

THE KURDS IN A CHANGING MIDDLE EAST

HISTORY, POLITICS AND REPRESENTATION



Edited by **Faleh A. Jabar** and **Renad Mansour**

I.B. TAURIS

Faleh A. Jabar was Director of the Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies in Beirut and Research Fellow at the School of Politics and Sociology, Birkbeck College, University of London. His publications in English include: *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* (2003), *Tribes and Power in the Middle East* (2002), and *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologues* (2002). He wrote a number of books in Arabic as well as contributions to peer-reviewed edited collections and journals.

Renad Mansour is Research Fellow at The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House and the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani. He has previously been Lecturer of International Studies in the Faculty of Politics at Cambridge University and the Faculty of International Relations at the London School of Economics (LSE). He was a Senior Fellow at The Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies, Beirut.

‘A very timely, well-put together work bringing together the leading scholars in Kurdish Studies.

The essays carefully embed contemporary challenges of governing diversity within Kurdish history, identity and historiography. A must-read for scholars interested in the region as well as in the political aftermath of the unitary state model.’

– Fatma Müge Göçek, Professor of Sociology and Women’s Studies,
University of Michigan

THE KURDS IN A CHANGING MIDDLE EAST

History, Politics and Representation

EDITORS

FALEH A. JABAR AND RENAD MANSOUR

Volume I: 'Governing Diversity: The Kurds in a
New Middle East'

I.B. TAURIS

LONDON · NEW YORK

Published in 2019 by
I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd
London • New York
www.ibtauris.com

Copyright Editorial Selection © 2019 Faleh A. Jabar and Renad Mansour

Copyright Individual Chapters © 2019 Hamit Bozarslan, Martin van Bruinessen,
Michael Gunter, Faleh A. Jabar, Janet Klein, Michiel Leezenberg, Renad Mansour,
David Romano, and Sami Zubaida

The right of Faleh A. Jabar and Renad Mansour to be identified as the editors
of this work has been asserted by the editors in accordance with the Copyright,
Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or any part
thereof, may not be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system,
or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

References to websites were correct at the time of writing.

ISBN: 978 1 78453 991 7
eISBN: 978 1 78672 549 3
ePDF: 978 1 78673 549 2

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: available

Typeset in Garamond Three by OKS Prepress Services, Chennai, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain by T.J. International, Padstow, Cornwall

*This book is dedicated to the life and work of Iraqi sociologist
Faleb Abdul Jabbar, who passed away during its writing. He will be
remembered as a leading Arab and Iraqi thinker, activist, and teacher.*

أنجز هذا المشروع بأجزائه الخمسة بدعم مركز أبحاث التنمية العالمية، أوتاوا-كندا

The work involved in this and subsequent volumes was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Center, IDRC, Ottawa, Canada. Iraq Studies (IIST)
دراسات عراقية – معهد الدراسات الاستراتيجية

CONTENTS

<i>Note on Transliteration</i>	ix
<i>Note on Bibliographic References</i>	x
<i>Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction The Kurdish Moment and the Fate of the Unitary State in the Middle East <i>Faleh A. Jabar and Renad Mansour</i>	1
Part I New Society: The Kurds in a Changing Middle East	
1. New and Old Dynamics in the Construction of Kurdish Nationhood – Some Reflections <i>Faleh A. Jabar</i>	17
2. Problems and Outlooks of Kurdish Representation <i>Renad Mansour</i>	41
3. Segmentation of Political Parties in Underdeveloped Contexts – The Case of the Kurds <i>Gareth Stansfield</i>	68
4. The Rise of the White Kurds – An Essay in Regional Political Economy <i>Michiel Leezenberg</i>	86
5. Forms and Prospects of Kurdish Armed Struggle <i>David Romano</i>	118

Part II Old Society: Perennial Continuity

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 6. Tribes and Ethnic Identity | |
| <i>Martin van Bruinessen</i> | 141 |
| 7. Tribes and Politics | |
| <i>Hamit Bozarslan</i> | 171 |
| 8. Gender, Family, Patriarchy and Women | |
| <i>Sami Zubaida</i> | 185 |

Part III Reflections on the Historiography of the Kurds

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 9. A Critical Overview of Early British Kurdish Studies | |
| <i>Michael Gunter</i> | 205 |
| 10. Kurdish History – Not a Neutral Pursuit | |
| <i>Janet Klein</i> | 222 |
| <i>Contributor Biographies</i> | 244 |
| <i>Index</i> | 246 |

NOTE ON transliteration

This book draws on texts and interviews in English, Arabic, Turkish and in Kurmanji Kurdish. The geographical areas that it covers are also home to a variety of languages, some of which have been politicized due to proscriptions on their public use. Therefore, using one model of transliteration applicable to all place names and organizations has not been possible. As far as possible, places commonly referred to by their Arabic names have been transliterated according to a simplified use of the system employed by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (excluding the use of diacritical symbols). However, common spellings are employed to promote ease of understanding.

The *IJMES* model of transliteration is employed. Names of organizations are referred by their most commonly used name or acronym (see glossary of acronyms and abbreviations) so as to be the most recognizable and understandable to the reader. Where necessary or appropriate, both Arabic and Kurdish names are given. People's names are generally written as they themselves would have them transliterated.

NOTE ON BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Due to the current and changing nature of the subject matter, research for this book involved constant monitoring of events on the ground in many countries in the form of field research, respondents and through live news and opinions available on open-source and social-media outlets. Sources have been provided to verify facts which may not be widely known and to gauge the widest possible impression of opinions of people in these regions. These sources have been corroborated as far as possible through field observations, interviews and other open-source materials. News sources are cited within the endnotes, whilst other sources – including academic literature, publications by think tanks and organizations, political documents and interviews – are listed in the bibliographies.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party
AQI	Al Qaeda Iraq
DOS	US Department of State
FO	British Foreign Office
HDP	Peoples' Democratic Party
ICP	Iraqi Communist Party
IKF	Iraqi Kurdistan Front
IMK	Islamic Movement of Kurdistan
IOR	India Office Records
IS	Islamic State
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria / Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (Syria and Lebanon)
KCP	Kurdistan Conservative Party
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KDPI	Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran
KDP-I	Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan
KDP-S	Democratic Party of Syrian Kurdistan
KNA	Kurdistan National Assembly
Komala	Organization of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KSSE	Kurdish Students' Society in Europe
OSC	Omar Sheikhmous' Collection

PJAK	Free Life Party of Kurdistan
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD	Democratic Union Party
Rojava	Democratic Federation of Northern Syria
TIP	Workers' Party of Turkey
TOKI	Turkish Housing Development Agency
YPG	People's Protection Unit; military wing of the PYD in Syria

INTRODUCTION

THE KURDISH MOMENT AND THE FATE OF THE UNITARY STATE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Faleh A. Jabar and Renad Mansour

This is the first of five volumes in a grand project: Governing Diversity, the Kurds in the Middle East in the aftermath of the ‘Arab Spring’. The project in general has two aspects. The first tackles the basic general issues of Kurdish diversity in terms of the history, identity, party politics and sociology of Kurdish communities in four host countries; these aspects are examined in our present volume.

The second aspect embraces problems of representation, that is, concepts of group representation, tied to conceptions of identity and forms of action to achieve representation. It comprises concrete case studies, country by country, contextualized in the framework of current conditions and developments. These cases involve Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran in four successive and separate volumes.

Basic Themes in Volume I

In our present, first, volume the research teams selected a few major issues drawn from all or most of the case studies. Patriarchy and tribalism, for example, are relevant to all cases. So is the spread and typical fragmentation of modern party politics. The role of modern Kurdish business classes is examined although it is mostly evident in Turkey and

Iraq, much less so in Syria or Iran. Problems of representation, while having an abstract conceptual nature, appear in different forms at different locations in different times, and range from local autonomy to federalism; to confederacies; to full independence; or, beyond all these, to a new, multi-ethnic 'autonomous democracy' as in Rojava (the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria). History and identity, or early Kurdish studies in the Anglo-American tradition, are also among the topics examined that shed light on the early problems of identity.

In a sense, this first volume is an introductory note to what we consider to be the basic current issues of the Kurds and their quest for self-representation in four host countries in the Middle East (ME).

The list of such basic issues may well be expanded or abbreviated, and the range defined here is not and cannot be exhaustive. It starts with the examination of nation-nationalism and nation-building in a failed state, Iraq, and the Kurdish endeavour towards independence; but this and other issues, crucial as they are, require a thorough examination of the profound changes that in certain cases have transformed Kurdish societies since the turn of the millennium. This is best seen in the predominance of modern forms of organization and culture, which, nevertheless, do not exclude the impact of traditional forces – in fact, they overlap and interact. Urbanization, for example, reduced the weight of the rural-peasant grounds for mountain-based guerrilla warfare and strengthened the potential of urban protest, peaceful or violent. In the words of a veteran *peshmerga* (Kurdish guerrilla), 'through urban mass protests in Iraq [March 1991], we achieved in few weeks what we could not in a half-century of armed fighting in the mountains'.¹

The study of self-representation requires the examination of modern party politics as a set of ideological tools in expressing demands, organizing actions and serving as a medium of representation. Parties strive to obtain representation in federal/national institutions (parliaments, local governments) and deploy their candidates accordingly, but communities and localities in turn strive to be represented in the leadership or branches of these parties. No single party can claim to represent all segments of the Kurdish community. In this sense, modern political parties carry representation in a dual manner: from community to party structures, and from party to central institutions. One of the prominent features of all party politics is its peculiar fragmentation.

The expansion and role of modern middle-class strata – and, more importantly, business classes – is another factual theme to be considered. This may well apply to Turkey, where business classes have grown into political maturity, and Iraq, where another pattern of state–business alliances has been in the making. The question is in what way these sociological changes influence ethnic identity and the quest for representation.

The same question applies to the role of tribes, Sufi orders and traditional social segments in such pursuits of representation. Stronger observable inclinations towards ‘ethno-Kurdish-ness’ have been observed lately in the political leanings of tribal chieftains who had hitherto opted for cooperation with central authority. This will be seen in the cases of Turkey and Iraq.

The historical roots of self-ethnic-identity, and the first offshoots of British Kurdologist studies, may well serve as a general background.²

The Kurdish discourse of group identity in the quest for self-representation has had to face the centralist–nationalist rebuttal, that is, that of the ‘dominant national group’, which denies ethno-cultural diversity. In its long history, this discourse sustained continuous change – from establishing a monarchy in Sulaimaniya (1920s) to founding an independent republic (Mahabad, in the 1940s) or seeking local autonomy in Iraq as of the 1960s, moving to federalism or con-federalism. The discourse, while ethno-linguistic and purely Kurdish, has shifted in recent years.

The Unitary State in Question

The Sisyphean efforts on part of the Kurds to achieve their legitimate representation clearly testify to the fact that the unitary state model constructed in 1917 is not only faltering in 2017 but has, in fact, failed when it comes to governing diversity.

Civil wars, and the declining reach of the central government testify to this failure: civil war in Syria resulted in the disintegration of the unitary state as of 2012; much earlier, the 1991 Gulf War ended with the ethnic division of Iraq and the subsequent mutation of the unitary state into federalism. The ultimate fate of the unitary state in Syria is still shrouded in uncertainty. Sensing the tide of change around them, the unitary states of Iran and Turkey are fiercely resisting the turning

away from their long-cherished, monolithic centralism; the demands for reform to allow for pluralism in these two countries may seem weak or dormant at the moment, but they continue pulsating beneath the surface. We may note that the Sykes–Picot and post-World War I arrangements are partly unravelling; the new arrangements, however, are still in limbo.

In Iraq and Syria, the drivers working at present to propel the unitary state in the Mashriq into the abyss of an uncertain future are also sending the Kurds on an uncertain trajectory. Perhaps the ethno-linguistic approach to Kurdish identity politics might invoke the notorious problem of cultural markers that make or break a national community: language. The old Wilsonian principles of self-determination were couched in the language of geographical borders of countries rather than the abstract norms of specific linguistic or cultural markers of ‘nation-ness’. In anticipation of the final fate of the unitary state, the Kurds face the same problems that their Arab or Turkish oppressors did: what to do with the non-dominant, non-Kurdish groups that share their geography? One way is to manufacture a new territorial identity bereft of ethnicity: the ‘Kurdistani’ as an inhabitant of a Kurdistan region. Cultural-linguistic ethnicity has been the marker of Kurdish nationalism, and it continues to be the marker of territorial disputes vis-à-vis the Iraqi federal government; however, it has been discontinued in governing diversity inside the KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government) or Rojava. In short, ethnic identity is being sacrificed to accommodate non-Kurds in the KRG or in Rojava (Syria). Such a prospect may face the Kurds in Turkey and Iran once their right to some form of autonomy is recognized. This is one of the many paradoxes of governing diversity in action. What comes next is a question that we strive to answer in the next four volumes.

Kurds and the Arab Spring

When this project was conceived at the beginning of the second decade of the new millennium, the Kurds were hardly present on most maps of the Middle East. In Syria and Iran, the Kurdish question seemed dormant. In Turkey, the HDP (People’s Democratic Party) was actually under the wing of the ruling Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party) and mediating semi-clandestine negotiations between the

Turkish Government and the PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party). The only genuine exception was Iraq, where Kurds had the privilege of enjoying a unique form of federalism that verged in certain areas, such as the military, airports, and representation in embassies, on confederacy.

When the project was completed in August 2017, the Kurds seemed to have re-emerged at the heart of Middle East politics. In Iraq, a referendum for independence (25 September 2017) was conducted in defiance of native, regional and international powers and actors; in Syria, the Kurds have a vital role in the global war against IS (Islamic State), as in the administration of Rojava, in the framework of 'autonomous democracy' experimented with by the country's leading Kurdish party, the PYD (Democratic Union Party). Their contribution to the liberation of Raqqa, the capital of the IS 'Caliphate', on 17 October 2017, was a phenomenal achievement. In Iran, mass Kurdish demonstrations erupt periodically into cultural protests or in support of their Iraqi fellow-Kurds' referendum; in Turkey, the electoral success scored by the HDP in June 2015 was remarkable. This upward trajectory, however, soon turned downward. In Turkey, the HDP was disfranchised, its leaders kept behind bars in the wake of a cruel anti-Kurdish campaign. In Iraq, the referendum backfired, dividing the Kurds, with Erbil pitted against Sulaimaniya (i.e., Barzani vis Talabani blocs or centres of power); the disputed areas controlled by the KRG were soon lost and a confrontational atmosphere prevailed. Airports in Erbil and Sulaimaniya were shuttered, border outlets under the KRG control were retaken by the federal authority.

The suggested ties between Kurds and Arabs via the 'Arab Spring' may seem a historical anachronism, or even an aberration. In reality, the relationship is profound and complex.

The Arab Spring was a new, additional catalyst to Kurdish yearnings for self-representation. While it was an 'Arab' phenomenon in general, it had clear direct or indirect links with Kurdish aspirations in Syria and Iraq – and, successively, in Turkey and Iran. Kurds in Syria were directly involved in their country's protest movement for democracy; so were their PKK Turkish mentors.

Looking at the Middle East through an ethnically divided lens that separates one group from the other is a naive way of thinking about the area. This is a cultural region that shares much in common, exactly like those of Eastern Europe and Latin America in the 1980s. More often than

not, we see an actual or potential 'spillover' effect in the Middle East. This is born of the region's history in the twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first.

Atatürk, for example, who emerged in 1920s' Turkey as a military leader-hero, was soon emulated by generals in Iran and Iraq (in the 1920s and 1930s) and, later on, even by Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt (1952); the last-named, in turn, was taken as an example in the Arab world during the later series of military takeovers of power in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya and Algeria. Or look at the aim of the *coup d'état* organized by the giant oil companies to remove the radical prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran: to prevent any spillover effect from his oil nationalism. Or, again, look at the Middle East itself immediately after the Iranian 'Islamic' revolution of 1979 that helped political Islam to spread more forcefully.

The Arab Spring brought the Kurds to the forefront of events in Syria and enhanced their position in Iraq. And both emboldened Kurdish groups in Turkey to run in the 2014–15 elections independently, the reactions notwithstanding.

Arab Spring protestors shattered fear of the Establishment and called for genuine reform to end the single-party system. Even the civil wars that subsequently erupted, or the rise of Islamic State as a terrorist menace, brought forth the Kurds in Syria and the KRG in Iraq as reliable allies to fight against terrorism and dictatorship. The KRG's peshmerga forces stood fast and fought back around the cities of Mosul, Kirkuk and Erbil. In Syria, the armed self-protection units of the PYD, an extension of Abdullah Öcalan's Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), took up arms and defended their major towns, including Kobani in the Aleppo Governorate among others, and created a self-organized federal domain inside the predominantly Kurdish areas of Syria, known in Kurdish as Rojava. Washington and its allies support both of these forces politically, militarily and financially.

The Turkey-based PKK has guerrilla groups in the northern parts of Iraq; they moved these fighters to defend Sinjar, the Yezidi district that had been overrun by IS, expanding the PKK's influence into Syria and Iraq.

The 'IS factor' drove the militarization of Kurds in Syria and enhanced their militarization in Iraq, whereas the heavy-handed crackdown on Kurdish peaceful institutional politics in Turkey has

invited violent reactions from the PKK beginning in mid-2015 and continuing to this day.

Representing the Kurdish Communities

The old right of nations to statehood, the Wilsonian formula that proved difficult to fit onto the region in 1918, still faced grave difficulties in 2017. When the one-nation/one-state formula is embedded in ethno-linguistic criteria, its model immediately creates contradictions. With the existence of some 8,000 linguistic groups worldwide and less than 200 polities at present, the ethno-language form of nation-statehood becomes the exception rather than the rule. Multicultural, that is, multilingualistic, states have been and continue to be the real, actual model in the Middle East. The success of ethno-linguistic nationalism has been limited worldwide. That such a pattern had scored success in Europe may have been the result of the spread of industrial capitalism, with its unifying markets and cultural forces. Still, we have counter examples – Catalonia was the latest case. Beyond Europe, uniformity of language did not and could not bring about a pan-Latin American union along the lines of Arab or Slavic unions.

The Middle East was, and to some extent still is, bereft of such modern unifying forces or drivers of integration. In the Middle East, ethno-nationalism could never override parochial localism, anchored as it was in various forms of social networks, tribes, clans, extended families, guilds and Sufi orders, overlapping with religion and sect. The discourses flowing from these networks competed against that of nationalism in many intriguing ways.

Long before the Kurds, most Arabs discovered that language and history are insufficient to cement or construct, let alone hold, a new, legitimate, all-representative national entity or central polity.

If the mono-ethnic political pattern proved difficult to sustain peacefully, democracy is also not enough to sustain the viability of local autonomy, federalism or con-federalism, which are contingent on a non-existent recognition of pluralism. But where should one look for it in the Mashriq, the Levant?

When it comes to rejecting pluralism, Turkey, the oft-cited most ‘advanced democratic’ example in the region, currently provides a case of the breakdown of democratic checks and balances and the rise of

authoritarianism. A simple move by the country's only enfranchised Kurdish party, the HDP, to obtain independent representation in the June 2015 elections invited fierce 'centralist–nationalistic' reactions on the part of the ruling Islamic party, the AKP. Furthermore, civil peace in Turkey broke down immediately. In Syria, a single-party, authoritarian-patrimonial system is still fighting to maintain the status quo, while both the secular and Islamic Syrian opposition are alien to the very idea of pluralism. The prospects indeed look grim, yet opportunities may well exist.

What is the fate of the current Kurdish quest for representation?

For Kurds as for others, representation is complex and involves multilayered forms that evolve over time and space and mutate with socio-economic and cultural configurations. Problems of representation are integrated with issues of identity, ethnic or otherwise, and, by extension, territoriality whenever and wherever autonomy, federalism or independence is on the agenda.

Various Kurdish social groups and entities have been wavering between full sovereign nationhood or federalism, decentralization or local autonomy and general participation or limited privileges. The radical case is that of Iraq, where independence is on the agenda.

There are also various sundry conceptions regarding the ways and means of achieving this objective. On the radical side are direct military rebellion (as in the 1920s), the establishment of a Kurdish polity in defiance of central power (as with the Mahabad Republic in 1946) and the reliance on a mountain-based, peasant-backed, guerrilla warfare insurgency – the last-named almost a continuous element of Kurdish folklore since early 1960s in Iraq, the 1980s in Turkey and, for a short period, in Iran right after the Islamic Revolution (1979–80).

On the opposite side, Kurds either joined the *Fursan* (knights) of Salahudin – pro-government paramilitary Kurdish battalions in Iraq (1963–91) – or the pro-government village-protection units in Turkey (1985–present). This, again, partakes of age-old folklore stemming from the *Fursan Hamidiya* of the late nineteenth century onwards. These counter examples to radical tactics indicate a political choice of cooperating with central authorities in exchange for accommodation and local privileges. Many such strategies are still alive, but hardly in a peaceful symbiosis with each other.

Since 1990, however, new trends in the Kurdish quest for representation have been at work: a turn towards urban protest against central governments or mostly urban constitutional–institutional politics, i.e., the creation of legal political parties to achieve representation in parliaments.

Political analysis or historiography usually links these new trends to the defeat of Iraq's Ba'ath regime in the 1991 Gulf War, which allowed for a de facto Kurdish state to emerge, or to the arrest of the historical leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, followed by Ankara's decentralization reforms. These political events were important; the shift, however, had more to do with profound socio-economic, cultural and demographic change, which weakened the very pillars of the old wisdom of peasant-backed, mountain-harboured guerrilla fighters. And this is an aspect of Kurdish representation that has not in the least been analyzed thus far.

A New Kurdish Society

A new society has been evolving, and with it the Kurdish community has also been mutating. Much of this change would meticulously explain why institutional politics, peaceful by definition, has gathered pace despite setbacks. But how do Kurds perceive or understand the representation of their community (either externally vis-à-vis the central government or internally vis-à-vis ruling Kurdish actors)? Internally, in addition, implies the representation of non-dominant ethnic and religious groups within predominantly Kurdish regions. These are not abstract questions but rather practical considerations in Iraq, Syria and Turkey, and they will appear on the agenda in Iran once the Kurds there come out of dormancy.

The Kurdish moment, just like the so-called Arab Spring, testifies to the need to reform the parochial nature of the century-old unitary state. However, the 'Kurdish Spring' may end up looking like a twin of its Arab counterpart, which in most cases thus far has resulted in dysfunctional states. In Syria, the Kurdish Spring could prove short-lived once the Islamic State threat is removed; in Turkey, the 'Kurdish Winter' is contingent on the outcome of the federal project in Syria and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's consolidation of power; and in Iraq, the Kurdish polity, the KRG, may continue to linger in the

current crisis of representation, under which the presidency and the parliament are locked in stalemate.

Lastly:

Volume II: Syria is to follow, with Volume III: Turkey after that. Volumes IV and V, Iran and Iraq, conclude this project, which will have covered a civil war in Syria, political violence in Turkey, a crisis in Iraq and protests in Iran.

Structure of the Book

This will be as follows:

Part I. New Society: The Kurds in a Changing Middle East

Chapter 1: *Faleh A. Jabar*, New and Old Dynamics in the Construction of Kurdish Nationhood – Some Reflections

Kurds have long suffered from the construction of the nation state in Iraq; now, they face similar problems in constructing their own nationhood. This is a historical paradox, in which two models have been and will continue to be at play. There is firstly the German tradition of ‘inherent’, that is, non-voluntary or coercive affiliation, and secondly the French tradition of free-willed togetherness. These two traditions, an authoritarian versus a liberal conception of nationhood, are in conflict. Nations do not grow naturally but are the products of meticulous engineering, through which politics, culture and economy are intertwined. Failure to comprehend such complexities as those involved in nation-building has the potential to break rather than make nations.

Chapter 2: *Renad Mansour*, Problems and Outlooks of Kurdish Representation

The Kurds have long yearned to have representation. Now they enjoy it in Iraq and are seeking to enhance it in Turkey. Mansour tackles the question of representation by focusing on the claims to legitimacy that Kurdish leaders in Iraq make in order to speak on behalf of their constituents when governing at home, when negotiating with the central government or when practising diplomacy abroad. The analysis looks at four time periods: post-World War I and the creation of the

Iraqi state; 1946–75 and Mullah Mustafa Barzani's united nationalist movement in Iraq and other countries; 1975–91 and the emergence of the PUK as a challenger to the KDP; and, finally, 1991–present and the institutionalization of the Kurdish political movement in Iraq through the establishment of governmental bodies like the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Mansour concludes that Kurdish leaders believe that it is important to employ a 'toolbox' of intersecting claims based on local popularity, effective control, dynasty and international support in order to prove their legitimacy as Kurdish leaders at home and abroad.

Chapter 3: Gareth Stansfield, Segmentation of Political Parties in Underdeveloped Contexts – The Case of the Kurds

Stansfield argues that today's segmentation and factionalism in Kurdish politics is neither unusual nor static, nor inherently 'bad'. Presenting a typology of segmentation that includes spatial, ideological, socio-economic and generational factors, he outlines Kurdish attempts to overcome schisms in the pursuit of greater representation and autonomy vis-à-vis their central governments. Moreover, his distinctive approach forms an analysis of the sociological context underlining the development of political parties and political life in Kurdistan to the present day. Ultimately, he asks whether the Kurdish history of segmentation is likely to repeat itself or whether the Kurds will rise above internal differences to become, for the first time, more than the sum of their parts.

Chapter 4: Michiel Leezenberg, The Rise of the White Kurds – An Essay in Regional Political Economy

Leezenberg offers updated field research on the new Kurdish business classes in Iraq and Turkey. He uses the term 'White Kurds' to refer to this new class. His argument is twofold. First, in Iraq, more than 2,000 Kurdish nouveau-riche millionaires have emerged and are moving beyond their old radical discourse and pursuing strictly business relations with the ruling political elite. Second, in Turkey, the business class is divided into two parts; those in the predominately Kurdish areas freely use their Kurdish identity in their dealings with local development projects, and those in Istanbul and other predominately ethnic-Turkish cities perceive their Kurdish identity as a liability in commerce. These new findings have major political implications for how the Kurds are represented in both constituencies.

Chapter 5: David Romano, Forms and Prospects of Kurdish Armed Struggle

Romano examines the recent Kurdish strategic shift from rural guerrilla warfare to peaceful urban politics in Turkey, and the institutional politics that has been established in Iraq since 1991. At the heart of both cases is the socio-economic and cultural change that has almost emptied the countryside and augmented the dense urban presence of an active community. Is this shift a final turn to peaceful politics or simply a conjectural moment, one that actually implies rather than excludes the adoption of urban warfare? The examination is not only empirical but also theoretical, as it invokes theories on conflict and collective violence.

Part II. Old Society: Perennial Continuity

Chapter 6: Martin van Bruinessen, Tribes and Ethnic Identity

Van Bruinssen provides a *tour d'horizon* of tribes and the evolution of ethnic identities across the Kurdish areas in the region. The competition between ethnic-identity discourse, on the one hand, and the kinship ideology of tribes, on the other hand, is problematized by another discourse: Sufism. An interplay of Sufi orders turning into tribes, political parties or socio-military organizations continues to impact on sociopolitical life in all Kurdish areas. Yet, the creation of a central administration in Iraq has resulted in the strengthening of bureaucratic, rather than tribal or Sufi, links.

Chapter 7: Hamit Bozarslan, Tribes and Politics

Bozarslan argues that Kurdish tribes are ushering in a new phase of their existence, characterized by the pursuance of ethno-national politics. This is a break from their old, changing loyalties, serving the powers that be or steering away from any manifestations of Kurdishness. This change from conformism to activism, observed since the beginning of the new millennium, is the subject matter of this socio-anthropological examination of tribes and tribal politics. The historical background is linked with current conditions, dissecting the drivers behind this long, twisting trajectory of tribal political alliances. In many ways, it supplements Bruinessen's account.

Chapter 8: Sami Zubaida, Gender, Family, Patriarchy and Women

Zubaida examines the traditional facets of Kurdish societies. He argues that the Kurdish regions share in the diversity of other Middle Eastern societies with respect to issues of gender, women, patriarchy and reform. They are diverse by dint of region, class, politics and religiosity. In the KRG, for example, the political class tries to present an image to the world of a liberal and secular government, in contrast to the religious authoritarianism of the rest of Iraq and the region. At the same time, the political classes, as well as the related military and police, are involved in complex power relations, patronage and tribal kinships and communal and religious networks – all of which grant immunity from the law for powerful persons and groups. Rapid economic development and the rise of business elites overlapping with the political class and leading families, widespread corruption in politics and business, gross inequalities in wealth and power and limited opportunities of employment for the region's youth have all contributed to the emergence of new tensions, frustrations and subjectivities. These include fear of loss of control by the patriarchal order and the family tensions and crises that produce heightened violence, killings and the more numerically important suicides and burnings. The cases of the Turkish PPK and the Syrian PYD, however, put this advocacy into practice within their own ranks.

Part III. Reflections on the Historiography of the Kurds

Chapter 9: Michael Gunter, A Critical Overview of Early British Kurdish Studies

Gunter traces the how, when and who of the initiation of Kurdish studies in the Anglo-Saxon tradition during the first decades of the twentieth century. The earlier generation of Kurdish studies, in a post-World War I context, comprised government employees and intelligence agents, and as such they contributed to the literature in many ways that have not been equalled let alone surpassed by subsequent generations of researchers. Indeed, a review of the work of these British political officers would pay rich dividends to new scholars seeking to study and write about the Kurds. Nonetheless, the past 50 years have seen a veritable explosion of studies, some based on innovative political and sociological theories and frameworks that have enabled an opening-up of new scholarly horizons on the Kurdish issue.

Chapter 10: Janet Klein, Kurdish History – Not a Neutral Pursuit

Klein employs Eric Hobsbawm's adage of 'historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan are to heroin addicts: we supply the essential raw material for the market', in order to examine the role of Kurdish historians and academics in the nationalist struggle. Today, the pursuit of Kurdish history is thriving. However, from the late Ottoman period, when Kurdish researchers joined other groups in the pursuit of documenting their 'national' history, to the present day, those who research Kurdish history have been faced with roadblocks erected by states, individuals and institutions who believe that the study of the Kurds somehow constitutes a threat. Accordingly, these obstacles have included restricted access to research fields and archives, the persecution of scholars, and the banning of books and articles. The newest generation of scholars of Kurdish history is nonetheless showing promise in navigating both ongoing obstacles and new opportunities for innovative research.

Notes

1. Interview with Mla Bakhtiar, Sulaimaniya, September 2015. Mla Bakhtia, a veteran PUK leader and Peshmerga, is currently a member of the PUK's Political Bureau.
2. The focus on the British (overlooking the rich Russian or French input) is understandable in the light of the decisive role that Great Britain played as the dominant colonial power in the politics of the Middle East before, during and immediately after World War I.