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Papers on Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity I: Kurdistan in Search of Ethnic Identity (Papers presented to the First Conference on Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity). University of Utrecht, 1990. - 78 pp.

Levon Marashlian. Politics and Demography: Armenians, Turks, and Kurds in the Ottoman Empire. Boston: "Zoryan Institute", 1991. -152 pp.

Mehrdad Izady. The Kurds: A Concise Handbook. London: "Taylor & Francis", 1992.- 280 pp.

The three works under review complement and illuminate one another; although they all explore the Kurds' place in the history of the Middle East, they do so from very different viewpoints: all maintain an academic tone, but the first is ostentatiously objective, the second has a self professed Armenian bias and the last is framed in a newly cobbled together Kurdish re-vision of Near Eastern history.

To set the stage, I will give examples of the various "historical minefields" that ideology presents to the purportedly objective scholar. Each "mine" (toponymic, geographic, political, or historical) is armed or disarmed dependent upon the political allegiance or antagonism of the academic: Kurdish, Israeli, Armenian, Palestinian, Iraqi, Turkish, etc.

A short history of the changes that the words designating the languages, peoples, and the politics of the Levant have undergone goes far to explain the complexities inherent in such oft used and supposedly well-defined terms as *Arab*, *Kurd*, *Turk*, *Palestinian*, *Iraqi* and *Israeli* and why they are so explosive. Most of the general terms began the Twentieth Century with a negative connotation given them by the "enemies" of those so designated: *Turk*, *Arab*, and *Kurd* were all used by the West to distinguish masses of people who themselves would have required more variety and precision in their ethnic, political, religious and linguistic identities.

For example, the area sequentially known as Canaan, Philistia (Greek Palestine), Judea, Judea/Israel, Syria, the Holy Land, Palestine, and Israel has been infrequently under the rule of the nations' who gave their names to the territory itself, yet has also harboured the Ammelikes, Phoenicians (also Canaanites), Ammonites (Amman reminds us), Philistines (one of the Sea Peoples), Aramacans (Syrians and pre-Mosaic "Jews"), Hebrews (post-Mosaic Judeans and Israelites), Moabites, Idumcans (usually considered Ishmaelites or Arabs), Hittites, Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, Armenians, Romans, Arabs, Kurds, Turks (Seljuk, Mameluk, Timurid, Ottoman, etc.), Crusaders, Circassians, French, English, and about every other nationality under the sun. This same territory in differing segmentations has been under the hegemony of distant Imperiums: Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Chaldea, Persia, Greece, Rome, Byzantium, the Arab Caliphates, Muslim Dynasties (the Ayyubids, etc.), Crusaders, the Mameluks of Egypt, the Mongols, the Timurids, the Ottomans, etc.

Whether Reoboham or Cyrus or Balduin ruled the land and diluted or exiled the population to some extent, the majority maintained their lives without great change after the introduction of agriculture in Neolithic times. However, the language of rule was more labile: Canaanite (Phoenician or Hebrew) was replaced by Aramaic (the *lingua-franca* of many successive Mesopotamian empires from Chaldea to Sassanian Persia and the probable

tent-tongue of Abraham), which was joined but not replaced by Greek (this situation continued for nearly a millennium). The Arab invasions started to tip the balance against Aramaic (this was a slow process), but the underlying mosaic of dialects affected spoken Arabic so that its dialects are more separate languages held together by a common written standard. In the Middle Ages, Persian, Kurdish, French, Turkish, Italian, and Mongol penetrated the area, and in recent times, English and Hebrew have been added: the last is an ironic return to one of the oldest dialects spoken, Canaanite, written with one of the longest lived alphabets, the Aramaic.

In the case of political geography, modern Israel's major population is situated in ancient Philistia (Palestine), while the majority of today's Palestinians live in Ancient Israel and Judea, far from the coast that used to bear the name of their chosen eponymous antecedents. This is no less true of the other inhabitants of the region, who use historical geography for a historical, political purposes, and as we shall see, the Kurds are as willing to work this magic as any.

The only viable summary of archaeology and history is that this region, like most others in the Near East and the world, has been home to many nations ruled by many Empires and that no one has unrivalled claims to all of it, and everyone has substantial claims to some of it.

Now it is also evident that the linguistic map has never overlain exactly the ethnic or the political one. Any individual, no matter the era, could have only been semi-accurately described with a much hyphenated designation: an Aramaic speaking-Jewish-Roman citizen from Armenia, a Persian speaking-Kurdish-Shiite-Arabic author, or a Hebrew speaking-Druze-atheist-Israeli citizen living in Lebanon.

This messy overview of the eternal ethnic mess that represents the essential, nurturing soil of civilization is the proper frame in which to view the many attempts to simplify or clarify the ethnic and political affiliations of the region: Empires grow best in diversity, while nation-states (usually the result of imperial disintegration) attempt to paint all inhabitants "ours or theirs (meaning dead)". Ethnic names which had little consequence during Empire could select for power or massacre during nationalist (oft-times xenophobic) regimes. Names such as *Arab*, *Kurd*, *Turk* and *Jew* have semiotic as well as cultural values. Often those meanings are determined originally by the enemy or the conqueror: *Greek* is a term of Roman origin; *Turk* was a curse in many languages before its partial amelioration in recent times; *Kurd* was used for peoples with a certain transhumant life style whether they spoke the language or not.

Again, the meanings of words such as *Arab* or *Turk* can be controlled by the "victims", Jews or Armenians, and the ethnos vilified can adopt some of the victims' program: Pan-Turkish or Pan-Arab political visions can subsume earlier Turkish or Arab conspiracies documented by other, inimical ethnic groups. To take an example far afield, the American Indians or Amerindians or Native Americans have chosen these designations from a few choices given them by their persecutors, the European-Americans. These terms have no meaning without the counterfoils, European- or African-Americans, and they tell us nothing about the languages, cultures or religions of those so named. At the same time, the existence of the notion Native American gives special significance to the American portion of the terms Italian-American, Armenian-American, etc.

Civilization is the result of the mixture of cultures: it is inherently polyethnic. It is not necessary for a nationalist movement that it be uncivilized, but the majority, nonetheless, fall into that most barbaric of stances, a univocal claim to unicultural superiority: making the inadequacy of

language (one, short name is convenient and often phonologically exigent) a means to ignore the complexity of all semantic reality represented by our semantically abbreviated tongues.

I. In the light of the above, let us look at the first book under review. It is a collection of papers given at a conference on the ethnic identity of the Kurds, seen as an instructive example of the general problems of ethnic identification.

The first paper included in the collection is by Hamit Bozarslan, and it bears the title *"The Kurdish Question in Turkish Political Life: the Situation as of 1990"*. Its most important revelation is the anti-political nature of the Kemalist and most other extreme nation-creating states. Politics is a process of compromise with the polyethnic and polysemantic reality of civilization. It is the engine of civilized development. The Kemalists wanted nothing to do with it: there was only one right path and they were on it. Using every means at their disposal they managed to cover the ethnically florid Anatolian carpet with a boring, synthetic, cheap, drab, machine made motel rug except in the South East.

Time always favours politics although the Kemalists' successes have left fewer political voices to be raised, yet the resuscitation of Lazarian languages, cultures and politics has been one of the surprises of our century and surely one of the miracles of the next. The author sees the present Turkish regimes as truly political despite the shadow of the Military's suspicion. Therefore, he finds the future of the Kurds in Turkey as necessarily brighter than most forecasters.

The second article looks to the wider region and highlights the intra-Kurdish problems that have destroyed every attempt at Kurdish unity. Not only have most Kurdish movements been mirror-images of their non-Kurdish opposition, they have been distinctly coloured by the nationalist politics of their states of residence; thus, Kurds of Iraq battle Turkish Kurds for political reasons that ignore the larger Kurdish Question, but are driven by local political advantages.

Martin van Bruinessen's *"Kurdish Society and the Modern State: Ethnic Nationalism Versus Nation-Building"* gives a historical overview of the Kurdish State movement through the last two centuries. Tribal loyalties and party discipline can have their confluences, but the one is driven by genealogy, while the latter, by ideology: stability is not an attribute of the last.

Although the PKK maintains a strong Maoist line in favour of a single Kurdish state, the supra-national world powers have forced most realistic Kurdish politicians to fight for ethnic and juridical rights within their resident states. At the same time, it is hoped that the Kurds may be a force to persuade the creators of the new regimes of the Middle East that their resident ethnic minorities be insured ethnic integrity in any future constitutions because the attempted destruction of interior minorities also leads to the slow death of the majority culture: the complex interior polycultural and polyethnic competitions within the individual artist or politician fructify the "national" culture.

The third essay takes on the language question (Philip Kreyenbrock's *"Kurdish Identity and the Language Question"*). The author rightly emphasizes the individual histories of the two written dialects of Kurdish, *Kurmanji* (in Turkey and Syria) and *Sorani* (in Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan). The latter has been referred to by Kurdish ideologues as *South Kurmanji*, but this is more an attempt to plaster over evident differences between the two main groups of Kurdish dialects. Altogether, there are greater differences between them than between German and Dutch, or English and Lowland Scots. He also dispels the notions of many Pan-Kurdists that Kurdish is the long-lost, direct

descendant of Median or of Parthian or that the Zaza and Gurani languages are any more closely related to Kurdish than is Persian itself although these peoples share a common life-style and were frequently confounded with the Kurds by hegemonic powers. This topic will be taken up below during the review of Mehrdad Izady's handbook.

What he fails to mention is the power that modern technology gives to essentially illiterate groups to maintain their dialects: the tape and video recorder, the telephone, etc. Moreover, computers allow the most arrant phoneticians to create their own scripts and to disseminate them. This provides a balance to ideological purists who are attempting to foist a pre-made, purified language on the majority for every reason except the practical ones. Purists can doom the linguistic unity of a future Kurdish state to fruitless bickering: unity must evolve from economic, cultural and political confluence. The situation in Armenia (two written languages united by a common ancient language and alphabet) may serve both as a model for solutions and dissolutions.

The symbolic value of the Kurdish language will drive many towards the creation of a unified and unifying written dialect, but it must be emphasized that culture resides in every spoken and written variant and that this process need not be a zero-sum game. Like all smaller nations, multi-lingualism (or multiglossia) is the best choice for the continued enrichment of Kurdish (economically as well as culturally) and this requires the accent be put on excellence of education for the individual Kurd who will take part in the always democratic evolution and fit of language to reality.

Monir Monad's *"Kurdish Ethnic Identity in Iraq"* is not as focused as the other contributors' work. It does, however, serve as a good review of the difficulties mentioned in the former articles.

This is especially true of the linguistic problems facing Sorani, which is not the only written dialect in Iraq. We are again brought face to face with the age old problem that an apparent unity disappears whenever you focus more than perfunctory attention upon it.

The best section is an extended excursus upon the Faili Kurds, whose present wealthy urbanite status opposes our common assumptions about the Kurds and their place in the social structure of their countries of residence. The Failis live largely in Baghdad, where they have replaced the Jews, as the predominant merchants, but they are in civic limbo due to the non-recognition of their citizenship as Iraqis (having kept Iranian citizenship under the British mandate, they later ran up against the Iraqi recognition of only Arabs and non-Arabs with Ottoman citizenship as Iraqis). It is these "city-Kurds", who represent the intellectual force behind the all-Kurds-are-one movement; it is among this civically unified dis-unity that the functional linguistic, economic, political and cultural Kurdish schemes will be forged.

These scholastic articles raise many more questions than answers. The name **Kurd** has not only changed dramatically from a transhumant descriptor to an ethnonym, but the ethnicity so described has itself changed with non-Kurds adopting the Kurdish language (Assyro-Chaldeans and Jews - with the inevitable mixing of the *echt*-Kurds into these groups) and Kurds assimilating into the larger ethnic units of the region, whether Arabic, Turkish or Persian.

Language is the result of the social consolidation of the creativeness of individuals themselves socially formed and controlled: an academic or ideological committee cannot win out against the interplay of the demos and the environment. The word concocted by the lexicographer has less chance of winning the laurel of wide usage than the nonce creation of a semilliterate typesetter with bad eyesight. The etymologists of the future will view with mild irony the pretensions of today's "language-makers".

Finally, there is a need for the questioning of the assumption that local, tribal or civic identity must be weakened in order to create a truly Kurdish super-nation. We are all pot-pourris of identities: each social stratum in which we function, each environment we interact with requires a different ethnic, political, economic and linguistic (even if only in register) descriptor. A strong nation is unified at definite strata, not at all. Respectful preservation of these essential differences is the first step to the selective, willing consolidation of the people into a viable, eclectic nation.

This is the chief reason that the first concern of nation-builders should be the successful creation of a constitution that recognizes and preserves the rights of all regional ethnic minorities and of every visiting ethnic so that the much more heterogeneous nature of the individuals that make up the hegemonic ethnoses can also have their individual rights preserved.

A future Kurdistan may need to be a federation of individual Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian and Syrian components. As modern Turkey and Iraq teach us, when the macrocosm overwhelms and destroys its component microcosms, the result is state-suicide.

II. The second book under review critiques Justin McCarthy's *Muslims and Minorities: the Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire*, New York University Press, 1983.

Both the Armenians' and the Kurds' demographic invisibility to the Ottoman state is explored although its origins had different sources. The Armenians and the Kurds evaded registration to avoid taxation, while the Kurds also wished to avoid conscription (which did not face the Armenians until after the beginning of this century). Moreover, the Armenians were a definite *millet*, while the Kurds were subsumed under the rubric *Muslim*.

Prof. McCarthy has justified his rejection of the use of Armenian village accounts, mostly written in the diaspora, because these sources were inherently biased towards increasing the number of Armenians in the Empire. What Prof. Marashlian shows is that Prof. McCarthy's final estimates agree with estimates of Armenian academics and that village accounts also largely agree with Prof. McCarthy's regional numbers; however, these village accounts add finer demographic detail to the picture and do this especially in reference to the Kurds, whose existing numbers at the time are usually the product of tortuous calculations based on present census data controlled by travellers accounts and foreign diplomats' estimates.

Prof. Marashlian suggests that Prof. McCarthy himself is biased towards the reigning Turkish ideological constructs and this is attested by this reference: "in areas of the Armenian Kingdoms there were great numbers of Turks of Kurdish ancestry, at least as far back as Xenophon, and probably earlier." (p. 50).

This is the rankest nonsense that uses the fantasy of the neo-Kurdish historians with that of Kemalist propagandists: there were Iranian components to the Indo-Europeans in the Armenian Highlands from ancient times till the present, but they were not Kurdish until at least the 8th century AD, and what may tell is a Turk of Kurdish ancestry? An assimilated Kurd? An assimilated Armenian? What? These sorry collocations are somewhat like a recent American history text's reference to St. Nicholas as a Turkish bishop. Is Ivan the Terrible a Soviet tsar or Caesar an Italian general?

Is the new definition of a Turk anyone living in Turkey who uses Turkish in their daily business? This is the Kemalist desire, but it always meets the intractable Kurds and their unwillingness to be subsumed into the glorious new alloy.

Scholarship is especially unfortunate when it becomes prey to political

favouritism: Prof. McCarthy clearly sees the slivers of the excesses on the Kurdish and Armenian side without noticing the beam of Turkish excess that would dissolve all the nations of an anciently mixed-national area into one pseudo-nationality using any means available.

Prof. McCarthy also questions the use of the word *Genocide* to describe the deportations and massacres of the Armenians in Ottoman territory. He assumes that many peoples shared the horrors of the time, including the surrounding Muslims, whom he disingenuously names Turks, although they were largely Iranian speakers: Kurds and Zazas. All of this may be demographically true and not in the least call into question the attempted genocide of the Armenians.

The destruction of a nation, by slaughter, deportation, or forced assimilation is an international crime, and most imperial nations (the Great Powers, for example) have been guilty of it. The attempt in modern Turkey to say that more "Turks" died during World War I than Armenians is similar to the statement that more White Americans died than Native-Americans during the Indian Wars of last century or that more Ukrainians and Poles died than Jews during World War II. They are factually true, but used tendentiously if they are supposed to whitewash the genocidal destruction of Native-Americans, Armenians, or Jews.

Genocide is not a numbers game; it is proven when a nation has been chosen for elimination by a government and that choice is acted upon by the various means at their disposal. When the US Government gave small-pox victims' blankets to Cherokee on the long march to Oklahoma, they were practising genocide through germ warfare; when the German government incarcerated and murdered every Jew they could find in the areas under their hegemony, they were practising genocide (note that there are few Jews in areas that had large Jewish populations even as there are few Cherokees in the American South or Armenians in South-east Turkey); when the Ottoman government chose to brutally murder most of the Armenian intellectual class and to deport hundreds of thousands of men, women and children of Armenian descent without any preparations for their sustenance in the desertified areas they were removed to, they were practising genocide and it should simply be so stated.

On the Kurdish front some parts of the present and past governments of Turkey have attempted to forcibly assimilate their Kurdish minority: thus the silly notion that Turks of Kurdish ancestry greeted Xenophon's Greeks with Kemalist nationalist slogans. There is a clear and present danger that the crime might be repeated.

The second half of the book summarizes information from some 70 village memoirs written by deported Armenians. This material was not used by Prof. McCarthy, but why it was not used is not clear. It is impossible that all 70 authors could join in a vast clandestine cabal across time and space so as to skew and exaggerate the numbers of Ottoman Armenians; moreover, those who may have desired to do so would be uncovered through comparison with Ottoman, Armenian and other sources. Would a modern Polish historical demographer cogently ignore the post-Holocaust Jewish accounts of shtetl life?

These works help to disentangle the Kurds from the larger group designated Muslims by the Ottoman authorities. The Kurds were after the Armenian genocide frequently the majority population in parts of Eastern and Southern Anatolia and that fact has been a problem for the realization of the Kemalist restructuring of the past to fit present ideology (something done by all governments, but never to be accepted by objective scholars).

These sources would be useful to scholars trying to get a cultural and

demographic snapshot of Eastern Anatolia during the dissolution of the Ottoman Imperium. Their existence in such numbers also attests to the Armenian genocide (recently officially recognized by Israel), for no people except the Jews, have published so many memoirs of their beloved, but lost, villages and families. This activity and its largely private publication testifies to the extraordinary trauma undergone by the indigenous Armenian population of the Eastern parts of Modern Turkey in the first decades of our century.

III. Now we turn to a truly heroic work that is at the same time heroically wrong-headed. There have been various Kurdish responses to the political and cultural attacks upon them organized by the Turkish, Iraqi and Iranian states. Most of them have been staged at the tactical level: documentation of the presence of Kurds for centuries in Shirvan or Van, for example, but Mehrdad Izady's handbook takes a global approach and he no less freely travels through time and space playing havoc with accepted historical verities than do the Kemalist historians he opposes so frequently in his pages. Fight fire with fire is the motto for the work, and he justifies his strategy by the frequency of its use in the schoolbooks put out for the nationalization of the young in almost every nation state: nations want to own the past even if they are only recent arrivals to the region.

While it is true that modern Egyptians have few cultural connections to the ancient Egyptians, whether in language, culture, religion, or politics and are still considered Egyptians, this cannot be extrapolated as a universal principle: the Anasazi are not "our ancient Arizonans" despite that state's attempt to convince the children of Tucson that they are; the ancient people of Cappadocia have never been considered speakers of an Iranian language until the coming of Cyrus and have never been considered Kurds until their Kurdification by M. Izady because presently there are Kurds residing there.

The often ignored and estranging truth that population genetics changes little or at all despite frequent cultural and political overlays is used here with a vengeance to substantiate the idea that the population of a prospective Kurdistan based upon the regions which today have a Kurdish majority population have always been Kurdish. Many a fact is twisted to do this and nineteenth century notions of an unchanging "Volkgeist" appear, but the major engine for this theory is the repeated evolution of the people from a citified to a nomadic existence and vice versa in answer to environmental change: religious, linguistic, economic, meteorological, etc.

There is much to say for the notion of a demographic bedrock and Colin Renfrew has popularized the idea in the field of Indo-European archaeology, but once you say that everyone in Neolithic Europe was somehow Indo-European, have you said anything very useful? More to the point, when I say that the Anasazi are Arizonans or the Cappadocians, Kurds, am I demonstrating anything more than that I know the present dwellers in the land and those in its past, and that I am too lazy or incurious to discover what those from the past may have called it?

M. Izady uses the usual linguistic imprecisions to get practically everyone under the rubric *Kurd*. He uses the already discussed North and South Kurmanji nomenclature and tries to include the Gurani and the Zaza under them. He uses the loose logic that as Median, Parthian and Kurdish are generally all considered Northwest Iranian languages that it follows that they all might as well be called Kurdish: I could as easily make German, English or Gothic.

He uses tribal names with the loosest of etymological rules (his normal rule being if it vaguely sounds the same, it is the same) to prove Pontian,

Cappadocian, Armenian, Median, Parthian, etc. ruling houses Kurdish, which is an exercise scholars cringe at when they meet it in privately published genealogical memoirs.

In general, he uses a kernel of truth to launch into the greatest exaggeration or simple falsehood. However, this does not say that the book's bringing together of many disparate facts is not useful. There are many interesting and well summarized sections in the book. The section on the Kurds and Religion has good thumbnail sketches of the various religious movements found in the area. Yet again you will find a depiction of the so called "cult of angels" (as he claims *yezad* means "angel" although most Iranists agree it means "one sacrificed to or deity") as some mysterious foundation upon/to which all subsequent religions are based or are connected. This is the stuff of "theosophy" rather than religious scholarship.

The handbook is richly illustrated with maps, tables, and diagrams most of which are as dubious as the text. It is divided into 10 chapters and each section has numerous cross references. The 10 chapters cover geography, land and environment, history, human geography, religion, language, literature and press, society, political and contemporary issues, economy, and culture and arts.

Almost everything M. Izady says has a well-known source and almost everything he quotes was not intended to be used in the way he has. This book is sure to enrage most Kurds and most of the nations bordering on them. It took great courage and conviction to write, and it is sad that the author used the methods of so many disciplines he has not deeply studied (linguistics chief among them, but also archacology, anthropology, etc.) to produce so many unwarranted notions.

What all of these books testify to is the importance of a clear ethnic identity on the modern political scene: the manufacture and maintenance of such an identity is a major intellectual occupation of ideological partisans throughout the world. Scholarship should as often as not, take a critical stance before such endeavours, for when they join the ranks of the PR men, they frequently lose their academic credentials.

VIRGIL STROHMEYER

Yerevan

محمد علی سلطانی، ایلات و طوایف کرمانشاهان شامل اوضاع اقلیمی، تاریخی.

سیاسی، اجتماعی و اقتصادی بانضمام فرهنگ اصطلاحات، جلد ۱/۲، ۲/۲،

تهران، ۱۳۷۲

M.-A. Soltani. *The Historical Geography and Comprehensive History of Kermanshahan*. Vol. 2, part 1. Tehran, 1993. 570 pp.; Vol. 2, part 2., Ibid., 1993. - 1120 pp.

The present volume is a comprehensive investigation devoted to the tribes of the Kermanshahan area in Iran. It represents a region, where, despite its small territory, there are juxtaposed different Iranian languages and dialects (Kurdish, Luri, Gurani, Laki, Auramani, etc.) and various Islamic trends and sects, from Orthodox Islamic Shafi'i and official Shi'ism to Sufi Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya orders and extreme Shi'a sects (*Ahl-i Haqq*, or *Ali-illahi*). The fact that the author is a native of the region, considerably