids. It moves the scope of discussion from the biography of Bidlisi to the imperialisation of Kurdistan by the Ottoman Empire. In Bidlisi's writings the term Kurdistan does not denote an ethno-demographic entity. Yet, according to Sönmez, Bidlisi lays stress on the ethnic identity of the Kurdish notables in order to place the Kurds in the larger history of the *'Ajam* world (p. 71-72). In this part, Sönmez successfully depicts an acute anxiety in Bidlisi's writings to attribute legitimacy to the autonomous polity of the Kurdish notables in the region. The first evidence is the depiction of the Kurdish notables as descended from Sassanid and Abbassid nobility or simply as belonging to the prophet's lineage (*sayyid*), statements bolstered by a strong emphasis on the Sunnite identity of the Kurds. The second is the reference to the hereditary political positions which the Kurdish leaders had negotiated with earlier rulers, such as the Seljukids or Mongols. The matrimonial ties that the Kurdish notables made with dynasties such as Karakoyunlu and Akkoyunlu in order to strengthen their power are also explored in this part. Following this, the author narrates the defeat of Shah Isma'il by the Ottoman forces and the role played by İdris-i Bidlisi as chief diplomatic intermediary important by his winning the loyalty of Kurdish notables to the Ottoman sultan. The second part of the book comes to an end with a detailed analysis of the creation of Kurdistan as an administrative unit under Ottoman rule.

In the third and the final part, the author places Bidlisi's writings in the context of the Ottoman claim to the Sunnite caliphate. The conception of rulership and caliphate in the works of Bidlisi bear a strong mystical tenor since, in his view, the perfect ruler was the reflection or light of God on earth. The idea of justice occupied a central place in his definition of the ideal caliph-sultan. Sönmez underlines that despite his mystical tone, Bidlisi in his writings kept himself aloof from the *hululi* ideas of *ghulat* Shi'is according to which God "transmigrated" into the Safavid shah. This point occupied a significant place in Bidlisi's efforts in proving the Ottoman Sultan's superiority over the Safavid shah, considering the latter as heretical. Particularly, in his *Selimshahname*, Bidlisi associated Shi'ism with Zoroastrianism, apostasy and infidelity. As the author underlines, these were also major arguments used by the great Ottoman jurists to formulate juridical opinions in order to establish the legitimacy of the Ottoman Sultan as caliph-sultan whose duty was to conduct *jihad* against the heretical Safavid power. It is at this point that the author makes the central argument of her book: Bidlisi's intellectual writings had a major impact on the construction of the figure of the Ottoman ruler as universal caliph-sultan. This process, according to the author, must be understood as the emergence of the conception of universal and absolute Muslim leadership demarcating a radical rupture from the post-Abbasid and the post-Mongol conception of regional caliphate.

Sönmez's exciting work is an important contribution to Ottoman/Kurdish history in particular, and to the intellectual history of the Middle East in general. The importance of this book cannot be overemphasised in terms of the sources used and in terms of its attempt at writing the history of the Ottoman Empire's encounter with Kurdistan, both from local and imperial perspectives. However, it is not without shortcomings. It misses the mark at certain points and the historiographical style of the author provokes certain questions discussed in the following lines.

Despite the author's intention to approach the subject from a different angle, one should perhaps note that she generally relies upon secondary sources written by Ottoman historians. This restrains the author from engaging in dialogue with works written by non-Ottomanists.[1] This restriction of intellectual sources may limit the readership of this important historical work. It should also be noted that at times the author tends to use weak secondary sources on certain themes or neglects earlier work on the central issues tackled in the book.[2]

As the author rightly argues in the introduction of her book, the history of the region has long been overshadowed by nationalist accounts. One can add that Ottoman Kurdistan, as an object of research, has generally been pushed to the fringes of the Empire, in the mapping of Ottoman-centred historiography. Therefore, the great deal of attention paid by the author in her narrative on the history of the term Kurdistan as an administrative unit that emerged under the Ottoman imperial expansion should be saluted.[3] In spite of a limited reading of geographical sources, this is a significant attempt to replace Kurdistan within the larger context of Ottoman historical writing.[4]

Notwithstanding, the author does not seem to have paid the same meticulous care when it comes to her usage of the word "Kurd". In Sönmez's work, that the word Kurd denotes a singular "ethnic category" with a principally Sunni-Muslim faith seems to have been taken for granted (p. 65-81).[5] Only occasionally does the author note Shiite tendencies among some Kurdish notables (p. 81-85). Thus the reader cannot help but to ask what exactly did the word Kurd stand for in the 16th century? It is true that in the writings of İdris-i Bidlisi and Şerafeddin Khan Bidlisi there is a strong tenor in representing the Kurds as a monolithic Sunni community. However, even a cursory glance at sources such as *Sharafname* suggests that the word Kurd had a polysemic meaning even for Şerafeddin Khan Bidlisi. Thus on several occasions the author of *Sharafname* writes of certain Kurdish communities not only as heterodox but also as Jewish, Yezidi, Jacobite, or Christian.[6] As such, the stress on Sunnism in these sources cannot refer only to the concern of Kurdish notables for legitimacy. It should also be taken as symptom of an inner "sunnitization[7]" process in 16th century Kurdistan.[8]

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[1] The author mentions the contributions of historians such as Hakan Özoğlu and Baki Tezcan, however, the following major contributions, among many others, should be underlined as well: Walter Posch, *Der Fall Alkâs Mîrzâ und der Feldzug des Jahres 1548-1549. Ein gescheitertes osmanisches Projekt zur Niederwerfung des safavidischen Persiens*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Bamberg, 1999, from the same author see, "What Is a Frontier?: Mapping Kurdistan between Ottomans and Safavids", in Éva M. Jeremiás (eds.), *Irano-Turkic Cultural Contacts in the 11th – 17th Centuries*, Piliscsaba, 2003, pp. 203-215; Alexander Khatcharian, "The Kurdish Principality of Hakkariya (14th-15th Centuries)", *Iran and the Caucasus* 7/1-2, 2003, pp. 37-58; Stephan Conermann, "Volk, Ethnie oder Stamm : Die Kurden aus mamlûkischer Sicht", in *Asien und Afrika* : *Die Kurden* 8, S. Conermann and G. Haig (eds.), EB Verlag, Hamburg, 2004, pp. 27-68 and Bacqué-Grammont and J.-L. Adle, C., "Quatre lettres de Sheref Beg de Bitlîs (1516-1520)", *Der Islam* 63, 1986, pp. 90-118.

[2] Thus the author relies on David McDowall (*A Modern History of the Kurds*, London I.B. Tauris, 1996, p. 22) in order to describe the political position of the Kurds under Seljukids. However, Claude Cahen's *La Turquie pré-ottomane*, 1988 is still an important work to be consulted on this particular point. See also the following work, among many, on the question of caliphate which is not cited in Sönmez's study: Gilles Veinstein, "La question du califat ottoman", in *Le Choc colonial et l'islam*, Pierre- Jean Luizard (ed.), Paris, L'Harmattan, 2006, pp. 451-468.

[3] It should be noted that the author does not seem to be paying the same attention when it comes to other geographical or political terms. As an example, in a page the author puts the terms Egypt and Transoxania together with the Ottoman Empire and considers them as Muslim states. p. 39.

[4] When viewed from this aspect, the reading of Sönmez reproduces the same limits as does the following work. Baki Tezcan, "The development of the use of 'Kurdistan' as a geographical description and the incorporation of this region into the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century," in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilisation*, 4 vols., edited by Kemal Çiçek. (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2000), vol. 3, pp. 540-553.

[5] It should be noted that even in the eighteenth-century context the word Kurd had a polysemic meaning. See, Yavuz Aykan, *Les acteurs de la justice à Amid et dans la province du Diyarbekir d'après les* sicil *provinciaux du 18e siècle,* unpublished Ph.D dissertation, EHESS, Paris, pp. 42-44.

Finally, while the author's aim of rescuing the past from the Kurdish and Turkish nationalist ideologues of the present is very important, what arouses the reader's curiosity is that all the examples of nationalist writings that she provides come only from Turkish historiography (p. 20). Indeed, it would have been a fascinating engagement for the Ottoman historian to deconstruct Kurdish nationalist historiography, however there is no evidence that such a historiography exists.

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Sabri Ateş, **The Ottoman–Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843-1914**, *New York; Cambridge University Press, 2013. 366., (ISBN: 978-1107033658).*

The Ottoman–Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary is about the story of the border-making process of the Ottoman and Iranian empires during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when both empires were experiencing great transformations in terms of centralisation, modernisation and state making in parallel with the reforms implemented in administrative, fiscal, military and legal spheres. Ateş's book challenges the long established nationalist and linear historiography which argues that the border drawn between Ottoman and Iranian empires with the Qasr-ı Şirin Treaty (1639) is the oldest and the most well-defined one and which has not changed ever since. Through focusing on the activities and decisions of several international borderland commissions, the treaties and the wars between the Ottoman and Iranian empires, the author not only shows the fluidity of the notion of "border" but also several changes carried out on the boundary between Ottoman and Qajar empires throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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[6] *Chèref-nâmeh ou fastes de la nation Kourde*, translated by François Bernard (Charmoy, St.-Petersbourg, 1870), volume 1/2, pp. 21/28-29.

[7] I borrow this term from the following work: Derin Terzioğlu, "How to Conceptualize Ottoman *Sunnitization*: A Historiographical Discussion," *Turcica* (44) 2012-2013, pp. 301-338.

[8] This is particularly important in the context of the Ottoman/Kurdish policy against Yezidi Kurds. See, Yavuz Aykan, *Les acteurs de la justice*, pp. 255-292.

By using a variety of untouched archival sources, including Ottoman, British and Iranian, Ateş successfully illustrates how a fluid Ottoman-Iranian borderland/frontier turned into a sharp boundary/border when the two empires attempted to increase their state capacities in their frontier zones. While doing this Ateş does not regard the "state" as the sole actor of the boundary making process in which the central bureaucracy imposed its policies from top down. He gives voice to a variety of local actors and borderland communities ranging from semi-nomadic tribes to powerful hereditary dynasties and pays attention to their role in the demarcation of the boundary. This challenges the historiographies which tend to see central states as the sole actor of change and transformation in history. Moreover, Ateş does not examine the border making process solely as an attempt of two intersecting states, but analyses this process within a broader/international context in which different imperialist powers, like the British, Russian and German states, were also involved.

Through referring to various studies about border making processes in different parts of world, the author analyses this process as a part of state making in which states expanded their infrastructural powers (administrative units, taxes, new methods of conscription, new land regime, salaried appointees and etc.) in their frontier zones and replaced indirect rules with direct ones. Thus, on the Ottoman side, the border making process ran parallel with the elimination or pacification of various hereditary Kurdish dynasties including the famous Baban, Soran, Botan who until the implementation of the Tanzimat reforms lived autonomously through engaging in different alliances and negotiations with surrounding states. Ateş shows how "borderland peoples lost their ability to manipulate or negotiate with state power, play rival states against each other, and "live autonomously in interstitial spaces" as a result of the territorialisation of the state-space" (p. 33) during the boundary making process. However, this does not mean that borderland populations were passive receptors of state policies, quite the contrary borderland peoples were involved in the different stages of the border-making process with different methods. In several examples the author shows how the decisions and claims of the borderland communities were important in the demarcation of the boundary and how Ottoman and Qajar officials tried to get the consent of the peoples from Shatt al Arab and Muhammarah in the south (p. 119, 20) to the Qotur (p. 148, 49) in the northern parts of the Ottoman and Qajar borderlands.

Ateş analyses how the Ottoman and Iranian empires attempted to transform the different ethno- religious and tribal groups of the borderlands into "modern" citizens through new identity cards, passports, patrols, different institutions, practices and surveillance methods. He also shows the response of the borderland peoples against the official identities imposed on them by the surrounding states. Among many, the author gives the example of the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt of 1880 as a case to exemplify this reaction (pp. 213-221). Without entering into the discussion on the nationalist/non-nationalist character of it, Ateş analyses the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt within the context of the Ottoman-Iranian border-making process. He argues that the revolt "was in a way an attempt to deactivate the boundary and generate an alternative understanding of space that would encompass the Kurdish ethnic group" (p. 221). He also regards the failure of the revolt as a "testimony to the reality of the boundary and the identities that were formed by it" (p. 211).

The author further argues that with the Treaty of Erzurum (1823), both states started to abandon the sectarian language in their diplomatic relations. In other words, Ateş regards this Treaty as the starting point of the secularisation of the relations between the Ottoman and Qajar Empires which also corresponds to the boundary making and modernisation process (p. 56). However, in the following chapters he illustrates how in practice sectarianism (although it had its limits) continued to play an important role during the demarcation of the boundary. While the Ottomans tried to win the loyalty of the Sunni Shekak tribe within the domains of the Qajar Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century (p. 180), Shi'i Kurdish tribes of Sanjabi, Zanganah and Kalhor supported Tehran during conflicts with the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century (p. 258).

Ateş puts forward that the demarcation of the boundary between Ottoman and Iranian Empires in the nineteenth century precluded the formation of a possible Kurdish nation state in the long run. The demarcation of the boundary together with the elimination of the hereditary Kurdish dynasties from the beginnings of the Tanzimat led to the atomisation of Kurdish society, a process which Ateş calls the "clanization of Kurdistan" (p. 82). Agreeing with Martin van Bruinessen, he claims that the extension of state power in the region led to a transformation from "complex, state like to much simpler forms of social and political organizations" (p. 82). Moreover, this atomisation or clanisation process expanded and accelerated after the formation of the Hamidian Light Cavalry Regiments in 1890s, (pp. 230-231) when the Ottoman centre increasingly extended its power over tribal entities. The atomisation of the Kurdish society left Kurdistan without any powerful brokers to negotiate with imperialist powers and thus prevented the formation of Kurdish political organisations (p. 319).

The author strongly emphasises that border making processes of the two intersecting states affected the mobility of nomadic tribes at the borderland. He claims that due to the pressure applied by surrounding states during the demarcation of the boundary, several nomadic tribes changed their migration routes although they continued their seasonal migrations (p. 163). Since his study is more about border-making and not about semi nomadic tribes, the author does not analyse how restrictions over nomads changed migration routes, migration patterns, migration cycles, livelihoods of nomads and whether this contributed to their settlement at frontier regions or not. But still, his observations on the tribes of the borderlands, particularly on the Caf and Zilan tribes, give many insights for further studies on borderland nomads.

In general, Ateş's study is full of new information, new arguments, and offers new perspectives to historians who aim to study frontier regions, centreperiphery relations and state formation processes in general and Kurdish history in particular. Ateş pays great attention to the claims of borderland communities and aims to make them visible actors throughout his study. However, since there are too many names of individuals, communities and places mentioned, at certain points this makes the book difficult to follow. Yet, twelve different maps included in the book not only enable the reader to follow the changes the border went through but also the claims made by the Ottomans and Iranians on the borderlands.

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Choman Hardi, **Gendered Experiences of Genocide: Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq**. *Farnham, Surrey and Burlington Vermont: Ashgate, 2011, xii + 217 pp., (ISBN:* 978-0-7546-7715-4*).*

This is a very, very important book. It is important for Kurds and Kurdistan, but not merely. In Choman Hardi's book on the Anfal genocidal attacks and their survivors, we have the most systematic and sympathetic social science study of one of the most brutal and depraved acts of humanity in the late 20th century. And yet this book is not situated or marketed as such. It is part of a series blandly called, "Voices in Development Management." It is only available (in hardcover and e-book) at prices too high for the average consumer (USD 92.47 and 95.96 respectively). By specifying that the experiences she gives voice to are "gendered," it might seem that this book belongs to a subset of the field of Anfal studies. However, Anfal's survivors were disproportionately women, because the Saddam Hussein regime systematically killed men and terrorised women. Anfal itself, not only this book, was highly gendered, and this aspect of it must feature prominently in any analysis of it. The women who speak from Hardi's pages recount incredible horrors. Many of the men associated with them were killed before experiencing further horrors about which they could have spoken. So this is a "gendered" account, true, but more importantly it is an account, and to my knowledge the richest and most detailed available. I hope it is soon re-released at a more affordable price, and marketed appropriately.

Anfal, "The Spoils," was highly-organised and systematic. As Hardi vividly describes, it was a campaign of killing, torturing, displacing, detaining, terrorising, raping, starving, humiliating, and disappearing waged against Kurds and other minorities by the mainly-Sunni Arab government of Saddam Hussein in the late 1980s. Like this book, Anfal should be much better-known. Yet, many members of global publics believe that Saddam Hussein's government did not have weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In so believing, they confuse assertions made about the early 2000s with the late 1980s, for which there is incontrovertible evidence that the Iraqi government not only had WMD, but used them to kill, injure, traumatise and displace hundreds of thousands of people in Kurdistan. The world must continue to learn about and recognise the outrageous fact of both the use of WMD and the campaign of which it was a part, and I believe this book will prove to be a very important resource toward that end. Anfal has received only limited recognition as a genocide from the world's governments (p. 30). One notable recognition came after this book was published, in the form of the British House of Commons' official recognition in 2013 (for which I had the privilege of lobbying during a 2010 parliamentary seminar).

For this book, Hardi interviewed 71 women and 23 men, and also obtained data from other conversations and meetings between 2005 and 2010 (p. 7). She interviewed most subjects "on camera" (p. 64). She found survivors both eager to talk about their ordeals, but sometimes insistent on telling the story in their own way, rather than with precise responses to the researcher's questions (p. 9). The book contains seven chapters, which range from a basic introduction to Anfal, to chapters rich with content from the interviews, to reflective and contextual material at the end of the book. Some of the content of the women's narratives was highly embarrassing or difficult for them to recount, but many pressed ahead despite this. Hardi's descriptions are unflinching, affording the reader important glimpses into the unfolding of events as experienced during the Anfal campaigns. For example: "Topzawa was buzzing with the people, the shouting soldiers and the various transports that brought some people and took others away. Every day, convoys of vehicles came to take people away, some to mass graves, some to Nugra Salaman in the south of Iraq and others to Dibs. The moment of departure was as chaotic as the moment of arrival. People were brought into the courtyard, pushed into full vehicles and driven away. Topzawa was the last place where most of the women last saw their men" (pp. 51-52).

Hardi makes frequent and useful comparisons to the Holocaust, arguing that many of the techniques and outcomes of Anfal were similar. For example, she notes that both Holocaust and Anfal victims' suffering was exacerbated if they were pregnant or had children (p. 68). They faced acute danger when giving birth, and their children died in great numbers. Some women even discarded or killed their children when they could not care for them or when they thought the children would be killed by other means anyway. Hardi also points out important differences from the Holocaust, such as the length of time that men spent in detention. In Anfal, men typically spent very little time in detention before being taken to execution sites. Many Anfal detainees were thus held in detention facilities populated by women and children. These comparisons do more than to simply aid in the analysis of the two genocides; they contribute valuably to genocide studies generally.

Not only does this book provide evocative and excruciating testimony of the actual events of Anfal, but it deals equally as strongly with the survivors' lives and difficulties afterward. Survivors' struggles range from the psychological to the political. Many struggled to provide for themselves and their children in the early years, and many still struggle as they age. Although the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has paid increasing attention to the Anfal survivors, both in acknowledging their suffering and in the form of cash and other assistance, many survivors have felt that it should have done more. Many struggle with survivor's guilt. Many struggle with rejection in the wider Kurdish community. The author reports that once, while giving a presentation on Anfal, a young man stood up and said, "We are fed up with hearing about Anfal, we should try to forget it" (p. 160). Perhaps the most vicious type of rejection is reserved for rape victims, or women perceived to have been victims of rape: "How many have been forced to marry and then killed because they were not virgins? Those women's stories will never be told... Women who were raped live with the burden of silence and the fear of being found out. It is no wonder that during the Anfal trials the Kurdish community managed to convince no woman to talk about being raped... They cannot admit to having been raped because to do so would damage their reputation and jeopardize their lives" (p. 67).

I wish this book included more-lengthy interview excerpts. The author's technique is to include short quotes of one to a few sentences, and then to summarise the rest of the data in her own words, which is appropriate for an academic text such as this. However, I think there would be great value in readers having access to the full, or nearly full, content of the interviews. So, I hope Hardi will publish another book with this material, or make her notes and interview files available to an archive for long-term preservation. They could be embargoed and thoroughly anonymised (to the extent that this is possible in the case of video) to honour confidentiality promised to the participants.

As I write this, the world is again grappling with genocide in Iraq – relatively small-scale genocides perpetrated by the Islamic State against Christians, Yezidis, and other minorities that may go unrecognised as "official" genocides much as Anfal did in many jurisdictions and as it does in many still. Very likely, some of the perpetrators are the same people, who were once Ba'thists and who now operate under an extremist Islamic banner. I will close with one last hope for this book: that it is translated into Arabic. Iraq is today home to thousands of people who have perpetrated horrific violence on their fellow countrymen. Most have not faced justice, and, sadly, many may never face it. But I hold out hope that, like other perpetrating populations such as that of Germany, at some point wide-spread reflection and soul-searching will commence that leads to contrition and revulsion at what was done. Books like this one can assist in that endeavor. That is among one of the things the victims, both living and dead, deserve. They of course deserve much more still, but bravo to Choman Hardi for doing this courageous research and giving us this detailed account of Anfal's horrors.

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Harriet Allsopp, **The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East**, *London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 2014, 299 pp., (ISBN: 978-1780765631).*

Harriet Allsopp's book seeks to explain a striking paradox: while the Kurdish political parties in Syria suffered from a slow but sure process of delegitimisation from the 1990s onwards, by 2010, the level of (Kurdish) "national consciousness" among Syrian Kurds had never been that high. Delegitimisation was marked by an ever-increasing gap between the intellectuals and the youth on the one hand, and the political leadership, on the other. Furthermore, some of the factors that explain Kurdish parties' "crisis of legitimacy" also help us understand why, despite unprecedented political opportunities (such as regaining political, as well as sentimental, attachment from the "Kurdish street" prompted by the Syrian uprising of 2011) only the PYD - the Kurdish Democratic Union, an offshoot of the PKK and one of the rare political parties with no historical connections with the first Kurdish political party, which was established in 1957 - had been able to benefit from these unexpected prospects thanks to the takeover of the Kurdish regions, both from military and political viewpoints.

In order to shed light on the abovementioned puzzling dynamics, Allsopp provides a detailed historical account of the emergence and evolution of the Kurdish movement in Syria (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) since the establishment of the Syrian state under colonial rule in 1920 up to 2012, including: the creation of the first Kurdish circles in mandatory Syria (1920-1946), the ambiguous relations between the French authorities and the Kurdish elites, the economic and sociological characteristics of the Kurdish leadership, and the increasingly strained relations between the Kurdish political activists and the other Syrian parties (especially the Communist and the Ba'th Party). In addition to the historical background, Allsopp offers a meticulous analysis (Chapters 3, 4, and 5) of the Kurdish parties' internal functioning, activities, programs, social as well as cultural roles within the Kurdish society, and relations with third parties in order to provide a better understanding of the reasons behind their "crisis of legitimacy".

The latter is probably the most original part of the book as it explores a largely understudied aspect of political parties, not only within the Kurdish context, but also in the Middle East and beyond. Thus, political parties, in particular within an authoritarian context, or perhaps precisely because of the authoritarian framework (illegality, repression) had to look for alternative paths, new functions, new alliances, as well as repertoires of collective action which allowed them to play a relevant role in societies or groups they pretended to represent.

In particular, the author enhances our knowledge of the Kurdish political space in Syria. While highlighting some input from the established political parties, such as national legitimacy, family as well as trans-border networks, the book also underscores parties' shortcomings, which became more visible after 2004. What's more, it allows the reader to comprehend both the crisis of legitimacy and the factors that account for different response of Kurdish parties to a new context, namely the beginning of the Syrian uprising in 2011 and the subsequent partial withdrawal of the Syrian forces from Kurdish enclaves in July 2012. In so doing, it also offers some hints about the possible developments of Syrian crisis in the short term and the role Kurdish parties might be able to play in the current dynamics in Syria and Iraq.

All in all, Allsopp's book fills a vacuum in the field of Kurdish studies. Her long and comprehensive research allows her to garnish her account with a wide range of primary sources and interviews conducted in 2000 and later. In addition to the well-documented discussion on Kurdish political parties, the book offers a thorough analysis of the origins and status of the "stateless" Kurds, beyond the mere description of the tragic consequences this "subgroup" suffered in the 1962 special census. In that sense, the book is particularly useful for students, observers as well as NGO experts interested in the Middle Eastern politics, Kurdish and human rights issues.

A primary criticism is, however, that since the Kurdish political parties constitute the main theme of the book, it would have been interesting to present a more general discussion about political parties in the Middle East from the very start, and particularly in Syria, in order to better signal out the particularities, as well as similarities between the Kurdish political space and parallel political spaces with which, by the way, the former interact in Syria. Engaging conceptually with the rich scientific literature on politics in the Middle East would have allowed Allsopp to better fit the Kurdish case into a wider theoretical framework. Thus, for instance, the incapacity of most Syrian political parties to respond to the 2011 uprising challenge may tell us something more general about political systems within authoritarian contexts.

Less importantly, while Allsopp's book discusses relations between Kurdish parties, Syria and the main Arab oppositional groups, the book does not tell us about the relationship that Kurdish parties have (or haven't) established with other political parties (in particular with the Assyrian movement) active in northern Syria, nor with the other communities (Armenian, Assyrian, Arab, Turkmen) living there. Thus, while the Kurdish parties in Iraq seem to have an active "policy" regarding "minorities" (mainly Turkmen and Christian from different sects) in Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurdish parties in Syria (at least until 2012) seem to have failed to establish relations with other political groups despite the existence of a common "enemy" - the Bath'ist regime. What are the factors that may explain this difference?

Despite these minor weaknesses, this is a highly compelling book. The clarity with which the main arguments are presented is complemented by a serious effort of primary research in Syria and several other locations, resulting in a most interesting contribution that was a joy to read.

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Khanna Omarkhali (ed.), **Religious Minorities in Kurdistan: Beyond the Mainstream [Studies in Oriental Religions, Volume 68]**, *Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014, xxxviii + 423 pp., (ISBN: 978-3-447-10125-7).*

This book could hardly have appeared at a more appropriate time. It presents a broad overview of the main religious minorities existing in Kurdistan and the problems they have been facing in the past century (with an emphasis on recent developments). The occupation of Mosul and Sinjar by the so-called Islamic State this summer, followed by the expulsion of Christians, the murder and enslavement of Yezidi men and women, and violent assaults on all non-Sunni groups in the region, have given this book a sudden relevance beyond its merits as an academic publication.

The book celebrates the religious diversity of Kurdistan, where many different religious communities have long co-existed in relative harmony, but it is pervaded by a deep concern that this diversity is under threat, not only due to persecution and oppression by dominant groups but also as a result of urbanisation and globalisation that are breaking up communities and provide strong incentives to assimilation and conversion. Most of the communities have been decimated by migration, to cities or nearby different regions in the same country or abroad, mostly to North America and Western Europe (or Israel, in the case of the Jews). In the diaspora there have been attempts to reconstitute their distinctive religious practices and the structures of social and religious authority of their communities, but this is a precarious process, as several of the contributions in this book show.

Khanna Omarkhali has succeeded in bringing together a remarkable team of seventeen contributors, including established authorities as well as promising young scholars, whose knowledge of these communities is based on recent field research, so that they are qualified to discuss recent developments. The editor's introduction touches upon some of the broader issues affecting all minorities; the other contributions each focus on a specific community. Sections of three chapters each deal successively with the Ahl-i Haqq, Yezidis, Alevis, (heterodox) Sufi orders and Shabak, Jews and Christians. The limitations of a book review do not allow me to do justice to each of the contributions.

Omarkhali's own chapter on transmission of religious knowledge, in the Yezidi section, discusses a structural aspect that is also relevant to the Ahl-i Haqq, Alevi and Shabak communities: the existence of sacred lineages of ritual specialists (*şêx* and *pîr*, *pîr* and *delîl*, *dede*, *seyyid*, etc.), in whom religious authority is vested and without whom major rituals cannot be performed. These lineages constitute an endogamous priestly caste, most strictly so among the Yezidis, where even individual linages are endogamous. Religious knowledge was until recently transmitted orally, within these lineages as well as by non-priestly specialists (*qewlbêj, kalâmkhwân, hozan*), in the form of religious poetry. Only recently have these sacred texts been made available in print, by which specific versions of them became fixated and standardised. Omarkhali investigates the effects of this process of scripturalisation of religious authority and its implications for the identity quest of young Yezidis in the diaspora.

Several of these themes recur in other papers. The ethnomusicologist Partow Hooshmandrad, whose primary interest has been in the *performance* of Ahl-i Haqq religious poetry (*kalâm*) in ritual contexts, highlights both the role of the *kalâmkhwân* as the authoritative repositories of religious knowledge and that of the hereditary *pîr* as the ultimate judge of correct performance. She was involved in a project of establishing a definitive version of *kalâm*, on the basis of different manuscripts held by *kalâmkhwân*. Significantly, the leading *pîr*, who had authorised this work of standardisation, does not allow publication of the texts, which would have given everyone unmediated access.

A contrasting case is presented by Mojan Membrado in her biography of the charismatic Ahl-i Haqq leader Hajj Ne`matollah Jayhunabadi, who wrote (in Persian) a large corpus of religious texts synthesising and reinterpreting older Gurani *kalâm*, part of which was later published in print. He did not belong to one of the existing sacred lineages but gained a following on the basis of his qualities as an inspired visionary (*didedar*) and is considered by some as the founder of a new sacred lineage. His son Nur `Ali Elahi also published major works, restating Ahl-i Haqq religious ideas in a framework of esoteric Shi`ism, appealing to educated urban Iranians but rejected by many of the traditional established authorities in Kurdistan. Membrado is highly critical of earlier scholars who have emphasised the pre-Islamic elements in the Ahl-i Haqq tradition and argues that the accommodation with Shi`a esotericism is not an innovation by this family but had been present in the tradition before them.

One of the connections between the Ahl-i Haqq and esoteric Shi`a traditions has been the Khaksar Sufi order, with which Shahrokh Raei's contribution deals. One of the higher stages of spiritual advancement in this order demands initiation by an Ahl-i Haqq *pîr* (suggesting one-way rather than two-way communication). Some of the earliest published Ahl-i Haqq texts had in fact belonged to, or were written by, Khaksar dervishes. Raei's chapter focuses on how the Khaksar established a permanent presence in Kermanshah in the mid-20th century, which they have been able to maintain after the Iranian revolution.

The dominant discourse on Alevism in Turkey has emphasised its origins in Turkish pre-Islamic beliefs and practices and insisted that all its sacred texts – poetry and prayer – are in Turkish. Kurdish Alevi intellectuals have recently made efforts to rediscover the specifically Kurdish elements of their religious tradition. The suppressed oral tradition of prayers and poems in Zaza or Kurmanci, was partially recovered and made available in print. The chapter by Lokman Turgut analyses a similar effort, a book written by a *dede* living in Germany, Pir Ali Bali, on Alevi ritual among the Kurds, as remembered from his youth. The entire book is in Kurdish; it contains lengthy prayers and other ritual texts and is thereby an interesting contribution to the scripturalisation of Kurdish Alevism.

The Shabak are one of the most elusive communities, about whose religious as well as ethnic identity there has been much controversy. Michiel Leezenberg surveys the evidence and presents new findings on developments in the post-Saddam period. Some of the ambiguity in the Shabak's religious identity may have to do with the sacred lineages to which individuals or entire villages attached themselves: some of these were Bektashis, others Shi`is, and Leezenberg found a community of Shabak origin that had attached itself to a Kaka'i (Ahl-i Haqq) *sayyid*.

The small Haqqa community, by contrast, is unambiguously Kurdish and Muslim but nonetheless sharply distinguished from its Muslim neighbours. It emerged from the orthodox Sunni Sufi order Naqshbandiyya but by the 1920s had become a utopian, egalitarian sect accused by their neighbours of heretical ideas and practices. Thomas Schmidinger traces the little-known history of this community and its confrontations with political and religious authorities, on the basis of interviews and literature only available in Sorani.

Yezidis and Alevis have massively emigrated from Kurdistan and are facing the choice between assimilation or reconstruction of their community structures and religious (and ethnic) identities. A lengthy analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet censuses by Nodar Mossaki throws light on the shifting (self-) definition of the Yezidis as a religious or ethnic group, subsumed under or separate from the Kurds, and processes of conversion and assimilation, noting the presence of Christian Yezidis in Russia. Markus Dressler and Janroj Keleş discuss Alevi associations and identity debates in Turkey, Germany and Britain.

The Kurdistani Jews (chapters by Birgit Ammann and Yona Sabar) are an exceptional case in this collection, because they have long disappeared from Kurdistan (although they have continued playing a role in its history); the last members of the community migrated to Israel in the 1950s. They remained a highly distinct community there, with a nostalgic attachment to Kurdistan and a material culture that differed little from that of their former Kurdish neighbours. Some of them were instrumental in the secret military support Israel provided the Iraqi Kurds in the 1960s (and most probably later as well). However, the younger generation is rapidly being assimilated into the Israeli mainstream, giving up the Aramaic language of their ancestors for modern Hebrew. As Ammann writes, the community's culture will soon be "lost forever." Not entirely lost, however, thanks to the efforts of Yona Sabar, who has painstakingly recorded a large corpus of oral tradition of the Kurdistan Jews. His contribution here discusses the various genres of this neo-Aramaic oral literature, and presents samples of each genre. He points at several distinct Kurdish influences, including the borrowing of Kurdish folk themes (including Mem û Zîn) and the use of entire sentences in Kurmanci embedded in neo-Aramaic texts.

For Iraqi Christians, Kurdistan is currently a (relatively) safe haven. Erica C.D. Hunter sketches the migration to Kurdistan in an apparent reversal of the inexorable exodus of Christians from Central Kurdistan of the past century, new hopes of establishing an autonomous Christian enclave in the partly Kurdish-controlled Nineveh plains (which were never realistic, and were definitively shattered with the arrival of IS), and the lasting suspicions in Christian-Kurdish relations. Those suspicions are rooted in old memories of depredations by Kurdish tribesmen and the stereotype of the "thieving Kurds", on which Martin Tamcke contributes a quaint article, largely based on reports in the German missionary press of the previous turn of century. Another aspect of the return of Christianity to Kurdistan is documented in a report by Marcin Rzepka on his research on recent Kurdish Bible translations which, unlike the 19th-century translations, do not appear to address Kurdish-speaking Armenians and Syrians but Kurdish converts from Islam.

Reflecting the diversity of the religious communities in Kurdistan and problems they are facing, there is little uniformity in the format of the contributions in this book, and the quality is uneven – some chapters might have profited from heavy-handed editorial intervention. On the whole, however, this volume is highly informative and provides an important and authoritative overview of the current state of affairs.

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Anna Grabole-Çeliker, **Kurdish Life in Contemporary Turkey: Migration, Gender and Ethnic Identity**, *London: I.B. Taurus, 2013, 299 pp., (ISBN: 978-1780760926).*

Kurdish Life in Contemporary Turkey: Migration, Gender and Ethnic Identity is a vivid account of rural-urban migration and how this has affected the everyday lives of people involved. The book follows Kurdish migrants who moved from Van to Istanbul and back again. For many of the Kurdish migrants in the city, it is argued, the village is a central cultural theme. In the book, the village is considered as a conglomerate of ideas and feelings, and treated as a cultural point of reference for migrants to the city. In the course of the book, the author also makes clear that the same is true for the city: in the lives of villagers and migrants the city too is a symbol that contains a multitude of ideas.

Important spatio-cultural themes discussed in the book are related to gender, identity and work and analysed from a socio-spatial perspective. Emphasising trans-locality and the networked character of migration, the authors go beyond the – long time dominant – modern idea of a rural-urban dichotomy. Instead of treating village and city as separate entities or worlds, she builds upon social network theory, showing how migrants inhabit what she calls "multi-layered" and "multi-sited" fields. These encompassing those who left (the village) and those who stayed behind, those who migrated from the countryside to the city of Van and those who went all the way to Istanbul, and those who returned again. This does not only result in a dynamic approach to migration, including multiple spaces and non-linear movements, but also makes allowances for fluidity and ambiguity.

Fluidity and ambiguity are two central and reoccurring themes in the book. Fluidity in the way "here" and "there" are connected, in the sense of multiple movements forward and backward from and to the village, and in the sense of feeling "at home" at different places. Referring to the "polytactic" potential of humans, it is argued that people feel "at home" not in a fixed location, which is made possible because the "here" and "there" are connected in people's living structures: transactions of goods, ideas, favours and people through which the spaces they live become intertwined and interconnected.

Ambiguity is expressed in the representation of both village and city. On the one hand, the village is looked at with nostalgia. The author discusses nostalgia as "embodied knowledge": such as when the fresh village air is compared with the toxic smell of coal in Istanbul in winter, or when the village *tendûr* bread is compared with the mass-produced loafs in the city, the fresh and cold water in the village with the chlorinated tap-water in the city, or the happy gatherings in the village with the cold relations in the city. On the other hand, many men refer to the hard work and the low financial returns, and women to the hard work in carrying water from a central village fountain to their houses, as well as the constant baking of bread. This is ambiguity of idyll and hardship, or, as the author argues, nostalgia in the context of a sense of necessity to leave the place in order to improve one's economic situation. If a family is sufficiently well-of, the family will avoid the grueling migrant labor life for their sons. This ambiguity can also be found in the idea of the city, which represents not only the promise of a better material life but as well symbolic violence and contempt.

An illustrative example for this is an anecdote told by the Kurdish writer Muhsin Kızılkaya, which the author shares with us. Taking his daughter by taxi to the crèche, Muhsin Kızılkaya talks Kurdish to her. The taxi driver is surprised that the little girl speaks Kurdish, stops the taxi at the side of the road and starts crying. The anecdote is shared with us as an illustration of what she calls, in terms of the sociologist Bourdieu, symbolic violence. The denigratory attitude towards the Kurdish language in combination with the linguistic assimilatory polices of the Turkish state resulted in a loss of mother tongue; a loss which is painfully lived through.

The author underlines that many of her interlocutors became reluctant to speak the Kurdish language after they arrived in the city, and argues that they seemed to have accepted the idea that Kurdish is an inferior language, an idea imposed on Kurds starting from the very moment they enter school at young age. The author concludes that the desire to modernise is often equated with (linguistic) assimilation, and a modern CV in Turkey would (still) not include proficiency in Kurdish. The result is that Kurdish ceased to be the language of communication in many families and people become increasingly nonlinguistic. Yet the author not only shows how the invisibilisation and silencing of Kurdish identity took (and takes) place, but also brings to our attention that the use of Kurdish has become a marker of identity in the city, and alleged loss of mother tongue is neither a linear nor irreversible process. On the part of the older generations, the author argues that self-identification as Kurdish was never strong, while younger generations proudly refer to their Kurdish identity and language. Unfortunately this ambiguity is not elaborated upon.

The themes of fluidity and ambiguity are reoccurring themes in the book. The author discusses pathways and routes of migration, but also shows how many have become used to "plurilocal homes". The elderly, who spend their summers in Van and the winters with their children in Istanbul, or the families who migrated to Istanbul and spend their summers in the village, or the children who are sent to the city for education. And then there are those who migrate to the city and return after a few years. The examples she discusses show the increasing flexibility in the way people move. The spatial fluidity is not only a result of movements made by people, but also a result of transactions of goods, favors and ideas. The most important of these, the author argues, has been the diffusion of the idea of wage labour, resulting in a self-perpetuating labour migration.

Two other dimensions along which the author discusses fluidity and ambiguity are kinship ties and the hometown association as a social field, and gender-hierarchies. In Kurdistan people do not identify with where they live, but where they are born, and the interlocutors in this research also identify themselves with Van and people from Van. Networks of people from one also determine, partly, whether or not someone from Van migrates to Istanbul: they come when they know work has been lined up for them by family of countrymen. In the city, they work together and live together. Here, and with reference to Bourdieu and Putnam, the author distinguishes bonding and bridging capital. Where bonding capital explains the strong ties, a lack of bridging capital might explain why many of them, and their children, are not able to improve their living conditions in the city.

Discussing gender-hierarchies, the author argues that due to migration the constraints of, what she calls the traditional gender- hierarchy, are less salient than before. The dominant gender paradigm idealises female domesticity and piety, and emphasises the role of men in public space, who is responsible for earning a living. Though in the village women's labour makes a considerable contribution to household subsistence, this is not the case in the city, and though it is argued that the gender hierarchy is incompatible with modern life, the author concludes that in the course of migration gender hierarchies are often reinforced rather than challenged.

Kurdish Life in Contemporary Turkey: Migration, Gender and Ethnic Identity is a well written account of Kurdish labour migration and multi-place living in Turkey today. The multi-sited fieldwork in combination with the idea that large scale processes are to be found in intimate interactions have contributed to a lively account. The author shows rather well how lives of many people have become organised in and around several places called home, or differently said, how people's or families' activity-spaces include various locations. Looking at the activity-spaces of the people involved in this research, their network of links and activities, of spatial connections and of locations, we come to understand the particular way in which life is organised today. And this is, increasingly, a life which takes place at various places throughout time. Though this is well expressed in the book, the chapters are organised around a more classical idea of sending and receiving communities. For the clarity of the argument, and to emphasise the relational approach, the structure of the book could have been organised around the idea of a network of links and activities, of spatial connections and of locations. And maybe these practices could also have been the starting point of the study, instead of letting the story begin in a village. But these could be considered suggestions for future research. "Kurdish Life in Contemporary Turkey" is an important book for all those who are interested in migration studies, and the spatial organisation of everyday life.

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