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Editorial

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There was a time, not so long ago (in the 1970s), when it was debated among Kurdish political activists whether one should think of Kurdistan as consisting of three, four or five parts. For some the fourth part, in Syria, was not a cohesive region in itself but really an extension of Turkish Kurdistan, from which many Syrian Kurds had originally come and where many still had relatives living. It was common, even among nationalist activists, to speak of "the Syrian Kurds" rather than Syrian Kurdistan.

The fifth part, finally, consisted of the Kurdish enclaves in Soviet Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan; the advocates of the "five parts" view asserted that the Soviet Union was also a colonial power occupying a part of Kurdistan and denying Kurdish rights, just like the Turkish, Persian and Arab nation states. This always remained a minority view and the group propagating it faded away even before the end of the Soviet Empire. Apart from a few references to the short-lived administrative district of "Red Kurdistan" that existed in Azerbaijan for a few years in the 1920s, the Kurds in the Soviet Union have tended to be perceived as part of a historic diaspora that has had little relation to the developments in Kurdistan proper.

In the past few years, Syrian or West Kurdistan (Rojava) has staked out its position as a distinct part of Kurdistan, with its own character, its own problems and its own distinctive composition of social forces. Although almost all of the Kurdish parties in Rojava are closely linked to one or another of the leading parties of North and South Kurdistan, the KDP and PKK in particular are engaged in fierce competition for influence in Rojava, the region has had its own dynamics, not determined by its neighbours. The heroic defence of Kobanê and other successes in the war against ISIS, as well as the experiment with grassroots democracy, have not only drawn wider international attention but made Rojava the centre of attention for Kurds in the other three parts of Kurdistan as well. The war in Syria has already spilled over into the neighbouring parts, as volunteers have joined ISIS or the anti-ISIS forces and millions of

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refugees have crossed Syria's borders. The developments in Rojava are likely to have a major impact on developments in Turkey as well as Iraqi Kurdistan.

Scholarship on the Kurds to a considerable extent reproduces the division of Kurdistan into four main parts. Most scholars have focused on one or at most two parts, and general books on the Kurds typically have separate chapters for each of the parts, between which there appears to be little interaction. This is not so surprising, given the choices researchers have to make: should they learn Sorani or Kurmanci? Should they prioritise Persian, Arabic or Turkish, Russian or Armenian, so as to be able to read major source materials? If historians, should they work in archives in France, Britain, Turkey or, again, Russia? If social scientists, should they carry out intensive field research in a limited area, or do more theoretically oriented work using mainly secondary sources? The nature of the available sources, which differ from part to part, and the multiplicity of relevant languages have tended to reinforce the separateness of the academic knowledge concerning the various parts of Kurdistan. The relations cutting across the different parts of Kurdistan have for this reason perhaps received less scholarly attention than is warranted. There has been little comparative work, and most of it has been based on secondary sources.

Similarly there exists a small corpus of academic literature on the Kurds in the Soviet Union, as there are minor bodies of scholarship on the Kurds of Khorasan and those of Central Anatolia. They have remained as marginal to Kurdish studies as the Kurdish enclaves they dealt with have been to the history of Kurdistan. The Kurds of Soviet Armenia had some impact on Kurds elsewhere due to the Kurdish programs of Radio Yerevan, which found eager listeners throughout Kurdistan, and through scholarships offered to (mostly Iraqi) Kurdish students for studies at Soviet institutes of Kurdology. But it was only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when international travel became easier and when prominent intellectuals settled in Western Europe, that an intellectual exchange between the Soviet Kurds and their counterparts from Kurdistan proper truly began. Similarly, it was well-known that there existed large Kurdish communities in Central Anatolia, but it was only after migration to Western Europe (and notably to Sweden) that these communities began re-connecting with each other and with the Kurds from Kurdistan. The monthly journal Bîrnebûn, significantly published in Sweden, is the major medium dedicated to the Kurds of Central Anatolia and their traditions; it has played an important role in relocating these communities in the larger history and sociology of Kurdistan. The Kurds of Khorasan, too, re-established connections with Kurdistan at least in part through the Kurdish diaspora in Europe.

It is perhaps possible to think of the Kurdish diaspora as a fifth "part" of Kurdistan, besides the geographical parts denoted as North (Bakur), East

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(Rojhilat), South (Başûr) and West (Rojava). The diaspora has rapidly grown in numbers and significance. Because of the large numbers of politicians and intellectuals who came as refugees, the diaspora became not only a space of social and political mobilisation but also the interface of exchanges between the different parts of Kurdistan (and, as said above, communities that had long been separate). Social and political developments in Kurdistan left their impact on the diaspora, but the diaspora in turn influenced developments in the places of origin in various ways, through flows of ideas, people and money. The diaspora has moreover begun to make significant contributions to scholarship on the Kurds and Kurdistan, as some of the political refugees turned to more academically oriented writing in the 1980s and 1990s, mostly in Kurdish or Turkish but also in European languages, to be followed by increasing numbers of university-educated second- and third-generation migrants writing theses on Kurdish subjects. Many of these studies were later republished in Turkey and had an impact on discussions in Kurdish intellectual circles there.

Scholarship on the Kurdish diaspora is a relatively new but rapidly expanding field, with approaches from such disciplines as migration and minority studies, transnationalism, social psychology and education, multiculturalism, social movement studies as well as comparative diaspora studies. We are pleased to present a special issue dedicated to this youngest branch of Kurdish studies, after an earlier special issue last year (Vol. 2 No. 2) dedicated to what is probably the oldest branch, Kurdish linguistics. Our guest editors, Bahar Başer, Ann-Catrin Emanuelsson and Mari Toivanen, have already made their mark with pioneering studies of the Kurdish diaspora, and we thank them for their efforts in preparing this issue.

Istanbul, November 2015

Editors' Acknowledgment

We are very pleased to publish this special issue of *Kurdish Studies* dedicated to the study of Kurdish diaspora. This is an important contribution to this growing branch of Kurdish studies as evidently seen in the strong participation at the Kurdish migration and diaspora sessions we organised as part of the annual Turkish Migration Conferences in 2014 (London) and 2015 (Prague) (www.turkishmigration.com). We would like to convey our sincere thanks to our guest editors, the authors, the anonymous reviewers and the book reviewers for their hard work and for making this special issue possible. Special thanks go also to Ergin Öpengin, Jaffer Sheyholislami, Deniz Ekici, Kaveh Ghobadi, Farangis

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Ghaderi, Saman Derafsh and Abdulkhalegh Yaghoobi for kindly translating all the abstracts into Kurmanji and Sorani. We are grateful for their time, effort and expertise. We would also like to specifically thank our copy editor Naomi Houghton for her meticulous work. As always, we are grateful to our scholarly colleagues in the field of Kurdish studies who continue to contribute, support and promote the field and the Kurdish Studies journal.

Welat Zeydanlıoğlu
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