

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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