



**Hakan Ozoglu.** *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004. xv + 186 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7914-5993-5.

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## Ferment and Fetters in the Study of Kurdish Nationalism

Identifying Kurdish nationalism as “one of the most explosive and critical predicaments in the Middle East,” the author notes that “the subject regrettably remains poorly studied” (p. 1). The book was, therefore, conceived as “an ambitious attempt to free the study of Kurdish nationalism from its current marginal position and to bring it into mainstream scholarship in Middle Eastern Studies” by examining “the issue in the context of the Ottoman Empire” (p. 2).

This work is, in the words of the author, a study of “the development of Kurdish identity and its culmination to Kurdish nationalism” (p. 3), a transition from pre- or proto-nationalist group identities into full-fledged nationalism. Its geographical focus is on the Kurds of the Ottoman Empire and those who, after its collapse, were incorporated into the Turkish Republic. Chronologically, it focuses on the late Ottoman period, WWI and early Republican years. The approach is both “social and political history” (p. 15), although the two historiographic traditions have developed in different terrains and in oppositional terms.

The book begins with an introductory chapter on theoretical, conceptual, methodological and organizational issues followed by discussions of the evolution of Kurdish “group identity” (chapter 2), the “Ottoman Empire and Kurdish tribalism since the sixteenth century” (chapter 3), and Kurdish “protonationalism” in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (chapter 4). The main topic

of the book is covered in chapter 5, which deals with the politics of the nobility in the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan (Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti, founded in 1918), a “political organization that was actively involved in defining and promoting Kurdish identity” (p. 14). The last chapter offers conclusions and suggestions for further research.

Ozoglu has produced a well-written, valuable study of a period in the history of Kurdish nationalism, which is now receiving more research attention.[1] The author has relied on evidence from diverse sources such as Ottoman and British archives, interviews, memoirs and Turkish language primary and secondary literature. The work is, however, constrained by the absence of theoretical frameworks that might turn it into the ambitious contribution envisaged by the author. I assess the book by placing it in the context of theories of nationalism and the growing literature on Kurdish nationalism.

### The Paucity and Powers of Theory

Ozoglu begins his study by reviewing “the scholarship on nationalism” in order to arrive at a “working definition,” and situate the study “within the theoretical spectrum of nationalism” (p. 3). However, his voyage into the realm of theory does not take him beyond the conventional binarism of the civic/ethnic nationalism. A brief elaboration will be in order.

Until the mid-1990s, studies of Kurdish national-

ism were, with very few exceptions, not informed by theoretical insight on nations and nationalisms. Early works, written in the Orientalist tradition by, among others, Basile Nikitine, Cecil Edmonds, Pierre Rondot, and Thomas Bois, did not touch theory, although like all a-theoretical studies, they had their own underlying assumptions about nations and nationalism. The first major work on the history of Kurdish nationalism, Wadie Jwaideh's doctoral dissertation, was also not preoccupied with theory.[2] The author of this comprehensive study was personally familiar with the development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq. Widely used by students of Kurdish history, it appeared in Turkish translation in 1999, and, was published posthumously 2006.[3] The earliest theory conscious work by Serge Gantner was simply ignored.[4]

The anthropological literature, based on fieldwork, was more interested in studying tribalism, nomadism, and kinship systems than depicting the Kurds as a nation in the making. One exception was Martin van Bruinessen and, more recently, Christopher Houston[5]. Although Soviet works treated the Kurds as a nation, they were often content with making a few references to Lenin and Marx in order to get published and, at the same time, evade theoretical issues, even those permissible within the official range of debate.[6]

While a-theoretical studies continue to be produced by both historians and political scientists, one expects that the introduction of theoretical insight into studies of Kurdish nationalism since the 1990s would initiate a rupture in this largely "Orientalist" and positivist tradition.[7] In my assessment, however, there is yet no breakthrough in part because theory itself has turned into fetters. The received wisdom, in theoretically inclined studies, is the well-known distinction between two types of nations and nationalisms—civic and ethnic (one is political, the other cultural). Dualisms such as rational/emotional, liberal/illiberal, and universalistic/particularistic go on and on, leading to the ideological claim that one is bad and the other good.

Although the ethnic/civic dualism has been effectively critiqued by Marxist, feminist, anti-racist, and, even, some liberal theories, students of Kurdish nationalism ignore this body of knowledge. Many are enchanted by the simplistic claims of this paradigm, which is, itself a product of nationalism, and faithfully serves the nationalist cause.

Today, based on the centuries-long history of actual civic nations, anti-racist theory sees the modern, civic nation-state as a racially constructed entity.[8] At the

same time, Marxist theory claims that the legal equality of citizens (equality before the law regardless of ethnic or other belongings), although indispensable to both bourgeois and socialist democracies, reproduces rather than eliminates the unequal distribution of racial, ethnic, or linguistic power.[9] Feminist theory makes a similar claim about gender relations. The civic nation is gendered: it is a patriarchal institution, which (re)produces male domination.[10] Marxist theory emphasizes the class nature of nation(alism): historically, it is a bourgeois formation that (re)produces the capitalist order. Even some non-Marxist and non-feminist advocates of democracy challenge the old dualism, and argue that ethnic and civic nations overlap in both theory and practice[11]; others identify the civic nation as a "myth"[12], while some theorize it as a phenomenon with a "dark side." The "dark side" of the civic nation includes a long list of practices, which makes it difficult if not impossible to distinguish from the ethnic nation: national chauvinism, racism, xenophobia, eugenics, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.[13]

It seems, however, that none of these theoretical advances would alert students of Kurdish nationalism to the limitations of the dualism. Fascination with it is all round. Thus, if the Kurdish case was identified as "nationalism" until the late 1980s, it is now labeled "ethnonationalism", as if state nationalisms such as "Turkish," "Iranian," or "Syrian" are either non-ethnic or less so.[14] For instance, anthropologist-historian Bruinessen, in contrast with his earlier work, identifies the Kurdish case as "ethnonationalism." [15] Simplistic as it may seem, the term is used as a synonym for non-state nationalisms (note the title of Bruinessen's 2000 book *Kurdish Ethnonationalism versus Nation-Building States*). [16] Kurdish nationalism does not, of course, neatly square with the ideal, good nationalism, and, as a result, those who dream of "civil"-izing it engage in strategies such as labeling it as a case of "nationalists without nationalism" or, even, "'nationalismless' nationalism". [17] Others depict it as "pastoral nationalism." [18]

Unlike most students of Kurdish nationalism, Ozoglu is aware that the ethnic/civic dualism does not adequately account for the Kurdish case. He outlines two positions on the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism: one treats them as distinct and incompatible (Eric Hobsbawm, Ernst Gellner, etc.) while the other combines them into one (Walker Connor, Anthony Smith, etc.). He notes that nationalism and ethnicity should not be theorized as mutually exclusive entities, and quotes Connor's use of "the two terms, nationalism and ethnonationalism,

as virtual synonyms” (p. 8). However, instead of discarding the dualistic framework, Ozoglu works within it: in his own words, he “carefully...takes an eclectic position and subscribes to several of different points of view” (p. 9). He notes that his book “fits better into the context provided by the cultural constructionists (he mentions Ernest Renan and Benedict Anderson), but further contends that the concept of ethnicity is deeply embedded in nationalism” (p. 7).

However, theoretical eclecticism does not help the author avoid some of the pitfalls of the dualism. Nationalism and nationhood are tied to statehood. Pre-nationalist Kurdistan or Kurdish identity became nationalist only when Kurds, or rather Kurdish notables, began to demand secession or, minimalistically, autonomy (see below). He offers a “working definition” for his approach to Kurdish nationalism:

“Kurdish nationalism” refers to an intellectual and political movement that is based mainly (though not entirely) upon two premises—“the belief in a consistent Kurdish identity, which is rooted in ancient history; and the conviction of an unalienable right for self-determination in a historic Kurdish homeland or territory (p. 10).

I will try to demonstrate that this definition blurs pre-nationalist and nationalist politics in spite of the fact that the right to self-determination is a hallmark of modern nationalism.

#### Making Sense of the Practice of Kurdish Nationalism

The main contribution of Ozoglu, emphasized throughout the book and in the blurb on its back cover, is not theoretical, although it is not difficult to pinpoint the ways in which theoretical assumptions constrain his methods of data gathering and analysis. According to the author,

Contrary to certain claims that the Ottoman state’s frustrating policies paved the way for the emergence of Kurdish nationalism, which in turn helped destroy the Ottoman Empire, my research suggests that it was the disintegration of the Ottoman state, one of the longest-lived empires in world history, that contributed to the emergence of Kurdish nationalism (p. 118; see also p. 69).

Here, Ozoglu addresses a claim by historians, mostly of Turkish nationalist persuasions, who assess the role of nationalist movements as one of destruction of the empire. This is hardly a sophisticated argument or insight. The fall could not be but the outcome of the interplay of

a host of contradictions within the empire and between it and other, external, forces. No doubt, the nationalist movements of the subject peoples in the Balkans, Arab territories, Armenia and Kurdistan constituted one significant factor, i.e., an internal contradiction, which converged with external conflicts such as the European wars on the “sick man of Europe.” In fact, the birth of (Ottoman) Turkish nationalism should also be considered a contributing factor. As an alternative to the two claims (“nationalisms overthrew the empire,” and “the fall of the empire created nationalisms”), one may argue that nationalist movements, both Turkish and non-Turkish, emerged as part of the evolution of these societies in the latter part of the nineteenth century; their projects ranging from democratization to constitutionalism to autonomy to secession, contributed to the disintegration process and were, in turn, bolstered by it. If the claim challenged by Ozoglu is not an illuminating insight on late Ottoman history, his own alternative, shaped by that problematization, can hardly do better.

Neither does the book offer a breakthrough in our understanding of the rise of Kurdish nationalism. The author argues, properly, that the first history of the Kurds, *Sherefname*, written by Sharaf Khan (Sherefhan), a Kurdish prince in late sixteenth century, and the major literary work, *Mem u Zin*, written by Ahmad-e Khani (Hani) a century later, were not products of nationalism (pp. 27-33), and “it was only after the penetration of the Western concept of nationalism into the Kurdish community early in the twentieth century that *Mem u Zin* became a monument of nationalist literature for the Kurds, and mobilized them politically” (p. 33). “Compared to Sherefhan,” he continues, “Ahmed-i Hani was more resentful of Safavid and Ottoman rule in the region, and his poem calls forcefully for Kurdish self-rule. ? erefhan’s perception of Kurdish society, on the other hand, seems to be closer to modern Kurdish identity than that of Hani” (ibid.). This claim is, however, inconsistent with the author’s explanatory framework, which equates modern (Kurdish) nationalist identity with secessionism (p. 78). One may argue, by way of an alternative analysis, that Sharaf Khan advocated the system of principalities though he also complained about the lack of unity among Kurdish rulers, while Khani insisted on the unification of the principalities under a single Kurdish monarch, who would ensure Kurdish independence. Although both visions were clearly those of the feudal society of Kurdistan, Khani’s views are more appealing to contemporary nationalists because of his problematization of Kurdish suffering under Ottoman and Safavid rule as a question of

the lack of a unified independent Kurdish state. It would be appropriate, therefore, to claim that a platform of independence per se cannot be considered the hallmark of nationalist politics.

Moving to the end of the era of principalities in mid-nineteenth century, the author treats, appropriately, the two revolts of Bedir Khan Pasha, 1847, and Sheikh Ubeydullah, 1880-81, as non-nationalist. This is in spite of the fact that the former defended its semi-independent principality and the latter engaged in a secessionist revolt. In order to disqualify them as nationalists, he has to call into play other, more relevant, features which may distinguish between nationalism and non-nationalism. However, his theoretical framework, or rather the absence of one, constrains his analysis; this is a problem that runs like a thread throughout the book. He notes, correctly, that Ubeydullah's ideal Kurdish state was a principality within the Ottoman Empire much like the one Bedir Khan Pasha was defending in 1847. While his revolt became a symbol of nationalist struggle among twentieth century Kurdish nationalists, he argues, it was "more like a transtribal revolt" and "it seems very unlikely that the participants (who at one point included some Nestorian Christians) in his revolt were motivated by nationalist designs" (p. 76). Instead of distinguishing their project as one of feudal statehood, Ozoglu refers to these two revolts as "militarist," and thus fails, on the one hand, to distinguish between militarism and armed revolt, and, on the other, to see the close ties that bind nationalism to militarism (e.g., p. 84); Kemalist nationalism is a case in point. By way of an alternative analysis, I contend that the two revolts were not nationalist because they aimed at the retention (Bedir Khan) and formation (Ubeydullah) of feudal mini-states none of which had any semblance to a modern state with elected, representative government, citizenship, the rule of law, separation of powers, etc. Both projects treated the majority population, the peasants, as *ra'iyats*, subjects, rather than citizens, and Ubeydullah would have opted for a theocratic regime.

Ozoglu does not make distinctions between tribalism and feudalism, and although he refers to the nobility as a "class," he lacks a theory of social classes and, even more debilitating, his class is not located in class societies or socio-economic formations such as feudalism or capitalism. Failing to distinguish between tribes and feudal socio-economic formations, he treats principalities as tribal formations. However, Kurdish society and principalities were very complex systems in which feudalism, tribalism, nomadism, urbanism, trade, and commerce co-existed in conflict and unity. Evliya Chelebi's descrip-

tion of his stay in the capital of Bitlis principality in 1655 and 1656 confirms this complexity.[19] The absence of an adequate theory of class and socio-economic formations leads to another shortcoming: he mentions in passing, but does not use it as an analytical framework, that some sheikhs (sufis, in his words, or leaders of the *tariqats*, i.e., religious orders) like Ubeydullah were members of the landowning class. If this was the case, the replacement of khans by religious leaders could not be a displacement of the land-owning class which aspired for a regime of principalities (p. 118).

The author then moves to the late nineteenth century, when the era of principalities was over, due to Ottoman and Iranian centralization policies, and part of the Kurdish nobility had left or was forced to leave Kurdistan, and relocated in Istanbul, and other major cities of the empire. Looking for a precise starting point for Kurdish nationalism (e.g., p. 117), Ozoglu finds it neither in the 1880 revolt of Sheikh Ubeydullah nor the Kurdish cultural and political activism of the 1890s-1914 (pp. 77-78), even though the latter is a period in which the first Kurdish newspaper had appeared in Cairo (1897), and, in the wake of the Young Turk revolution of 1908, the first Kurdish cultural-political groups with their journalism had emerged.

The author examines the activities of Kurd Teavun ve Terakki Cemiyeti, the Society for the Mutual Aid and Progress of Kurdistan (SMPK), formed in 1909, which was "one of the earliest Kurdish cultural organizations that brought together different Kurdish notable families" (p. 78). It also launched a journal, *Kurd Teavun ve Terakki Gazetesi (Magazine of SMPK)*, which published articles, in Kurdish and Turkish, about Kurdish history, politics, and literature, and opened schools for Kurdish children in Istanbul (pp. 79-80). However, the author argues that it "had no nationalist dimension" (p. 80), and was, rather, "a sociocultural organization that exhibited the characteristics of the 'protonationalist' evolution of many ethnic groups in Europe and the Middle East" (p. 79).

If the SMPK and its founding nobility did not qualify, by the beginning of WWI, as nationalists, the book treats them as architects of Kurdish nationalism when, by the end of the war, they established Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti, the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan (SAK). Ozoglu emphasizes that the "founders of the SAK were the same Kurdish notables prominent in the earlier Kurdish organizations" (p. 81). If this is the case, how can this nobility suddenly transform, in the absence of a visible change in their social base or ideology, into

a jack-in-the-box and rupture the continuity of Kurdish history?

In explaining the shift, the author highlights the fall of the empire, and Woodrow Wilson's declaration of the Fourteen Points, which "recommended political self-determination for all ethnic minorities" (p. 81). Under these conditions, there was an "ideological shift" (p. 78): "Kurdish nationalism emerged as a full-fledged political movement..." and "appeared to be the only viable choice for Kurds in the absence of a functioning ideology such as Ottomanism. It was the result of a desperate search for identity after Ottomanism failed" (p. 117). This claim is, however, far from satisfactory. Ozoglu notes, for instance,

My research has also determined that Kurdish nationalist leaders were almost exclusively notables; they did not belong to the Kurdish middle class, which was quite small in the late Ottoman period. Moreover, most Kurdish nationalists were predominantly from the landowning class, and possessed a sense of territoriality, a sense that is vital for the growth of nationalism. In other words, the close link between group identity and territory is evident in the claim that the Kurds are the inhabitants of Kurdistan; the land is the defining factor in the formation of Kurdish identity (p. 119).

While it is true that, in the period under study, the majority of political and religious leaders were notables, and most of them were members of the landowning class, it would be difficult to anchor the rise of Kurdish nationalism in the vicissitudes of this class. Indeed, these landowners, whom I identify as the feudal class, were primarily interested in maintaining their ownership of land and uncontested rule over the peasantry. This was the main source of their power in Kurdistan, as elsewhere. Land, the primary means of agrarian production, was, for these notables, the locus of wealth rather than the homeland of the "nation," a notion that was just emerging in the late nineteenth century. As such, the significance of territory in Kurdish nationalism does not derive from the interests of the feudal class in land (see below on the situation in the 1960s). Kurdish rulers were generally content with maintaining their principality, while non-princely feudal lords were happy to pay taxes to an overlord if they were allowed to maintain full control of the peasantry. Khani, a landless, poor mullah, appealed to the princes to put aside their differences, unite under the flag of a Kurdish king, and liberate Kurdistan from Ottoman and Iranian rule. However, none of the princes listened to him. Ozoglu repeatedly notes that the nota-

bles, in the period he studies, wanted to retain their lost principalities and become kings in an independent Kurdistan; however, his study fails to distinguish, theoretically, between the interests of this class and nationalist politics.

The question of origins or beginnings of nationalism haunts students of Kurdish history. Many see Ubaydullah's 1880 revolt as the beginning; others seek it in the publication of the first Kurdish newspaper (1898), or in the cultural and political activism of the Kurds of Istanbul in the wake of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908; another date is the 1925 revolt led by Shaikh Said against Republican Turkey. Since the western, Ottoman part of Kurdistan was re-divided in 1918, some seek different beginnings for each part.[20]

Ozoglu locates the beginnings in the "ideological shift," from "protonationalism" to nationalism, in the formation of the SAK of 1918. In my study of the language component of Kurdish nationalism, I, too, have identified the post-1918 period as one of "consolidation of the Kurdish nation." [21] I argue, however, that the political and ideological shift had taken shape earlier, not in Sheikh Ubeydullah's revolt but during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The ideas of Haji Qadir Koyi (1815? -1897), a mullah and poet who had moved from southern Kurdistan to Istanbul, constitute a shift from the feudal politics of the principalities to nationalism. Haji was active in Istanbul's Kurdish circles formed around the uprooted princes and exiled landed nobility. In contrast with Khani, who wanted the independence of Kurdistan under the rule of a Kurdish king, Haji invited the Kurds to learn from the anti-Ottoman national liberation movements of the Bulgarians, Serbians, Greeks, and Armenians. Although Haji, much like Khani, still looked at the princely families as founders of a future Kurdish state, he encouraged the Kurds to take up arms in order to achieve independence. Both persuaded the literati to write in their native language, and to develop its literary tradition. Unlike Khani, he encouraged the Kurds to fight religious superstition and adopt, instead, modern science, technology, and journalism, and promote women's education. Both saw "pen and sword" as the founding pillars of statehood; while Khani could not envisage a transition from scribal to print culture, Haji vied for print language:

A hundred epistles and odes are not worth a penny [any more],

Newspapers and magazines have [now] become valuable and respected.[22]

Khani could not envisage the exercise of state power except through kingship, although he complained about the failure of princes to provide patronage for Kurdish literature. By contrast, Haji, strongly castigated members of the landed and tribal nobility, the sheikhs, and the clergy who were not interested in the Kurdish language and the liberation of Kurdistan.

We can see in both the pre-nationalist ideas of Khani and nationalist views of Haji that, contrary to Ozoglu's claim, Ottomanism was not and could not be the glue that tied the Kurds to the empire until its demise in 1918. How could Ottomanism and the claims of the Ottoman sultan to the caliphate ensure Kurdish loyalty to the empire? Khani and Haji were both men of religion, and the latter's doxology in praise of God is a well known poem in Kurdish literature and among the faithful. However, none had any respect for the caliphs and their caliphate, which had, in their view, oppressed the Kurds. Haji, for instance, wrote:

It is a requirement of the climate and soil of the Ottoman land...[that its] magistrate is the bandit of the city, judge is the thief at large, ministers and deputies are wolves, the subjects (*re'iye*) are a herd....Their oppression of the public is [so] ubiquitous, the subjects have perished.[23]

He also noted that Kurds were

[Trapped] between Red-hats [Ottoman Turks] and Black-hats [Persians]

Wrecked and visible like branded cattle.[24]

Indeed, Kurdish oral tradition, too, is also full of admonishments of the Ottoman and Iranian monarchs as oppressors. It is, thus, inaccurate to claim that Ottomanism was the "functioning ideology" of the Kurds before 1918. Such a claim denies the ability of the Kurds (or other subject peoples of the empire) to construct their own identities, politics, or world views, and make their own history. Also, underlying such a claim is an understanding of religion not as a site of struggle but, rather, as a source of consensus. How could the Ottoman sultans and Kurdish khans resolve their worldly conflicts for the sake of promises in the sky or in the name of the holy script? In the struggle for hereditary rule in Kurdish feudalism, as in other cases, brother killed brother, uncles killed nephews, and fathers killed sons.[25] Under the conditions, neither Islam nor the imaginary claims of the Ottoman sultans to the caliphate could overshadow the struggle over hereditary rule.

The author's project of "establishing a precise time frame for the origin of Kurdish nationalism" (p. 117) is problematic on other accounts, too. First, social formations such as nationalism, capitalism, socialism, liberalism, or classes emerge as processes with no visible or single points of departure. Haji's ideas, for instance, constituted both continuity with and rupture from those of Khani. His politics, an early statement of Kurdish nationalism, was still colored by the values of the feudal society in which he had grown up. While this late nineteenth century Kurdish nationalist was no Jean Antoine Condorcet (1743-94) or Denis Diderot (1713-84), his vision of a modern Kurdistan constituted a break that was perhaps more profound than the "ideological shift" from SMPK to SAK. Still, while his politics, enshrined in poetry, was popular in the Ottoman Kurdish press and later among the literati in Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan, they were not transformed into the political platform of a Kurdish nationalist party until 1942 in the "Komeley J.K." in Iran.[26]

Second, identifying the origins of nationalism, in general, or Kurdish nationalism, in particular, is a question of theoretical understanding and political inclination. Historians who trace the beginnings of Kurdish nationalism to Ubeydullah's revolt base their claim on the sheikh's declared aim to create an independent Kurdish state. This position does not distinguish between feudal statehood and nationalist nation-building.

Third, while Ozoglu's genealogy of Kurdish nationalism is more accurate than the traditional one, it does not radically depart from it. He, too, does not distinguish, theoretically, between the nationalist quest for sovereignty and the exercise of state power by the landowning nobility. Secession as well as centralization of state power exists in both the feudal state and in capitalist systems, although they are rooted in different dynamics. Historians have shown that, even in the last decades of the regime of Kurdish principalities, some princes struggled not only for secession but also for the creation of a larger state through annexation of territory.[27] It is difficult to trace nationalism in these quests for territory.

Fourth, the author does not use the concept "modernity" frequently, but when he does, it is defined as, primarily, a consequence of the collapse of the Ottoman regime, and the post-Ottoman definition of political loyalties in terms of "homogenous nation states" (p. 118). In fact, it is perhaps more appropriate that he has ignored the concept, which is used, in current theorization, as an explanatory framework with magical powers.

The uneven and partial development of Kurdish nationalism should encourage us not to seek a precise date for its beginning. This nationalism does not lend itself to a neat periodization. However, if identifying an origin is desirable for heuristic purposes, I would argue that Haji Qadir's ideas constitute the first indications of a shift away from the politics of the principalities. Feudal politics, vividly documented in *Sharafname*, *Mem u Zin*, and the oral tradition, dominated Kurdish history for centuries even after the fall of the mini-states system in the mid-nineteenth century. At the same time, if we agree on Haji as a point of departure, it is important to note that he may not have been a lonely traveler, and was, no doubt, part of a milieu, and a political and intellectual movement centered in cosmopolitan Istanbul; this was the era of emerging national and anti-colonial movements.

Ozoglu's work is in the genre of "notables paradigm" introduced into the study of Arab nationalism by Albert Hourani in his well-known article "Ottoman reform and the politics of notables."<sup>[28]</sup> In spite of its theoretical and methodological limitations, this work contributed, according to a recent assessment, to the scholarship on Arab nationalism.<sup>[29]</sup> However, Ozoglu's study, valuable as it is, may not replicate Hourani's experience. Both historians undertake the study of a class without engaging with class theory. Both are studies of nationalism, one without much theoretical insight (Hourani), the other without engaging in critical theories of nationalism. At the same time, while Arab nationalism had not received much research attention by the 1960s, the literature on the Kurdish case is, at present, growing fast. If theories of nationalism were still rudimentary in the 1960s (mired in the old civic/ethnic binarism), today they are much more complex. If research on Arab nationalism was by and large a-theoretical in the 1960s, the literature on Kurdish nationalism today is increasingly informed by theory, including feminism.<sup>[30]</sup> Moreover, while general surveys of Kurdish nationalism are still a favorite topic, micro-historical and specialized studies are now in the making.<sup>[31]</sup> These works shed new light on the origins, dynamics, and outcomes of the Kurdish nationalist project, and challenge us to engage in theoretical understanding of the topic.

#### The Destinies of the Notables

Ozoglu's study is significant not only for understanding the early history of Kurdish nationalism but also for its contemporary context. The hegemony of the "notables" in Kurdish politics lasted long after the period covered by the book. And this is in spite of the fact that non-

notable classes and strata were emerging, many driven into nationalist struggle due to the unbridled violence of the nation-states that ruled over re-divided Kurdistan in the wake of WWI. In fact, we see, even in the Kurdish press before WWI, the emergence of a new, largely urban, intelligentsia, which was engaged in drawing the contours of the nation and its homeland. In journalism, they began to define the homeland, *weten*, and discuss nation building projects such as education, health, alphabet reform, reform of gender relations, and opposition to religious superstition.<sup>[32]</sup> Why Ozoglu does not treat these projects as nationalist activism?

In spite of their modernist ideas, non-notable nationalists did not challenge the hegemony of the ruling class. If French nationalists, a century after their revolution, were able to see "the end of the notables," a century of Kurdish nationalist activism could hardly even displace them.<sup>[33]</sup> Most of the early revolts against the Turkish republic (e.g., 1925 and 1937-38), the Iraqi state (Shaikh Mahmud, 1918-19 and 1922-24), and the Pahlavi monarchy (Smail Agha Simko, 1919-22 and 1926) were led by the tribal and feudal nobility. Even, the first modernist regime, the Kurdish Republic of 1946, was a compromise between the landed, tribal, and religious notables, on the one hand, and the urban middle classes, on the other. The 1961 revolt against the Iraqi state, which Kurdish nationalists consider a "revolution," began as the resistance of the feudal nobility against the land reforms of the first republican regime.<sup>[34]</sup> In Iran, too, in the wake of the land reforms of the early 1960s, part of the resenting feudal nobility raised the banner of *Kurdayeti*, "Kurdish nationalism." And in Iraq, during the long armed conflict between the Ba'th regime and Kurdish autonomists, both sides bolstered tribalism and feudalism.

According to Ozoglu, the main conflict within the nationalist movement was, in early twentieth century, between the factions of the nobility. Significantly, these intra-class conflicts persisted, while inter-class conflicts, between the notables and the rising urban middle classes, did not surface until after WWII. Urban nationalists who took up arms against the central government took refuge in the villages, where the feudal nobility ruled. They did not raise slogans such as "land belongs to the tiller," even though most of the members of the nation were peasants who lived in a regime of serfdom. The formation of Komeley J.K. (Society for the Revival of Kurdistan) in 1942 in Iran was a landmark. This organization translated Haji Qadir's ideas into a political platform. However, when it was reorganized into the Kurdish Democratic Party in 1945, it allowed the landed and

tribal aristocracy a prominent place in the cabinet and other organs of power. After the fall of the republic, most Kurdish observers explained the role of the tribal and feudal notables as “betrayal.” Some fifteen years later, when the armed autonomist movement began in Iraq in 1961, urban nationalists, many to the left of the center, united with or rather went under the banner of the notables again. However, this time the union lasted only three years, and led to political and organizational split in the Kurdish Democratic Party. In Iran, the formation of Komeley Shorishgeri Zehmetkeshani Kurdistan (“Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Kurdistan”) in the 1970s was the most radical separation between feudalism and nationalism; this new organization, formed by young urban intellectuals inspired by Marxism and Maoism, advocated the elimination of feudalism through radical land reform and the liberation of urban toilers. In Turkey, too, the leadership of the nationalist movement, which re-appeared in the 1960s, transferred to urban intellectuals, radicalized in the 1970s, and organized in different, mostly ephemeral, organizations, one of which emerged as the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK, in Kurdish acronyms).

#### A Valuable Study

Rather than diminishing the value of Ozoglu’s book, the questions raised above and my comments point to the significance of his study, which, like all good research, raises more questions. Using archival material, the author has also generated fresh data on, e.g., the understudied Kurdistan province formed by the Ottoman state in the mid-1840s (pp. 60-63). Compared with mainstream Turkish historiography of the Kurds, the book is more mature in departing from some of the nationalist biases of Turkish historians. This study will be useful especially for those who do not have access to the growing research on the topic published in Kurdish and Turkish. A useful line of research proposed by the author is comparative studies of Kurdish and Arab nationalisms, especially Palestinian nationalism (pp. 125-29). The book fills a visible gap in the maturing literature on Kurdish nationalism.

The questions I have raised do not necessarily point to errors of the author; they are, rather, issues of interpretation, method, and politics of writing history, on which we can agree and disagree. However, in the tradition of book reviewing, it would be appropriate to list a few errors that have escaped the attention of the author or editors. Apparently a typographic mistake, the date of launching of *Hawar* is given as 1923 (e.g., p. 101, 102) rather than 1932.

Sweden, rather than Norway (p. 165), has been an active center of Kurdish diasporic publishing. The quality of some of the maps (2/1, 2/3 and 2/4) is very poor.

Not a question of error is the choice of transliteration and transcription codes. For instance, in order to “establish a consistent pattern in spelling Ottoman, Persian, and Arabic words,” the author has spelled “all words used in an Ottoman context...according to Modern Turkish forms” (p. xiii). This transliteration policy leads, perhaps unwittingly, to Turkification. Thus, the Kurdish magazine *Jin* (with a circumflex over the i) (“Life,” in Kurdish) is spelled, on pages 82 and 163, as simply *Jin* (“Woman,” in Kurdish). While the Turkish rendering *Jin*, is pronounced much like Kurdish *Jin* (with a circumflex over the i), the reader not familiar with the spelling of the two languages cannot be expected to decipher the phonetic value of the Turkish *i*. In fact, English language readers of the book would get a more accurate picture of Kurdish names if, for example, Sherefhan or Bedirhan were spelled as Sharaf Khan or Bedir Khan (p. xiii).

#### Notes

[1]. E.g., Günther Behrendt, *Nationalismus in Kurdistan: Vorgeschichte, Entstehungsbedingungen und erste Manifestationen bis 1925* (Hamburg: Deutschen Orient-Instituts und der Arbeitsstelle Politik des Vorderen Orient, 1993) and Martin Strohmeier, *Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity: Heroes and Patriots, Traitors and Foes* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003).

[2]. Wadie Jwaideh, “The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Its Origin and Development,” Ph.D. thesis, University of Syracuse, 1961.

[3]. Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origin and Development* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

[4]. Serge Gantner, “Le mouvement national kurde,” *Orient* Nos. 32/33 (1964/1965): 29-120.

[5]. Martin van Bruinessen, “Agha, Shaikh and State: On the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan,” Ph.D. thesis, Utrecht University, 1978; *Ibid.*, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992); Christopher Houston, *Islam, Kurds and the Turkish Nation State* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

[6]. E.g., Dzhaliye Dzhaliye, *Kurdy Osmanskoi imperii v pervoi polovine XIX veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1973).

[7]. E.g. historian, Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-*



- 1925 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989) and political scientist, Michael Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).
- [8]. David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).
- [9]. On the Marxist critique of legal form see Bob Fine, *Democracy and the Rule of Law: Marx's Critique of the Legal Form* (Caldwell, NJ: Blackburn Press, 2002).
- [10]. E.g., Jacqueline Stevens, *Reproducing the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
- [11]. See the vast literature in Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 94-120.
- [12]. Bernard Yack, "The Myth of the Civic Nation" in Ronald Beiner ed., *Theorizing Nationalism* (Albany: New York State University Press, 1999), 103-118.
- [13]. On the ties that bind democracy to ethnic cleansing see Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); for a discussion of this work see John Breuilly, David Cesarani, Sinisa Malešević, Benjamin Neuberger, and Michael Mann, "Debate on Michael Mann's the Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing," *Nations and Nationalism* 12 (2006): 389-411.
- [14]. (Entessar 1992; Natali 2005) Entessar, Nader. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*. Boulder: Lynn Rienner Publishers, 1992; Natali, Denise. *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005.
- [15]. Martin van Bruinessen, "Agha, Shaikh and State"; *Ibid.*, *Agha, Shaikh and State*.
- [16]. Martin van Bruinessen, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism versus Nation-Building States* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2000).
- [17]. For "nationalists without nationalism," see: Abbas Vali, "The Kurds and their 'Others': Fragmented identity and Fragmented Politics," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 18 (2) (1998): 82-95, esp. 84, 94. For "'nationalismless' nationalism," see: Ali Kemal Ozcan, *Turkey's Kurds: A Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan* (London: Routledge 2006), 227-231.
- [18]. Farideh Koochi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral Nationalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
- [19]. [Evlîya Chelebi], *Evliya Celebi in Bitlis*, ed., R. Dankoff (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990).
- [20]. For studies of the "origins" or periodization of Kurdish nationalism, see Robert Olson, "Five Stages of Kurdish Nationalism, 1880-1980," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 12 (1991): 392-410; M. Hakan Yavuz, "Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 7 (3) (Autumn 2001): 1-24; Vali Abbas ed., *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2003).
- [21]. Amir Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan, 1918-1985* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 60-65.
- [22]. Haji Qadir Koyi, *Diwani Haci Qadiri Koyi* (Baghdad and Heler: emindreti Gisti Rosinbiri w Lawani Nawcey Kurdistan, 1986), 88.
- [23]. *Ibid.*, 140.
- [24]. *Ibid.*, 254.
- [25]. See Claudius James Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan* (London: James Duncan, 1836), 306-62; Fredrik Barth, *Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan* (Oslo: Brodrene Jorgensen, 1953), 129-130, and the *Sharafname*.
- [26]. See, for instance, references to Haji Qadir and the texts of his poems in the early Kurdish press of the Ottoman Empire: *Kurdistan*, No. 3 (20 May 1898), p. 3; *Hetawi (or Hetave) Kurd*, No. 1 (1913), pp. 20, 24-27; No. 2 (1913), p. 27-30; No. 3 (1914), pp. 21, 28-30; *Roji (or Roje) Kurd*, No. 2 (1913), pp. 25-30.
- [27]. E.g., Dzhaliil Kurdy *Osmanskoi imperii*.
- [28]. Albert Hourani in his well-known article "Ottoman reform and the politics of notables," in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers eds. *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 41-68.
- [29]. James Gelvin, "The 'politics of notables' forty years after," *MESA Bulletin* 40 (1) (2006): 19-29.
- [30]. E.g., some of the chapters in Shahrzad Mojab ed., *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds*. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers 2001.

[31]. E.g., Strohmeier, *Crucial Images* and Hashem Ahmadzadeh, *Nation and Novel: A Study of Persian and Kurdish Narrative Discourse* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2003).

[32]. For *weten* see, in *Kurd Teavun ve Terakki Gazetesi*, No. 8 (1909), pp. 69-71; *Hetawi Kurd*, No. 3 (1913), pp. 26-27. For education, *Hetawi Kurd*, No. 3 (1913), pp. 30-31; *Kurd Teavun ve Terakki Gazetesi*, No. 9 (1909), p. 78-79. For health, *Hetawi Kurd*, No. 3 (1914), pp. 16-18; Nos. 4-5 (1914), pp. 7-9. For alphabet reform,

see, *Roji Kurd*, No. 2 (1913), pp. 12-13. For reform of gender relations, *Roji Kurd*, No. 4 (1913), pp. 10-12. For opposition to religious superstition, *Hetawi Kurd*, No. 1 (1913), p. 17.

[33]. Daniel Halevy, *The End of the Notables*, translated from the French by Alain Silvera (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1974).

[34]. Ismet Cheriff Vanly, *Le Kurdistan irakien entite nationale: Etude de la revolution de 1961* (Neuchatel, Switzerland: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1970).

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