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## **Kurdish Studies in Western and Central Europe**

*Martin van Bruinessen*

*Moderne Kurdische Studien haben ihren Ursprung in den Beobachtungen und Untersuchungen von Missionaren und Konsuln, die in der Region eingesetzt waren. Die kurdische Grammatik, die vom italienischen Missionar Garzoni 1787 publiziert wurde, wird konventionell als die erste seriöse Studie betrachtet. Innerhalb der Iranischen und generell der Orientalischen Studien war Kurdisch von geringerem Interesse, hauptsächlich beschäftigte man sich in Russland damit. Im Ersten Weltkrieg und während der britischen und französischen Mandats Herrschaft im Irak und in Syrien war ein Bedarf nach praktischem Wissen über die KurdInnen. Politische Offiziere mit Ausbildung in Orientalistik verwalteten die kurdische Gesellschaft und arbeiteten eng mit der kurdischen Elite zusammen. Nach ihrer Rückkehr nach Europa, erlangten einige dieser Offiziere Lehraufträge an Universitäten. Dies führte zu den ersten akademischen Institutionalisierungen von Kurdischen Studien – die verstanden wurden als Studien der Sprache, Kultur und Geschichte der KurdInnen. Anthropologische Studien in der kurdischen Gesellschaft begannen in der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts, aber zeigten aufgrund des schwierigen Feldzuganges eine ungleiche Entwicklung. Die Entstehung einer starken kurdischen Nationalbewegung seit den 1960er Jahren stimulierte ein akademisches Interesse an der kurdischen Politik und machte die Politikwissenschaft zu einer dominanten Disziplin innerhalb der Kurdischen Studien. Zusehends seit den 1990er Jahren trug die Größe und die Mobilisierung einer kurdischen Diaspora wesentlich zur Entwicklung der Kurdischen Studien bei – dies vor allem durch die Schaffung von unterstützenden Institutionen wie dem Kurdischen Institut in Paris, durch die Anregung des Interesses an der Kurdischen Frage und der kurdischen Kultur und Geschichte generell und durch die ForscherInnen, die daraus hervorgingen. Der Umfang von Forschungen über KurdInnen und der*

*Umfang von Themen sind seit der Mitte der 1990er Jahre grundlegend angestiegen. Themen, zu denen es eine Reihe rezenter Forschung gibt, sind die Kurdische Diaspora und der Transnationalismus, gegenwärtige politische Bewegungen und die Unterdrückung der Rechte der KurdInnen, die ethnische Politik im späten Osmanischen Reich und in der frühen Türkischen Republik, gender- und Frauenstudien, Islam und heterodoxe religiöse Gemeinschaften sowie die kurdische Sprache, Literatur und Oraltraditionen.*

*Modern Kurdish Studies have their origins in the observations and investigations by missionaries and consuls posted in the region. The Kurdish grammar published by the Italian missionary Garzoni in 1787 is conventionally regarded as the first serious study. Kurdish became a minor interest within Iranian or general Orientalist studies, mainly cultivated in Russia. The First World War and the British and French mandates in Iraq and Syria caused a demand for hands-on knowledge on the Kurds. Political officers with Orientalist training administered Kurdish society, working closely with members of the Kurdish elite. Returning to Europe, some of these officers were given teaching positions at universities, resulting in the first institutionalization of Kurdish Studies – understood as the study of language, culture and history of the Kurds – in academia. Anthropological studies of Kurdish society began around the mid-twentieth century but developed unevenly because of the difficulty of access. The emergence of a strong Kurdish national movement from the 1960s onwards stimulated both an academic interest in Kurdish politics, making political science one of the dominant disciplines of Kurdish Studies. The growth and mobilization of a Kurdish diaspora, noticeable since the 1990s, has also contributed significantly to the development of Kurdish Studies, by founding supporting institutions such as the Paris Kurdish Institute, by stimulating an interest in the Kurdish question and in Kurdish culture and history generally, and by becoming*

*researchers themselves. The volume of research on the Kurds and the range of subjects studied have increased dramatically since the mid-1990s. Topics on which there has been much recent research include: the Kurdish diaspora and transnationalism; current Kurdish political movements and repression of Kurdish rights; the ethnic policies of the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic; gender and women's studies; Islam and heterodox religious communities; Kurdish language, literature and oral tradition.*

## **Ancestors**

In 1936, the former Russian diplomat and Orientalist Basile Nikitine published a brief article on the current state of Kurdish Studies, 'Où en est la Kurdologie?'. This may have been the first time that the term 'Kurdology' was mentioned in a Western language; Nikitine appears to have adopted the term from its usage in the Soviet Union, where Kurdology had come to be recognized as a distinct branch of Oriental studies with its own institutions and publications. Nikitine mentions in particular the Congress of Kurdology held in Yerevan in 1934, which had been attended by no less than 80 participants.<sup>1</sup> Although the name was relatively new, Kurdish Studies had a respectable history, and Nikitine pays homage to the Italian missionary Maurizio Garzoni, whom he calls 'the father of Kurdology' for being the author of the first Kurdish grammar almost 150 years earlier.<sup>2</sup> Nikitine went on to shower praise on the learned Soviet professor Nikolaj Marr who had declared the Kurds 'a people forgotten by history' and whose highly original as well as speculative 'Japhetic' theory made the Kurds the indigenous inhabitants of their

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<sup>1</sup> Nikitine 1936: 124.

<sup>2</sup> Garzoni 1787. The Kurdish scholar Rohat Alakom also places Garzoni at the beginning of his overview of two centuries of Kurdology (Rohat 1987). In fact, Garzoni is the best known but not the first of the missionaries who wrote on Kurdish language and culture. For an historical overview of missionary Kurdology and more specifically Italian contributions, see Bois 1965b; Galletti 1995.

region and closely related to the Armenians (as well as the Georgians) rather than Indo-European immigrants from the East.<sup>3</sup>

Coming to his own times, Nikitine pays some attention to Kurdish literary activities in Syria (where the Bedirkhan brothers published the journal *Hawar*) and Iraq (where Seyyid Huseyn Huznî published a series of books on Kurdish history and literature as well as a journal named *Rûnakî*). In Turkey and Iran, the political conditions did not allow significant Kurdish cultural activity but in the Soviet Union, where the Kurds constituted only a tiny minority, Kurdology was taking a high flight (*'connaît un essor remarquable'*). The Imperial Russian Orientalist tradition, which had produced such Kurdish scholars as Peter Lerch, Alexandre Jaba and Ferdinand Justi,<sup>4</sup> was in a symbiotic relation with the Soviet policy of culturally strengthening small nationalities that previously had low rates of literacy and education. Soviet Armenia had established forty schools for Kurds, published a remarkable number of books in Kurdish, and established a Kurdish section at the Institute of History and Culture. Soviet scholars in Leningrad, Moscow and Yerevan did not only continue the Russian Orientalist tradition but they were also training Kurds to become Kurdologists.<sup>5</sup>

Nikitine's overview does not touch upon Kurdology in Western Europe, probably because there were no specialized institutions at that time and because works in German were not accessible to him. Therefore, he missed the major contributions to Kurdish dialect studies by Oskar Mann.<sup>6</sup> However, he mentions the recent work by

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<sup>3</sup> On Marr, his Japhetic theory and Soviet Kurdology, see Leezenberg 2011 and especially 2014a.

<sup>4</sup> On pre-Soviet Russian Kurdology, see Cwiklinski 2004–5.

<sup>5</sup> Nikitine 1936: 125.

<sup>6</sup> Oskar Mann was a librarian at the Royal Prussian Library in Berlin and the first Western scholar to carry out extensive linguistic fieldwork among the Kurds and neighbouring Iranian groups. The materials he collected and analyzed were

the Italian Orientalist Michelangelo Guidi on the Yezidis, the studies by his fellow émigré Russian, Vladimir Minorsky, on the Ahl-i Haqq and on the history of the Kurds, and brief articles by Pierre Rondot and Cecil J. Edmonds, political officers in French Syria and British Iraq respectively, on the efforts to develop a Latin alphabet for the Kurdish language.

From his overview one gathers that in Nikitine's view, Kurdology primarily consisted of the study of the Kurdish language and of written texts – primarily in Kurdish and other Oriental languages – about Kurdish history, culture and society. Its practitioners were typically in the service of governments that had a strategic interest in the region of Kurdistan and had received some general Orientalist education. Interestingly, Nikitine also mentions Kurdish pioneers of Kurdish Studies and notes that they undertook their literary and cultural activities under the patronage of the Soviet regime or the British and French colonial authorities and in collaboration with Russian, British and French scholar-administrators. As there was no such patronage in Turkey and Iran but instead rather cultural and political repression, there was no Kurdology in those countries.<sup>7</sup>

### *Diplomats and missionaries as scholars*

By then, Nikitine had himself published more than a dozen articles on the Kurds in various Western journals, mostly based on Kurdish texts that one of his key informants had written for him and on other

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published in a monumental series, which was completed by Karl Hadank after his death: Mann 1906–09; Mann / Hadank 1930; Hadank 1932. On Mann, see also Blau 2009; Ruciyar 2008. Another German study that had some impact on later scholarship was a philological dissertation on the Kurdish city of Bitlis in the 17th century (Köhler 1928).

<sup>7</sup> Nikitine was not entirely right about the absence of Kurdish Studies in Turkey. The Young Turks and the Republican regime felt the need for knowledge about the Kurds but this was mostly produced in the form of confidential intelligence reports. See Bayrak 1994, where a number of these reports are reproduced.

information he had gathered during the years 1915–18, when he was the Russian consul in Urumiyeh.<sup>8</sup> He later went on to write a handbook on the Kurds that claimed to be a ‘sociological and historical study’ but that in reality was a somewhat quaint collection of observations and anecdotes on such subjects as the Kurdish national character, the Kurdish family, the Kurdish tribe, the relations between the Kurds and states, and the history of the Kurdish movement, all based on written sources of various kinds rather than direct observation.<sup>9</sup>

A quite similar text was published a decade later by another man who had devoted much of his life to the study of the Kurds, the French Dominican Father Thomas Bois.<sup>10</sup> Bois (d.1975) was the last of a long line of missionaries writing on Kurdish language and society.<sup>11</sup> He had been a member of the Dominican mission in Mosul from 1927 to 1937 before he was posted in Qamishli in the Syrian Jazira for several years. Though primarily working among the local Christians, he established good relations with the Kurds as well, learning their language and collecting much information on their traditions. For health reasons, he spent most of the 1940s in Lebanon where he was in contact with leading Kurdish intellectuals (the circle of the Bedirkhan brothers) and occasionally contributed to their publications.<sup>12</sup> Bois returned to France in 1965 and, two years later,

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<sup>8</sup> Nikitine’s memoirs of those years were later published in Persian translation: Nikitine 1950 [1329]. The most interesting as well as amusing of the Kurdish texts that his Kurdish teacher, Mulla Said, wrote for him concerns the clever way in which a religious leader manipulated tribal chieftains and managed to gain control of their possessions: Nikitine / Soane 1923.

<sup>9</sup> Nikitine 1956.

<sup>10</sup> Bois 1965a.

<sup>11</sup> Father Bois writes on his predecessors in Bois 1965b; on Bois’ own life and works, see Blau 1995.

<sup>12</sup> He was the first to draw attention to the still young and progressive nationalist poet Cigerxwîn in a brief article in a Beyrouth magazine, which was reprinted in the Kurdish journal *Roja Nû*: Bois 1945.

was appointed as a lecturer on Kurdish civilization at the *École Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes* (National School of Living Oriental Languages, *Langues 'O*), where Kamuran Bedirkhan had preceded him as the first to teach Kurdish subjects in a West European academic institution (more on this institution below).

The third person to write an encyclopaedic overview of Kurdish history and society was the said Vladimir F. Minorsky, by far the most accomplished scholar of the three. Minorsky too had been in the Russian diplomatic service in Persia, to which he came with a more thorough Orientalist training (in languages and history) than his colleagues. Moreover in 1914, he took part in the international commission that delimited the Ottoman-Persian boundary, travelling its entire length for the major part of that year. This gave him first-hand knowledge of the topography, ethnography and archaeology of an important part of Kurdistan about which he was later to publish numerous articles. After the Russian revolution and the end of the war, he also settled in Paris, where he obtained a position as a lecturer of Persian at the *École Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes* in 1923. In 1932 he accepted the invitation to teach Persian literature and history at the School of Oriental Studies (later: School of Oriental and African Studies, SOAS) in London, where he lived for the rest of his life.<sup>13</sup>

Minorsky published extensively on a wide range of subjects. Only a modest part of his scholarly output concerned the Kurds but it includes studies of lasting importance. The articles on 'Kurdistan' and 'Kurds' that he contributed to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* were based on a remarkable range of source materials in Oriental languages and represented the most authoritative summary of Orientalist knowledge on the subject in his day. It still remains important today,

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<sup>13</sup> For Minorsky's scholarly biography, see Lang 1966.

even though our paradigms have changed.<sup>14</sup> Kurdistan is marginally present in his *magnum opus*, the richly annotated translation of *Hudud al-'Alam*, an anonymous 16<sup>th</sup>-century Persian geography of the then known world.<sup>15</sup> Minorsky also had a lifelong fascination with the various heterodox communities of the Middle East and authored the first serious studies of the Ahl-i Haqq (with whom he had become personally acquainted during his stay in Persia).<sup>16</sup>

### *Scholars in colonial service*

Three younger contemporaries of Nikitine and Minorsky, who were also to make major contributions to Kurdish Studies, developed their expertise as political and intelligence officers in the service of the British and French mandate authorities in Iraq and Syria: Cecil J. Edmonds, Pierre Rondot, and Roger Lescot. Their jobs required them to engage directly and intensively with Kurdish society. This is also reflected in their writings, which are more sociologically informed than those of the scholars mentioned so far. Edmonds travelled extensively in Kurdistan, got to know most personalities that mattered and as a political officer became actively involved in local politics. He kept copious notes of his observations in the field and the book he later published on his encounters with Kurds, Turks and Arabs in Northern Iraq contains a treasure of detailed information on social and economic conditions, prominent personalities, tribal relations and the various religious communities of the region.<sup>17</sup> He was also briefly involved in the standardization of Kurdish, working closely with Colonel Tawfiq Wahby, a Kurdish officer in the Iraqi army, who had been commissioned to write a Kurdish grammar for

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<sup>14</sup> Minorsky 1927a, 1927b. For the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia*, Minorsky's articles were updated by Thomas Bois and D.N. MacKenzie (1986).

<sup>15</sup> Minorsky 1937.

<sup>16</sup> Minorsky 1920, 1921; see also, on related subjects, Minorsky 1943, 1954.

<sup>17</sup> Edmonds 1957. His notes on earlier travels in Iran and Iraq were published posthumously: Edmonds 2010. For a biography of Edmonds, see Richard 2012.

use in primary schools.<sup>18</sup> Together they strove to develop a phonemic Latin alphabet for Southern Kurdish, believing that it would be easier to learn to read and write the language in a script that represented the sounds more precisely. (It was, however, not their Latin alphabet but a modified version of the Arabic script that was adapted for use in Iraqi Kurdistan.)<sup>19</sup>

Edmonds returned to Britain in 1945 and, after retiring from service in the Foreign Office, lectured Kurdish at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London from 1951 to 1957. He was, thus, one of the first to hold an academic position dedicated to Kurdish Studies (at the same institution, Minorsky was teaching Persian and Islamic history). It was while at SOAS that he wrote his most important publications. Like Minorsky, Edmonds took a special interest in the heterodox communities of Kurdistan, on which he wrote some insightful studies.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, he continued working with Tawfiq Wahby (who had also retired in London) to compile a dictionary of Sorani Kurdish.<sup>21</sup>

Rondot was a professional military officer who had served in North Africa before being sent to Syria to serve the French mandate administration as an intelligence officer in 1928. He learned Kurdish and established a close working relationship with the brothers Celadet and Kamuran Bedirkhan and the nationalist intellectual circle around them (the association Khoyboun), becoming actively involved in the publication of their journal *Hawar* (1932–43). He played a role

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<sup>18</sup> Wahby 1929.

<sup>19</sup> Hassanpour 1992: 360, 372. Edmonds was not the first British officer to actively intervene in the standardisation of written Kurdish. The remarkable Ely B. Soane had edited the pioneering Kurdish journal *Têgeyishtinî Rastî* published by the British military command in Baghdad in 1918–19, see Ehmed 1978.

<sup>20</sup> Edmonds 1967, 1969 (in addition to the relevant sections in Edmonds 1957).

<sup>21</sup> Wahby / Edmonds 1966. This dictionary uses the Latinized spelling of Kurdish developed by the authors.

in the development of a Latinized alphabet for Kurdish but also wrote the first analytical study of Kurdish and Assyrian tribes and tribalism.<sup>22</sup>

Before he arrived in Syria in 1935, Lescot had studied Arabic, Turkish and Persian languages to work at the Institut Français d'Études Arabes in Damascus, with which Rondot was also affiliated. He, too, focused on learning Kurdish and collaborated with the Bedirkhan brothers even more closely than Rondot. Helped by his Kurdish friends, Lescot collected, transcribed and translated a large corpus of Kurmanci oral tradition.<sup>23</sup> He also worked with Celadet Bedirkhan on a Kurdish grammar (which was only to be published many years later)<sup>24</sup> and carried out field research among the Yezidi communities of northeastern Syria that resulted in an important study.<sup>25</sup>

Rondot and Lescot conducted their work with the Kurds as part of their mission to establish an intelligence network and mobilize support for the French authorities – the journal *Roja Nû* that Kamuran Bedirkhan published in 1943–46, for instance, was an undisguised medium of Allied war propaganda – but they continued their personal commitment to the Kurds long after the termination of their official functions in Syria.<sup>26</sup> Rondot's further career was as a specialist of Middle Eastern politics but he maintained a lifelong sympathy for the Kurds.<sup>27</sup> Lescot and Thomas Bois, who had joined

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<sup>22</sup> Rondot 1935, 1937.

<sup>23</sup> Lescot 1940, 1942.

<sup>24</sup> Bedir Khan / Lescot 1970.

<sup>25</sup> Lescot 1938.

<sup>26</sup> On these intelligence officers' close involvement in Kurdish affairs and their patronage of the intellectual circle of the Bedirkhan brothers, see Tejel 2006, Tejel Gorgas 2007. A brief biography of Rondot is provided in Blau 2000b, and interesting information on his relations with the Bedirkhan brothers is provided by Bozarslan 2002.

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. Rondot 1958.

the same circle, were to play a role in the institutionalization of Kurdish Studies in France, similar to the one Minorsky and especially Edmonds played in Britain.

### **The first institutions: Paris and London**

Kurdish Studies became institutionalized in Western Europe, be it very modestly, as a direct consequence of the British and French mandates over Iraq and Syria. Langues 'O in Paris (the École Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes, later renamed Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, INALCO) and the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London were for a long time the only institutions where one could study Kurdish language, culture and history.

#### *Paris: Langues 'O*

Due to the help of his influential French friends, Kamuran Bedirkhan, who during the war years had distinguished himself by his services to Allied war propaganda, resettled in Paris and began teaching Kurdish at Langues 'O together with Lescot after the war. In 1960, a chair of Kurdish language and civilisation was created at the École for Kamuran Bedirkhan. Kamuran compiled a Kurdish grammar for his courses,<sup>28</sup> published an irregularly appearing newsletter on Kurdish affairs (the *Bulletin mensuel du centre d'études kurdes*), and during the sixties acted as the unofficial ambassador-at-large of the Iraqi Kurdish movement. (In the last-named capacity he was succeeded by Ismet Chérif Vanly, a Syrian-born Kurd who briefly studied with Bedirkhan before submitting a dissertation on the Iraqi Kurdish movement to the University of Lausanne.<sup>29</sup>) From 1967 to 1970, the École's Kurdish section was reinforced by Thomas Bois teaching

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<sup>28</sup> Bedir-Khan 1953.

<sup>29</sup> Vanly 1970.

Kurdish Civilization and by Joyce Blau, who had written a master's thesis on the Kurdish movement and published a Kurdish-French-English glossary under Kamuran Bedirkhan's strict supervision before becoming his successor.<sup>30</sup>

The Bedirkhans were committed to the development of a Kurdish standard language, and their work on grammar and vocabulary was prescriptive rather than descriptive. After linguistic fieldwork in Northern Iraq, Joyce Blau liberated herself from Kamuran Bedirkhan's influence in what is probably her most important work: a detailed descriptive study of two Kurmanci dialects that vary considerably from the *Hawar* standard.<sup>31</sup> For almost three decades, Joyce Blau led the Kurdish section that had already been renamed the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), assisted by several native speakers of Sorani and Kurmanci dialects as language instructors. During her tenure, she produced reference grammars for both dialects.<sup>32</sup> Courses given in the section were attended by students of various other faculties and universities preparing research on the Kurds. Besides teaching at INALCO, Joyce Blau also joined the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), where she was a valued member of the *équipe* of Iranian Studies.

There was yet another Kurdish expert at CNRS, the learned Mohammad Mokri, who had come to France as a political refugee from Iran in 1954. Mokri was born in Kermanshah in a highly cultured family, studied linguistics and Islamic Studies in Tehran and wrote a dissertation on the various languages and dialects of western Iran. He travelled extensively among the various tribal communities of Iran and especially those of southern Kurdistan, while helping to set up a

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<sup>30</sup> Blau 1963, 1965; on Kamuran Bedirkhan, see also Blau 2000a, 2009; Scalbert Yücel / Le Ray 2006: § 14.

<sup>31</sup> Blau 1975. This book is based on her doctoral dissertation.

<sup>32</sup> Blau / Barak 1999; Blau 2000c.

system of national education for the nomadic groups. As a high official in the Ministry of Education, he was close to Prime Minister Mossadegh who was brought down by a coup in 1953. Mokri himself was imprisoned for a year. It was with the help of prominent scholars such as Minorsky and French orientalists that he could settle in France and find a position at CNRS. Mokri became a prolific author whose numerous articles and books are based on his close acquaintance with the tribal groups of Iranian Kurdistan and the manuscripts he had collected. His most notable contribution to Kurdish Studies consists of his edition, translation and analysis of a large corpus of sacred texts in Gurani of the Ahl-i Haqq.<sup>33</sup> After the Iranian revolution, he returned to Iran and served his country in various capacities until he became disillusioned and returned to France where he spent his last years (he died in 2007) in increasing isolation.

#### *London: The School of Oriental and African Studies*

In London, SOAS became a centre of Kurdish Studies with the appointment of Cecil J. Edmonds as a lecturer of Kurdish in 1951. Minorsky had been at the School since 1932 but Kurdish was only one of his many interests; his formal appointment was in Persian. He was already retired by the time Edmonds was appointed but remained part of the small circle of Kurdish experts in London until his death in 1966. In 1955, the Kurdish section at SOAS was reinforced by the appointment of D.N. (Neil) MacKenzie as a lecturer of Kurdish, and later Iranian languages in general.

MacKenzie had learned Pashtu while serving in British India during the war, and had studied Persian and Iranian languages at SOAS. He

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<sup>33</sup> The most important of his numerous journal articles are collected in Mokri 1970 and 1995. He continued publishing learned articles, notably in the *Journal Asiatique*, after his return from post-revolutionary Iran. For a more complete bibliography, see the dedicated website <http://siegfried.mokri.free.fr/>.

published important studies on dialect variation in (Southern) Kurdish; especially his dissertation (published as a two-volume book) is a landmark in Kurdish linguistics, the first study of an ambition and scope to parallel Oskar Mann's monumental work.<sup>34</sup> He also took a serious interest in Gurani, writing a monograph on a Hawrami dialect, and adopted a polemical position against those who believe in the fundamental unity of Kurdish dialects by arguing strongly that Zaza and Gurani belonged to a different branch of the Iranian family than Kurmanci and Sorani, although Sorani showed signs of being influenced by Gurani.<sup>35</sup> In the following years, he mostly worked on other Iranian languages, remaining at SOAS until 1975, when he was appointed Professor of Oriental Philology at the University of Göttingen (Germany).<sup>36</sup>

After an intermezzo of more than a decade, the appointment of Philip Kreyenbroek as lecturer in modern Iranian languages reactivated SOAS' involvement in Kurdish Studies in 1988. Kreyenbroek was deeply interested in Zoroastrianism as well as Old and Middle Iranian, had studied with MacKenzie in 1972 and 1973, and had become interested in Kurdish while teaching Persian in Utrecht, at least in part through contacts with the emerging Kurdish diaspora. At SOAS, he was at the centre of a small group of scholars of various disciplines who shared an interest in contemporary Kurdish society and the religions of Kurdistan, resulting in a number of collective publications.<sup>37</sup> Kreyenbroek took a special interest in Yezidism and its relationship with older Iranian religions. He wrote a major study based on fieldwork in Iraq and his translation and

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<sup>34</sup> MacKenzie 1961a; see also MacKenzie 1954, 1956. Cf. Mann 1906–09.

<sup>35</sup> MacKenzie 1966, 1961b.

<sup>36</sup> Sims-Williams 2001.

<sup>37</sup> Kreyenbroek / Sperl 1992; Kreyenbroek / Allison 1996.

analysis of sacred texts that had been kept secret until recently.<sup>38</sup> In 1996, he followed in the footsteps of MacKenzie and was appointed to the chair of Persian Studies at Göttingen.

### **Enter the anthropologists (and other social scientists)**

Until the middle of the twentieth century, Kurdish society was primarily studied by orientalists trained in language, philology and history. Anthropology and the other social sciences were relatively late in making an impact on Kurdish Studies. Some of the work by Rondot (on tribes) and Lescot (on Yezidi communities) was admittedly based on their direct observations during extended stays in the field, as was Mark Sykes' equally informative earlier article on Kurdish tribes, but the authors' analysis was not informed by a disciplinary training.<sup>39</sup>

#### *Anthropologists in Iraqi Kurdistan: tribal organization, the position of women, rural transformation*

The first trained anthropologists to carry out fieldwork in Kurdistan were the Briton Edmund Leach and the Norwegian Fredrik Barth, who studied tribal social organization in different parts of Iraqi Kurdistan during the late 1930s and early 1950s, respectively – years when Iraq was still under British influence and relatively open to foreign researchers.<sup>40</sup> Barth wrote his 1953 book while at the London School of Economics, where he was a student of Leach. Both focused on the segmentary organization of the tribes and the social consequences of Father's Brother's Daughter marriage as the preferred marriage type, and Barth also paid much attention to social

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<sup>38</sup> Kreyenbroek 1995. Other work on the Yezidis carried out by scholars affiliated at one time or another with SOAS include Fuccaro 1999 (originally a PhD dissertation submitted to the University of Durham in 1994); Allison 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Rondot 1937; Lescot 1938; Sykes 1908.

<sup>40</sup> Leach 1940; Barth 1953, 1954.

stratification and the relations between tribes and non-tribal peasantry. For both, their work on the Kurds was their first exposure to field research, carried out under unfavorable conditions, and both appear to have considered it as a partial failure.<sup>41</sup> Both became famous and influential anthropologists due to their later research, carried out in other parts of the world – Burma and Ceylon in the case of the former, and Pakistan’s Swat valley in the case of the latter – and for their theoretical innovations, which reshaped our way of understanding ethnic identity. Neither revisited Kurdistan or even commented on their Kurdish research later in life.

The third anthropologist to carry out field research on Iraqi Kurdish society was the Danish anthropologist Henny Harald Hansen, who had joined an archaeological expedition as a way to gain access to Kurdish village society (as Barth had done before). She was the first author to go beyond superficial generalities about the position of women in Kurdish society. Today, however, her work comes across as dated.<sup>42</sup>

Following the 1958 *coup d’état*, it became virtually impossible for Western scholars to carry out field research in Iraqi Kurdistan. Until the emergence of a protected Kurdish region in 1991, very few foreign researchers succeeded in gaining access. I carried out a few months of fieldwork in the ‘liberated areas’ of Iraqi Kurdistan during Mulla Mustafa Barzani’s last uprising in 1974–75, and Polish anthropologist Leszek Dziegiel spent a longer period in government-controlled districts where he accompanied a Polish team that was building ‘new villages’ to which the regime planned to displace the entire rural population in the late 1970s.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In 1938, Leach had to prematurely break off his fieldwork due to political reasons. Barth saw his book on the Kurds rejected as a doctoral dissertation.

<sup>42</sup> Hansen 1960, 1961.

<sup>43</sup> Bruinessen 1978; Dziegiel 1981.

*Anthropology and the social and economic history of Turkish and Iranian Kurdistan*

Turkish Kurdistan had been virtually inaccessible to outside observers since the establishment of the Republic,<sup>44</sup> but in the relatively liberal period of Democratic Party rule in the 1950s, three German scholars – social geographer Wolf-Dieter Hütteroth, social anthropologist Wolfgang Rudolph, and ethnomusicologist Dieter Christensen – succeeded in carrying out fieldwork in Turkey's deep Southeast. Hütteroth studied the nomads and semi-nomads in the mountain range south of Lake Van in Turkey and focused on human and physical ecology besides tribal organization.<sup>45</sup> Rudolph made some general observations on the variety of material culture among the Kurds, even in a relatively limited area, and offered the hypothesis that present Kurdish society had emerged from at least two originally different populations. In a response, Hütteroth rejected the rigid association of culture and ethnicity and suggested that the changes in material culture could well be explained by ecological factors.<sup>46</sup> Christensen studied the musical forms of Siirt and Hakkari; he made a second visit in 1965 and continued publishing his material in later years.<sup>47</sup>

After 1960, Turkish Kurdistan was inaccessible once again. Hütteroth continued working in other parts of Turkey and much later returned to Kurdistan with a study of the human geography of the region

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<sup>44</sup> Here too, there was an exception: the Norwegian geographer Frødin had made a tour of Eastern Turkey in 1936 and made some general observations on nomadism and social changes resulting from the mass deportations of the preceding years: Frødin 1944a, 1944b.

<sup>45</sup> Hütteroth 1959, 1961.

<sup>46</sup> Rudolph 1959; Hütteroth 1961.

<sup>47</sup> Christensen 1963, 1975, 2002.

between Mardin and Mosul in the sixteenth century, based on Ottoman census data.<sup>48</sup> Rudolph continued his research in the 1960s in the Iranian part of Kurdistan, combining field observations with the analysis of local written sources (notably a family chronicle).<sup>49</sup> By the next decade, Hütteroth had become a professor of geography at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, Rudolph a professor of anthropology at the Free University of Berlin, and Christensen taught at Columbia University in New York. None of them appeared to have students who continued their work on Kurdish society and culture.

When I began preparing my own fieldwork in the early 1970s, I had read Leach and Barth and considered Hütteroth and Rudolph as my most direct predecessors. In fact, I went to visit Rudolph who generously shared his field notes with me but I felt more inspired by two younger scholars who I was to meet in person only much later, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou and Ismail Beşikçi. Their works were sociological rather than strictly anthropological, and informed by Marxist class analysis without being dogmatic. At that time, Turkish sociologist Beşikçi was in prison serving a 13-year sentence for having written a sociological study on Kurdish society that was accused of being 'separatist' propaganda by the Turkish authorities. Beşikçi's work was conceived in the framework of social and economic development studies that were the dominant paradigm at Ankara University's Faculty of Political Sciences, and investigated the articulation of tribal, feudal and capitalist relations of production in Turkish Kurdistan ('The East'). Unlike his colleagues, however, Beşikçi took the ethnic factor into account in his analysis of the differential impact of modernization, and he sought to explain the rise of Kurdish national awareness – then still a taboo subject – with socio-economic

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<sup>48</sup> Göyünç / Hütteroth 1997.

<sup>49</sup> Rudolph 1967a, 1967b.

factors as well as discriminatory and oppressive government policies.<sup>50</sup>

Ghassemlou was an Iranian Kurd affiliated with the Democratic Party of Kurdistan-Iran (KDP-I) who had lived in exile since the 1950s and pursued a doctorate in Czechoslovakia. His book is an original study of the political economy of Iranian Kurdistan, and the only serious book that paid attention to peasant rebellion in Kurdistan.<sup>51</sup> (After the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Ghassemlou left for France where he became one of the Kurdish language instructors at INALCO and contributed to an important book on the political struggles of the Kurds.<sup>52</sup> During the Iranian revolution he was to return to Kurdistan to lead the KDP-I.)

Yet another Kurdish scholar writing in Europe in those years deserves to be mentioned here: Majeed Jafar, an Iraqi Kurd whose dissertation on regional inequality in Turkey and Kurdistan was based on official Turkish statistics and explicitly brought the factor of deliberate neglect and ethnic discrimination into discussions of unequal development.<sup>53</sup> Ghassemlou and Jafar were among the first members of the emerging Kurdish diaspora to make contributions to Kurdish Studies in Europe.<sup>54</sup> In the following decades, the volume and quality

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<sup>50</sup> Beşikçi 1969; cf. Bruinessen 2003-2004.

<sup>51</sup> Ghassemlou 1965.

<sup>52</sup> Ghassemlou 1978.

<sup>53</sup> Jafar 1976.

<sup>54</sup> Three other early scholars of the diaspora, in different disciplines though, were the Iraqi Kurds Jemal Nebez who wrote a dissertation on the nineteenth-century Kurdish ruler of the emirate of Soran (Nebez 1970), and Kamal Fuad who prepared a catalogue of Kurdish manuscripts in German libraries (Fuad 1970) as well as the Syrian Kurd Ismet Chérif Vanly who wrote the first academic study of the Iraqi Kurdish national movement (Vanly 1970). Like Ghassemlou and Jafar, these three scholars were political activists at the same time. Nebez was the founder of the ultra-nationalist parties KAJYK and PASOK; Fuad was close to Jalal Talabani and became one of the founding members of the PUK; and Vanly was a loyal supporter

of contributions by Kurds living in Europe to this field of studies was to keep increasing.

These authors constituted my frame of reference (besides my general reading in anthropology and political economy, and history of Turkey and Iran) when I set out on my own field research in 1974–76. I had applied for a research permit in Iran but I could not stay in a single group of villages as planned because I failed to receive a proper permit. I ended up spending shorter periods of time in many different villages, nomadic camps and towns in all major parts of Kurdistan, which made my doctoral thesis a more different work than I had originally envisaged. Comparison of tribal organization in different parts of Kurdistan had alerted me to the importance of the political and historical context, and I realized that I had to incorporate the relations between Kurdish society and the state (Ottoman, Safavid, Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi) into my analysis.<sup>55</sup>

Several of my key informants, men who were well-read in local history, had convinced me of the importance of historical Persian and Ottoman sources for understanding present conditions, mentioning notably the *Sharafname* (late 16<sup>th</sup> century) and Evliya Çelebi's *Book of Travels* (mid-17<sup>th</sup> century). Some of my later work consists of

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and European representative of the Barzanis' KDP. The first Kurd to write a dissertation in Europe, as early as 1933, may have been Messoud Fany (Fany 1933). In the same year, former Kurdish nationalist Şükrü Sekban published a book in which he advocated assimilation as the solution to the Kurdish question, apparently as a condition for being allowed to return to Turkey (Sekban 1933).

<sup>55</sup> My dissertation (Bruinessen 1978) was printed privately in a limited edition and long remained unpublished. A slightly edited German translation was published in 1989, followed by a Turkish translation in 1992 and a Sorani Kurdish one, based on the German version, in 1996. The book based on the dissertation (Bruinessen 1992) is slightly abbreviated (I had to reduce the excessive amount of detailed information in the footnotes) but has a new introduction that surveys the political developments since 1978. This version was translated into Persian (1999), German (2003), Turkish (2003), and Arabic (2007–8).

attempts to read those sources through the eyes of an anthropologist.<sup>56</sup>

The mid-1970s were a period when Turkey's Kurdish regions were relatively open to foreigners, and I was fortunate to be in the field precisely in those years. Around the same time, the German anthropologist Peter Bumke carried out fieldwork in Dersim (Tunceli) and wrote insightfully on Kurdish Alevi identity.<sup>57</sup> The only anthropologist who succeeded in carrying out fieldwork over an extended period in a single location, however, was Lale Yalçın-Heckmann, a Turkish anthropologist pursuing a PhD at the London School of Economics (thesis submitted in 1986). She worked in Hakkari for two long periods focusing on tribal organization and local politics.<sup>58</sup> After her dissertation, she also wrote several articles on the position of women in Kurdish society, which are among the few studies of the subject based on systematic observation. She also co-edited a general book on the Kurds.<sup>59</sup>

### **The impact of the Kurdish national movement and the Kurdish diaspora**

Political developments in Kurdistan – the Kurdish armed uprising in Northern Iraq of the 1960s, resulting in the formal recognition of autonomy in 1970; the rise of a new movement for Kurdish cultural and political rights in Turkey in the late 1960s and 1970s; and the appearance of a strong movement for Kurdish autonomy in

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<sup>56</sup> Bruinessen / Boeschoten 1988; Bruinessen 2000c. Many of my publications are available online at my Utrecht University homepage, [www.hum.uu.nl/medewerkers/m.vanbruinessen/publications/](http://www.hum.uu.nl/medewerkers/m.vanbruinessen/publications/), and/or at [www.academia.edu/](http://www.academia.edu/).

<sup>57</sup> Rotkopf 1978; Bumke 1979.

<sup>58</sup> Yalçın-Heckmann 1991.

<sup>59</sup> Yalçın-Heckmann 1990, 1991; Yalçın-Heckmann / van Gelder 2000; Strohmeier / Yalçın-Heckmann 2000.

revolutionary Iran – drew increasing attention from journalists and gave rise to (very modest) solidarity movements in western Europe. A small but gradually increasing number of Kurds, typically from well-to-do elite families, had been coming to attend European universities since the beginning of the century. In the 1960s, they established their first association followed by several other associations reflecting the political divisions in Kurdistan a decade later. The ranks of these associations were reinforced by refugees; the first groups from Iraqi Kurdistan following Barzani's 1975 defeat, and later in increasing numbers from Turkey.<sup>60</sup> Kurdish students and refugees were also increasingly successful in mobilising the large population of Kurdish labor migrants as the second generation was coming of age in the 1980s.

### *Political activism and scholarship*

Journalism and political activism are beyond the scope of this overview but some of those involved also produced work of academic pretensions. The first solidarity committee, active during the 1960s and for most of the 1970s, went by the impressive name of International Society Kurdistan (ISK) but was, in reality, a one-man operation run by Silvio van Rooy in Amsterdam. Van Rooy was an archivist by profession; he collected a large amount of documentation on Kurdistan – books, photographs, newspaper clippings, audio recordings – and published a bulletin, *Kurdish Facts*, that reported on the struggles of the Kurds in all parts of Kurdistan. ISK's main contribution to scholarship was a useful two-volume bibliography on the Kurds listing scholarly as well as journalistic items.<sup>61</sup> In the preparations to my own research, I have personally

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<sup>60</sup> Soran 1997; Bruinessen 2000d.

<sup>61</sup> van Rooy / Tamboer 1968. Van Rooy's and ISK's archives are held by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, see [www.iisg.nl/archives/en/files/r/ARCH01952.php](http://www.iisg.nl/archives/en/files/r/ARCH01952.php).

benefited more from van Rooy's knowledge of Kurdish affairs and especially his collection of materials than from properly academic institutions.

In Germany, the *Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker* played a role somewhat similar to ISK, although the Kurds were only one among the numerous threatened peoples with which this Society concerned itself. Its monthly journal *Pogrom* as well as its book series reported regularly on the situation of the Kurds and the minorities living in their midst.<sup>62</sup>

A collection of essays dealing with the political struggles in the various parts of Kurdistan, edited by well-known journalist and expert of Third World liberation movements, Gérard Chaliand, with contributions by Kurdish scholars and activists, marks the beginning of a new emphasis in Kurdish Studies in Europe.<sup>63</sup> The political struggles of the Kurds became a dominant theme of research as political scientists turned their attention towards Kurdistan. Jean-Pierre Viennot in Paris, Ismet Chériff Vanly in Lausanne, and Ferhad Ibrahim in Berlin were the first political scientists to write their dissertations on the Kurdish movement.<sup>64</sup>

### *Scholarly institutions outside academia*

Kurdish Studies remained marginal in academia, and it was institutions outside the universities that played key roles in stimulating scholarly interest in Kurdish society. In Berlin, which

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<sup>62</sup> E.g., Yonan 1978; Schneider 1984; Chaliand 1984; Vanly 1986, 1988a.

<sup>63</sup> Chaliand 1978 (English translation 1980; expanded second edition 1993; German translation 1984). In Italy, Mirella Galletti had published a study of the Iraqi Kurdish movement in a similar spirit of politically committed scholarship a few years earlier: Galletti 1975.

<sup>64</sup> Viennot 1969; Vanly 1970; Ibrahim 1983. Earlier, several of the pioneers of Kurdish Studies had also written on the Kurdish movement(s): Rambout 1947 (a pseudonym of Bois); Rondot 1958; Edmonds 1971; Blau 1963.

hosted a large Kurdish community (mostly Alevi from Turkey), the Berliner Institut für Vergleichende Sozialforschung, a private institution led by the political scientist Jochen Blaschke, brought together a group of young scholars who were interested in Turkey, Iran and international migration, often with special attention to the Kurds. The institute was later renamed Europäisches Migrationszentrum, reflecting a shift of focus from the politics of the Middle East to migrants and immigration policies in Europe – a shift that can also be perceived in Kurdish Studies in general. The institute's major publication on Kurdish subjects was a two-volume handbook on the Kurdish diaspora with contributions by numerous collaborators.<sup>65</sup>

The presence of highly educated Kurds in Europe has increasingly stimulated the interest of politicians and policy-makers as well as scholars in the Kurdish issue in the countries of origin as well as in the emerging Kurdish diaspora. Moreover, Kurdish students and academics have contributed to institution-building and to the acceptance of Kurdish Studies in academic circles.

In 1983, a group of Kurdish intellectuals and artists established the Kurdish Institute of Paris, funded by private contributions and supported by the French government (when the Parti Socialiste was in power). The founding director, Kendal Nezan, was a nuclear physicist at CNRS as well as a contributor to Chaliand's 1978 volume.<sup>66</sup> Other academics deeply involved in the institute included political scientists Abbas Vali and Fuad Hussein (then based in Great

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<sup>65</sup> Blaschke et al. 1991. The Institute had earlier published a German translation of my dissertation that did much to establish my name in Germany: Bruinessen 1989 (superseded by an improved and updated translation that appeared in 2003). My own association with the Institute dates from the early 1980s, when I took part in their conferences and publications on the Iranian revolution and Turkey after the 1980 coup: Bruinessen 1981; Blaschke / Bruinessen 1985.

<sup>66</sup> Kendal 1978a, 1978b.

Britain and the Netherlands, respectively) as well as Joyce Blau. The institute has a rich library to which several people, including Pierre Rondot, donated their private collections. It published the journal *Studia Kurdica* (appearing irregularly between 1984 and 1993, with consecutive issues in different languages including Arabic and Turkish), which was succeeded from 2000 onwards, with the involvement of younger scholars such as Hamit Bozarslan and Salih Akin, by the monolingual journal *Études kurdes*, to which numerous young European scholars have contributed.<sup>67</sup> In addition, the institute published the Kurdish literary and cultural journal *Hêvî / Hîwa* (in Kurmanci, Sorani and Zaza) and the linguistic periodical *Kurmancî* from 1983 to 1992. Appearing twice a year since 1987, the latter reports on the institute's series of seminars on problems of terminology and standardization of the Kurdish language, including writers representing the entire range of Kurmanci dialects.

One of the Kurdish Institute of Paris' most significant activities is its scholarship program which enables promising students from various parts of Kurdistan to pursue postgraduate studies in France – in various disciplines, with an increasing emphasis on sciences but including Kurdish Studies as well. In the twenty years of the institute's existence, 450 young students from all parts of Kurdistan have been recipients of MA or PhD scholarships, 85% of them finishing their studies successfully.<sup>68</sup> The program has contributed to an increased interest in Kurdish issues at various French universities besides INALCO (where language and literature had long been taught), notably at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris.

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<sup>67</sup> Scalbert Yücel / Le Ray 2006: § 29. See also the institute's website, [www.institutkurde.org](http://www.institutkurde.org).

<sup>68</sup> Personal communication from Joyce Blau, 15 July 2014.

Another Kurdish academic institution is the Kurdish Library of Stockholm, established in 1996 by Nedim Dağdeviren with the support of the Swedish government and the Swedish National Library. In the 1980s, Sweden had become home to a large number of political refugees from all parts of Kurdistan, many of them highly educated. The country's multiculturalist policies, which made subsidies available for publications in Kurdish (and other threatened languages) and made it possible for Kurdish children to learn standardized Kurdish in school, had resulted in a flourishing range of Kurdish writing and publishing; some of it literary, some political, and some also scholarly. This was especially important for the Kurds from Turkey where the Kurdish language remained legally banned until 1991. Journals such as *Berhem*, *Bergeh*, *Bîrnebûn* and *Çira*, which appeared in the 1990s in Turkish and Kurmanci, contained many contributions of academic interest (mostly historical and ethnographic).<sup>69</sup> Authors such as Rohat (Alakom) and Malmîsanij (Tayfun) produced a large body of writing – in Turkish, Swedish, Kurmanci and Zaza – of increasing scholarly quality.<sup>70</sup> Others published collections of folklore, literary and historical texts previously only existing in manuscript, and memoirs in Kurmanci, Sorani and Zaza. The Stockholm Kurdish Library is an expression of Kurdish cultural revival in the diaspora, a depository of the remarkable output of Kurdish authors in Sweden, and a major resource for research on the Kurds.

In 1993 at the Freie Universität in Berlin, Kurdish and German students established a Kurdish Studies working group that organized several conferences and workshops, and successfully pressured the

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<sup>69</sup> Of these journals, *Bîrnebûn*, dedicated to the culture and history of the dispersed Kurdish communities of Central Anatolia, is the only one that has continued appearing without interruption since 1997.

<sup>70</sup> Rohat 1987, 1991; Alakom 1995a, 1995b, 1998; Malmîsanij / Lewendî 1989; Malmîsanij 1994; Tayfun 1998.

university administration to establish a chair of Kurdology.<sup>71</sup> For one year, in 1996–97, I had the honor of occupying that chair as a guest professor at the Department of Anthropology (Institut für Ethnologie). This enabled me to cooperate with two Kurdish political scientists who were then also teaching at the Freie Universität, Ferhad Ibrahim and Gülistan Gürbey,<sup>72</sup> and to get to know the Kurdish poet and linguist Feryad Fazil Omar who taught at the Department of Iranian Studies and was the author of an important dictionary.<sup>73</sup> Due to changes in the university administration, the chair of Kurdology was discontinued but the Kurdish Studies working group consolidated itself as a private research institution outside the university, the Berliner Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Kurdologie (Berlin Society for the Advancement of Kurdology), formally established in 1999. This society, in which young scholars of various disciplines cooperate, published an important series of books and, from 2001 to 2006, the scholarly journal *Kurdische Studien*.<sup>74</sup> The society also built a rich library collection, one of the best resources in Europe for research on the Kurds.

Elsewhere in Europe too, small clusters of young Kurdish (and other) scholars and students emerged that were interested in further developing Kurdish Studies, and organized regular meetings, seminars or lecture series. The Kurdish Studies and Student

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<sup>71</sup> Atasoy et al. (Ed.) 1994 is a programmatic book making the claim for Kurdish Studies as an interdisciplinary subject needing institutionalisation in academia. Contributions to the book are in the disciplines of philology, history, sociology, international relations and international law.

<sup>72</sup> Neither was specialising on Kurdish issues which constituted only a part of their output. They were to cooperate on one major publication on the Kurdish question in Turkey: Ibrahim / Gürbey 2000.

<sup>73</sup> Omar 1992, 2005.

<sup>74</sup> Titles from the *Kurdologie* book series include: Borck et al. (Ed.) 1997; Savelsberg et al. (Ed.) 2000; Ammann 2000; Kren 2000; Skubsch 2002; Fischer-Tahir 2003; Hajo et al. (Ed.) 2004.

Organisation at SOAS, which brings together students and staff from different universities in London, is perhaps the largest of its kind – compensating for the fact that Kurdish is currently no longer taught at SOAS. Today, many European universities have Kurds of the second (in some cases first) generation among their teaching and research staff in various faculties. Most of them do not primarily work on Kurdish subjects but many show an interest in developing Kurdish Studies as an academic subject.

### **Current institutional situation**

There are very few academic institutions specialising in Kurdish Studies, and given the declining position of area studies in general, this is likely to remain so. Most of the scholars who carry out research on Kurdish society, history or culture are affiliated with academic departments of a disciplinary specialization, such as history, sociolinguistics, anthropology, development studies, political science, migration studies, archaeology or religious studies.

#### *Kurdology as a branch of Iranian Studies*

In some universities, however, Kurdish language and literature are subjects of teaching and research in departments of Iranian Studies – as was the case at the first institutions to open themselves to Kurdish Studies, Paris' School of Living Oriental Languages (later INALCO) and London's School of Oriental and African Studies. Of these older institutions, SOAS currently has no staff teaching Kurdish language and/or history; it is only the Kurdish Studies and Students Organisation (and of course the library, which among other things holds Minorsky's collection) that maintains the association of SOAS with Kurdology. At INALCO in Paris, Joyce Blau was not at once replaced at the professorial level upon her retirement but the teaching of both Kurmanci and Sorani continued. There is now again a chair of Kurdish language and literature, currently held by Halkawt

Hakim who has previously done research on the Naqshbandiyya in South Kurdistan and on Kurdish literature, and who is the author of a dictionary.<sup>75</sup> Ibrahim Seydo Aydoğan is attached to the chair as a lecturer of Kurmanci.

Furthermore, there are departments of Iranian Studies with Kurdish expertise (and Kurdish language teaching) at the University of Uppsala (Sweden), the Freie Universität of Berlin and the Georg-August University of Göttingen (Germany), and the Jagiellonian University of Kraków (Poland). Ferhad Shakely in Uppsala and Feryad Fazil Omar in Berlin have made notable contributions to Kurdish literary studies and linguistics, respectively.<sup>76</sup>

The Seminar für Iranistik in Göttingen, where Philip Kreyenbroek succeeded Neil MacKenzie, became a centre of Yezidi studies. Khalil Jindy [Rashow], a prominent Yezidi shaykh from northern Iraq with whom Kreyenbroek worked,<sup>77</sup> taught Kurdish here. Currently, Khanna Omarkhali, who was trained as an orientalist in St. Petersburg and is also an expert of Yezidism, is lecturer of Kurdish and research associate in Göttingen.<sup>78</sup>

In Kraków, there is a young and dynamic Kurdish study group centred around the Department of Iranian Studies and formally established in 2008. With members working in a range of academic disciplines, the group has been publishing an online journal in English and Polish, *Fritillaria Kurdica*, since 2013.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Hakim 2012.

<sup>76</sup> Shakely 1983, 1996; Omar 1992, 2005.

<sup>77</sup> Kreyenbroek / Jindy 2005.

<sup>78</sup> Omarkhali 2011, 2014.

<sup>79</sup> For self-representation, in which the group places itself in an older Polish tradition of scholarship on the Kurds, see: [http://www.kurdishstudies.pl/?en\\_ks-in-poland,2](http://www.kurdishstudies.pl/?en_ks-in-poland,2) (accessed 12-10-2014). The journal can be downloaded from the same site, at [http://www.kurdishstudies.pl/?en\\_bulletin,16](http://www.kurdishstudies.pl/?en_bulletin,16).

### *Kurdish Studies as part of social sciences*

There are two universities that have modest centres of Kurdish Studies conceived as interdisciplinary area studies. Both owe their existence to external funding by Iraqi Kurdish political forces. This is perhaps the most visible reflection of the improved position of the Kurds in the Middle East but also a symptom of academia's increasing dependence on external and not necessarily impartial funding. (In Turkish and especially Arab Studies, endowed chairs and study programs funded by foundations linked to Turkey and the Gulf states have long been prominently present.)

In 2006, the Centre for Kurdish Studies at Exeter University was established within the Department of Arab and Islamic Studies thanks to generous funding by the Ibrahim Ahmed Foundation (associated with the PUK). The Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani (KDP), augmented this with funds for open scholarships. The academic staff consists of political scientist Gareth Stansfield, linguist and specialist of Kurdish oral tradition Christine Allison, literary scholar Hashem Ahmadzadeh (until 2012), and social geographer and scholar of literature Clémence Scalbert Yücel.<sup>80</sup> The centre has organized international conferences and workshops focusing on its general research themes, which currently include: Kurdish literature; ethnicity, domination and resistance; memory and heritage; political science and international relations; migration studies. Due to its scholarship program, this appears to be the one viable concentration of Kurdish Studies in European academia. So far, Exeter has awarded 20 PhD scholarships (of which four have already been defended) with over 30 PhD students

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<sup>80</sup> See the self-presentation of the centre at: <http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/iaais/research/centres/kurdish/about/>. Significant publications by the staff include Allison 2001; Ahmadzadeh 2003; Ahmadzadeh / Stansfield 2010; Stansfield 2003; Scalbert Yücel / Tejel Gorgas 2011; Scalbert Yücel 2014.

registered in Kurdish Studies; 19 students have received MA scholarships in Kurdish Studies (the first of its kind in the UK) from a total of 30 students.<sup>81</sup> The Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Erfurt (Germany) houses an endowed chair of Kurdish Studies, the Mustafa Barzani Arbeitsstelle für Kurdische Studien, which focuses on the modern history, sociology and politics of Kurdistan. The Arbeitsstelle is led by political scientist Ferhad Seyder (Ibrahim); the associated junior position was held by Lokman Turgut, a scholar of Kurmanci oral tradition with a PhD degree in Iranian Studies from Göttingen until 2014. This is primarily a teaching institution but there is a modest number of PhD candidates carrying out research on a variety of subjects including the political economy of oil in Kurdistan, the peace process in Turkey, and Alevi identity struggles in Germany. Furthermore, the Arbeitsstelle also publishes a modest series of reports called *Studia Kurdica*, of which three issues have appeared to date.<sup>82</sup>

Besides these two centres, the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris deserves to be especially mentioned. Hamit Bozarslan, whose appointment at the École is in the sociology of violence in the Middle East, is one of the most prolific authors on the politics of Kurdistan.<sup>83</sup> He and several of his colleagues at the École have, jointly or separately, supervised a large number of students writing MA theses and dissertations on various aspects of Kurdish history, politics and society. Due to the presence of two other important institutions, INALCO and the Institut Kurde de Paris, there is probably a larger concentration of Kurdish expertise covering a

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<sup>81</sup> Personal communication from Christine Allison, 28 July 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Ferhad Seyder, personal communication 30 July 2014. See the self-presentation of the Arbeitsstelle at: <http://www.uni-erfurt.de/staatswissenschaften/mustafa-barzani-arbeitsstelle/profil/>. Seyder's major publications include: Ibrahim 1983; Ibrahim / Gürbey 2000; Turgut's dissertation was published as Turgut 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Bozarslan 1997, 2009.

wide range of academic disciplines in Paris than anywhere else in Europe. This is also reflected in the online *European Journal of Turkish Studies* that is based in Paris and that, notwithstanding its name, has contained numerous important contributions on Kurdish society and politics.<sup>84</sup>

Since 2009, the infrastructure of Kurdish Studies has been reinforced by a virtual institute, the Kurdish Studies Network, coordinated by Welat Zeydanlıoğlu. Starting out as an e-mail discussion list, the Network has become a valuable meeting place where members learn about new publications, help each other find literature and other resources, and stay informed about developments in Kurdistan. The Network hosts an online bibliography and a database of scholars, and began publishing a peer-reviewed academic journal, *Kurdish Studies* in 2013.<sup>85</sup> Today, this is the most promising specialized periodical and, because of its connection with the Kurdish Studies Network which incorporates almost all scholars working on Kurds, likely to succeed where more ephemeral journals have failed.

### **The increasing volume of Kurdish Studies**

Although there has not been a major increase in the number of formal institutions dedicated to Kurdish Studies, the volume of published research has shown dramatic growth in the last few decades. Obviously, most of this research has taken place at other than specialized institutions. The number of doctoral dissertations on Kurdish subjects may give an indication of the growing importance of Kurdish Studies in academia. I have no comprehensive overview but

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<sup>84</sup> See especially the special issues 5 and 14: Scalbert Yücel / Le Ray 2006; Casier / Jongerden 2012.

<sup>85</sup> See [kurdishstudiesnetwork.wordpress.com/about-us-3/](http://kurdishstudiesnetwork.wordpress.com/about-us-3/) for the network, and [www.kurdishstudies.net/](http://www.kurdishstudies.net/) for the journal.

these are the numbers of dissertations on Kurdish subjects submitted to European universities of which I am aware:<sup>86</sup>

1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
4	5	5	22	18

There was a similar sharp increase in journal articles and books beginning somewhat earlier in the 1990s. This scholarly output covers a wide range of subjects and disciplines ranging from linguistics and studies of literature and oral tradition to detailed ethnography, archaeology and history, cultural studies and discourse analysis, political economy, demography, criminology and legal studies.

This increase in scholarly writing appears to reflect (or to have been made possible by) a number of important political and social changes. The international intervention to protect the Iraqi Kurds in 1991 and the emergence of a semi-independent Kurdish region in Northern Iraq made the Kurds major actors in the Middle East, with semi-official diplomatic representations in Washington as well as Ankara. In Turkey, restrictions on the use of Kurdish and the mentioning of the Kurds were gradually lifted from 1991 onwards, and legal 'pro-Kurdish' parties gained a presence in parliament (however much contested) as well as later the municipal administration of major cities in Turkish Kurdistan as well. These developments attracted interest among the general public and, more importantly, persuaded book publishers and journal editors of the

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<sup>86</sup> These are the dissertations I have come across and listed in my private database. It is likely that my coverage for the earlier decades is more complete than for recent years, so that the real growth is even sharper than the table shows. As elsewhere in this article, I do not include studies carried out by researchers based outside Europe, although their work may have had an impact on scholarship in Europe.

relevance of research on Kurdish society. Moreover, Turkish and Iraqi Kurdistan gradually became more accessible for researchers (although there were serious reversals during the ‘dirty war’ of the mid-1990s). Another important factor was the growing significance of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, which had become increasingly organized and mobilized in the 1980s, and from which both political activists and scholars have emerged.

### **Major themes of recent research**

Unsurprisingly, both the Kurdish diaspora and the Kurdish conflict in Turkey have a prominent place among the themes of recent work in Kurdish Studies. In the literature of past decades, the most conspicuous new thematic emphases consist of two partly overlapping clusters of themes: migration, transnationalism and the diaspora, and Turkey’s Kurdish movement, the state’s responses and international implications (including the EU accession process).

#### *Diaspora and transnationalism*

Beginning with Östen Wahlbeck’s dissertation comparing the Kurdish diasporas in Finland and the UK,<sup>87</sup> the emergence of a Kurdish diaspora in Europe, problems of integration, and identity politics have been the subject of much recent research. Especially among researchers based in the Scandinavian countries, diaspora studies appear to be the favorite specialization – perhaps reflecting policies and preferences underlying research funding.<sup>88</sup> Some of the studies especially dealt with the ways in which political struggles in Turkey

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<sup>87</sup> Wahlbeck 1999 (PhD diss., Warwick, 1997).

<sup>88</sup> Relevant dissertations include: Ammann 2001 (diss. Berlin 2000); Østergaard-Nielsen 2003 (diss. Oxford 1999); Marouf 2002; Alinia 2004; Emanuelsson 2005; Khayati 2008; Grojean 2008; Eliassi 2010; Başer 2012; Pelling 2013. There was earlier pioneering work done outside academia that remains significant: Vanly 1988b; Blaschke et al. 1991; see also Bruinessen 2000d; Hennerbichler et al. (eds.) 2013.

and Iraq were reproduced and transformed in the diaspora and, in a few cases, with the significant contributions made by the diaspora to the struggles in the home countries.<sup>89</sup> One particular aspect of diaspora cultural politics that has received considerable attention concerns the way religious minorities, such as the Yezidis, Ahl-i Haqq and Alevis, reconstruct belief and practice in the diaspora as a strategy of survival.<sup>90</sup>

### *The Kurdish movement in Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria*

Research on the Kurdish national movement initially focused on Iraqi Kurdistan; the pioneering works by Viennot, Vanly and Ibrahim have already been mentioned above. These were complemented by a few studies on the relations of the Great Powers (USA and USSR) with the Kurdish movement.<sup>91</sup> The genocidal Anfal operations of 1988 and the developments in Iraqi Kurdistan after 1991 have given rise to a modest but steady stream of publications on the political developments, social transformation, and political economy of this region.<sup>92</sup>

From the 1990s onwards, however, the plight and struggles of the Kurds in Turkey have taken an increasingly prominent place in academic research. Turkey's repressive policies received more attention and were seriously analysed by human rights groups and academics. Lawyers studied violations of human rights,<sup>93</sup> while anthropologists studied the forced village evacuations, the lives of the internally displaced and their efforts to return and reconstruct

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<sup>89</sup> Grojean 2008; Başer 2012; Casier 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Yalkut-Breddermann 2001; Kreyenbroek et al. 2009; Kehl-Bodrogi 2006; Ağuıçenođlu 2013.

<sup>91</sup> Rasoul 1988; Yassin 1995.

<sup>92</sup> Leezenberg 1997a, 2003b, 2006; Bruinessen 2000b; Fischer-Tahir 2003, 2009; Stansfield 2003; Yildiz 2004; Jabar / Dawod 2006; Hardi 2011.

<sup>93</sup> Bayir 2013; Yildiz 2005; Yildiz / Breau 2010.

village life.<sup>94</sup> The Kurdish movement, and more specifically the PKK, was subject of a growing number of studies, which were generally more informed by social theory than earlier work on the Kurdish movement.<sup>95</sup>

There is hardly any comparable work on Iranian Kurdistan, which remains seriously under-researched, especially in terms of developments since the Islamic revolution. Koohi-Kamali's monograph focuses on the political economy of Kurdistan during the Pahlavi era, with a few chapters on the nationalist movement and some observations on the years of struggle at the time of the Islamic Revolution. Even Abbas Vali's long-awaited study of Kurdish nationalism in Iran focuses primarily on the 1946 Mahabad Republic (but he has announced another book on the Kurds in the Islamic Republic).<sup>96</sup> There are a few articles on the Kurdish movement of the revolutionary period, when for a short period the Kurds controlled some territory. On the developments of the past thirty years, there is almost complete silence, though (to quote Yann Richard's title).<sup>97</sup>

Syria's Kurds are, at the time of writing, at the centre of attention but there are few scholarly studies of Kurdish politics in Syria, apart from a recent book by Harriet Allsopp and a detailed report published by the 'Kurdologie' centre in Berlin, both on the Kurdish political parties.<sup>98</sup> Earlier, the Berlin centre published a major report on the

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<sup>94</sup> Netherlands Kurdistan Society 1995; Wiessner 1996; Jongerden 2007; Geerse 2011.

<sup>95</sup> Dorransoro / Grojean 2004; Grojean 2008a, 2008b, 2013; Özcan 2006; Casier / Jongerden (eds.) 2010, 2012; Gunes 2012; Gunes / Zeydanlioğlu (eds.) 2014; Akkaya / Jongerden 2013.

<sup>96</sup> Koohi-Kamali 2003; Vali 2011.

<sup>97</sup> Bruinessen 1981; Richard 1991. The only exceptions to this silence (apart from journalistic accounts) are Ahmadzadeh / Stansfield 2010 and the sections on the Kurds in Elling 2013.

<sup>98</sup> Allsopp 2014; KurdWatch 2011.

human rights violations to which the Syrian Kurds were subjected.<sup>99</sup> The most significant and innovative research on Syria's Kurds, however, concerns the period of the French mandate.<sup>100</sup>

*The late Ottoman period, Young Turk policies, and the beginnings of Kurdish nationalism*

Another area of research in which there has been important recent research is the history of the closing years of the Ottoman Empire, the ethnic policies of the Young Turks and the Republican regime, and the beginnings of Kurdish nationalism. Hilmar Kaiser, Hans-Lukas Kieser and Uğur Ümit Üngör have analysed a wide range of hitherto unexplored archival sources that shine important new light on the complex ethnic relations of the region, the ethnocidal and genocidal policies of the Young Turk period, and the role of the Kurds in the Armenian massacres.<sup>101</sup> Gunnar Wiessner wrote a fascinating micro-history of a single valley near Van that had been predominantly inhabited by Armenians until 1915 and is now almost exclusively Kurdish. His study showed that the process of ethnic, economic and cultural change had been a gradual one, in spite of the massacres of 1895-96 and 1915, and that there were surprising continuities.<sup>102</sup> Contemporary observations of the process of ethnic change in the late nineteenth century, when Kurdish tribes were settling in many previously Armenian-held districts, were recorded by Manuel Mirakhorian whose travel reports are now available in an annotated

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<sup>99</sup> Montgomery 2005.

<sup>100</sup> Fuccaro 2003; Tejel 2009; Altuğ 2011.

<sup>101</sup> Kieser (Ed.) 1997; Kieser 2000; Üngör 2011; Kaiser 2014. See also Hofmann / Koutcharian 1986; Bozarslan 1995; Verheij 1998; Altuğ 2011; and the detailed studies in Jongerden / Verheij (Ed.) 2012.

<sup>102</sup> Wiessner 1997.

French translation – an important source for the social history of the region.<sup>103</sup>

The first stirrings of Kurdish nationalism, including the first Kurdish associations and the first journals, were also the subject of major new work, much of it by Kurds living in Europe. Mehmet Emin Bozarslan produced annotated editions of the early journals *Kurdistan*, *Kürd Te`avün ve Terakki Gazetesi*, and *Jîn*.<sup>104</sup> Martin Strohmeier, Jordi Tejel and Nelida Fuccaro published major studies on the protagonists of the Kurdish movement in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Istanbul as well as in Syrian exile.<sup>105</sup> Malmîsanij, Rohat (Alakom) and Naci Kutlay published their important first work on the same period and its protagonists while living in Swedish exile.<sup>106</sup> Since then, they have returned to Turkey or commute between Sweden and Turkey where they engage with a much larger readership. Their later work, therefore, does not belong in an overview of Kurdish Studies in Europe.

### *Gender and women's studies*

The increasing interest in gender and women's issues in academia, and especially the growing number of women scholars, inevitably also had an impact on Kurdish Studies. A simple tabulation of authors in the bibliography at the end of this article is revealing: of the authors who published their major work before 1990, 50 were men and only 4 were women; of those whose careers began in 1990 or later, however, no less than 40 were women, whereas the men numbered just over 50. Most women scholars, incidentally, did not specifically write on women's issues. However, we do find an

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<sup>103</sup> Mirakhorian 2013.

<sup>104</sup> Bozarslan, M. Emin (Ed.) 1985–88, 1991, 1998.

<sup>105</sup> Strohmeier 2003; Fuccaro 2003; Tejel Gorgas 2007; Tejel 2009.

<sup>106</sup> Kutlay 1990; Malmîsanij 1994; Alakom 1995, 1998a, 1998b.

increasing gender awareness in studies from the 1990s onwards.<sup>107</sup> The emergence of Kurdish women's movements in Turkey and Iraq and their uneasy relationship with Turkish and Arab modernist feminism as well as male-dominated Kurdish political movements further contributed to a shift in scholarly attention. The title of an early book by Rohat Alakom, *A New Force in Kurdistan: Kurdish Women*, nicely captures the new interest in women and changing women's roles, especially their political and military participation.<sup>108</sup> Three, partly overlapping, collective volumes by members of the Kurdish women's studies network that was established in the late 1990s illustrate the broad range of approaches and topics covered under the general title of Kurdish women's studies.<sup>109</sup>

Women's daily life remained a topic of interest to scholars working in the 1990s and 2000s, but the changing circumstances of forced or voluntary migration and political participation gave rise to new emphases. Henny Harald Hansen's books had presented glimpses of the daily life of Kurdish women in Iraqi Kurdistan in the 1950s, which she believed still was as it had been 'for the last thousand years.' Three decades later, Lale Yalçın-Heckmann wrote on the household economy, kinship and marriage, gender roles and everyday strategies of Kurdish tribal women in Hakkari, where 'traditional' village life was soon to disappear due to the armed conflict.<sup>110</sup> Migration from the

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<sup>107</sup> Of the four women scholars before 1990, only Henny Harald Hansen wrote specifically on Kurdish women due to the conditions under which she carried out fieldwork rather than her deliberate intent (her work on other cultures did not focus on women's roles). The most prolific of the four, Joyce Blau, wrote on language, literature and politics without a gender perspective, and Mirella Galletti, whose work is mostly on politics, wrote only a brief study on Kurdish women in the perception of European travellers (2001). Gabriele Yonan worked exclusively on the Christian minorities of Kurdistan.

<sup>108</sup> Alakom 1995b.

<sup>109</sup> Savelsberg et al. (eds.) 2000; Mojab (Ed.) 2001; Hajo et al. (eds.) 2004.

<sup>110</sup> Hansen 1960, 1961; Yalçın-Heckmann 1990.

village and the struggle for a new life in the urban environment became part of everyday life and, inevitably, defining elements of more recent studies of Kurdish women's lives. Heidi Wedel focused on gender roles and women's political participation among migrants in Istanbul, and Miriam Geerse and Anna Grabolle-Çeliker studied changing gender roles and perceptions of ethnicity among migrants who moved from villages in Turkish Kurdistan to Istanbul neighborhoods.<sup>111</sup>

Others focused on the changing image of women in Kurdish political discourse and symbolic violence against women,<sup>112</sup> on the participation of women in the Kurdish national movement and on the Kurdish women's movement.<sup>113</sup> The gender-specific aspects of repression, especially of Iraq's genocidal *Anfal* campaign, have received serious attention from scholar-activists.<sup>114</sup> Traumatic experiences narrated by women refugees were the subject of a study in Norway.<sup>115</sup>

Armed conflict and (forced) migration have inevitably had a major impact on male gender roles as well. In her work on political activism in Iraqi Kurdistan, Andrea Fischer-Tahir has consistently paid much attention to Kurdish masculinities.<sup>116</sup> One particular aspect of masculinity, the complex of honor and shame, has received increasing attention due to the dramatic rise in reported honor killings in Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey as well as in the diaspora.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Wedel 1999, 2001; Geerse 2011; Grabolle-Çeliker 2013.

<sup>112</sup> Yalçın-Heckmann / Gelder 2000; Fischer-Tahir 2009.

<sup>113</sup> Al-Ali / Pratt 2011; Hardi 2013; Açık 2014.

<sup>114</sup> Hardi 2011; Fischer-Tahir 2012; Mlodoč 2012.

<sup>115</sup> Ahlberg 2000.

<sup>116</sup> Fischer-Tahir 2003, 2009, 2012.

<sup>117</sup> On honour killings in Iraqi Kurdistan: Begikhani 2005; Alinia 2013; in Turkey: Doğan 2010; in the diaspora: Wikan 2008; Doğan 2013. See also Ehrkamp 2008 for a

### *Islam and heterodox minorities*

One remarkable constant in Kurdish Studies has been the fascination of scholars with heterodox groups like the Yezidis and, less prominently, the Ahl-i Haqq and Alevi. The sheer volume of publications on the Yezidis (of which only a small selection will be mentioned here) is truly surprising, and far surpasses that of studies concerning aspects of Islam and Muslim communities in Kurdistan. Recent work includes major studies of the Yezidi religious system and the relation of Yezidism with earlier religions,<sup>118</sup> the history and sociology of Yezidi communities,<sup>119</sup> Yezidi material culture,<sup>120</sup> and non-religious oral and musical traditions.<sup>121</sup> The precarious position of the Yezidis in the Middle East and the resettlement of large numbers of Yezidis in Western Europe, especially in Germany, are undoubtedly factors that have contributed to the stream of publications on Yezidis and Yezidism.

The Ahl-i Haqq or Yaresan of Iran and Iraq (where they are known as Kaka'i) are in a precarious situation as well but there is (to my knowledge) no significant Ahl-i Haqq diaspora in Western Europe. In spite of their lesser accessibility to foreign researchers, there also exists a considerable volume of scholarly publications on the Ahl-i Haqq. Their religion was the subject of three European dissertations

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study of less dramatic forms in which young Kurdish men enact their masculinity in a German city.

<sup>118</sup> Kreyenbroek 1995 and Kreyenbroek / Jindy 2005 (both analysing Yezidi religious texts); Spät 2005, 2008, 2009; see also the earlier studies by Guidi 1932a, 1932b and Edmonds 1967.

<sup>119</sup> Fuccaro 1993, 1999; Schneider 1984; Yalkut-Breddermann 2001; see also Lescot 1938.

<sup>120</sup> Açıkyıldız 2010.

<sup>121</sup> Allison 2001; Amy de la Bretèque 2013. Allison 2008 gives an overview of Yezidi studies.

and a number of major articles by authors based in Europe,<sup>122</sup> and there is some work on the (political) difficulties their communities are facing in Iran and Iraq.<sup>123</sup> A recent sociolinguistic study of the dialect of Gurani spoken by an Ahl-i Haqq enclave in South Kurdistan also provides interesting information on the current position of the Ahl-i Haqq in the Islamic Republic.<sup>124</sup>

Alevism experienced a strong resurgence in Turkey in the 1990s, partly under the influence of the relatively well-organized Alevi diaspora in Western Europe. This led to a sharp rise in academic studies of Alevism and the Alevis, but only a small proportion of this dealt specifically with the Kurdish (or Zaza) Alevis.<sup>125</sup> (The volume of European scholarship on Alevism, incidentally, is dwarfed by the research carried out on this subject in Turkey.)

Compared to the lavish attention paid to these heterodox formations, there has been a striking lack of interest in orthodox Islam as a learned tradition and as a lived religion. There appears to have been a distinct anti-Islamic bias in scholarship on the Kurds, or at least an implicit assumption that Islam is somehow less Kurdish than Yezidism or Alevism. This neglect of Sunni Islam in Kurdish Studies has occurred in spite of the well-known facts that the vast majority of the Kurds are Sunni Muslims who take their religion seriously, that North Kurdistan is the only part of Turkey where the *medrese* tradition of learning has persisted in spite of the official ban, that classical Kurdish literature is intimately connected with, and an integral part of, the Kurdish *medrese* tradition, that Sufi orders are strongly rooted in Kurdish society and have played a crucial role in

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<sup>122</sup> Hamzeh'ee 1990; Ozgoli-Membrado 2007; Vali, Shahab 2008; Mir-Hosseini 1994a, 1996, 1997; Membrado 2013; chapters in Bruinessen 2000a and Omarkhali 2014.

<sup>123</sup> Mir-Hosseini 1994b; Leezenberg 1997b.

<sup>124</sup> Mahmoudveysi / Bailey 2013.

<sup>125</sup> Bumke 1979; Bruinessen 1997; Astare 2001; Seufert 1997; Kehl-Bodrogi 2000, 2006; Leezenberg 2003a.

the emergence of Kurdish nationalism. Even Kurdish intellectuals in Sweden paid little attention to Islam, with only a few exceptions: both Rohat and Malmîsanij wrote essays about Turkey's most influential Islamic thinker, Said Nursi, and his early involvement in the Kurdish movement, and Zeynelabidîn Zinar wrote a detailed study about *medrese* education and its curriculum, as well as editing literary works by Kurdish ulama.<sup>126</sup> They wrote in Turkish and Kurdish, however, and had little interaction with scholars working in other languages (though Zinar was translated into English). There have been very few studies in European languages concerning Islam as practised among the Kurds.<sup>127</sup>

One possible reason for the remarkable lack of interest in Islam among scholars of Kurdish society may be the fact that Kurdish political movements, in all parts of Kurdistan, have been largely secular in character until quite recently. This could easily be mistaken to mean that Islam was not a relevant factor for understanding Kurdish society. Since the 1980s, however, various Kurdish Islamist movements have emerged to contest the virtual hegemony of the secular movements. Their influence appears to be growing, and in response the secular parties have also made overtures towards the pious segments of Kurdish society. There are as yet very few

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<sup>126</sup> Rohat 1990; Malmîsanij 1991; Zinar 1993. Zinar also published the *Dîwans* (volumes of collected poems, systematically arranged) of several Kurdish *ulama* in Latinized transcription, as well as numerous volumes of folkloric texts.

<sup>127</sup> See, however, Bruinessen / Blau (eds.) 1998, which remains the single collection of significant articles on the subject. Yalçın-Heckmann 1991 discusses lived Islam in a tribal community. On the Sufi orders, see the relevant chapters in Bruinessen 1978 (1992) and 2000a. Leezenberg 2014b elaborates further on Zinar's work on the Kurdish *medrese* tradition and its possible role in the vernacularisation of the learned tradition.

academic studies of these Kurdish Islamist movements and Islamic political discourse.<sup>128</sup>

### *Language, literature and oral tradition*

The disciplines that long constituted the core of Kurdology, the study of Kurdish language and literature, did not experience as rapid a development as the social science-based study of Kurdish society and history. Nevertheless, there has been a steady production. The dictionaries, grammars and other studies produced by staff at various departments of Iranian Studies have already been mentioned above.<sup>129</sup> Pioneering new studies include a dissertation about regional variation of the ergative in Kurmanci, which may be due to differential language contact; two dissertations on the grammar of Zaza, both stressing the differences to Kurmanci, and a detailed linguistic and sociolinguistic study of a Gurani dialect spoken by an Ahl-i Haqq enclave.<sup>130</sup> Turkey's ban of the Kurdish language, and its policies after the ban was formally lifted in 1991, were the subject of a number of studies from various perspectives,<sup>131</sup> and so was the revival of Kurdish, which began in Sweden.<sup>132</sup>

Modern Sorani and Kurmanci literature was the subject of two major studies.<sup>133</sup> The increasing accessibility of Iraqi and Turkish Kurdistan for fieldwork has resulted in a number of studies of oral tradition and

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<sup>128</sup> Bozarslan 1992; Leezenberg 2001 (on Iraqi Kurdistan); Dorronsoro / Grojean 2004; Casier / Jongerden (eds.) 2010 (on Turkish Kurdistan). Scholars based in Turkey have paid more attention to these movements as well as to other aspects of the role of Islam in Kurdish society but their work is beyond the scope of this overview.

<sup>129</sup> Blau / Barak 1999; Blau 2000c; Omar 1992, 2005; Hakim 2012.

<sup>130</sup> Dorleijn 1996; Selcan 1998; Paul 1998, 2008; Mahmoudveysi / Bailey 2013.

<sup>131</sup> Rumpf 1989; Skutnabb-Kangas / Bucak 1994; Haig 2004; Uçarlar 2009; Zeydanlıoğlu 2012.

<sup>132</sup> Scalbert Yücel 2006; Tayfun 1998.

<sup>133</sup> Ahmadzadeh 2003; Scalbert Yücel 2014.

notably the revival of the *dengbêj* tradition.<sup>134</sup> In this connection, it deserves mentioning that one of the pioneering collectors of oral traditions, the former Soviet Kurdish scholar Celilê Celîl, has relocated to Austria and has begun (re-) publishing the vast collection of folklore texts, recorded by him and his brother Ordîxan in various parts of Kurdistan over many years.<sup>135</sup>

### **Final observations**

In this overview, I have restricted myself to Kurdish Studies in (Western) Europe, a limitation that makes sense for the mid-twentieth century, when Britain and France had political interests in the region that, to some extent, were translated into institutional support for Kurdish Studies. This geographical demarcation of scholarly activity, however, is rapidly losing its usefulness in a field of study that is increasingly characterized by transnational relations. Scholars, wherever they are born, may be based in Europe for one part of their careers and elsewhere in other phases of their academic life. It is not uncommon for scholars based in Europe to collaborate on a publication with colleagues based in North America or Turkey. Thanks to the Internet, we communicate as easily with fellow scholars in North America, Asia or the Middle East as we do with those working in the same country. Members of the Kurdish Studies Network are not differentiated by place of residence, and their discussions are not hampered by national or continental boundaries. At least a part of the studies mentioned in this overview explicitly engaged with academic work done in the USA, the former Soviet Union, Turkey or Kurdistan.

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<sup>134</sup> Allison 2001; Spät 2008; Scalbert Yücel 2009; Turgut 2010; Hamelink 2014.

<sup>135</sup> Celîl / Celîl 2014. Kurds in Sweden had earlier published one volume of texts collected among the Kurds of Syria: Celîl 1989. On the Celîl family and its great contribution to the preservation of Kurdish oral tradition, see Metin Yüksel's recent (2013) book.

In spite of this, there are still distinct French and German traditions in Kurdish Studies, and these are more strongly connected to national academic institutions than work in the dominant academic language, English. About 50 per cent of the works discussed in this overview are in English, but almost 25 per cent are in French and 20 per cent in German. (The remainder are in Italian, Swedish, Kurdish, Turkish and Persian.) There appears to be a gradual shift towards English, and many authors have published in English besides French or German, but the volume of original academic work that continues to be written in the latter languages is remarkable. (There is, moreover, much journalistic work in those languages as well as translated academic work that, barring one or two exceptions, is not mentioned in this overview.)

This is, of course, also related to the structure of funding of research and teaching, which in France and Germany strongly favor publication in the national language, whereas in the smaller countries there is a strong trend towards publishing in English. It is hard to discern a clear relation between research funding and European countries' political and economic interests in Kurdistan or the Middle East in general, though. It is certainly the case that the presence of an institutional infrastructure for Kurdish Studies in France and Britain is directly related to the involvement of these two countries in Syria and Iraq between the two world wars. However, the establishment of chairs at Langues 'O and SOAS appeared to be meant as a reward for past services rather than an investment on behalf of future policy needs. Neither institution ever became known for having a coherent and policy-relevant research agenda.

Significant new sponsors of Kurdish Studies in Europe are the Kurdish authorities of Iraqi Kurdistan (or foundations connected with the two leading parties there). The Paris Kurdish Institute has in the past received some support from the KDP but there are more visible and direct contributions in form of funded programs at Exeter and Erfurt.

The presence of a Kurdish diaspora in Europe has probably had a stronger impact on Kurdish Studies than the foreign policy needs of European countries. Kurdish students and intellectuals have actively lobbied, at various degrees of success, for funding of relevant teaching and research, and they have established private institutions supporting research. The Paris Kurdish Institute has been more successful than most in receiving government support for a scholarship program (most of which was to support students from Kurdistan studying sciences, though). Sweden's multiculturalist policies stand out because they contributed to the revival of Kurmanci language and literature at a time when these were repressed in Turkey, besides enabling numerous Kurds to get academic training.<sup>136</sup> Along with other Scandinavian countries, Sweden has also actively funded research on the emerging Kurdish diaspora and the second generation's identity and integration dilemmas.

The Kurdish writers and scholars who had fled Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s and settled in Sweden wrote most of their work in Kurdish and Turkish, primarily addressing the Kurdish diaspora as well as audiences in their home country. Their contributions to Kurdish literature and to Kurdish Studies were made possible by Swedish policies but there was but little interaction with the Kurdish Studies carried out in western European languages. (However, some of these authors also wrote books and articles in Swedish for the benefit of local audiences.) When the circumstances allowed, they relocated their journals, and in many cases themselves, to Turkey. They have, henceforth, preferred publishing their work in Turkey, where they

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<sup>136</sup> In a recent article, Rohat Alakom has drawn attention to another aspect of Sweden's policies: the creation of a pool of competent Kurdish translators, several of whom came to play central roles in the efforts to standardise Kurmanci (Alakom 2014).

find far more readers than in Sweden but attempt to remain involved in both worlds.

The centre of gravity of Kurdish Studies, which in the twentieth century gradually had moved from Russia and the Soviet Union to Western Europe, may be shifting again, this time to Turkey and perhaps Iraqi Kurdistan. Several Turkish universities already have departments of Kurdish language and linguistics. At other universities too, there is a remarkable increase of theses and dissertations dealing with aspects of Kurdish history or society, even though these remain 'sensitive' topics. The arrival of a new generation of highly educated Kurds (and other citizens of Turkey) with a strong commitment to academic studies on their history, culture and society, is likely to provide a stronger impetus for the institutionalization of Kurdish Studies in Turkey than can be found anywhere else in the world. This is likely to strengthen the position of Turkish and Kurdish as languages of scholarship on the Kurds, although many of these scholars will prefer to publish their most important work in English. Kurds of the diaspora constitute a lasting connection between the networks of Kurdish Studies in Western Europe and in Turkey.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> I wish to thank Christine Allison, Joyce Blau, Michiel Leezenberg, Maria Six-Hohenbalken and Welat Zeydanlioğlu for their comments on (parts of) earlier drafts of this article.

## Bibliography

[Note: This is by no means an exhaustive bibliography but it has the more modest aim of listing those publications that are most significant in the context of this overview of Kurdish Studies in Western and Central Europe. Most of the authors have published much more than the books and articles listed here. Some of these publications are available online. The URL links given here were all still active in early August 2014.]

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