

Book Reviews

Twana Faris Bawa, **The Privatisation of Security in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq**.
University of Buckingham Press, 2014, 305 pp., (ISBN 978-1-908684-51-6).

Twana Faris Bawa's 'The Privatisation of Security in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq' is an important contribution to the literature on the Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) and Kurdish studies with a focus on the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI). In his book, Bawa argues that the PMSCs play a crucial role in the economic development of the KRI. By borrowing from international and regional legal practices, he proposes a well-defined legal framework for security-sector reform in order to enable the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) to regulate the PMSCs that are operational in the KRI. Therefore, the main theme remains his aim to provide a legal framework for regulation of the PMSCs to maintain security, and thus the economic growth of the KRI. This book review argues that this main theme constitutes the core of strengths and weaknesses of the book.

Regarding strengths, Bawa offers good understanding of the historical backgrounds and present contexts of the KRI and the PMSCs. Regarding the KRI, he dates the historical background of the region back to the beginning of Saddam's Baathist regime in 1979. He especially focuses on the Kurdish uprising in 1991 and the UN's response to the conflict. Then, he examines the present context of the KRI by emphasising the relationship between the Iraqi Constitution of 2005 and the KRG as well as the conflict between the Iraqi government and the KRG regarding the disputed areas. Regarding the PMSCs, he explores the conceptualisation and practices of mercenaries, and then compares the PMSCs with mercenaries in order to define the PMSCs. He significantly focuses on the Geneva Convention to reject any association of the PMSCs with mercenaries. He dates the historical background of the PMSCs to the Second World War and later Vietnam War, and provides a good account of the use of the PMSCs in the 2000s at the global level. Indeed, he offers a detailed account of activities of the PMSCs ranging from consulting, training and logistic support to intelligence gathering and combat. He also provides a detailed categorisation of the PMSCs, particularly in the KRI, in relation to their activities and services, main users of services, and main areas of activity.

Furthermore, Bawa provides a comprehensive insight on the international and domestic legal framework for the status and the use of the PMSCs at the global level in comparison with practices of the PMSCs in the KRI. Significantly, he analyses domestic legal structures of the USA, the UK, South Africa and Iraq. He also examines the Montreux Document as an important step to provide international legal structure. He further provides case studies derived from Africa in his approach to the KRI as 'a weak state' (p. 131), in order to explore reasons for and consequences of the lack of regulation on the PMSCs in the KRI. He particularly focuses on Angola and Sierra Leone, and



activities of the Executive Outcomes in order to underline illegal activities of the PMSCs in weak states which lack regulations on the PMSCs. Regarding his proposal for a legal framework in the KRI, he describes and explains the security sector and the legal structure in the KRI. At this point, his extensive field research--based on governmental documents as well as semi-structured interviews with government officials, the PMSCs and local population--offers an invaluable research. He further provides case studies, namely the events of Zrary and Khalid Raouf, based on interviews with local population, media and personnel of the PMSCs. It should be noted that both Zrary and Khalid Raouf were civilians who were physically harassed by the PMSC contractors in the KRI (pp. 180-186). These case studies illustrate consequences of the lack of a legal framework for regulation of the PMSCs. In Appendices, his book includes the 'Proposed Law on Private Security Services [in the KRI]' (pp. 268-305), which is very useful for future research on primary sources. However, it does not include other Appendices on interviews or official documents, which limit ability of readers to access primary sources.

Regarding weaknesses, Bawa does not present any theoretical or methodological discussion either in literature review or in the rest of the book. However, both argumentation and the structure of book reveal which school of thought Bawa is inclined to. As said before, he provides a legal framework for the regulation of the PMSCs in the KRI to enhance the economic development of the region. However, he does not present any critical analysis between the global capitalist system and commodification of security, whose meaning and practices are broadened and blurred.¹ Similarly, he does not offer any critical understanding of the dependent relationship between core and (semi)peripheral countries.² Therefore, this book review argues that Bawa accepts the main premises and approach of neoliberalism. Indeed, he defines the Iraq War in 2003 as 'the liberation of Iraq' by associating it with 'the overthrow of the Saddam regime' (p. 31), in order to downplay the invasion of Iraq by the coalition forces under the USA's flagship. He further portrays the coalition forces as giving efforts to 'win the "Hearts and Minds" of the local civilian population' (p. 6). As a result, instead of contextualising the relationship among legal structures, states and the PMSCs, Bawa overwhelmingly accepts legal documents as *a priori* frameworks to define the relationship between the state and the PMSCs.

Bawa significantly suffers from recognisable vagueness and paradoxes in his definitions and analysis regarding the relationship between the PMSCs and the KRI. He defines the PMSCs as 'profit-driven corporations [...] [that] trade in professional services [...] linked to conflict and warfare' (pp. 47-48). In this way, he argues that the

¹ Abrahamson, R. and Williams, M. C. (2008) Selling Security: Assessing the Impact of Military Privatization. *Review of International Political Economy*, 15(1), 131-146; Huysmans, J. (1998). Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier. *European Journal of International Relations*, 4(2), 226-255; Krause, K. and Williams, M. C. (1997). *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Strategies*. London: UCL Press; Leander, A. (2005). The Power to Construct International Security: On the Significance of Private Military Companies. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33(3), 803-826.

² Albrecht, P. and Jackson, P. (2014). State-Building through Security Sector Reform: The UK Intervention in Sierra Leone. *Peacebuilding*, 2(1), 83-99; Herring, E. (2009). Iraq, Fragmentation, and the Global Governance of Inequalities. *Globalizations*, 6(1), 91-97; Herring, E. and Rangwala, G. (2005). *Iraq in Fragments: The Occupation and Its Legacy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; Jackson, P. (2012). Security Sector Reform and State-building: Lessons Learned. In Schnabel, A.; Farr, V. and Verlag L. (Eds.), *Back to the Roots: Security Sector Reform and Development* (251-270). Geneva: Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces; Leander A. and Munster, R.V. (2007). Private Security Contractors in the Debate about Darfur: Reflecting and Reinforcing Neo-Liberal Governmentality. *International Relations*, 21(2), 201-216.

operations of the PMSCs should be considered legal on the grounds of permissions of the governments (p. 75). He takes for granted the rise of the PMSC industry and their role in state-building in post-conflict zones, significantly in the KRI (p. 3), by associating privatisation of security with efficiency and reduced costs. Also, as he approaches the KRI as 'a weak state', which lacks 'a monopoly of force over their territory' in Weberian sense (p. 131), he considers the privatisation of security as an opportunity for the KRI to provide security through the use of the PMSCs. Since he accepts the principles of accountability and transparency as the fundamental pillars of liberal democracy (p. 106), he narrows his explanations on consequences of the lack of regulation on the PMSCs to abuses and ill-treatment of civilians, and exploitation of natural resources including gas and oil (p. 147). Furthermore, he narrows the process of state-building with maintaining security to enhance foreign investment and economic growth of the region. This weakness stems from his vague and paradoxical approach to the KRI. Indeed, he problematically defines the KRI as 'a transitional state within a state' (p. 9), and he maintains that '[the KRI] is widely considered to be in a period of transition leading to a new form of governance' (p. 24). Since he compares the KRI with Kosovo (p. 31), and since he underlines the existence of territory, government and capacity to be represented in the international arena (p. 155), it can be argued that he considers the KRI as an autonomous region in the process of state-building whose legitimacy depends on international recognition. However, he still does not explain what kind of *state* or *governance* he refers to.

Bawa, arguably unintentionally, further credits the problematic role of the PMSCs in the process of state-building in post-conflict zones, particularly the KRI, both at the international and domestic levels. At the international level, he fails to problematize the call for an 'apolitical approach' to the international law on the PMSCs (p. 199). This statement demonstrates that he does not accept the political nature of the notion of security. In this way, he fails to acknowledge the arbitrary nature of international law, which aims to protect long-term interests of capital, embedded in the global capitalist system. Furthermore, he fails to critically examine the relationship between the Western core countries, such as the USA and the UK, and (semi)peripheral countries, such as Iraq. Consequently, he legitimises the construction of post-conflict zones as marketplaces for both domestic and international capital to buy and sell the commoditised security. Thus, he arguably unintentionally legitimises the reproduction of post-conflict zones as (semi)periphery of the global capitalist system. In other words, he arguably unintentionally contributes to the reproduction and reinforcement of weak states.

At the domestic level, he fails to acknowledge the relationship between neoliberalism as a particular moment of capitalist modes of production and accumulation, and the transition of state. In this sense, he not only legitimises the purge of the welfare state's role to provide security as a public good, but seeks further transition to the regulatory state whose role is limited to control conditions under which both domestic and international capital functions to increase profit to the detriment of subordinate classes. At this point, he fails to present a critical understanding of the relationship between privatisation of security and labour rights—except mentioning the difference between wages of international and local personnel of the PMSCs (p. 170). It should be noted that he has already conducted interviews with local workers of the PMSCs. Thus, this book review argues that he could have dealt with the (lack of?) legal framework to solve possible tensions between the international PMSCs and domestic

labour unions in the KRI. Furthermore, his engagement with gender issues remains very limited. He underlines the need for the use of female workers in the PMSCs by giving reference to an interviewee's statement that 'in [Kurdish] culture only a female is allowed to search another female' (p. 240). As a result, he fails to critically engage with the LGBTQ issues, either in relation to labour relations or the militarist role of PMSCs in the state-building process.³

To conclude, aside from these flaws Bawa's book is significant by providing a comprehensive insight on a legal framework for the regulation of the PMSCs in the KRI. His extensive research is vital for researchers who focus on the Middle East, including Iraq and the KRI, to examine both primary and secondary sources. This book review argues that Bawa's book serves as one of crucial contributions to the literature to be challenged and broadened with critical approaches to the role of PMSCs in the process of state-building in the KRI in the neoliberal era.

Gönenç Uysal, King's College London, UK

Marianna Charountaki, **The Kurds and US Foreign Policy: International Relations in the Middle East since 1945**, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, 320 pp., (ISBN: 978-0-415-58753-2).

This "book investigates the role of the Kurds in US foreign policy from World War II until Gulf War III (March 2003) and its aftermath" (p. 1), and is "an extended version" of the author's "PhD thesis, submitted to the University of Exeter (Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies) in March 2009" (p. x). The "Introduction" or first chapter constitutes of a review of the literature and also surveys the various methodologies and schools of thought used in the study of International Relations. While this may be useful, what is one to think of such conclusions regarding the inadequacy of realist theories regarding "the interaction between state and non-state actors" that "even post-positivists critiques though as meta-theories have been limited so far into the criticism of the realist paradigms rather than provide the IR [International Relations] with a new theoretical stance" (p. 13).

After spending the bulk of her analysis on US-Kurdish relations, Charountaki returns to theory as her final chapter on "Conceptual implications and general conclusions" suggests that "for an alternative outlook for IR as "multi-dimensional" and "interactional" as well as "inter-relational". This means that it embraces on one hand the inter-relation among politics, IR and foreign policy and on the other the interaction between state and non-state actors other than structures and policies (pp. 246-47). Maybe it would have been best for the author in the published version of her thesis at least to have concentrated less on theory and more on policy.

In her analysis of "US foreign policy towards the Middle East," the author identifies "five major changes": 1.) "US economic interests in the Middle East which were enriched by political interests in the period from World War II until the 1970s"; 2.) "from the 1970s until 1990 . . . the gradual militarization"; 3.) "the collapse of the USSR" and "direct political intervention by the United States . . . and the US use of force alongside its interactions with such non-state actors as the Kurds of Iraq"; 4.)

³ See Stachowitsch, S. (2013) Military Privatization and the Remasculinization of the State: Making the Link between the Outsourcing of Military Security and Gendered State Transformations. *International Relations*, 27(1), 74–94.

“Clinton’s era . . . constitutes the foundation of the US ‘containment’ of both state actors *vis-à-vis* [the] Iraq Liberation Act and non-state ones, namely terrorist groups, continued with great zeal by George W. Bush”; and 5.) “under the Presidency of George W. Bush . . . the direct interventionist policy . . . rather than a limited use of force [that] . . . have overtaken the humanitarian foreign policy discourse” (pp. 102-103). Elsewhere the author adds that “internally, the formulation of US policy appears to depend on four factors: the Constitution; the ideologies of US Presidencies; the particular system and staff allocation for the functioning of the administration and the personalities of the bureaucrats” (pp. 138-39). Together these “five changes” and “four factors” provide the author’s analytical roadmap.

Thus, “whereas US interest in the Kurdish issue was confined, until the 1950s, to minimal and covert aid undertaken mainly by the US embassies in each country with a Kurdish population, there was no such a thing as a US-Kurdish relationship. . . . It is not until the post-Cold War period that a more structured relationship with the United States emerges” (p. 127). While Chapter Two “focuses on the Kurdish Issue as the link between the Kurds and international relations, Chapters Three, Four and Five concentrate on the dynamics of US foreign policy and its relation to the Kurds” (p. 43). In addition, as she analyses US foreign policy from 1945-1990, the author finds that “this foreign policy preoccupation with regional conflicts and particular threats, as well as the advantage to regional states of weakening each other through the Kurdish Issue contributed further to the deteriorating status of the Kurds, while the focus of the United States on regional stability at the expense of the Kurdish cause explains Kurdish marginalization” (p. 132).

There is much positive food for thought in the author’s findings. For example, “unless the regional states and the international community address all aspects of the Kurdish Issue, political turbulence in the region is unlikely to be resolved, which will lead to further political and economic repercussions. The United States has been the only major power in a position potentially to mediate in the issue” (p. 165). However, “such complexities mark the Kurdish Issue as a complex phenomenon in international relations whose solution seems problematic and, as such, calls into question any kind of political settlement” (p. 261). Although it midwived the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq and has come to support it up to a point, the United States still maintains that Iraq must be kept intact to maintain regional peace and security. Thus, “the original US principle . . . was that it would in no way be associated . . . with the 60 year old Kurdish rebellion in Iraq or oppose Iraq’s legitimate attempts to suppress it” (p. 171) remains operative today.

Valid also is the author’s conclusion that “Turkey’s persistence in interpreting the Kurdish Issue as a ‘PKK problem’ that must be fought against seems to have deprived the Turkish bureaucracy of the possibility of reaching a *modus vivendi* by applying political and diplomatic means” (p. 180). The veracity of this maxim was illustrated once again when Turkish air power was launched against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in July 2015 and the once promising Turkish-PKK peace process was terminated. Thus, notes the author, the paradox that “while the PKK elevated Turkey’s Kurdish Issue and boosted Kurdish aspirations for political and cultural rights, it had a disastrous impact on Turkey’s Kurdish policy from early 1984 onwards through its militarization strategy” (*ibid.*).

Further worth restating is that the “Turkish belief that recognition of the Kurds, or any other non-Turkish ethnicity, is deeply equated with separatism . . . constitutes the

core of the Turkish ideological discourse” and that “Turkey’s Kurdish policy of war and violence further endangers the state’s democracy project on the one hand, and reinforces the Turkish-Kurdish engagement in a never-ending armed struggle even more strongly on the other” (p. 197). As the author points out, “the armed struggle had not been the PKK’s choice but was the only way out, having been imposed through force by Ankara, and that the movement was not looking for a solution simply in the context of war, as the international community or Ankara appeared to think” (p. 180). On the other hand, insightful too is the author’s finding that “there is a certain irony in the Turks having contributed to the renaissance of Iraq’s Kurds while at the same time Turkey’s own Kurdish policies were so restrictive” (p. 181).

Interesting too is that despite the US unwillingness to support KRG independence, “starting from David Schwartz [whose dates unfortunately are not listed] there has always been an official in the Iraqi section of the Northern Gulf Affairs Office in the [US] State Department’s Near Eastern Bureau in charge of Iraq’s domestic portfolio, part of which was the Kurdish file as well” (p. 190). Since Charountaki’s book was completed in 2009, more than two years before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war brought the Kurds of Syria to the attention of many observers, prescient is the author’s statement about “the Kurds of Syria whose vociferous claims for citizenship rights have started to be heard on numerous occasions” (p. 172). “However, should US regional policy need the Kurds of Syria, Turkey, and Iran as an indispensable means for promoting US national interests in the near future . . . then the start of US-Kurdish relations might indeed become a reality” (p. 174). Indispensable US air support for the Syrian Kurds while they battled ISIS for Kobane in 2014 and subsequently elsewhere have made the author’s insight here valid.

Unfortunately, the author’s manuscript needed one more good editing—possibly by another knowledgeable eye—to catch what are too many galling errors. One in particular was the repeated and totally inexplicable erroneous citations (pp. 62/n. 88, 69/n. 176, 155/n. 21 in the notes and p. 296 in the bibliography) of the well-known classic by Gerard Chaliand ed., *A People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, 1980 and with new chapters, 1993, as instead being somehow co-edited with David McDowall. However, McDowall merely wrote a very brief two-page foreword to the 1993 edition and was certainly not a co-editor. The author’s error here is compounded by her listing McDowall’s name first despite its being alphabetically subsequent to Chaliand’s, thus implying incorrectly that McDowall was even the senior editor. (David McDowall, of course, is the well-known author of *A Modern History of the Kurds*, which has appeared in several different editions since 1996 and which along with Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaiikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, 1992 are arguably the two leading studies in modern Kurdish studies.)

Equally problematic is the author’s repeated mix up between George H.W. Bush (the father) and George W. Bush (the son) on pp. 185, 187, 189, 191, 199, 200, 202, 220, and 235 where the father is said to have been the President Bush who fought the Iraqi war in 2003, instead of the son. However, on other pages the author manages to get the two correct and also has separate entries for them in the index, but of course with the confusion between the two.

Some other unfortunate infelicities follow. A non-existent “Abbas Vanli,” (instead of Ismet Cheriff Vanly, who is arguably the dean of modern Kurdish scholars) is incorrectly said to have discussed certain “secret agreements” (p. 41). On page 147 the author confuses the PKK and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and refers to

“Operation Safe Heaven” (p. 147 and again p. 318 in the index), instead of Operation Safe Haven, which she does get correct elsewhere in the manuscript. Elsewhere, the author tells us correctly that Iran assassinated the KDPI leader Abdul Rahman Qassem-lou, but then erroneously also the religious leader Shaikh Ezzedin Hosseini (p. 150) when she really means Qassem-lou’s secular successor, Sadiq Sharafkindi. Former US secretary of state and earlier chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell is somehow incorrectly identified as “Deputy Secretary of Defense” (p. 99), which of course he never was.

On at least two occasions the author also mentions “President Massoud Barzani” (pp. 172 and 200) several years before he assumed this position. Kirkuk is said to contain “70 per cent of Iraqi oil outputs” (p. 159/n. 136), a figure which is much too high given the Basra and other KRG resources. In the discussion of the Iraqi Kurdish refugees following the 2003 war, the author at first mentions a mere “60,000” (p. 168), a confusion with the figure from 1988 at the end of the Iran-Iraq war. Subsequently, the author gets the 2003 tally correct when she mentions “the mass exodus of two million refugees who feared a second Halabja” (p. 169). “[Ahmed] Chalabi and [Hoshyar] Zebari” (p. 201) are said to be the Kurdish representatives to an important Iraqi opposition meeting in New York, when, of course, Chalabi was instead the notorious Shite Arab opposition leader who so egregiously misled US policy makers about the nature of the Iraqi situation leading up to the war in 2003. “Salam Arif and Mullah Mustafa Barzani” appear as the two main Iraqi Kurdish leaders (p. 131), when clearly Jalal Talabani was intended instead of Arif, who is mentioned correctly a few lines later as one of the Arab leaders who overthrew Abdul Karim Qassim in 1963. The current reviewer has a list of several other infelicities.

Despite these unfortunate problems and given the many important subsequent events, the author might be encouraged to write an updated second edition that would include her analysis of the Syrian civil war, the rise of Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), and their existential struggle against ISIS, epitomised by the battle for Kobane in 2014. Equally important would be an analysis of the now failed Turkish-PKK peace process and the rise of the pro-Kurdish Peoples Democratic Party (HDP) and its charismatic leader Selahattin Demirtas in Turkey, among other major events, which have involved US foreign policy.

Charountaki’s study also contains rich documentation, an extended bibliography, maps, an index, a list of acronyms, figures, and an appendix containing a report on the Kurds referenced in the US Congress.

Michael M. Gunter, Tennessee Technological University, USA

Ramazan Aras, *The Formation of Kurdishness in Turkey. Political Violence, Fear and Pain*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2014. xii + 227 pp., (ISBN: 978-0-415-82418-7).

Ramazan Aras is an anthropologist teaching at Artuklu University in Mardin. He grew up in the ethnically mixed (Kurdish and Syriac) town of Kerboran in Mardin in the years of rapidly escalating violence between the PKK and Turkey’s military and police forces during the 1980s. He studied sociology and history in Turkey and did a PhD in anthropology in Canada, specialising in the study of collective violence, emotions, pain and fear. He has carried out oral history research on communal violence between

Muslims and Christians as well as state-society violence and trauma in Kurdistan. In this book, which is based on his Ph.D. dissertation (at the University of Western Ontario), he investigates how Kurdish subjectivities in Turkey have been shaped by the experience of violence (both from the side of the state and the PKK) and memories of suffering and fear. He writes from the position of those who were caught in the middle and were fearful of the military as well as the guerrillas. If his narrative takes sides, it is with Islam, the primary identity of many Kurds, rather than secular nationalism. This study is informed by Aras's own experience of witnessing violence, knowing fear and feeling threatened as a Kurd and a Muslim.

His chapter on the state and the politics of fear opens with a violent incident that took place in Kerboran when the author was still a child. His family were sleeping on the roof, as is common in the hot summer months, when they were woken up by bursts of gunfire and the sound of women crying. Trembling with fear, they locked themselves in the house until daybreak, unable to sleep and seeking protection in reciting verses from the Qur'an. The following day they heard that guerrillas had entered the town that night and wiped out a family – killing the women and children but missing the husband, who was not at home. The man was a traitor, people said, a police informer, who worked for the state against his own people. The laments of the dead women's relatives and the intimation of more violence to come imprinted themselves on the child's mind. Assassinations, disappearances, arrest and torture, gunfights and bombs, demonstrations and massive house searches by police and army soon became everyday experiences, which, as Aras writes, shaped his memories and his personal identity.

Twenty years after that first experience with fear and violence, having prepared himself by reading a wide range of relevant theoretical and comparative literature, Aras returned to Turkish Kurdistan to carry out fieldwork for his dissertation. He interviewed close to a hundred respondents from across the political spectrum about the traumatic events they had lived through in the past decades. The analysis of these interviews, along with published memoirs of the period, constitutes the main body of this book. This material is organised in three core chapters dealing with the politics of fear, pain and gendered suffering, and violence against the body in the form of imprisonment and torture, respectively.

These chapters are preceded by a theoretical chapter on the nation state and political violence, in which Foucault on bio-power, Agamben on sovereignty and the state of exception, Talal Asad on agency and pain, cruelty and torture, and Veena Das on bodily affects, hate and pain in communal conflict loom large, besides studies of collective violence, memory and reconciliation in South Africa, Ireland and Palestine. A second chapter on the genealogy of Kurdish suffering in Turkey places the events of the 1980s and 1990s against the background of (memories of) the Sheikh Sa' id rebellion and the violent suppression of Kurdish and Islamic identities, the genocidal Dersim campaign, mass deportations, random state violence and the emergence of a more ideological Kurdish movement from the 1960s onward and a more deliberate recourse to violence in the following decades.

Many of Aras's interviewees, like traumatised people elsewhere, found it painful and almost impossible to speak of their own traumatic experiences and had remained silent about them to their relatives and acquaintances. When interrogated, they tended to hide the most intimate memories and to depersonalise their narratives, shifting from "I" to "we" and then to "the Kurds"; the memory of their personal suffering appeared to be more tolerable and become more meaningful when part of an anonymous, generalised

narrative. “Inner and intimate experiences and feelings,” in the words of Aras, were thus “attach[ed] to the collective experience and suffering of the local community, and then of the Kurdish people” (p. 105). Aras suggests that this retelling of personal experiences as “packaged stories” may be a strategy of coping with fear and insecurity as well as a way to sustain the struggle in making oneself part of a larger whole. He also notes the importance of religious metaphors of suffering and martyrdom as well as the oral tradition of laments and heroic tales as templates for understanding individual suffering.

In the 1980s and 1990s, detention and torture were defining elements of the Kurdish experience in Turkey, with the notorious Diyarbakır prison as the iconic theatre of horror. Many testimonies of the prison experience have been published (and were studied by Aras, besides his own interviews). The vast majority of testimonies are by men and, as Aras observes and attempts to explain, women’s narratives of detention and interrogation have tended to be silenced or marginalised. He relates the silence to “certain cultural and religious values and norms in the Kurdish community.” Stated less cautiously, the issue is one of honour and shame; rape and other forms of sexual torture violate the honour of the victim’s male relatives (which is of course one of the reasons why it has taken place systematically). Short of killing their daughter or sister themselves, which traditionally is the ultimate way in which male relatives may restore their honour, families have had a strong interest in silencing accounts of her prison experience.

The PKK’s discourse, in which honour is located in the nation rather than in the family and women’s modesty, and in which gender equality is emphasised and gender separation rejected, was liberating to some but identity-threatening to conservative Kurdish Muslims, including those who supported the PKK because of its struggle for Kurdish rights. The participation of unmarried young women in the guerrilla forces, alongside male fighters, was a revolutionary development that had been seen never before in the Middle East, and it shocked many Kurds – the majority, according to Aras. Resistance in the prison, led by PKK inmates, several times took the extreme form of self-immolation, shocking and unacceptable to believing Muslims. But yet these transgressions had a strong formative influence on Kurdish subjectivities, as did the violent repression by the state.

The strength of this book is that it gives a voice to those who were not active participants in the Kurdish movement and may even have grave reservations about its ideology and rejection of traditional values yet are profoundly influenced by it. The author is at pains to show that these people too are not passive victims of the dominant political forces but active political subjects, with agency in the making of Kurdishness.

The readability of the book, unfortunately, suffers somewhat from its origin as a dissertation and its excessive references to theoretical and comparative literature. I should have liked to read more extensive renderings of the interviewees’ narratives, such as we find in Çayan Demirel’s impressive documentary film on the Diyarbakır prison, *5 no’lu Cezaevi 1980-1984*, to which Aras also refers as an important document. (The film is available online at Dailymotion but is unfortunately not subtitled.) Aras’s ambition has been, of course, to go beyond description to analysis, and he offers much food for thought.

The book was written at a time when there was hope for dialogue and reconciliation, and Aras devotes some hopeful passages to the solution of violent conflict elsewhere and prospects for the Kurdish case. The return, on an unprecedented scale, of violence,

fear and pain, traumatising numerous Kurdish communities, makes the reflections on trauma and identity in this study a subject of obvious importance.

Martin van Bruinessen, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Senem Aslan, **Nation-Building in Turkey and Morocco: Governing Kurdish and Berber Dissent**, *Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 250 pp., (ISBN: 1107054605).*

Senem Aslan's comparative study on Kurdish and Berber cases brings the state back in explaining ethnic insurgency. Aslan argues that the state policies in governing ethnic dissent are so crucial that they can transform the trajectory of the relationship, resulting in violent outcomes in some cases and contentious accommodation in others. Unlike Morocco's accommodating strategy of handling Berber demands—which are initially comparable to Kurdish demands in modern Turkey—the Turkish state pursued an “extreme make-over” policy that inadvertently caused a growing Kurdish insurgency.

Although the book allocates an equal number of chapters to each case, the Kurdish case appears to be more interesting to the reader because of theoretical implications in explaining ethnic insurgencies. In her comparative case selection, the author highlights the similarity of the two contexts: underdevelopment of Berber and Kurdish communities, colonial divide-and-rule policies, absence of a democratic system, contentious ethnic conflict in a neighbouring state, and top-down nation-building projects by the state elites (pp. 11-14, 196-97). The remarkable difference between the two, however, is the Turkish state's extremely “intrusive” nation-building efforts that combined with indiscriminate state violence, contrasted with the Moroccan state's flexibility in defining the boundaries of Moroccan identity as well as a policy of selective repression and co-optation.

Aslan's book is an excellent example of a state-centric approach in explaining ethnic insurgency. Yet, the reader may be surprised to find the author shy in engaging with significant literature. For example, Jeff Goodwin's authoritative study, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991*, puts two critical factors forth to explain radical insurgency formation in Latin America and the Far East: the weak state and the exclusivist state. In Chapters 2 and 4, Aslan nicely depicts how the Turkish state perceived itself as “weak” in penetrating Kurdish society and pursued policies of discrimination in an exclusivist manner. Goodwin's discussion of neo-patrimonial regimes is also noteworthy because differences in the regime structure may explain divergence in nation-building efforts in Morocco and Turkey. Unlike the Moroccan monarchy, the Turkish elite was reminiscent of the French, who “did not believe indigenous cultures or institutions offered anything of value,” and, thus, saw their “civilizing mission” (*mission civilisatrice*) as strongly opposed to local nationalisms (Shafer, 1998: 142; quoted in Goodwin, 2001: 130). Such an attitude may also explain why Kurds were not trusted in local administrative positions in the early years of the Turkish republic (pp. 47, 60). Although the regime type was discussed briefly (pp. 16-18), I wish the author had an in-depth theoretical engagement with the relevant literature on these remarkable topics. The limitation, in part, seems to be due to the case selection: A historically rooted nation-state, not monarchic Morocco that established in the Cold War years, may have been a better pick to compare with Turkey.

Aslan should be commended on the utilisation of Turkish government documents in 1930s and 40s. The book is a rare study that employs military officers' reports about the region during Ataturk's reign, the investigative reports by the Republican People's Party (CHP) officials, and rich sources of the People's Houses (*Halkevleri*), which was established in each town to penetrate the Kurdish society for cultural assimilation.

Aslan demonstrates how mutual mistrust and vicious cycles of violence haunted the Republic very early on: "After the 1927 elections, the percentage of the parliamentarians born in the Kurdish areas was 34.7, and it fell as low as 17 percent in the mid-1930s...The single party increasingly nominated bureaucrats and former military officers who were born in the Western provinces to represent the Kurdish provinces" (p. 46). These officers were not only alien to Kurds but also incapable of grasping the region's reality due to the language barrier—a serious problem that was often noted in observatory reports about the region. A report written in 1943 by First Inspector-General, for example, indicates that "the governors were unable to obtain even basic information such as the number of tribes in their regions, who the tribal leaders were, which of these tribal leaders participated in the rebellions against the state, and how many arms these tribes possessed" (pp. 59-60). Aslan depicts how the Turkish state's uncompromising language policy "paradoxically undermined its efforts to build efficient state rule" in the region (p. 69).

In following chapters, the author explains the role of electoral competition as well as military interventions in Turkey's multi-party era. Every major coup (1960, 1971, 1980) has subjugated the Kurds bitterly but the military policy in the early 1980s was remarkably repressive, and, at times, indiscriminately violent. Aslan traces intrusive state policies over the naming of Kurdish children, the ban on Kurdish music and publications, and other forms of Kurdish cultural expression. "Unlike the first few decades of the republic," notes Aslan, "the state's intrusion into daily life of the Kurdish areas could now be more forceful because more Kurds lived in the easily accessible urban areas and the state's infrastructural capacity was higher" (p. 131). As the Kurdish migration increased westward, so did Kurdish grievances and "relative deprivation" as Kurds became more aware of exclusivist state policies. In this regard, Aslan reads the rise of the PKK in a state-centric approach.

Nation-Building in Turkey and Morocco is a valuable book. It is especially recommended for those who would like to put Turkey's Kurdish issue into a comparative perspective.

Mustafa Gurbuz, American University, USA

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Michael M. Gunter, **The Kurds: A Modern History**. Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2015, 236 pp., (ISBN: 1558766154).

Michael Gunter's well-structured monograph is an exceptionally accessible study of the Kurds and should be considered a mandatory read for undergraduate students with an interest in international relations. A general readership will also benefit, gaining a deeper understanding of regional intricacies that contributed to the rise of the Kurds as political actors in the region. Gunter's study offers seven self-contained and very

manageable chapters that range from insights into the early history of the Kurds to the United States' current relationship with the Kurds and the Kurdish struggle against ISIS ("Islamic State"). In addition, the monograph offers several maps that provide an indispensable geographic context. Gunter also added a number of fascinating personal vignettes about his experiences in the region during the past 30 years. He integrates, for example, personal accounts including his meeting with the now imprisoned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan back in 1998 (p. 47-49). Later, he shares his personal observations of the situation in Irbil in 2014 after ISIS's failed attempts to take the city. He finds life in Irbil almost back to normal despite the harrowing threat, just 50 miles away. Walking through Ankawa, the Christian section of the city, he observes that "modern day religious fanatics would literally like to crucify these very Christians living peacefully with the Kurds!" (p. 85).

Gunter's newest monograph focuses on providing an updated and frank analysis of Kurds in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran for readers who may be familiar with his 2014 monograph *Out of Nowhere: The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War*. In *The Kurds: A Modern History*, Gunter further develops major themes he initially explored in his earlier work—themes that turned out to have been too fluid to fully explore in 2014. In particular, he investigates the US government's relationship with the Kurds and the experiences of Kurdish fighters in an imploding Syria. One can only assume that Gunter is already in the process of composing yet another monograph that will be available by next year to update the mercurial developments. Among the issues that will need to be addressed, of course, are the dramatically deteriorating situation inside Turkey, which could result in a full blown civil war by the middle of 2016, and a further assessment of the increasingly gruesome sectarian battle in Syria following Russian and Iranian interventions of behalf of the Assad regime.

Several chapters are of particular importance to readers keen on gaining a clearer understanding of the significance of Kurds in the region. Chapter two chronicles the contentious rise of the PKK, talks of peace, and the blunt assessment that "heavy fighting between Turkey and the PKK had resumed" (p. 60). Nearly six months after Gunter wrote his last remarks foreshadowing the deteriorating conditions for Kurdish communities in Turkey it is hard to even recall the general optimism supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) expressed following the successful June 7, 2015 election. The chapter reminds readers that the basic parameters for peace negotiations between the Turkish state and the Kurds had not been agreed upon despite much rhetoric to the contrary. The tragedy for the Kurds of Turkey is that in 2016 they face a hyper-nationalist Turkish public and a hardened military, which is once again determined to crush Kurdish resistance to state control.

Chapter four examines the marginalising experiences of Syrian Kurds. This section is of particular interest to students striving to understand the Syrian complexities. Gunter integrates a detailed examination of the treatment of Kurds as *ajanib* (foreigners) in Syria starting in 1962 based on the proclamation of Decree 93, which resulted in the denial of civil rights to Kurds and their loss of property rights, and also excluded them from accessing a range of employment options. He then discusses the impact of Arabisation policies and the rise of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its military wing, the Peoples Defence Units (YPG), the PKK's sister organisation across the border. This chapter also offers sobering remarks about the Syrian civil war's human toll by focusing on both the appallingly high numbers of casualties, internally displaced populations, and refugees in neighbouring countries. Fascinating are Gunter's

observations that the Assad regime was soon expected to collapse, which of course turned out to have been premature as both Iranian and Russian interventions provided essential lifelines for the dictator and his inner circle.

In Chapter six Gunter observes that the United States pursued a number of clear priorities in Syria that failed to intersect with Kurdish interests. He emphasises that the US focuses on curbing the influence of ISIS and other jihadi extremists, but also aims to keep Iran from partitioning the Syrian state. His final chapter frames the regional rise of ISIS and the group's keen interest in destroying Kurdish influences. Gunter's most recent monograph faces an inevitable challenge for authors who analyse ongoing crises: the monograph was completed in April 2015, which means that Turkey's attacks on Syrian Kurds are not addressed and a further evaluation of the potential for hostile acts and clashes between Russia and Turkey are not included. His analysis up to this point, however, elucidates key nuances of a constantly shifting set of complex regional factors.

Gunter's *The Kurds: A Modern History*, just as his prior contributions in the field, adds an enormously valuable and readable study. He reaches an audience that struggles to keep up with the dramatic changes throughout the region. Gunter convincingly concludes that both Turkey and the United States have been too slow to grasp the profound geopolitical shifts underway by insisting on maintaining the existing artificial boundaries of Iraq and Syria. In essence, Gunter suggests concentrating on the question of self-determination that was raised but inadequately addressed some 100 years earlier during the final years of WWI.

Vera Eccarius-Kelly, Siena College, USA

Djene Rhys Bajalan and Sara Zandi Karimi (eds.), **Studies in Kurdish History: Empire, Ethnicity and Identity**, London: Routledge, 2015, 179 pp., (ISBN: 978-1-138-88468-7).

This edited book is a collection of articles originally published in a special issue of the journal *Iranian Studies* under the name "The Kurds and their History: New Perspectives", co-edited by Djene Rhys Bajalan and Sara Zandi Karimi. The chapters are organised in chronological order. After a brief introduction by the two co-editors (pp. 1-3), the second chapter (pp. 4-33) is a study by Boris James on the use of the word "Kurd" in Arabic medieval sources. Taking issue with the view that the term "Kurd" would be a synonym of "nomadic", he distinguishes two phases in the use of the term: a first phase (8th-11th century) where it is "at the crossroads between [Arab and 'Ajam]" (p. 12) and related to the concepts of "nomadism-bedouinness and Arabness" (p. 16), and a second phase (11th-14th century) where it became "an ethnonym among others" (p. 17). The author then argues that the Kurds were, since the beginnings of Islam, seen as the "archetypal bedouins" (p. 22) for three reasons: the lack of a central power and the failure of Islam and Arabic to fully penetrate Kurdish society (pp. 23-28). The ideas developed by the author in this article have been covered in previous publications (see James 2006 and 2008), but this is the first time a coherent and synthetic overview is made available to an English-speaking readership. The theoretical soundness and critical use of numerous sources make this a very valuable essay; it would certainly be of interest to apply a similar approach to Persian-language sources of the same period.

The third chapter (pp. 34-54), written by Michiel Leezenberg, is titled "Eli Teremaxi and the Vernacularization of Medrese Learning in Kurdistan". It is part of a larger project of the author examining the rise of "new linguistic ideologies" in the 18th century as "one of the central preconditions of language-based nationalism" (p. 42). The study focuses on Eli Teremaxi's *Tesrif*, a work on *sarf* (morphology) written in and on Kurdish and dated by the author to the late 17th/early 18th century. After describing its contents, the author argues that the *Tesrif* "embodies (...) the so-called vernacularization of Kurdish" that is the gradual development of a high culture in the language (p. 41). The second part of the article deals with *medrese* learning in Kurdistan, contending that the 17th century witnessed "a broader shift towards using Kurdish as a medium of both spoken and written medrese instruction". The *Tesrif* is seen as an important part of this "normative" process, which "may have helped in bringing about a sense of a linguistic standard for the Kurdish language" (p. 48). While these arguments are convincingly conveyed, one cannot follow the author when he links this vernacularisation process with "an early stage in the rise of a language-based modern Kurdish national identity" (p. 41), concluding, albeit tentatively, that "the roots of Kurdish nationalism (...) do not lie in the late nineteenth century" and European ideologies, but in "new ideologies of Kurdish as a language" which emerged as a result of this vernacularisation process (p. 54).

The fourth chapter (pp. 55-118) by Sabri Ateş is an extremely detailed and well-researched study of the 1880-81 rebellion of the Naqshbandi Sheikh Ubeidullah of Nehri, a movement to which virtually all contemporary authors trace "the origins of Kurdish nationalism" (p. 56). The first part of the essay is a comprehensive narrative of the rebellion (pp. 60-106), while the second part consists of an analytical treatment exploring the Sheikh's motives and various other aspects of the movement (pp. 106-118). Seeing the rise of Ubeidullah as "a response of local society to the results of centralisation which had decentralised the elite hierarchy of the region" (p. 116) – a reference to the "power vacuum" created by the removal of Kurdish dynasts in the mid-19th century (p. 61) –, the author argues that the rebellion, as "an early response of the Kurds to the age of nationalism" and "a case of sectarian violence" (p. 117), had decisive implications for the borderlanders and the Ottoman and Iranian states. While the former were forced to "make stark and very public choices" in terms of their preferred identity, the latter seized the opportunity to assert their authority and conclusively establish their hegemony in the borderlands (pp. 82-88). Not only a brilliant essay on a neglected topic, this article is also an important contribution to the field of frontier studies, which intersects in many ways with the study of Kurdish history.

In Chapter 5 (pp. 119-42), Harun Yilmaz studies "the Rise of Red Kurdistan", that is the Kurdish enclave at Laçin, in the first two decades of the Soviet Union. The title of this work is a little misleading as it is mainly focused on the development of Kurdish-language education in the SSR of Azerbaijan. Despite the proactive policies of the early Soviet state, the author explains that in effect, "primary education as well as publications in Kurdish remained an unfulfilled project until 1931" (p. 131). This was due to a combination of economic and cultural factors specific to Azerbaijani Kurds, as well as the convergence of pro-Russian and pro-Turkic sections inside the bureaucracy and state apparatus of the SSR of Azerbaijan. Even after a new push was given in 1930-31, the author concludes that if "in 1938, primary education in Kurdish did exist in some schools (...) its success was very limited" (p. 141). Arguing that "the Soviet minority policies can only be understood through All-Union, republican and regional levels", the

author tackles these three layers of complexity at once, which sometimes proves confusing. The article could have been better structured in this regard. However, this three-layered approach is also the strength of this study. The fact that the topic of Kurds in the former USSR is seldom treated in Kurdish studies outside of Russia only adds to the value of the article.

In the sixth chapter (pp. 143-57), Serhat Bozkurt studies the "continuities and discontinuities" in the settlement policies towards the Kurds of the late-Ottoman and early Republican eras. He specifically compares two constitutional documents, the Ordinance adopted in 1916 by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), and the 1934 law on settlement policies of the Republican government. The article also includes telegrams sent by Talat Pasha to the provinces about the operations in question. The comparison is clear and straightforward, even though more attention seems to have been devoted to continuities than discontinuities, which are only hinted at in the conclusion of the article. However, nothing is said of the practical application of the policies envisioned by the two documents: How many Kurds were actually relocated? Did they assimilate and if so, to what extent? To this effect, the author only makes vague and unsourced comments about the situation in present-day Ayntab, Maraş and Malatya. Furthermore, only sources in Turkish seem to have been used. A wider array of sources relevant to the subject might have enriched the study (see for example Üngör 2009; Schaller and Zimmerer 2009, among others). This is an informative but limited essay, which would have benefitted from a broader scope in terms of problematics and sources.

In Chapter 7 (pp. 158-74), Jordi Tejel analyses the cultural activities of prominent Kurdish intellectuals in exile and their relations with French authorities in mandatory Syria. The author contends that after the failure of the revolt of Ararat (1926-30), these intellectuals launched "a cultural Kurdish renaissance" on the Armenian model, thus operating a move back to the "intellectual activities of the Ottoman period" (p. 167). This was all congruent with the plans of French intelligence officers, who wished to use the Kurds to further French interests in the region (p. 165). The collaboration ended in 1936 with the signature of the Franco-Syrian treaty; however, further unofficial relations are also alluded to. The essay mainly relies on French intelligence reports and, to a lesser extent, articles published in French in the journal *Hawar*. The author could also have studied articles published in the Kurdish section of this journal, which seem to contradict the assumption that the new "discourse around Kurdish identity", relying on folklore and folk culture, was actually assimilated by the Kurdish intellectuals at that time. Indeed, the articles in Kurdish regularly treat such subjects as Kurdish written literature or Quranic interpretation, thus establishing a continuity with the Kurdish journals of the late-Ottoman era. This is an interesting article which could have given more space to Kurdish agency in the developments studied.

While this collection of articles might at first seem to lack a clear feeling of unity due to its large chronological spectrum, its main problematic – how to write the history of the Kurds in new ways – is really present throughout the book. In their various chapters, the authors endeavour to assess old questions in new ways, which proves to be a very stimulating approach. The book, however, would have benefitted from a more detailed introduction clearly linking together the different contributions. There are also editorial shortcomings, including numerous typographical errors and discrepancies in the transcription of proper names, even inside individual articles. This could have been avoided with more careful editorial work. Kurdish history is still a nascent field, in

which some historical periods have received more attention than others. In this respect, the wide chronological and thematical scope of this book is surely one of its strengths. With the many questions it raises, it stands as a starting point for further inquiry. It is hoped that more such projects will flourish in the coming years.

Sacha Alsancakli, La Sorbonne nouvelle – Paris 3, France

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