The Kurdish Question Revisited is an edited volume with contributions by over thirty-five scholars from various academic disciplines. The book introduces a wide range of topics and theoretical approaches within Kurdish studies. The editors, Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef, start off with an overview of the “Kurdish question” and examine how the international community’s perception of Kurds has changed in the last several decades. “Artificial borders” in the Middle East, imposed after World War I and consolidated by the end of World War II, created unfulfilled nationalist aspirations. The plight of the Kurds, the editors indicate, was overshadowed by other more “pressing” issues in the region. For decades, the international community approached Kurdish demands cautiously and viewed Kurdish question(s) as domestic crises of the countries in which Kurds lived: Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Kurdish demands finally gained prominence in international relations since the 1990s, and more recently Western powers have begun to see Kurds as key allies in the region. For the editors, Kurds’ transition to prominent actors in the eyes of Western powers also explains increasing scholarly interest regarding Kurds. The Kurdish Question Revisited is a response to this quest for knowledge about Kurds. While recognizing that Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian, and Syrian state frameworks profoundly affect the way Kurdish movements operate, the editors also stress the importance of approaching Kurdish issues in ways transcending the “artificial” borders of the Middle East. On this note, the first part of the book deals with issues that concern Kurds in general before the rest of the book focuses on Kurdish questions within existing state frameworks.

The first part opens with Jordi Tejel’s assessment of historiography regarding Kurds and Kurdistan. While emphasizing the importance of burgeoning popular, scholarly, and institutional interest in Kurdish history, Tejel tackles the question of whether it is possible to write Kurdish history from a non-nationalist perspective. He suggests comparative history, transnational history, and global history as alternative approaches for Kurdish studies. Elaborating on his 2006 book The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity, David Romano analyzes the employment of social theories in Kurdish studies in the past decade. Michiel Leezenberg looks at the articulation of Islam among Kurds and their response to secular nationalism and Salafi Islam and explains why the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has not attracted major support among Kurds. Based on her extensive fieldwork, Diane E. King explains why she believes pluralism, tolerance, and diversity will prevail and non-Muslims will coexist with the Muslim Kurdish
majority despite past conflicts. Hakan Özoğlu scrutinizes the significance of collective forgetting in the construction of Kurdish identity since the twentieth century, as in the case of “non-Kurdish” genealogies of major Kurdish figures. Hamit Bozarslan traces the interplay between the “particular” Kurdish nationalist demands and “universal” values and movements since the early twentieth century, such as civilization/progress, left-wing ideas, Islamism, and more recently the “neo-liberal” and “feminist-ecological” model. Ofra Bengio’s essay clarifies how Kurds had managed to develop a transborder pan-Kurdish sense of identity and ties in spite of their political, social, and linguistic separation. In reference to a short story and a novel from southern Kurdistan from the early decades of the twentieth century, Hashem Ahmadzadeh explains how political and social realities of Kurds have been reflected in Kurdish fiction. Christine Allison tackles the intriguing issue of politics of Kurdish folklore studies shaped by Kurdish nationalists/scholars, outsider non-Kurdish scholars/folklorists, and nationalist policies of Kurds’ host states. Nahro Zagros introduces the genres and instruments of the Kurdish music of Yezidis in Armenia and demonstrates how music performed in religious and cultural activities is a marker of social and ethnic cohesion among the Yezidis.

The second part of the book is on the Kurdish question in Turkey since the Ottoman times. Sabri Ateş emphasizes Kurdish agency in the famous Sheikh Ubeidullah Rebellion of 1880 while referring to Russo-Ottoman conflict, delimitation of the Ottoman-Iranian border, and reports by Western consuls and missionaries in the region. Janet Klein scrutinizes the Bedirkhan brothers’ motives to publish the first Kurdish gazette, Kurdistan (1898-1902), with their “three hats” as agitated Ottomans, Kurds, and proponents of their family’s legacy. Moving to a more contemporary era, Cengiz Gunes demonstrates that the appeal of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) to the Kurdish masses in the 1980s and ’90s was not only a reaction to the Turkish state’s use of excessive force but also a result of the myth of resistance and sacrifice produced by the PKK itself. Joost Jongerden describes how the PKK’s discourse of self-determination in the form of nation-state shifted to self-determination through democratic autonomy since 2005. Clemence Scalbert-Yücel looks at the hegemonic impact of PKK and Abdullah Öcalan on Kurdish cultural production with regard to rationales, practices, and modes of organization. The three essays by Henri Barkey, Michael Gunter, and Bill Park focus on the rise and fall of Turkey’s “Kurdish opening” led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP). Barkey presents a list of reasons why Erdoğan and AKP started negotiations with the PKK in the first place. Park argues that Turkey suspended the Kurdish opening in 2015 due to the internationalization of the Kurdish question following the Syrian civil war and Kurds’ involvement in the anti-ISIS war in Iraq and Syria as Western allies. Barkey indicates that these unexpected regional developments also increased pan-Kurdish sentiments. Expanding the analysis into the aftermath of the 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey, Gunter explains that both regional developments and the volatile situation in Turkey led the Turkish state to go back to the traditional security approach vis-à-vis Turkey’s Kurdish question. Both Gunter and Barkey, however, underline the fact that even though the Kurdish opening proved to be unsuccessful for the time being, the Turkish state had taken an unprecedented step, namely, openly negotiating with the PKK, which might lead to a permanent peace in the future.

Two chapters in part 3 of the book deal with the Kurdish movement in Syria, which has been obscure to many until recent years. In their coauthored piece, Zeynep Kaya and Robert Lowe tackle the sometimes problematic nature of the relationship between the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria and its mother organization, the PKK. Kaya and Lowe explain the PYD’s rationale to distance itself from the PKK as the former has become an increasingly Syrian Kurdish party as a result of unexpected developments since the beginning of the
Syrian civil war in 2011. Harriet Allsopp examines Kurdish party politics in Syria by explaining why the PYD overshadows other parties known as the 1957 parties, which more recently organized themselves as the Kurdish National Council (KNC). While acknowledging the PYD’s success, Allsopp also points out the hegemonic nature of the PYD that limits the freedom of other Kurdish political parties in Syria.

The next part of the book focuses on Iran. Nader Entessar explains how the years between 1979 and 2003 were formative in defining minority-state relations in Iran under the Islamic regime. He demonstrates that as far as minorities, and more specifically Kurds, are concerned, the new regime presented continuity with the Pahlavi dynasty that it had replaced in 1979. Emphasizing the same continuity, Olivier Grojean, indicates, however, that political developments redefine the core Iranian identity and restructure hierarchy of identities in multiethnic Iran vis-à-vis the Islamic regime’s national unification project. Finally, Walter Posch analyzes how the Islamic Republic reacts to Kurdish nationalism and explains what the three official narratives (Persianness/Aryannes, traditional Islam, and Iranian-led pan-Islamism) have meant for Iranian Kurds.

The last and the longest part of the book deals with Kurds in Iraq. Gareth Stansfield looks at major political and economic developments since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and demonstrates how they shaped the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) as of 2016. Mohammed Ihsan examines the policy of Arabization in Iraq since 1968, especially in disputed territories such as Kirkuk, and discusses the changes in those territories after the fall of Saddam and following the rise of ISIS more recently. Katherine Ranharter looks at KRI’s rapidly expanding education sector since 2003 with regard to its effect on women’s and girls’ access to higher education and explains if it generated full gender inclusion. Kelsey Shanks examines “peace education” in KRI and assesses how subject matters in existing curriculum, inappropriate teaching resources, and lack of trained teachers affect its implementation despite the fact that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) acknowledges its importance. Greg Shapland focuses on KRI’s water resources by examining amount of water, increasing demand, the KRG’s water policy, relations with neighbors, and effects of climate change. Benjamin Isakhan assesses the KRG’s strategy of using the ISIS threat as a leverage to claim the disputed territories and to buy weapons from Western countries and discusses what it would mean for relations between the Iraqi central government and KRG. Renad Mansour presents how the KRG, as a sub-state, has been developing a diplomatic apparatus to create alternatives to Kurds’ dependency on the Iraqi state, in order to build state institutions and infrastructure with foreign help and more important to express the KRG’s desire to become a sovereign state eventually. In his second essay in the book, Mohammed Shareef puts the relations between the United States and KRI since 2014 in a historical context and indicates that the recent American contribution is not intentional but rather accidental due to the rise of ISIS. Thus, Shareef emphasizes continuity in the American policy of supporting “Arab Iraq” contrary to the Kurdish expectations that US policy shifted toward backing Kurdish independence. By examining the 2014 commemoration of the 1988 Halabja massacre, Nicole F. Watts demonstrates how Halabja has developed a local memory/agency that does not run against the overreaching Kurdish national project in Iraq but rather contributes to it by nuancing and pluralizing it. Andrea Fischer-Tahir’s essay introduces Kurdish political journalism in KRI. She showcases reactions to the 2010 assassination of Sardasht Osman, a young journalist in Erbil, and shows how the assassination immediately brought back bitter memories of the militia wars among Kurds in the 1990s. Another unfortunate death—the honor killing of the Yezidi Kurdish girl Dua Khalil in 2007—is the starting point of Nazand Begikhani and Gill Hague’s essay based on their
fieldwork project funded by the KRG. After explaining what honor violence means in the particular context of the KRI and how the KRG reacts to it, Begikhani and Hague present an action plan to combat honor-based violence in KRI. Francis Owtram elaborates on the status of confederation that KRI was officially granted in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution and demonstrates what it means with regard to retaining the armed forces or gas and oil revenues. Owtram examines whether the confederation status constrains the KRI's secession from Iraq or induces it, and what the Arab Spring and rise of ISIS meant in this case. The Kurdish independence referendum in September 2017 took place after the completion of this book. Even so, the cautious tone of many contributors in this work seems to have predicted why the goal of Kurdish independence in Iraq was not easy to achieve.

*The Kurdish Question Revisited* is a welcome addition to recent academic works on Kurds. While it includes a number of informative and thought-provoking essays exclusively on historical aspects of Kurds, the overall focus of the book is relatively recent issues. *The Kurdish Question Revisited* showcases many topics, questions, and scholarly approaches within Kurdish studies. It is not an introductory book on Kurds, but it is definitely essential reading for students and scholars of Kurdish studies as well as anyone with scholarly interest in Middle Eastern affairs. I strongly recommend that graduate students and scholars have a careful look at this book.

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**Citation:** Ahmet Akturk. Review of Stansfield, Gareth; Shareef, Mohammed, eds. *The Kurdish Question Revisited*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. February, 2019.

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