**Mahir A. Aziz, The Kurds of Iraq: Nationalism and Identity in Iraqi Kurdistan. I.B. Taurus, revised paperback edition published in 2015, 163 pp., (ISBN: 978-1-78453-273-4).**

**Book review of Mahir A. Aziz, The Kurds of Iraq: Nationalism and Identity in Iraqi Kurdistan"**

**Reviewed by Nadia Jones Gailani, Central European University, Kurdish Studies, 4:1 (May 2016)**

Aziz’s sociological study assesses the development of ethno-national identities amongst a new generation of Kurds in the post-1990 era of Iraq. The Kurds of Iraq aptly traces how memory and identity in the Kurdish north have evolved away from the centralizing force of Iraqi state hegemony. Aziz comprehensively traces the ways in which Kurdish youth balance competing, but ultimately complimentary, national, regional and ethnic forms of belonging. The introduction clearly outlines the main research questions, which address identity as a sociological model of inquiry, how and why Kurdish and Iraqi identities might differ, and to what extent Kurdish identity is dependent upon territorially-specific mappings of individual and communal histories. Aziz approaches the development of identity as organic, allowing for fluidity within the process of remembering and reconstructing new identities. *Kurdistanism* is not static in this sense, lending credence to the success of the Kurds in keeping alive their autonomy and ‘otherness’ in the wake of repressive nationalizing schemes. Kinship systems of marriage and family alliance play a part in the ordering of tribal affiliations, enabling a closely knit community to weather successive dictatorships whilst maintaining their internal cohesion. Aziz also complicates the relationship between the developing sense of *Kurdistaniyeti* in the post-1990s period, and the implied failure of ruling regimes to homogenize the north and bring it into the Iraqi fold. The “failure of these regimes to instill a normative sense of Iraqiness in the Kurdish people,” (p.161) is the success of ethnic, territorial and traditional forms of belonging that bind together an imagined nation within the broader boundaries of the Iraqi nation-state. The division of the book into a theory-heavy first part that treats the history and development of nationalism in the region, and a second part that disseminates and analyzes data from the questionnaires, is somewhat disjointed. The first part of the book is especially frustrating because these short and choppy chapters frequently become repetitious, and remain disconnected from the research findings. Understandably, a discussion of nationalism(s) requires a discussion of theoretical lineages; however, it might make for a more interesting overview if these lineages were put into conversation with each other. Perhaps a more historically oriented approach might be useful to addressing how discussions of nationalism and ethno-nationalism germinate over time. An entire chapter on Anthony Smith’s theoretical model and its applicability in this monograph felt excessive, since an additional chapter on history and the developments of the Kurdish region within the broader history of the Iraqi state may have been more helpful to students of the region. In the second part of the book, Aziz provides a rich statistical analysis of how identity can at once be segmented but overlapping, and the reason behind the designation of *Kurdistaniyeti* to denote Kurdishness can traverse ethnic and national identities. At times, the text felt cluttered by demographic information that might be best included as an appendix to the book. The statistical data suggests that the segmentation of ‘Iraqi’ and ‘Kurd’ is problematic as this new generation embraces a more nuanced ethno-political identity. One element that Aziz does not address in

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