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NEWROZ AS A SITE OF PERFORMANCE: RELATING KURDISH LIFEWORLDS ON BEIRUT'S DALIEH

by
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ABSTRACT
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Since the outbreak of widespread violence in Syria, Kurdish militias have claimed a large territory of north Syria which they govern as Kurdistan. Regardless, Kurds make up a significant portion of millions of diverse refugees that have fled, and continue to flee, Syria. Many of these Kurds have been displaced to Lebanon, but due to Lebanon's lack of demographic data, refusal to grant legal status to most refugees, and decentralized "weak state," there is very little that can be stated as fact about the Syrian Kurds *new* to Lebanon. Kurds displaced from Syria are likely multigenerational refugees, and encounter nested crises in Lebanon, as well as a historical Kurdish community that has resided in Lebanon for a century or more.

Considering the lack of knowledge about such a large population, this thesis conducts a literature review of Kurdish anthropology to suggest themes that may be relevant to a Kurdish-Lebanese anthropology. First, this thesis looks to the significance of Kurdish *Newroz*, an invented tradition that is celebrated by Kurds across the Middle East despite the violence that almost invariably follows. Regimes' campaigns of targeting, silencing and assimilating Kurds over the last century makes their ability to occupy Beirut's Dalieh every year in the name of *Newroz* without fear of state-sanctioned violence historically significant.

Next, this thesis reviews three important ethnographies of Kurdish populations from the last decade. These ethnographies enlighten understandings of kinship, gender, agency, media, Islam and public urban space, contributing to some of the most important discussions in Middle Eastern anthropology today. The first of these ethnographies, by King, argues that life in Kurdistan is currently typified by an uneven, awkward grapple with "ascension," which is likely also experienced by Kurds who are displaced to urban centers like Beirut. I posit these ethnographies as a new "wave" of Kurdish anthropology, since they all treat agency as dynamic, complex, and often invisible to western academics.

Finally, I note similarities between themes in Lebanese and Kurdish ethnographies to suggest how the identities may interact in a currently precarious Lebanon, a context in which *many* groups may feel marginalized or ignored.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There were a few reasons why I was surprised to receive an invitation to a Kurdish *Newroz* celebration in Beirut, Lebanon on March 28, 2021. For one, it was not *Newroz*. After a series of sporadic yet strict lockdowns related to the Covid pandemic, a handful of local Kurdish groups grappled with government officials to find a weekend in which a large, communal celebration could be held outdoors without getting dispersed by the police or military. For many, including myself, this celebration was the first instance in nearly a year in which a large group could gather socially and do so with a clear legality that amounted to more than "skating by" while officials turned a blind eye. *Newroz*, a celebration of the start of a new year in an Iranian calendar, is a temporal holiday that falls on the Spring equinox and, in a literal sense, cannot be delayed in the same way as the Equinox itself cannot.

The suspension of disbelief needed to delay the celebration of a milestone by only a week, however, is easy. The yearly celebration of a specific holiday is a ritual, and rituals are often self-aware representations. Protestants fully acknowledge that the bread and juice that they ritualistically consume act only as a representation of flesh and blood, yet the ritual of communion holds a great deal of meaning to many. This is the anthropological lens through which I initially interpreted *Newroz*: as a holiday, a ritual whose function is not to "produce a practical result on the external world" (hence its ability to be imprecise), but rather to ease or "expel" some root source of anxiety by reinforcing participants' status as "a member of a society with definite traditions"

(Homans 1941, 171). The temporal aspect of tradition holds more importance to some than others.

For those temporal sticklers, perhaps for whom the Earth's natural equinox holds ritualistic significance, a similar celebration had taken place in the exact same location one week earlier (March 21, 2021). These two celebrations visually appeared different; though both were crowded with thousands of participants wearing cultural garb, any visitor to the Dalieh on the 28th would be confronted with infrastructure including stages, structures for shade in the hot sun, and vendors selling water, juice and snacks. This infrastructure was nowhere to be seen on March 21, signifying a lower profile. The celebration of March 28th was also marked by the attendance of Lebanese officials, whose presence represented the bureaucracy that condoned a March 28th *Newroz*. Naturally, this gathering of thousands, including representatives from the Lebanese Communist Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and the administration that governs the autonomous Kurdish region of north Syria itself, and as such was heavily documented in the media (Rida and Browne 2021; Taher 2021).

On March 21st, there was no stage to be seen, no representatives, officials or microphones. The only type of infrastructure among the massive crowd were speakers hoisted onto truck beds, blasting *dabke* music. In some senses, this space was friendly; families with children clustered around *arguile*s, coolers or tiny grills under what sparse shade the few trees granted. Teenagers dipped their feet in the Beiruti Mediterranean water despite the oil and pollution, and merchants offered motorboat rides through Pigeon's Rock. But the environment had an edge to it, one that was more political and pointed than I had expected. The March 21st *Newroz* celebration was not, in fact, condoned by Lebanese officials – in this confusing time, the Ministry of Health had

lifted its total prohibition on entering the public, but had not yet signed off on public gatherings. At the tail end of an intense series of lockdowns instituted by a government that seemingly refused to communicate its own lockdown rules clearly, Kurds in Lebanon took advantage of the temporary legal gray area in which simply existing in public lay. By staying condensed, individuals could avoid putting themselves in danger of being arrested or issued a ticket by presenting themselves as a part indistinguishable from a larger entity, and so their safety relied on this physical form of solidarity. After all, the vast majority of refugees from Syria in Lebanon do not have legal residency, so the consequences of an arrest are unknown (Alsharabati and Nammour 2015, 12).

A. Purpose and Structure

These observations at *Newroz* prompted to start to think about what an anthropology of Kurds living in Lebanon would look like. Almost immediately, I began to put together research proposal for my MA thesis which focused on the lifeworlds of Syrian Kurds in Lebanon. My personal interest in the Syrian Kurdish population has been piqued since about 2014, when some social media users began to discuss a new global leftist project that they tentatively referred to as "Rojava." When it became clear that ISIS enclaves were successfully seized by Rovaja's militas while the US-led international coalition struggled to make comparable progress, I was fascinated that an army composed of (by and large) impoverished and stateless individuals forced the strongest military in the world to overcome its dependence on Cold War attitudes to fund an administration whose goal is leftist utopia, and who is explicitly affiliated with the PKK (which the American government officially considers a terrorist organization). However, I was also interested in the continuing flow of Kurds out of Syria, and even

out of Rojava. I wondered how the Kurds themselves conceived of the administration, and how its establishment affected the lives of Kurds *outside* of the two Kurdish administrations of northern Syria and Iraq.

I wanted to try to understand their lives in terms of their layered displacement and dispossession. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, my aim to conduct fieldwork was interrupted. The nested crises that Lebanon continues to endure escalated to the point where it was no longer tenable for me to remain in the country. I explain these reasons, some of which are health-related, later on in this chapter. Following my departure, I began to think of ways to approach my interests from another angle. Following conversations with my advisor, I decided to reflect on what an anthropology Syrian Kurds living in Lebanon would look like from a conceptual framework. That is, I decided to write a literature review of recent Kurdish anthropology whereby I identify and situate certain themes that may have become relevant to the fieldwork I had hoped to do. This exercise, which is one of attempting to master a body of literature, is by no means exhaustive, although I have done my best to be as thorough as possible.

In Chapter 2, we delve further into my observations informed my conceptual framing which is heavily influenced by Bourdieu. I will also provide an overview of a Kurdish anthropology, identifying recurrent themes. These themes will become the focus of the following chapters. In Chapter 3, I attempt to situate attention to kinship in Kurdish anthropology within broader debates of kinship anthropology. Doing so sheds important light upon the fact that, despite their social and economic marginalization, Kurdish communities have long been studied by anthropologists. Indeed, there is no better place to demonstrate this than in kinship anthropology, a domain of study that some might argue is the bread and butter of anthropology. I highlight kinship specialist

Diane King's work on Iraqi Kurds to demonstrate her influence in pulling Kurds back to the "fore" of anthropology. In Chapter 4, I look to two recent ethnographies of Kurdish populations in Turkey that I see as furthering King's project. Together, these pieces are part of a new "wave" of Kurdish anthropology that uses King's description of Kurdish patriliny as a foundation, that they build on to illuminate how the traditional logic of Kurdish life reacts to the uneven influences of globalization. Finally, I compare some major themes of Kurdish and Lebanese anthropology to posit how that logic may operate socially in Lebanon.

This literature review draws on robust Kurdish, Lebanese, and Middle Eastern anthropologies to posit an anthropology of recent Kurdish migrants to Lebanon despite a lack of ethnographic data. Within the literature, this thesis finds a current re-emergence of Kurdish ethnography in the field of anthropology. This thesis argues that this re-emergence literature illuminates the unique "foothold" that Kurdish conceptions of kinship provide to popular decolonization initiatives in anthropology about the Middle East and Islam. On a practical level, this thesis finds many nodes of solidarity between Kurds and Lebanese, both potential and operative, suggesting that Kurds may find a route to mobility in future reforms of Lebanon's political system.

B. Methodology

1. Reflexive Positionality

Lila Abu-Lughod's emphasis on positionality is influential in post-colonial anthropological theory, especially with regard to reflexivity. Abu-Lughod emphasizes that "every view is a view from somewhere" (1991, 141), an elaboration that contributes greatly to understanding interpersonal dynamics in fieldwork. Today, post-

Orientalism, an author depicting Middle Eastern entities as primitive, simple or backwards is obviously problematic; toward the same end, Abu-Lughod calls into question which particularities about the region authors decide are central enough to focus on. For example, Abu-Lughod criticizes the western media's fixation on portraying the burqa as the ultimate symbol of Muslim women's oppression by the Taliban. To Afghani women, the burqa was only the specific type of headcovering they must wear, and was not the salient symbol that the US constructed domestically. Abu-Lughod reasons that, in a social class of women who are used to the "portable seclusion" presented by modesty, the burqa is a mundane particularity without relative significance (2002, 785-786). To these women, the act of wearing veils is "so conventional that most women gave little thought to their meaning," so even if the Taliban abandoned their burqa mandate, "most of these women would choose some other form of modest headcovering" (Ibid.). If the burqa is seen as one option within an array of similar veils, then the burqa naturally does not take on the same charged political saliency that media ascribed to it. This instance demonstrates the crucial role of reflexivity in positionality; although an anthropologist may intend to confront their positionality by acknowledging the political power dynamics between their social class and that of a participant, the anthropologist must constantly re-evaluate how knowledge of participant populations was *constructed* to write with meaningful nuance.

Neglecting positionality is not only offensive, but can be genuinely dangerous. Laura Bush's overemphasis on the burqa mobilized public opinion in the US in order to manufacture the public's consent to invade a country to solve conditions that were produced by US intervention to begin with. As a child, I was just starting to attend school when she delivered the 2002 radio address criticized by Abu-Lughod. I formed

my earliest memories in the immediately post-9/11 United States, a time in which public opinion asserted that intensive American invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan were both unquestionably necessary for our own ends, and our moral obligation toward civilians in the Middle East. I belong to a social class whose very base of knowledge was formed with constant reference to the war on terror. Through the first half of my adolescence, my opinions and perceptions of the world gained tentative coherency in the context of a wartime that has since been condemned by the very same public with a similar ubiquity. The public held especially strong opinions considering that knowledge of the details of operations was very sparse; rhetoric often subsumed Iraq and Afghanistan into one Islamic mega-regime, and conflated all "bad" actors into a "Taliban-and-the-terrorists" mutant villain (Ibid.). Distilling details out of complex events to fit them neatly into a rhetorical narrative allows the public to easily choose from the political "camps" presented by media, leaving little room for nuance. Choosing a neat, prefabricated platform and adopting its base of knowledge uncritically is tempting in its ease, especially in youth. The US's repeated reliance on and subsequent betrayal of the Kurds is a historical pattern that deviates from desirable narratives, perhaps a reason why many Americans are unaware of Kurdish nationalism's enduring role in regional affairs.

Indeed, the US is a colonial power so strong that it can utilize entire ethnicities as foreign policy tools that may be discarded on a discretionary basis with little meaningful consequence. It incepts implicit and reproducing hierarchies into constituency dispositions to preserve its own power, which become cemented as "structuring structures" disguised as an objective global or even existential logic that must be intensively confronted from its foundation to dispel. Like many in my social

class, I was introduced to the entire Kurdish ethnicity about a decade ago due to the YPG's primary role in the SDF, championed as being on the frontlines in the fight against ISIS. Also like many around me, I was thrilled at the prospect of the top third of Syria being "transformed" into a secular state where women hold an equal socioeconomic and political power to men, with a militia whose guerrilla prowess has forced the US to collaborate with them, despite their self-avowed leftism. The "finally women have a voice" rhetoric (which will be addressed in chapter 4) is a tempting response to the Rojava narrative since it portrays their situation simply and positively.

My enthusiasm led me to several assumptions that are offensive and even potentially dangerous. For one, I had developed too strong a focus on Syrian Kurdistan due to its recent emergence. That a Kurdistan was, in fact, proposed in the Treaty of Sevres and existed cohesively within the Ottoman Empire suggests that an emphasis on Syrian Kurdistan is fallacious, since borders were drawn not long enough ago to view the Kurds within the autonomous region as markedly Syrian, nor to view Syrian Kurdistan as independent from the rest of Kurdistan. I was neglecting an entire nationalist movement with a rich history, one that is crucial to the Kurdish identity. Rojava views itself as furthering the cause of, yet distinct from, the PKK, an organization that multiple western states have deemed terroristic. In the context of foreign policy, the perception that the administration of Rojava is a meaningful break from the PKK can be used to justify the favoring of the autonomous region as an "ally" while continuing to demonize the PKK as terrorists despite the Turkish regime continuing to violently oppress Turkey's Kurdish population.

2. Leaving Lebanon

It may be clear by this point that this project was originally ethnographic in nature. As an urban space, Beirut changed radically between when I moved there in September 2019 and when I left in September 2021. Lebanon shattered my patently Western assumption that state services were too important to be "allowed" to fail. My fieldnotes questioned, time and time again, "How is it possible for the electricity to simply stop?," "How can the 20,000 lira in my pocket be worth so much less today than it was yesterday?", "How can a state allow food to be too expensive for its population to eat?." Ultimately, these questions landed at "Where are the global powers? How can an entire country be allowed to run out of gasoline? Do no other countries care that there's no medicine when everybody has salmonella and dysentery?"

In retrospect, I realize that October 17th, 2019 was not the first day of Lebanon's crisis, but only a day in which the absurdities of poverty and deprivation were thrown into the sharpest relief by yet another proposed tax. Prior to this date, which marked the mobilization of mass protests, the crisis was far from invisible, but was largely ignored as the west focused on its own "refugee crisis." I recall when Gallup (2021) released a global emotions report that ranked Lebanon's population as the least well-rested of *any* country's, encountering the least "positive experiences" and the second most "negative experiences" on a daily basis in the world. Reading the report over the shoulder of a Lebanese friend, I remember my surprise that their response was not despair but laughter. They remarked that they had been so used to their suffering going ignored by global actors that they gained some sense of catharsis from recognition only. Only after parsing the report further did I notice that Lebanon

had held some of these ranks for years: "[t]he majority of Lebanese people have not experienced enjoyment in their daily lives since 2018" (Ibid., 7).

On August 14, 2021, it felt like the entirety of Lebanon received the warning of AUB's imminent hospital closure due to lack of gasoline in just hours. It was this intersection, the energy crisis and the medical crisis, that permanently altered my mindset, made my research impossible to conduct, and made my own continued existence in Lebanon untenable. Were I perfectly healthy and had my research passed the IRB stage, ethnography would have been difficult, if not impossible, to conduct regardless. A lack of gasoline meant I would not have been physically able to transport myself to conduct interviews, nor could they be completed virtually without issues, since scarce electricity meant that a call of sufficient length would be significantly detrimental to participants' lives. But more importantly, I, along with many others who could not make the choice to leave Lebanon, am immunocompromised and dependent on medication. I often wonder if I would still be alive were I outright unable to leave Lebanon like millions of holders of Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian passports, and I remain skeptical.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter, I reflect on the conceptual framework underpinning my literature review. I begin by explaining my perspective on the politicization of the Kurdish identity, which relies on the relevance of Bourdieu and his notion of *habitus* to Kurdish anthropology. This will hopefully become clear in the following section where I speak briefly about the life of Hussain Hajj, a Kurdish musician who, in this narration of life in Aleppo, details the moment in which exclusionary state policies surrounding Kurdish *Newroz* endowed his own Kurdish identity with political salience. This encounter is likely common amongst Kurdish individuals, but is also a micro-scale example of how Kurdishness became political in the four countries through which Kurdistan extends. Following this short interlude into Hajj's lifeworld, the final sections offer a broad overview of Kurdish anthropology. Rather crucially, this section notes that there has long been anthropological attention to the Kurdish societies. This section explores meta-narratives of Kurdish anthropology to show important shifts in conceptual framing throughout its history.

A. Syrian-Kurdish *Newroz*

One evening in March of 2000, Kurdish musician and student Hussain Hajj sat in his cousin's small "mini studio" in Aleppo practicing the oud that was forbidden in his family's strictly Muslim home in Kobane. Inspired to record, Hussain hopped on a motorbike, also borrowed from a cousin, and set off to pick up two of his friends who were skilled vocalists. Only one was home, and the two men began the drive back to the

studio in the rain. Suddenly, a Jeep belonging to the *mukhabarat* appeared in front of the motorbike. A fear-struck Hussain began to go through a mental checklist to understand exactly how much danger he was in: "We do not have drugs in our pockets and we do not even use drugs. We are not drunk. We do not belong to political parties and we have neither certain political views." The rhythm and speed of Hussain's checklist reminded him of a fast tempo, and his heartbeat of a harmony.

While quickly taking stock of himself, Hussain realized that he held something "more dangerous than drugs" – the long, slim plectrum that he used to pick or strum the strings of his oud. Hussain began to panic:

> In that time of the year and a plectrum in my pocket? *Newroz* is coming and you will give them a very good reason for accusation to put you in prison; that you play music, and so you have rehearsals, in March 21st you will be on the stage to sing "national Kurdish" songs in *Newroz*! How can I get rid of this curse! I thought to swallow it. But it was too long to be swallowed! No! I will put it in my shoe. No, they will take my shoes off! I thought it would be better if I threw it under the chair. The back side of the jeep consisted of two opposite long chairs. Me and my friend were opposite each other and four intelligence men were in both our sides. But in the mid of silence, when you throw something it will make a sound. So, I made a cough and threw it. Now, thank God! We do not have any guilt to be accused of. After three hours of waiting for nothing and asking their usual questions that I had already known, we were set free. But for three months, I was afraid of playing music and I didn't have a plectrum to play, as well.
>
> So, sometimes small events and events you live, hear, experience or witness leave a very big influence on you and lead you to begin searching for answers to big questions and problems. I had always believed that there is no national identity for music, but friends and acquaintances' experiences from one side and moments like the one I experienced on the other side opened a new way or another perspective about music to me; it made me a "Kurdish" musician. It made me think how far politics can orientate someone's musical taste and production. Day by day, this question led me to think more thoroughly about politics and music, not just the political way the authorities handle Kurdish music and the repeatedly taken measures to fight it and get it muted. But the political elements that reside in the Kurdish music itself make an assertion for its existence and survival. In other words, it can be said that it is a matter of action and reaction. (Hajj 2018, 3)

Hussain attributes his drive to study Kurdish music to this event, and he moved to Istanbul to do so. Within Istanbul, Hussain found and studied a community of displaced Syrian musicians of mixed political, religious and ethnic backgrounds. Though these musicians play Kurdish, Turkish and Arabic songs in different styles and for different purposes, Hussein found that the salience of their positionality as Syrians displaced to Turkey since 2011 meant that their music is inextricable from their identity; music performances by refugees are typically attended by other refugees, or, due to a sense of solidarity derived from "common otherness," members of different groups that are also marginalized in Turkey (Hajj 2016, 482). Syrian musicians in Turkey express shared sentiments that resonate with other displaced communities and, in this way, "perform the migration" (Kurtişoğlu et al. 2016, 67-81). *Newroz*'s role as a node of Kurdish solidarity, regardless of tribal or geographical affiliations, is so salient amongst Kurds that state forces police Kurdish populations in a draconian manner. Regimes' fear of empowered Kurdish nationalistic movements are so extreme that something as simple and innocent as a plastic pick becomes dangerous paraphernalia during early Spring.

Hajj's reflection above, in which he ruminates on "action and reaction," is a micro-scale, individual version of the moment in which encounters with state enforcement of exclusionary policies *grants* saliency to ethnic difference. He realizes that the Kurdish need to *assert* existence and survival is the reaction to the marginalizing, state sponsored action, and he decides to pursue a specifically *Kurdish* musicianship as a direct result of this encounter. Though Kurds as a collective pursue Kurdish governments in Syria and Iraq as a response to large-scale and protracted exclusionary policies, the Kurdish individuals most dedicated to these projects were

probably mobilized to some extent by this type of event, in which they felt targeted or excluded due to their Kurdishness. Each year, skirmishes between Kurdish communities and state forces in the states through which Kurdistan extends break out *around* the time of *Newroz*, when both Kurdish and exclusionary (regime) political will peaks. Hajj's encounter, which leads him to dedicate himself to Kurdish nationalism, is likely evocative of the moment in which *many* Kurds first encounter the salience of Kurdishness on the individual level.

1. *Newroz* as Resistance

Operating in the gray space of legality, thousands attended *Newroz* on its traditional date in Beirut despite the moral and legal risk. Drawing confidence from the 2019 Lebanese revolution, Syrian Kurds enthusiastically asserted their right to this rocky, uneven space through occupation and identification. Co-occupying a space in a celebratory manner can serve to de-emphasize the juxtaposition between the "self" and the "other," which contributes to "the internal constitution of the society. It gives the members of the society confidence; it dispels their anxieties; it disciplines the social organization" (Homans 1941). Political symbols played a large role in the power behind the assertion of space. Practically every attendee wore the colors of the flag of Kurdistan and performed Kurdish dances, and multiple attendees waved flags bearing the face of Abdallah Öcalan, a controversial Kurdish figurehead and the founder of the PKK (who remains exiled in Turkish prison), or the flag of the Kurdish autonomous region in Syria (whose constitution explicitly derives from Öcalan's theory) (Rida and Browne 2021). These flags were particularly poignant in the post-*thawra* environment, in which Lebanese flags were practically "omnipresent [...] as (allegedly neutral)

alternatives to flags of political parties" (Makkawi 2022, 202). The performance of Kurdishness that I witnessed at the Dalieh *became* political, as Hajj says, through its very assertion that the Kurdish identity continues to survive, and that Kurdish music refuses to be muted.

These symbols granted particular saliency to the meaning of the performance, adding an intensely political edge and hinting at the meaning behind the celebration – a meaning that was purposefully endowed, not developed. In fact, Öcalan himself revived the holiday for Kurdish purposes. In the mid-1980s, the PKK *designated Newroz* as an instrument to rally Kurdish nationalistic sentiments and channel them into political power (Yanik 2006, 287). Though *Newroz* originated in Iran, it was celebrated throughout the Ottoman Empire, but the holiday fell to the wayside in the new Turkish Republic after 1923 (Ibid.). Within Turkey, *Newroz* became socially typified as a Kurdish holiday for two reasons. Firstly, Kurds celebrated the holiday within Turkey, partaking in *Newroz* rituals such as jumping over bonfires. Celebration is a bold act when the celebrators' existence itself is illegal on the very ground they dance on. Secondly, the PKK carried out insurgent attacks every *Newroz* (for maximum exposure) as part of its long campaign of insurgency against Turkey. Ironically, the Turkish state went on to co-opt *Newroz* as its own in the 1990s as another method of denying the existence of Kurds (Ibid.). This Turkish strategy was not an instance but a facet of an intensive nation-building campaign, just one of a series of "invented traditions" meant to exclude non-Turks such as Kurds that worked in conjunction with the strategies that actively targeted and killed non-Turks. Houston notes that Turkey's ethno-nationalist policies granted saliency to its ethnic divisions and not only mobilized Kurdish nationalist militants, but also typified the survival of Kurdishness as something that

must be fought for (2008). Turkey was not the only state with exclusionary policies that activated these divisions, but just the most coordinated; all four recognized states through which Kurdistan stretches targeted Kurds to different extents, influencing the development of different conceptions of Kurdishness.

Colonial powers control representations on a global level, including within literature and media. The unrecognized state of Kurdistan's large population is stretched across four nation-states, so regimes (historically, of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran) have a heavy incentive to either repress or co-opt Kurdish political groups and parties rather than letting them fall to the wayside. Now, Kurds make up at least ten percentof the population of every nation-state through which Kurdistan passes, even after a century of diaspora. Colonial powers exercise strategies of domination against a group (or groups) that are *heterogeneous* in relation to the colonial power (Horvath 1972). In the post-*Orientalism* world, most disciplines recognize (and, in the case of anthropology, continue to grapple with) the historic pattern of Western powers carrying out strategies of domination over the Middle East. In this paradigm, regimes use rhetoric to distinguish themselves as superior against the Oriental "Other," who is inferior because they develop, act, or pursue goals in ways that are not aligned with Western Enlightenment ideals ("politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively" [Said 1978]).

Since colonialism is "done" by the dominating power in the relationship, the manner in which a colonial power chooses its targets hinges on *its own* perceptions and goals. Any nuanced analysis of the Middle East therefore must account for the ability of regimes to choose to carry out Orientalist Otherization toward its own ends, despite possibly being targets of Otherization themselves. Turkey is a colonial power, even

though it is not western, and even though it itself has been a target of Orientalism by powers *more* dominating than itself (Devran 2007, 108; Zeydanlıoğlu 2008). Since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey has, again and again, politicized ethnic lines as a method of consolidation in order to build a patently Turkish nation state with "ethnic Turkish singularity" to portray itself as "the embodiment of enlightenment progress" (Ozyurek 2004; Houston 1997). Prior to organized Kurdish insurgency, this meant outright denial of the very existence of the Kurdish identity. During intensive Turkification campaigns, the regime declared Kurds "mountain Turks" in an act of cultural genocide (Sagnic 2010, Ozyurek 2004, Houston 2020). Notably, while Turkey has most explicitly articulated and intensively coordinated its attack on Kurdishness, Iran, Iraq and Syria have historically taken cues from Turkey and implemented similar policies, including a "forgotten genocide" in Iraq (Hardi 2011).

B. Lebanese Intersections

The assertion of a right to public space as a mechanism of nationalistic sentiments was timely for Lebanon. Lebanon's *thawra* started in late 2019, and though protests were initially sparked by austerity measures associated with the state's financial crisis, protesters quickly developed an ideological focus on the pluralistic re-seizure of space and infrastructure that had once been public domain, asserting that they had a "right to the city" (Ioannides and Petrido 2021). In this case, as in the Kurdish case, uncondoned occupation of space was a means, not an end. The occupation of the Egg theater, an iconic symbol of *thawra*, operated in the same legal gray space as 2021's first *Newroz*: not *condoned,* but seemingly not presenting an imminent enough threat to powers to provoke a crackdown against protestors (Kosmatopoulos 2021). The

occupation of the Egg thus presented a risk of retaliation by legal powers against occupiers in a similar manner to the Kurds' occupation of the Dalieh.

The Egg was not only occupied in the most literal manner, but protestors ensured to mark the Egg semiotically. The presence of "vandalism" itself marks something about an urban space; as noted above, the Kemalist City beckons to its asserted "oneness" by ensuring, via policing, that no counter-publics can be sensed, including visually and sonically (Houston 2005; 2020). Beirut deviates radically from this. Vandalism, paint whose situation is not condoned, can be seen in every direction, especially since the beginning of *thawra*. Its concentrated presence does not deprive it of its meaning. First and foremost, vandalism signifies the presence of counter-publics; when vandalistic marks assert similar meanings, especially in the same location, vandalism can signify the presence of a large or strong counterpublic, as it does in Beirut (Holland 2014). The Egg bears repeated messages condemning the system (*kellon y'ani kellon*, for example), as well as touting specific advocacies ("Gay Rights," for example) (Majed and Salman 2019).

Thawra disrupted the soundscape of Beirut with similar sentiments. *Kellon y'ani kellon* originated as a chant of condemnation, an assertion that it was not one sectarian group that ought to be toppled, but rather the entire system (a Lebanese pluralistic sequel to the Arab Spring's *ash-shab yureed isqat an-nizam*) (Ibid.). If vandalism is assertionary paint that exists in an uncondoned location and may provoke legal action from authorities, purposeful soundscape disruption as an asserted condemnation of the system by its public can be considered a kind of sonic vandalism. Similar to its painted, visual variety, sonic vandalism via chanting carries a dual meaning: firstly, its very

existence signifies a counter-public and secondly, the words chanted clarify the motivation of the counter-public.

Many Kurds certainly mobilized amongst the millions who took to the streets during *thawra*. Lebanon's politically rooted refusal to conduct a census since the early 1930s means that there is no way to understand the specific demographics of incoming refugees, so there is no way to know how many Kurds are in the country, let alone how many mobilized (Akram 2018, 424). Research coming out of Lebanon today, much of it funded by the UN and conducted by NGOs, focuses on the plight of refugees, mostly Syrian, Palestinian and Armenian. Kurds who have entered Lebanon within the last decade are researched only as "Syrian refugees," alongside Arabs, Assyrians and other ethno-religious identity groups. As such, there is little that can be stated as fact about the participation of Kurds in *thawra*, except that many Syrian refugees in Lebanon did mobilize alongside the Lebanese (Makkawi 2022, 201). Though some Lebanese hold negative perceptions about Syrians (Alsharabati and Nammour 2015, 5), resenting the Syrian regime's occupation of Lebanon that lasted nearly three decades, Syrian refugees in Lebanon certainly have plenty to protest. Surveys show that the vast majority of Syrian refugees in Beirut (and, to a lesser extent, Lebanon as a whole) do not have legal papers and do not feel safe in public, especially outside of daylight hours (Ibid., 12). Around 90% of those surveyed also reported a causative relationship between these two factors, suggesting that Syrian refugees in Lebanon feel unsafe due to Lebanese authorities in large part (Ibid.). Interviews with Syrian refugees who did mobilize shows that their interests did align with that of their co-protestors at *thawra*: "Several Syrians shared advice from experiences of revolt in Syria aiming to help Lebanon's uprising avoid the fate of Syria's revolution. Public declarations of solidarity and encouragement

emerged from Syrians in the diaspora, Idlib, etc. That non-Lebanese communities believed in the uprising's goals is evidenced too by how some refugees continued to show up to demonstrations despite mounting danger" (Makkawi 2022, 201).

The background of *thawra* has a lot to lend to an understanding of the first, uncondoned Kurdish celebration of *Newroz* at the Dalieh. Perhaps it was the shared sentiment of a right to occupy public space, and the recent, Lebanese yet "welcom[ing]" assertion of this right (Ibid.), that emboldened the Kurds to mobilize on March 21st. But many other similarities exist between the Lebanese *thawra* and the type of Kurdish nationalism promoted by the administration of Rojava. Both Lebanese and Kurds are extensively diasporic, so it is likely that the mobilized Kurdish and Lebanese individuals have close family and friends in Europe and elsewhere after a regime rendered their lifeworld uninhabitable, and may, themselves, be pursuing a route out of Lebanon (Schlein 2020). Furthermore, since those with socioeconomic mobility are frequently the ones who *can* leave, those left behind face the most deprivations and therefore levy the most grievances against regimes (Osseiran 2020). Both conceptualize secularism as a solution to sectarianism in government, to the latter of which both groups attribute their poverty and lack of mobility (Anstorp 2020, 48-50; Öcalan 2011, 17). Finally, *thawra* and Syria's prevailing Kurdish movement both state as one of their goals a strong advocacy for women's rights, including demands for increased safety and representation in government (Mourad 2022, 140-144).

C. Kurdish Anthropology

The nature of 20th-century anthropological texts concerning the Kurds is unique against the background of Said-inspired critical re-readings of Western canon about the

Middle East, as well as the larger global movement in academia that seeks to isolate and understand the influence of colonialism on the production of knowledge. Said's famous argument that Western Orientalists desire a static "'object' of study" and thus unilaterally "adopt an essentialist conception of the countries, nations and peoples of the Orient" (1978, 82) is contested by Houston in the Kurdish context. Houston argues that, during the functionalist era in which the treatment of cultures as isolated was certainly conducive to this racial essentialism, western ethnographic texts about the Kurds were, in fact, not very locally influential. Instead, texts about Kurds were produced or influenced primarily by Ottoman and Turkish regimes, who ironically broke the dominant mold of functionalism to portray the Kurds simply as reactionary, tribal, "backward" Turks (Houston 2009, 22). The rejection of essentialism in this case was, itself, an act of colonialism, a denial of the existence of the Kurdish people in line with Turkish "folklore" to disempower Kurdish nationalism (Ibid., 27). Houston advocates thusly that 19th and 20th century texts about Kurds be re-read *today,* not for Western colonialism, but Turkish.

However, this "colonial project" is ongoing in new ways. In the late 20th and early 21st century, facing the reality that the existence of Kurds must be acknowledged, Turkish publishing houses have tasked themselves with translating and re-printing early Western functionalist ethnographies that depict the essence of the "Wild Kurd" (Ibid., 21). After over a century of total denial, many "Kurds have looked sympathetically upon any Western work that has confirmed their existence," or have otherwise rebelled with a less offensive, yet similarly essentialist "romantic" depiction of the Kurdish people as "the sole source of a Mesopotamian civilization that has existed for thousands

of years" (Ibid.). As such, influential ethnography about Kurds has largely been *made* influential toward colonialist ends, by two distinct colonial traditions.

An analysis of Meho and Maglaughlin's 2001 annotated bibliography *Kurdish Culture and Society* suggests that the majority of influential 20th century ethnographic texts on Kurdish communities focus on kinship in either Iraq or Turkey (61-66). Though Meho is amongst the only academic specialists on Lebanon's Kurds, the work only cites four texts concerning Kurds in Lebanon, none of which are ethnographic. In contrast, texts about diasporic Kurds in Europe are numerous, outweighing even those concerning Kurds in Syrian Kurdistan. Crucially, the vast majority of ethnography cited in the volume primarily concerns intertwined and inextricable analyses of family, kin and tribe. To Meho and Magaughlin, significant anthropology concerning the Kurds began in 1940 with famous early anthropologist Edmund Leach, who published his first ethnographic account *Social and Economic Organization of the Rowanduz Kurds* immediately after meeting Bronisław Malinowski and whilst participating in the latter's weekly seminar. Like most early Malinowskiesque ethnography, the monograph is a survey of social structures that disguises itself as apolitical (since it was written prior to the field's developed fixation on positionality), though Leach fallaciously represented the Kurds as a historically insular, holistic culture who had only just begun to experience global encounters despite "the partial dominance of the British in Iraq," "the history of modern Ottoman colonialism in the region," and "the growing presence there of the emergent Iraqi nation-state" (Houston 2009, 31). Indeed, Leach's book is amongst the most common of the ethnographies currently being translated and reprinted in Turkey toward colonialist ends (Ibid., 21). Interestingly, Meho (2001, 64) points out (via an excerpt from a 1941 review by Elizabeth Bacon in *American Anthropologist*)

that Leach devotes "a part of the monograph [...] to a consideration of the present social and economic problems with which the Rowanduz Kurds are confronted as the result of recent intensification of western cultural influences upon Iraq."

Anthropology concerning Kurds therefore holds a special place in the history of the field, since Leach's book was published within the first "wave" of sociocultural ethnography and contributed to the very formation of the practice of fieldwork. Furthermore, in its intensive and protracted auto-decolonization initiative, the current field of anthropology has turned back to the very same reading of modern history that sees a huge portion of the "social and economic problems" encountered in populations of the global periphery as directly attributable to the "intensification of western cultural influences." For example, anthropologists (Al-Rasheed 2002; 2013, 43; Le Renard 2014, 2, 29; Katakura, 1977) have been very careful to emphasize to students in the west that Wahhabism, though it carries a rich scholarly tradition of its own that emerged in the 18th century (Mahmood 2011), was not a "traditional" mechanism of rule and was co-opted as a method of power consolidation for state-making by the Saudi royal family, whom Britain essentially placed into power and whose rule America later cemented through oil patronage. This assertion aims to warn students against implicitly conceiving of "history in terms of linear progress and modernization, according to which all obstacles to women's professional activity are the result of traditions inherited from the past" (Le Renard 2014, 29).

Leach was likely amongst the first to make an argument of this shape, noting that Kurds were far "freer" before British colonizing forces began paying Kurdish tribal leaders (*agha*s) to ensure that their populations "behaved themselves" (Leach 1940, 5). He argues that the *agha*'s salary led to the artificial development of an elite class who

began importing luxuries for the first time, only to go into debt trying to simultaneously maintain their lifestyle *and* their allocative kinship duties when the salary ended and selling the land that had, in practice, been owned and tended to by the collective tribe (Ibid., 40). Out of jobs *en masse* and no longer appeased by an *agha*, the Kurds who had farmed that land "detribalized" and moved to Kirkuk to supply labor for the Iraq Petroleum Company which (prior to its 1972 nationalization) was owned by a conglomerate of western corporations (Ibid.). Leach's suspicion that this method of economic displacement was strategic on Britain's part, since "[a] completely detribalised community is in many respects easier to administer than a tribal one, at least in the short term view" (Ibid.), was astute and remains relevant today as Kurds in Syria construct a non-separatist nationalist project that advocates a decentralized, egalitarian, agrarian, markedly Kurdish confederacy, which can be construed as a purposeful retribalization.

Since its founding, Syrian Kurdistan (formerly AANES but, colloquially and henceforth, "Rojava") has received an unprecedented amount of attention by academics, especially those with leftist and feminist persuasions, regardless of discipline. Recent works (Tank 2017; Schäfers 2018, 2022; Graeber 2014, 2016; Knapp, Flach, Ayboga 2016, 61-83; Al-Ali and Tas 2017) especially concern women's activism in the region in relation to Kurdish nationalism, revolution and the autonomous region's political system (a self-proclaimed "democratic socialism"). In fact, while the context of Rojava is new, the subject matter is not; a look back to Meho and Maglaughlin's bibliography shows a plurality of texts primarily about Kurdish women historically lie at this exact same intersection of topics (2001, 285-291). Rojava asserts a particular type of Kurdish nationalistic identity that emphasizes horizontal solidarity, gender equality and

secularism, and caters to the international community for recognition with its media campaign. However, Rojava has created a second Kurdish political "camp", arguably fracturing the nation's unity further since it radically deviates from the type of separatist Kurdish nationalism asserted by the "big tent" KDP, the senior partner of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq.

Kurds have always constituted a huge portion of the population within the borders of Turkey; even today, with high rates of immigration *into* Turkey and the extensive Kurdish diaspora *out*, Kurds make up an estimated twenty percent of Turkey's population. In early attempts to assimilate Kurds by forcibly displacing them, a full third of the country was (geographically) deemed non-Turkish and its population slated for assimilation (referred to in Turkish policy as "regions to be completely evacuated" – the justification used to destroy Kurdish villages, and a major provocation leading to the formation of the PKK). *Newroz*'s express purpose was to combat the restrictive, purposefully exclusionary and ethnicist national building tactics of Turkey under which anything signifying "Kurdishness" was illegal (Yanik 2006). One common repressive mechanism deployed against the Kurds in Turkey was the deprivation of Kurdish-identified space in the "Kemalist City," which "is visually surveilled and policed for signs of counter-ethnic publics" (Houston 2008). Here, Houston uses "counter-ethic publics" to mean social structures that are markedly non-Turkish. Neither Beirut nor other Lebanese cities resemble conceptualizations of the Kemalist City, but Lebanon presents a host of its own political particularities. Kurds displaced to Lebanon who choose to perform Kurdishness do so in an urban space that is less familiar with it, and will therefore interact with it in new ways. "Performing Kurdishness*"* refers to public, explicit assertions of Kurdishness, which includes ritual (as is the case of

Beirut's *Newroz*). The manner in which recognized nation-states deprived Kurds of space by policing a sensory landscape, the saliency that this deprivation granted to Kurdish counter-publics, and the resultant significance of the Kurds' occupation of the Dalieh (which I call an assertion of the right to peripheral space) will be examined in further detail throughout this thesis.

Furthermore, this thesis posits that Kurdish anthropology has returned to the fore of the field as anthropologists attempt to consolidate today's conception of complex, intersubjective, dynamic lifeworlds in the global periphery with historical fieldwork attitudes that emphasized trade, rituals and cultural artifacts. This thesis reads three ethnographies of Kurdish communities written in the last decade as committed to the same project, one that endeavors to recognize, depict and cross-culturally compare particular *phenomena* with clarity and brevity as early ethnographers intended for the method, while recognizing and even demonstrating that depicted *lifeworlds* are more complex than an ethnographic vignette could endeavor to capture. As *Orientalism* approaches its fiftieth birthday, anthropology about the Middle East remains, by and large, idiomatically stuck between a rock and a hard place: ethnographers struggle to "write against culture," a goal that encourages the writer to detail the practical circumstances that prompted the development of observed practices ("ethnographies of the particular"; Abu-Lughod 1991, 150), while trying to avoid the Orientalist assertion that *Islam* must be that circumstance (Said 1978, 279). This thesis concludes that the current "wave" of Kurdish ethnography presents a particularly valuable foothold supporting the delinking of (misogynistic) "culture" from (masculine) "Islam" in the Middle East, since authors concur that, in Kurdistan, gender segregation and restrictions

on women's freedom originated due to the enduring, secular logic of patrilineal organization.

D. *Habitus* within Lifeworlds

This thesis relies on Pierre Bordieu's practice theory (and elaborations on it) to articulate the current position of Kurds throughout the Middle East. Bordieu proposed this paradigm in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), in which he drew upon his own fieldwork in Algeria to propose a paradigm with which to parse the formation of dispositions and social structures. Bourdieu elaborated on practice theory through the next few decades until his death, as have countless other authors (Navarro 2006). Advantageously, this paradigm takes into account individual, subjective peculiarities alongside large-scale, mobilizing strategies and, as such, anticipates both personal and communal agencies. Put plainly, extant social conditions form individual dispositions: your concept of your relationship to the external is formed by those very same external circumstances. Bourdieu calls the collection of dispositions formed by any given person their *habitus*, "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (1977, 72).

The way a given person acts is determined by their choice, which they base in their perception of circumstances, which are *interpreted* by that person. Interpretations happen according to a set of "norms" that the person is predisposed to assume, and their interpretation informs their practice (Nash 2003, 50). I am predisposed to believe that I will be hungry tomorrow, since that is how things tend to go. I keep my food in my refrigerator, so I am predisposed to interpret an empty refrigerator as a lack of food. Based on this information, I will likely choose to go to the grocery store today. This last

step, practice, is both a product and a reproducer, since practice determines social structures and conditions (Ibid.). I chose to go grocery shopping, and to put my groceries in the refrigerator, reinforcing the norm that the refrigerator should have food in it. Were children around, they may view the state of the stocked refrigerator as the "norm," and be more likely to replicate the cycle when they are older.

Discussing *habitus* can help understand reflexive positionality. There are many disciplines, including history, medicine and anthropology, in which the "observer" is most likely to notice or deem important traits of an interlocutor which would stand out most within the lifeworld of the *observer*. One cannot help but operate under the assumptions presented by their own *habitus*, and as determined by their "social class," Bordieu's term for the group of people that are more likely than others to have similarly structured assumptions to you due to similar backgrounds (1977, 85). *Habitus* "possesses" individuals rather than vice versa, since it acts as a "*modus operandi* informing all thought and action" (Ibid.,18). If our *habitus* is our implicit reference that informs our sensory interpretations and allows us to coherently understand and react to our environment thereby, and our identity is in constant dialect with (informing and informed by) our thoughts and actions, then *habitus* exists *prior* to identity. Conceiving of a particular identity requires a reference point, i.e. what *makes* the individual particular, so identity must be built on top of the foundation of perception and interpretation that is *habitus*.

So, *habitus* structures interpretations of conditions based on implicit expectations. But in the case of migrants, who have experienced different "modes" of life that may contrast greatly with each other, expectations are naturally more flexible. Every individual lives within and above a background tissue, a horizon that acts as a

"lifeworld," containing certain patterns of how settings and outcomes *are* and are expected to continue to be (Grønseth 2013) – the total accumulation of structures, dispositions and practices. In their navigation from one lifeworld to another, migrants often attempt to preserve aspects of their culture or traditions through re-articulation. This can mean modifying practices themselves, or maintaining certain practices while shifting their meanings (Ibid.). The traversal of these "borderlands" that migrants must undertake after geographic displacement may challenge conceptions of the self, since humans frequently link aspects of our identity to the configuration of our external surroundings -- for example, our hometown, or our family. However, adaptation to new environments is part of the human experience. Associated challenges can lead to a restructuring of agency and an emergence of creativity, as migrants attempt to pull compatible aspects of their beliefs and customs through the borderlands into their new lifeworlds (Ibid.).

Husserl popularized the term "lifeworld" in 1938, when he described the concept as the "subsoil" on which "objective science" relies and which functions as a set of assumed "pre-logical validities" on which theoretical truths may be formed (Husserl 1970, 36). Put more intuitively by later writers, the lifeworld is described by Harrington as a "tissue of intersubjective background understandings" (2006, 341), and by Grønseth as "a [dynamic] horizon of all our experiences that creates a background against which identity and meaning emerge and are decided upon" (2013, 2). To Husserl, writers of lifeworlds must minimize, whenever possible, the impact of their own presuppositions, aiming primarily to describe and avoiding unilateral and coercive forms of interpretation (Dahlberg and Dahlberg 2020, 458-459). Husserl emphasized intersubjectivity as crucial to the constitution of the self; a definite border cannot be

drawn between an individual and their environment, nor between individuals who empathize with each other (Ibid., 460).

The lifeworld, which is dynamic in some senses yet assumes some extent of homeostasis in lived or expected experience, is conducive to depictions of migrant experiences as migrants traverse between lifeworlds. Grønseth articulates the nuanced manner in which migrants' agency emerges and configures itself while they live *without* stability, in the "borderlands" between lifeworlds (Grønseth 2013, 2, 6). Migrants depend on this agency to transcend and negotiate borders in both material and conceptual ways. Furthermore, the migrant experience can further intensify the co-constitutive experience by blurring pre-assumed distinctions. Concepts that non-migrants view as vague, such as the "past" and the "present," are tangible to migrants as the terms are loaded with extremely specific and lived sets of material conditions (Ibid., 10). This is evidenced by the fact that the body acts as the intermediary to any formation of meaning, so opposed or shifting environments not only affirms the self, but also changes one's predisposition to the manner in which they interact with their surroundings (Ibid., 11). The belief that time is and will continue to be experienced in a consistent way is a part of a rigid *habitus* that migration may bend, break or dispel.

Grønseth argues that, since movement and the shifting of meanings is a crucial part of the human experience, the study of negotiation between lifeworlds in migrants can grant crucial insight into the human condition through a unique understanding of the consciousness's response to change. Since re-configuration of the self is especially visible through micro-level social exchanges, ethnography is crucial (16). Consistent with Husserl's phenomenology, the self being an "embodied relation" demands that anthropologists not only think conceptually about humanity as a whole, but also work to

understand and depict the shifting dispositions of migrants on the micro-level (11). The creative energy that originates within the liminal areas between and bordering lifeworlds is particularly important in the maintenance (or lack of) of cultural practice, tradition and meaning, which, although operating on both materialistic and theoretical levels, cannot be conceptualized in the abstract (3).

The Kurds traverse a borderland fraught with unique challenges, and have responded in dynamic ways. Areas of north Syria are claimed and administrated by Kurds, but are ultimately subject to Syrian rule of law. Kurds have no country that is truly their own that they may return to. Furthermore, representations of Kurdish communities rely on kinship ties that are portrayed as inherent; familial lines are traced and ascribed with unique and known attributes including location or occupation (King 2014, 115). Since the refugee experience frequently involves familial separation and may spur the development of solidarity with other displaced individuals or communities, displacement may require Kurds to re-articulate the very meaning or operation of kinship itself. Finally, the intensely globalist encounter that accompanies modern displacement as refugees cross borders and apply for asylum, or enter mixed refugee camps run by international NGOs, for example, may radically deviate from refugees' established lifeworlds in the global periphery, shaking logic and intensifying the encounter with the borderlands.

In this chapter, I explored the background of Kurdish anthropology and demonstrated the ethnographic importance of *Newroz,* which Kurds assert their right to celebrate despite danger. I demonstrated how the colonial forces that oppose *Newroz* are the very same ones that granted saliency to Kurdish nationalistic movements. I also noted similar assertions of a right to inhabit public space that may allow formations of

solidarity between Kurds and Lebanese. Finally, I discussed *habitus* and lifeworlds, two concepts that especially help understand the lives of migrants. In the next chapter, I emphasize Diana King's ethnography and its influence on kinship literature, arguing that King's insights brought Kurdish studies back to the fore in anthropology, but also that her contributions enriched contemporary conceptions of kinship as a whole.

CHAPTER III

KINSHIP AND RELATEDNESS

In this chapter, I will attempt to situate the focus of kinship in Kurdish anthropology within broader debates of kinship anthropology. My main focus will be on the work of Diane King, an anthropologist whose formative work has offered critical insights into relations of kin within Kurdish communities. I begin by providing an overview of her work and then go on to unpack different themes as they are in conversation with an array of approaches that broadly fall under the heading of kinship anthropology.

A. "Old" Kinship

Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1991) addresses the fieldwork trope of the "savage slot," which is amongst the "implicit premises" of the discipline. Trouillot barely needs to define his term, despite being its inventor. It is clear that the savage slot refers to the trope of the Western ethnographer's departure from the west and tendency to seek Otherness in ethnography through depictions of primitivity. Trouillot argues that, since European explorers began to write fantastical travel accounts before photography was accessible, European audiences conceived of ethnographic accounts of faraway populations only as "other," conflating savagery and utopia as simply exoticism. Authors purposefully facilitated the development of a desire for the "elsewhere" in audiences and conflated fictional stories, half-true travel accounts and early ethnography as similarly true: "Outside of a restricted group of overzealous scholars and administrators, it mattered little to the larger European audience whether

such works were fictitious or not. That they presented an elsewhere was enough. That the Elsewhere was actually somewhere was a matter for a few specialists." (Ibid.)

This "savage" orientation became clearer with Malinowski's impact on the field. Anthropology studies the nature of humanity as per its very definition, but by typifying ethnography as anthropological, Malinowski's (in)famous fieldwork in Melanesia singlehandedly drew parameters around the discipline. Depending on qualitative research and data to propose conclusions about the nature of living, anthropology is "harder" than philosophy and "softer" than sociology. Anthropology's earliest function was the defining of the "savage" life, leading ethnographers to study lines of descent and their ascribed meaning since the concept of privileging one's own offspring to most successfully reproduce their own genetic material predates humanity itself. Trouillot typifies anthropology as the savage slot of academia itself which, if true, positions kinship studies squarely at the heart of the field.

As such, depicting kinship is amongst the most traditional methods of ethnography and has been "claimed" by anthropologists "as the area of expertise central to their discipline" since the late 19th century (Carsten 2004, 7). Ethnographers describe conceptions of "family" or "relation" by tracing and terming structures of descent and marriage, defining the roles of the individuals within those structures, and theorizing how their positions in a "family tree" introduces and shapes those individuals' conceptions of their *duty* to each other. The cruciality of kinship to anthropology cannot be overstated, and its relevance to every field of anthropology betrays this. Kinship is the only mainstream concept that straightforwardly bridges biological, sociocultural and linguistic anthropology, for example.

However, the validity of kinship studies has been questioned by anthropologists who criticize the method as bio-essentialist, or furthering harmful meta-narratives. Per the former critique, the charge that ties based in genealogy are always privileged over others, or that genealogy ascribes meaning to otherwise arbitrary ties, is not inherently true. Since kinship is used as an entryway to ethnography, it acts as a foundation on top of which all other social structures are built. Schneider's critique of kinship, which he spent two decades articulating, effectively defined the end of "old kinship" and the beginning of "new kinship" in popular anthropology by arguing that individuals within studied populations do not themselves ascribe discrete portions of meaning to relationships with relatives simply because they ought to (Ibid., 18-20). By treating kinship ties as a standard to the human condition, ethnographers *contextualize* relationships between family members as biological in nature, referring to an implicit "translation manual" in the process. Kinship is a self-fulfilling prophecy in which an ethnographer finds meaning in ties and ascribes it to biology, since biological ties are definitionally what they are looking for; familial ties are found, and then transcribed onto a "biological-genealogical-reproductive grid" (Wilson 2016). To Schneider, then, kinship is a "non-subject": "It exists in the minds of anthropologists but not in the cultures they study" (Ibid.).

Per the latter critique, the role of kinship ought to be questioned in the Middle East in particular, especially since it evokes Orientalist sentiments in a field whose self-stated current goal is decolonization. Some writers (Arebi 1991, 99-100; Tuastad 2003; Allouche 2019, 22) have argued that an over-focus on kinship in ethnography about the Middle East contributes to Orientalist attitudes and that focusing on kinship portrays kinship as more central to daily live in the region than it is; together, kinship-based

ethnographies construct a meta-narrative that portrays Middle Eastern social structures as biology-driven and, therefore, uncivilized and backwards. While it may be argued that, in principle, the work of individual authors should not be beholden to whichever meta-narratives can currently be seen in the discipline, this theoretical principle may be outweighed by real harm.

Dag Tuastad is a staunch critic of the shape of kinship studies in the Middle East. Tuastad (2003) points out the (in)famous book *The Arab Mind* by anthropologist and colonizer Raphael Patai as an example of how meta-narratives lead to real harm when an obscuring line is drawn between "west" and "rest." In addition to the problematic and truly impossible assertion that Arabs somehow share one cohesive mindset, which is the very definition of bio-essentialism, Patai and those in his camp argue that, due to the interaction of Bedouin tribalism and *sharia* law, "the Arab has a 'proclivity to blaming others for his own shortcomings and failure.'" (Ibid.) Patai portrays Arabs as fully beholden to extended kinship groups which he calls "familialism," which is his attempt to translate "tribalism" into a timeless concept to account for urban populations. Political scientists have pointed out that, especially after 9/11, *The Arab Mind* has underwritten American policy and, as such, is directly responsible for death and destruction accompanying American intervention in the region, especially in Iraq and Palestine (Hasso 2007; Rejwan 2016). *The Arab Mind* is "probably the single most popular and widely read book on the Arabs in the US military," and some have reported that the account is treated as a textbook in American military universities (Whitaker 2004). This is not the only instance in which anthropologists have been implicated or complicit in problematic western intervention,

but it is an instance in which ascribing too much meaning to kinship for its own sake caused (and continues to cause) real harm.

Critics of kinship, then, see the method as the glue that holds anthropology in the "savage slot" of academia. These critics see anthropology, a western invention, attempting to translate the meaning of family ties into English terms according to preconceived notions of how family trees ought to be structured, where meaning is likely to be, and what shape that meaning is likely to take. Their conceptions of what is "likely" derive from their own experiences, as well as the bits and pieces of the "translation manual" that they have picked up from reading kinship ethnography (Wilson 2016). They transpose conceptions of family values rooted in the western experience to the field, while paradoxically portraying the population of the field as uncivilized for ascribing *too much* meaning to those relationships.

B. "New" Kinship

How, then, can kinship be salvaged? All three ethnographies examined in this thesis deal with "new" kinship in a thick manner. Influential ethnographer Diane King posits herself as a defender of kinship and argues for its continued relevance, pointing out that kinship studies are necessary to understand self-claimed familial identities in Kurdistan since these identities are transmitted patrilineally. However, King (2014) dedicates plenty of real estate to describing where and how globalism unevenly seeps into Kurdish daily life, affecting the ways in which kinship ties are expressed. In her digital ethnography of social media, Elisabetta Costa (2016) examines how the malleable online public/private divide allows Kurdish youth to uphold their family's reputation by posting with propriety on public profiles while expressing themselves

truthfully in direct messages or on anonymous or private profiles. Finally, Marlene Schäfers (2022) discusses how Kurdish women are bound to patrilineal identity but do not embody it; since men pass identity on, men embody the identity itself, and women's role is to "nourish" kinship ties behind the scenes with emotional labor ("the female sphere of labor") so that identity *can* be passed on.

As a realm, kinship deserves the same treatment as economics - a recognition that, while kinship exists and ought not be ignored, it also cannot be meaningfully dealt with independently. Lifeworlds are complex, and since migrancy involves passing through "borderlands" from one lifeworld to another, migrant lifeworlds take on even further complexity. Diaspora stretches kinship ties and may totally change their nature of expression or nourishment. Kinship acts as a thread in a greater tapestry of interpersonal relationships, amongst a *series* of tapestries that portrays the personal identity or conception of the Self. Schneider is right that kinship is a non-subject in that kinship is not *sufficient*. However, patterns of duty toward kin that are assigned by role, whether the role was chosen or given, are an inalienable aspect of the human experience globally. Whether those roles and duties can be compared cross-culturally without creating an implicit translation manual, or to what extent kinship ties are shaped by biology, are different questions entirely.

In *Cultures of Relatedness* (2000, 3-4), Carsten argues for a revival of kinship that is modified to shed its bioessentialist history. Carsten cites Schneider's argument that the validity of kinship in anthropology was "under question" starting in the 1970s due to a shift in focus from structure, to practice, to discourse -- the destabilization of the relationship between the biological and the social. However, Carsten attributes kinship's return to popularity in the 1990s to ethnographies of intensely communal

social groups such as feminists, gays and lesbians (Ibid.). Also included in her analysis is Bodenhorn's ethnography of the Iñupiat of northern Alaska, who do not consider shared bloodlines, DNA, ancestors, or biology in general to be salient, instead looking to "acting," or practice (Ibid., 1-2; Bodenhorn 2000, 128). The Iñupiat, then, are not passively descended from their family, but instead actively choose to *relate*. To represent this shift in discourse, Carsten suggests a turn to "relatedness," which "conveys [...] a move away from a pre-given analytic opposition between the biological and the social on which much anthropological study of kinship has rested" (2000, 4).

Relatedness studies aims to better understand the human condition by depicting how individuals develop intersubjective attitudes, including analyses of the roles of solidarity, platonic or romantic love, and (in)security in relationships. "Relating" refers to a deep sense of compassion and empathy that originates when someone perceives bits of themselves in another; "relatedness" is therefore the permanent, yet dynamic state of personally identifying with others. If "no one is an island," then everyone is in a state of relatedness at all times, hence the permanence of the state. Typically, relating to another involves desiring that they have positive encounters in their lifeworld; if one sees bits of oneself in another, the good or bad that the other encounters is also encountered, albeit in smaller part, by the relater.

Perceiving oneself in another can be colloquial as it is in the case of making friends, when kinship is felt due to similarities in personality, which can be gratifying since it affirms those aspects in oneself. But identifying with another can also be more literal, especially when those identifiers were close in childhood. Childhood involves a formation of a personal identity, when children reckon with their very conceptions of their Selves. Growing up involves constructing a *habitus* which one uses to develop

expectations by tracing the pattern that their life follows, with the logic that present circumstances are likely to either continue, or otherwise develop in predictable ways. Growing up with a constant presence, often a parent or sibling, forms children's *habitus* around and including that presence. If one constructs their identity while taking for granted the presence of another, then the Self can become intensely intersubjective. The human condition certainly allows for individuals to identify so much that those involved draw no distinction between each other; they are so crucial to each other's lifeworld that inhabiting different bodies is an arbitrary distinction.

The ability to relate so deeply that identities intertwine is evidenced by loss. Philosopher Judith Butler describes the impact of intersubjective loss in her book *Precarious Life* (2004). When we lose someone to whom we intensely relate, "something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us. It is not as if an "I" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am. [...] When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well. At another level, perhaps what I have lost "in" you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary, is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as *the tie* by which those terms are differentiated and related" (Ibid., 22). Here, the crisis that Butler details is not only mourning the loss of another, but also the loss of the part of the Self that the other embodied or possessed. The lifeworld is shattered and the self becomes "disordered"

(Perdigon 2015, 90). The relater's *habitus* is no longer operable, since its logic took for granted a presence that no longer exists.

The relationship detailed by Butler does not necessitate a biological relationship. Relatedness can be used to anthropologically understand friendships in a manner unique to academia. Academic analyses of friendships often portray this type of connectedness as strategic, pursued simply because they benefit each party. This pessimistic take assumes that individuals will never genuinely subjugate their own needs for the sake of another's, as doing so would be irrational. Interestingly, while many in the west consider this to be true on a global level, they are vigilant to avoid toxic "transactional relationships" themselves, which is confusing and inconsistent. "Writing against culture" requires an acknowledgement that human relationships are an amalgam of particularities, loaded with complex and unique meanings, and that relationships deserve anthropological consideration regardless of region or biology (Abu-Lughod 1991).

This is not to rebuke Mauss's "gift economy," from which some fallaciously extract the message that *no* altruism really exists, and that gestures that indicate caring are *only* done strategically. The gift economy can, in fact, find its own position *within* a world of relatedness, since strategic relationships, or relationships based in the nodal exchange of propriety,honor, labor, goods and capital, can and do still exist. The value of relatedness is in its ability to explain relationships that are *not* necessarily strictly rational, the existence of which is undeniable. In fact, this value is evidenced in the very circumstances that brought about the re-emergence of kinship studies into popular anthropology's current era. "New kinship" is not an artificial or theoretical study, but came about from ethnographies that could not adequately account for the intense

intersubjectivity found in gay and lesbian communities. Ethnographers found that members of these communities demonstrated a profound level of devotion to each other, referring to their social networks as their "chosen family" (Carsten 2000, 12). These relationships presented as *more* than simple friendships, since members had been expelled from their homes and disowned from their biological families. The intense solidarity formed by this shared trauma led members of these communities to transpose culturally conceived notions of family or household roles onto each other to avoid familial deprivation. Termed fictive kin, ethnographies of these communities brought kinship back to the fore since their relationships could not be described in terms of pure rationality, nor in terms presented by "old kinship." Fictive kin may sound arbitrary since it does not have a biological basis, but has traditionally held real stakes in many cultural instances. Like biological kinship, fictive kinship is arbitrated both by law (as in the case of adoption) and religion ("godparents," for example).

Alienation from one's lifeworld due to a loss of close kin forces one into a "borderland" in a manner similar to migrancy (Grønseth 2013). In both cases, one's entire reality is reconfigured as a crucial aspect of their environment is lost or altered. As Grønseth argues with migrancy, social practices and their associated meanings can be reconfigured as a "creative agency" emerges when victims of loss must blaze a trail through borderlands to establish a new lifeworld, which occurs when some semblance of stability or homeostasis is achieved again (Ibid., 3). This conceptualization of intersubjective relationships is especially important to examine in the migrant context for two reasons. Firstly, migrancy almost always includes *both* losses as loved ones get left geographically behind, meaning that migrants not only have to reconceptualize how

to relate to their environment but must do so *whilst* reconceptualizing (and mourning the loss of parts of) their very Selves.

Secondly, understanding relationships between migrants in intersubjective terms "thickens" how their lifeworlds may be conceptualized, which is especially important in the current era in which over one percent of the global population has been displaced. "Welfare chauvinism," to which academics attribute anti-Syrian sentiment in Sweden, for example, originates when "native" locals "are inclined to show little support for government expenditures that benefit groups which "they do not recognize as their own" and to whom they hence do not feel obliged by *social* proximity" (Goldschmidt and Rydgren 2018). Here, "social proximity" refers to the same sentiment as does relatedness; Swedes who are welfare-chauvinistic cannot or refuse to relate to Syrian refugees. They instead desire that public services go to those who, by their own definition, are also Swedes, since they feel they share some sense of "relatedness" due to that shared aspect of identity.

Many studies have shown, both qualitatively and quantitatively, that welfare chauvinism throughout Europe is caused by stereotypes of refugees as threatening, and that *direct contact* with refugees dispels such stereotypes and increases refugees' perceived "deservingness" (De Coninck, d'Haenens and Joris 2019; De Coninck and Matthijs 2020; Knappert et. al 2021). Furthermore, welfare chauvinists are more influenced by perceived *symbolic* threats – "the fear that migrants will challenge the cultural identity of the native population" – than *realistic* threats – the fear of "competition for scarce, mainly economic, resources in society" (De Coninck and Matthijs 2020). Finally, identifying aspects of shared *identity* is amongst the most powerful tools in spurring compassion toward refugees and is especially effective at

dispelling perceptions of symbolic threats (Ibid.). Altogether, these studies suggest that reductive portrayals of refugees cause real harm globally, but discussing refugee lifeworlds as "thick" and complex, with dense networks of interpersonal relatedness, as well as interests, hobbies and passions, mitigates perceptions of inherent difference. Discussing refugee lifeworlds with reference to love, compassion, support, devotion and even loss is not only accurate, but also contributes to the refugee situation globally since these experiences are crucial to the human condition.

The above argument goes to show that discussing feelings of intersubjective relatedness to thicken popular conceptions of migrant lifeworlds can contribute to greater feelings of relatedness in populations that receive refugees, which in turn, improves refugees' new, burgeoning lifeworlds. However, these studies point to another important characteristic that distinguishes relatedness from kinship: the role of the state and/or nation. Kinship duties are often formally mediated by the state; childbearers cannot legally abandon, physically hurt or neglect their children, and are beholden to specific inheritance rules. Meanwhile, since relatedness does not necessitate any specific *shape* of relationship, it interacts more informally with the *nation*, since one's network of relatedness is comparable to an "imagined community" (Anderson 2016). Even those who are critical of their nation form their *habitus* in reference to it, and rely on their ascribed national identity to understand their situation with regard to the rest of the world, both geographically and otherwise.

Relatedness suggests that one may embody the role of a family member or relative to different extents, allowing for a comparison of perceived closeness between individuals. It is sensical for one to feel more related to a friend with whom they grew up, especially if they had spent a bulk of their life in each other's company, than a

"blood relative" from whom one is estranged. Rather than assuming a direct relationship between genetic similarity and forefront roles in lifeworlds, analyses of relatedness suggest that there are multiple methods of relating. Individuals who consider themselves very related likely perform primary roles in each others' lifeworlds, such as providing emotional support and catharsis. If, as "new kinship" authors argue, biological relationships are *assigned* meaning instead of carrying inherent meaning, then biological kinship is a subcategory of relatedness.

This definition is crucial to studies of gender within kinship. Relatedness deconstructs only the apriori link between biology and practice and does not necessitate that the two delink entirely. In King's study of Kurdish kinship via patriliny, she attributes the "sexual control" that Kurdish women are subject to to the maintenance of the "patrilineal identity" that King and Stone argue comes from their "descent through males from a man who did something memorable" (King 2014, 115). By looking to relatedness, the obligations presented by patrilineal identity need not be refuted. Relatedness as a rubric can be seen as vague, but the solution to conceptual vagueness is not to *place* meaning where it makes sense to the ethnographer, nor to artificially construct that meaning so that it accords with extant themes in the field. To do so would not only fallaciously represent lifeworlds, but would also be a vacuous reproduction of extant knowledge and, at best, a waste of time. That relatedness *is* nearly conceptually shapeless deprives ethnographers of Schneider's "translation manual," which may make analyses of intersubjectivity more difficult, but also *thicker*,, which does justice to the complexity of sociocultural particularity globally.

A benefit of the traditional kinship rubric is the ease with which it explains state mediation of relationships. In conventional western kinship systems, the state assigns

two biological parents legal responsibility for their offspring until they graduate into independent adulthood. Parents act illegally when they neglect offspring because of a shared recognition that human beings deserve to live without deprivation; if the offspring is unable to sufficiently care for themselves due to youth or disability, then the responsibility to do so gets assigned to those whose actions *created* the life that needs labor to sustain. To administrate and even promote this relationship, the state treats a child and their two responsible guardians as sharing one household identity, the origin and transmission of which varies across populations (matrilineal, patrilineal or bilineal). Though adoption breaks this mold, this paradigm easily accounts for it by treating it as a simple re-assignment of the exact same legal responsibility.

However, the relationship between descent and identity has become much more complicated, so the manner in which the state mediates identity is becoming rife with inconsistencies globally. A major locus in studies of the Middle East (and especially in Lebanon) is sectarianism, with which identities are constructed and reproduced so successfully that a type of stratification occurs in which identities become so rigid that they cannot compromise enough to form one representative administration (Cammett 2014, 224-227). But uneven, awkward globalization typically reaches urban spaces first, and as rates of urbanization grow globally, so does the malleability of identity. Seemingly, while short-term or forced interactions with the urban can cause a retreat back into tradition, *sustained* encounters with the global introduce disillusionment into the relationship between tradition and legitimacy.

In Lebanon, where a generational divide can be readily seen in perceptions and interpretations of identity, this relationship matters *a lot*. The weak state relies on identity-based and party-controlled institutions to administrate their populations, but

this delegation is proving more complicated as time goes on, especially amongst urban youth. Individuals and families convert if they face obstacles with marriage, inheritance or their sect's court system (Mikdashi 2014, 287). Student clubs at universities that advocate for a secular government have become the most widely supported groups on campus, in opposition to clubs that are funded by, and act as proxies for, identity-based political parties. A plurality of the protestors that mobilized during Lebanon's 2019 *thawra* demanded secularity in governance, evidenced by the prevalence of Lebanese flags instead of party imagery despite the protest's opposition to the current iteration of the state (Makkawi 2022). In Tripoli, protestors citywide tore down political iconography to demonstrate resistance to sectarianism in politics. Meanwhile, the populations of many villages in Lebanon are still dedicated to their lineal identity since parties control local institutions, collect taxes, provide welfare and mediate disputes, making the maintenance of a rigid, traditional identity advantageous in a manner comparable to that in the tribal structure that King sees in Kurdish communities. Finally, Lebanese and Palestinians in the south face threats to their identity from Israeli occupation, and identity therefore remains salient in urban spaces like Tyre.

State mediation of kinship roles means that, within the borders of that state, there should be a reasonable amount of agreement on the meaning, rigidity, operability and transmission of lineal identity. In Lebanon, the current lack of consensus on where sect-influenced identity belongs in daily life has spurred resentment with the very concept of sect amongst some, and led others to rely on it more than ever. This massive and disruptive discrepancy presents challenges to *any* unified theory of kinship. "Relatedness" is conceptually vague because anthropologists are realizing that, while cross-cultural comparison is still a worthwhile project, the extent to which identities are

rigid or flexible in a given population is ultimately unpredictable as each individual's adherence to kin identity depends on the infinite internal and external constraints and motivations inherent to lifeworlds. For example, living in the severe margins of the state or in protracted deprivation can lead to increased solidarity due to a recognition of shared struggle as it did in Tyre, or disillusionment with identity since it failed to serve its possessor as it did in Tripoli. Relatedness allows for an analysis of this discrepancy that includes both rationality *and* human sentiment, which are both relevant to the decisions of autological subjects. Finally, relatedness treats transmitted, lineal identity as a facet of identity that is just as dynamic as others, which is important to migrant lifeworlds since, as Grønseth states, the creative agency of the human condition allows for the re-articulation of cultural practice in response to loss.

1. Critiquing "Relatedness"

Ladislav Holy criticizes Carsten's relatedness in his 1996 book *Anthropological Perspectives on Kinship*, arguing that kinship loses meaning when its definition is no longer circumscribed to biological fact, since "the concept of 'relatedness' [...] cannot be separated in any precise way from the general notion of the social" and is therefore "analytically vacuous" (165-170). I disagree with this for multiple reasons. For one, I do not think that Holy's conclusion is substantiated; "the general notion of the social" constitutes a huge bulk of the human condition, and studies of the social can never be exhausted as human sociality is infinitely complex in its current state *and* in history, and the method by which humans socialize by and large changes with our external environment. For example, the Why We Post project (which I will discuss in further detail in chapter 4) clarifies some ways that technology has altered the very notion of

the social in the global margin and is, in fact, very analytically useful since social media has radically altered not only socialization, but our very psyches and *habitus*.

Holy further states that "renaming a phenomenon does not solve the problems involved in its conceptualisation. If we insist on talking about relatedness rather than kinship, we shall soon be debating what we mean by relatedness as we have been debating for decades what we mean by kinship" (Ibid.). Holy fails to explain why this is detrimental. Does he mean to imply that the decades of kinship debate that initialized modern anthropology itself was a waste of time? King's ethnography asserts that anthropological kinship is *not* obsolete and uses Kurdish patriliny as evidence, and hers is only one of the many examples of ethnography inspired by the kinship debate. Holy himself participates in the debate that he criticizes, proposing an alternative definition of kinship two pages later in the same volume. Unless he believes his own work is vacuous, Holy's criticism defeats itself.

Although I disagree with Holy's assertion that "the general notion of the social" is not worthwhile to study, he compromises kinship's reliance on biological fact with relatedness's relaxed cultural circumscription, valuably contributing to the very kinship debate that he rejects. Holy (Ibid., 170-171) cites Kelly's 1993 definition of kinship as "social relations predicated upon cultural conceptions that specify the processes by which an individual comes into being and develops into a complete (i.e. mature) social person." Holy's original contribution is an emphasis on the *shared substances*, whether tangible or "spiritual," that one needs in order to attain complete personhood. This definition includes traditional kinship, since reproduction involves shared bodily substance (especially important in the Kurdish case, in which King notes that semen transmits identity). However, it also allows for fictive kin. Adopted children share food,

water and medicine with their non-biological parents. Close friends can be kin as "chosen family" because they contribute to and affirm identity through social give-and-take, which Holy sees as transmitting spiritual substance. According to Holy and Kelly's definition of kinship, *every* individual likely has some kinship ties without a biological basis "due to the ethnographic fact that a full complement of spiritual components is never derived exclusively from the parents" (Ibid.).

Due in part to criticisms like Holy's, "new kinship" is not synonymous with relatedness. King's ethnography does *not* reference relatedness and does, in fact, primarily detail kinship that *is* based in biological fact. However, King's ethnography brought new kinship to Kurdish ethnography by "writing against culture." Her steadfast refusal to reduce social practices to simple cultural tradition means that her book does not only include depictions of kinship structures, but explains why and how those structures became meaningful in the Kurdish context specifically. Relying on her rubric of "connectedness" and the "glocal" of ascending Kurdistan, King furthers the study of relatedness while still writing an ethnography that is irrefutably a study of kinship, even by the "old" standards.

C. King's Ethnography

Diane King states that the objective of her ethnography is to examine "social and symbolic" life in an Iraqi Kurdistan that is "ascending" (2014). The book serves another purpose, however, as King's substantiated assertion that kinship is still relevant in Middle Eastern studies. In *Kurdistan on the Global Stage: Kinship, Land, and Community in Iraq* (2014), King positions herself within today's roster of critical kinship writers such as Janet Carsten, Linda Stone and Marilyn Strathern, three

contemporary anthropologists who specialize in the interaction between kinship and gender in social structures found in populations of the global periphery. These writers have endeavored to revive kinship studies as a method of understanding the development of personhood in various cultures while eschewing the "translation manual" so criticized by Schneider. New kinship tends to rely much more on intersubjectivity than its predecessor, since the translation manual that new kinship writers oppose was "written" under the assumption that a desire for western individualism is an inherent part of the human condition.

King's ethnography cemented her role as amongst the revivers of kinship such that she co-authored the sixth edition of the primer *Kinship and Gender* (2018) alongside Linda Stone and contributed new content primarily concerning conceptions of fictive kinship and logics of gender-based violence. That she was informed by fieldwork in Kurdistan means that ethnography about Kurds *significantly* impacts the current state of kinship anthropology, which is likely to continue into the next generation of ethnography since *Kinship and Gender* acts as a primer for professors to assign to upcoming anthropologists. Due to King, the historically understudied Kurds have irrevocably marked institutional understandings of kinship, especially in studies of communities encountering globalization.

King's very first chapter emphasizes the historical importance of Kurdistan's ascension: "The issues of female genital cutting [...], early and forced marriage, and child labor have pitted an old Kurdistan—a Kurdistan in which these practices have taken place probably for thousands of years—against a possible new Kurdistan. In this new Kurdistan, such behaviors are no longer tolerated by a "modern" society that lives in, and is self-consciously accountable to, "global" standards of conduct rooted in

"human rights" and other values promoted by international publics and organizations such as the United Nations" (2014, 2-3). In a sense, Kurdistan itself has been plunged into a borderlands in which it must determine which practices it must reconceptualize due to the increasingly pervasive global "mood" (Trouillot 1991, 21) set by liberal organizations funded by western powers. Within the aesthetic frame of western liberalism, Kurdish gender-based laws and social norms appear antiquated. This global mood shaped by the western liberal order is especially influential amongst refugees since they must appeal to the UN for assistance, and is likely even more so for Kurds since they pursue international recognition of Kurdistan.

To King, that anthropology about Kurds has long focused on kinship is not sufficient reason to reject the topic's continued significance. In fact, King points out the importance of kinship's interaction with the law in an "ascending" society. A population who is slowly and unevenly encountering globalist influences may react in any number of ways to extant laws that prescribe duties based on birth role, especially if the duties do not align with those present in the societies of the primary agents of colonial globalism. For example, King (2014) endeavors to explain the prevalence of honor killings amongst Kurds; crucial to her argument is that honor killings are carried out by agnatic relatives, nearly always a father or brother to the murdered woman. These killings continue today, seemingly unimpacted by the global mood. The cultural logic for honor killings runs so deep that Iraqi laws concerning murder provide for certain amnesties if a man kills a woman to regain honor. Similar provisions were changed in Turkey (in an attempt to join the EU) in 2004, leading to the emergence of "honor suicides," (Ibid., 236) in which conceptions of patrilinial honor are so ingrained in the *habitus* that women honor kill *themselves*. Honor killings in diasporic Kurdish

communities make the news as an *immigrant problem* in places like Sweden, where the global liberal mood influences the public to view them simply as murders driven by misogyny (Olsson and Bergman 2022).

Bettina Shell-Duncan focused much of her ethnographic career on female genital cutting (FGC), another practice amongst Kurds that links to patrilineal identity and honor. She eloquently argues that "global" institutions that are actually western have adopted a human rights framework that they apply to problematize FGC without nuance (2008). Shell-Duncan points out that the WHO and UN have typified FGC as violence against women, and have waged a campaign to illegalize the practice globally as part of "gender mainstreaming," an attitude that greatly contributes to what I have called the global liberal mood. Shell-Duncan does not *advocate* for FGC, as some have accused (Coyne 2016). Instead, she argues that the global discourse about FGC is emaciated of nuance when transplanted from the medical framework to the liberal human rights framework, and that this deprivation is detrimental to all parties involved. FGC practices vary greatly across cultures, and many methods of FGC are superficial and not typically risky; in these cases, FGC is comparable to male circumcision in the west, and may even be *less* impactful to the body if cutting is done for symbolic reasons rather than for a physical function. Shell-Duncan not only advocates on behalf of those women who may, in fact, *choose* FGC, but also clarifies (quoting anthropologist Ellen Gruenbaum) that liberal feminists who seek to end the practice globally ought shift their framework for their own purposes: "Social customs [...] are not 'pathologies'; and such a view is a poor starting point for change, since it is not necessarily the one shared by the people whose customs are under attack" (Shell-Duncan 2008; Khazan 2015). Thus, nuance is crucial in addressing gender-based practices, regardless of the position of the

addresser (even if one's express goal is to eradicate the practices, for example). In this vein, King approaches gender-based violence in Kurdistan with the goal of understanding it prior to condemning it. King's choice to detail the logic underlying violence against women in Kurdistan is the only way to meaningfully understand why women may *choose* FGM, or commit an honor suicide.

1. Patrilineal Gender

Kurdish conceptions of gender rely on the generational passing on of a patrilineal identity whose honor is cumulative. Semen is the all-important transmitter of identity, and contained within semen are the accomplishments of male predecessors in a patrilineal line. Semen is the essence of life itself, and the womb is only an incubator (King 2014, 114). To agrarian Kurds, semen is the seed and the womb is the field. That men naturally produce semen grants them immense privilege in the social order because they are responsible for the reproduction of life itself. Though most global societies are more patrilineal than otherwise, men's control of reproduction is somewhat particular to the Kurdish case. In the core countries of the west, "creating life" is often portrayed as a special ability that only women have and forms the basis of some feminist rhetoric (i.e. women have a divine link to the earth), as well as some conservative rhetoric about the nuclear family unit (i.e. immobility from pregnancy and breastfeeding means women are meant to stay home and housekeep). To Kurds, a woman is an incubating vessel of familial honor (which King notes that the Kurds call *namus*) linked to an identity that accumulates through male members of generations (Ibid., 67; King 2008). This is not to say that they are simply disregarded, since farmland must be maintained to ensure that it can properly nourish crops. Indeed, though women do not directly *add* to the *namus* of

their patriline, they are still heavily responsible for its maintenance since they can, in fact, *destroy* their patriline's *namus*.

A Kurdish patriline views marriage as a "sovereignty-affirming" determination, resulting from careful deliberation, that a different lineage is worthy to use a woman from its own lineage to propagate itself (Ibid.). Rather than the uniting of two individuals, marriage represents the intersection of two entire lineages. Since male achievements constitute a patriline's *namus*, a woman's father and brother are responsible for determining which man she may marry and, thereby, which lineage maintains sufficient *namus* for a linkage to be desirable. In King and Stone's kinship primer, they argue that patriliny is amongst the most popular conceptions of kinship ties across cultures and developed in a tribalistic manner, as a strategic method of linking families for social or economic gain. By population, most people globally live in a society or culture with patrilineal customs, at least historically (Stone and King 2018, 62).

Despite the lack of autonomy exercised by women in choosing whether or who to marry, women themselves heavily subscribe to patrilineal conceptions of kinship because a patriline is positioned as part of the basic logic of the human condition. Patrilineal identity is cemented into the *habitus* of the Kurdish "social class" and is crucial to local social structures since the portrayal of family identity as cumulative and patrilineal is taught during childhood through school, media, and local cultural and legal practices such as patrilocality (the norm of brides moving to live with the lineage of the groom). The importance of following patrilineal practices is emphasized through generations since patrilineal identity, being cumulative, *always* contains more *namus*

than ever before and is, therefore, more important for women to protect than in any prior generation.

Amongst King's strongest assertions is that honor killings are primarily substantiated by the logic of patriliny rather than that of Islam (2008). The era in which King wrote practically demanded that she account for gender-based violence against women in the name of sexual propriety, since this violence was probably the most popular topic in academia concerning Kurds prior to the surge of media about the Rojava narrative (which, as will be discussed in the next chapter, shifted the locus of Kurdish gender studies from gender-based violence to secular agency and "voice"). Furthermore, honor killings in diasporic Kurdish (and other displaced or refugee) communities have made news in the west and have been typified in the media as a problem of Islam in the post-9/11 war on terror rhetoric. Since no basis for honor-based violence can be found in Islamic materials, King endeavors to explain in a particularistic manner why Kurdish communities, despite their "ascension" to meet the global mood, cannot seem to shake honor-based violent practices.

Patrilineal identity, as well as its accompanied attitudes in men which King calls "lineal masculinity," is both ontological and epistemological for Kurds. Historically, Kurdish families were organized by tribe, and many still are. *Aghas* (lords) led tribes hierarchically through patronage networks and gain their legitimacy through their claim to the land on which tribe members (clients of the patron) sharecropped in the Kurdish iteration of feudalism (King 2014). They lead a tribe composed of lineages and can call upon the men of the tribe to mobilize as a paramilitary group. Sufi *sheikh*s sometimes hold a similar role in land allocation, with followers who pay tribute and even partake in paramilitary operations on their behalf just like the *agha*, but they can also appeal to

Islamic piety for legitimacy. Both *agha*s and *sheikh*s consolidate power and money, but are also responsible to the needs of their tribe via conflict mediation, welfare distribution and protection. The title of *agha* is passed on patrilineally, and wives and daughters of *agha*s are referred to by their relationship to the *agha*. The tribe to which one belongs, or to which one's predecessors belonged, is maintained as a major facet of the identities claimed by many Kurds today. When asked about their personal history, Kurds in Iraq mention something about the males of their lineage, whether it be their status as *agha*, their relation to their *agha* (or *sheikh*), the geographic location that their family claims, and, like other Muslims globally, their link to Muhammad (Ibid.).

That the *agha* and the *sheikh* hold similar roles does not mean that this structure is linked to Islam. Tribalism is a defense mechanism that is necessary for stability through protection prior to the formation of a centralized state that holds a monopoly on violence, and linkages between lineages through marriage and childbirth function as nodes of tribal belonging. Patriliny gained salience as a method of power transfer due to inheritance of land. King acknowledges that the patriliny instituted by tribal structures had less influence in the *logistics* of daily life in 2014 versus, say, a decade prior, since many Kurds now supply cheap labor to multinational corporations rather than working the land of an *agha* (the same "detribalization" trajectory described by Leach in 1938). However, King asserts that lineage's continued salience in identity is an ethnographic *fact* ingrained from childhood; children memorize and recite their lineage and the geographic area whose land their family identifies as its origin (Ibid.). Patriliny as an organizing principle acted as a precondition to the development of sectarianism in Kurdistan, since the benefits of a group of lineages becoming insular came about due to

threats from others, which contributed to the placement of the parameters distinguishing one's collective from the Other.

The *namus* of a patriliny is another organizing method that creates a hierarchy within a lineage, as well as a hierarchy of lineages (Stone and King 2018). The holders of *namus* also hold sovereignty, so men generate and hold *namus* while a woman can only destroy *namus.* A lineage maintains and passes on a *namus* from generation to generation that is crucial to the identity of each individual of the lineage, especially within those lineages that are privileged in their regional or tribal hierarchy such as *agha* or *sheikh* lineages. *Namus* can be portrayed as so crucial to the very logic of human life that it becomes both epistemological, since an individual may learn to relate to the world at large through the lens of gaining or losing honor, and ontological, since an individual can learn to only relate to *themself* through perceptions of their own level of honor (King 2008). King identifies the collective interest of a lineage in their shared *namus* as the reason why women's sexual propriety is treated with such high stakes. For example, the state of the *namus* is one of the main differences between *sheikh* and "gypsy." Power and social positioning act as a feedback loop since both hierarchies present more nodes of exchange at higher levels, so endangering a lineage's *namus* could be genuinely detrimental to every individual in the lineage.

It was the high stakes presented by *namus* that led to the establishment of and continued adherence to the norms of female genital cutting, arranged marriages and honor killings as a method of control in Kurdistan (Ibid.). If one woman can tarnish her entire ancestral past and ruin the future hopes of a full lineage by endangering a *namus*, and if *namus belongs* to men (as the group who invented, contributes to and maintains the *namus*, and also who will lose their hierarchical position if their *namus* is

destroyed), then it may logically follow that men are due control over women in their lineage. Female genital cutting takes the form of the clitoridectomy in Kurdistan, and is promoted because it makes a woman *miskin* (gentle); preempting the development of promiscuity by disallowing sexual pleasure makes a certain sense and can even be construed as merciful if the alternative is honor killing (King 2014). Marriage arranged by the males of one's agnatic lineage ensures that women do not flirt or act with sexual impropriety, but also prevents social consequences from a woman giving birth to a child in a lineage with a poor *namus*. Honor killing, which is traditionally decided and acted upon by a woman's agnatic male relatives, is the only way for a lineage to reclaim *namus* lost due to her sexual impropriety, and puts on display the men's devotion to their lineage, tribe and religion (Ibid.). FGC, marriage and honor killing are all therefore all methods of sexual control instituted by men to preserve their lineage's *namus*, but differ in tense. FGC preempts, arranged marriage prevents, and honor killing penalizes sexual impropriety in women.

Patriline, tribe, religion and ethnicity, in that order, still prevail as methods of distinguishing positions within the hierarchy of relatedness, at least in identity if not in the logistics of daily life. Many groups of Kurds *are* still affected by these hierarchical methods of positionality and allocation, however, since the introduction of state mediation to tribal structure meant that titles to lands previously owned by tribal collectives were given to *agha*s. King wrote in an important moment of ascension and, in the years that have followed, her ethnographic project exploring Kurdish identity in the context of accelerating globalist influence has continued, though the geographic locus has largely shifted to Turkey. The literature exploring the continuity of patrilineal kinship in urban spaces will be explored in the next chapter. However, the parameters

that patriliny has ascribed to the duties of each gender remain influential because they are ontological methods of understanding one's position in the world and are integral to the collective memory of Kurds. As Kurdish communities have been exploited and deserted by colonial powers repeatedly throughout the last century, insular attitudes have naturally gained credibility; an old Kurdish proverb still cited today holds that Kurds have "no friends but the mountains" (Bulloch and Morris 1992).

The decline of tribal power is not occurring due to the targeting of Kurds by colonial powers, but rather due to increased urbanization and, therefore, more frequent and intense encounters with the liberal global mood. King seemingly agrees, since she calls Christopher Houston's 2008 ethnography about Kurdish tribal ties in Istanbul "salvage anthropology" (King 2010). However, *namus* is a way of understanding oneself and the world around one, and is therefore a *structuring structure* – a social structure that is instilled into *habitus* that cannot be shaken later in life without accepting the crumbling of structures built on top of it. Indeed, though some Kurdish migrants *do* have their entire sense of logic shaken (perhaps, as Grønseth suggests, because some link their perceptions of reality to geography such as Home versus Elsewhere, or to temporal designations such as Past versus Present), others turn to dispositions learned prior to displacement in order to maintain a sense of comfort and stability. Others may maintain patrilineal attitudes, but shift their practices to those more consistent to "gender mainstreaming" to avoid social ostracization in their new setting. Still others may change their conceptions of gender and conceive of their own identity that is not linked to their lineage, but may continue gendered practices for the sake of those close to them or simply to evoke memories of home. Migrants' tendency

to reshape cultural practices or their associated meanings after a translocational encounter represents the emergence of creative agency that Grønseth elaborates.

As noted, Kurdish nationalism became salient due to the regimes of recognized states' targeting of Kurdish groups and culture (Houston 2008). Similarly, attempts to force Kurdish practices into alignment with the conceptions of gender pushed by the global core and its institutions can lead to disillusionment and reinforced insularity. For example, women's social worlds were far more limited prior to widespread internet access because, as in most patrilineal societies, their role was to maintain the home. Now, women can access an entire social world from a handheld device, and some displaced Kurdish women have begun to work outside the home due to poverty. If the collective attitude of a community holds that women belong to their agnatic relatives on an ontological level, then their exponentially growing social world also presents a growing level of risk to the lineage's *namus* as a woman has more opportunities to destroy this honor. After all, even the rumor of a woman acting in a flirtatious manner can dispel *namus* (King 2014). Some Kurds may see the protection against sexual impropriety granted by FGC as more important than ever before, since *namus* is cumulative (higher in amount and pertaining to more individuals than ever before) and threatened by technology (more endangered than ever before).

Migrancy can interact with these practices in unpredictable ways. For example, Sweden attempts to track and prosecute all instances of female genital cutting, child marriage and honor killings, which it identifies as a problem in its Kurdish communities. Heydari et. al (2021) argue that a "dark side of modernity" occurs when a community feels that their practices are marginalized, which is undoubtedly the case in both Kurdistan, where signifiers of Kurdishness are largely illegal, as well as globally,

where members of the Kurdish diaspora choose to rededicate themselves to customs to evoke feelings of home, to rebel against attitudes that they feel are being forced upon them, or to feel security and solidarity again after blazing a trail through the borderlands between lifeworlds.

D. Kurdish Kinship in the Lebanese Context

In the context of the Kurdish diaspora, looking at the significance of kinship may be more important than ever. King's theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of "connectedness" in a social matrix that is slowly and unevenly accepting (or modifying to make fit) aspects of globalist culture (2014). Patrilineal kinship ties act as grids with plenty of intersections that direct and spur patronage based on perceived aspects of shared identity. Kurds leverage intersections in patrilineal or tribal identity for economic and political gain, but also derive feelings of solidarity and contentment from these intersections since they also act as social encounters.

Naturally, many of these identity-based networks are present in Lebanese society. Lebanon still maintains tribal kin networks, which are not necessarily obvious in Beirut but quickly become clear in less urban areas. Identity-based politics are associated more with religious sect than tribe on the national level, perhaps due to the relative ease of state mediation in the former case as compared to the latter. But due to the decentralized Lebanese economy and the weak state that does not offer adequate welfare, studies of patronage networks in Lebanon are often written within the discourse of *wasta.* Traditional knowledge tends to define *wasta* as a method of leveraging one's social connections to gain access to resources; straightforward examples include scholarships granted to students due to their family's party

membership, aid packages distributed to poor families through “community centers” that are implicitly party-run, and free or discounted medical care at party-associated hospitals (Egan and Tabar 2016; Cammett 2014).

Wasta is developing to work less formally in the context of increasing global influence. Robinson’s (2013) brief ethnography of the Beiruti rooftop nightclub SKYBAR depicts nightlife personalities leveraging *wasta* for social gain: “For those individuals lacking *wasta* connections derived from prestigious familial, sectarian and monetary ties, knowing how to manipulate one's social and perhaps erotic capital (Bourdieu 2008) is of the utmost importance.” To Robinson, this social gain still indicates the presence of *wasta*, since socialization is the very labor of nightlife personalities. The networking that takes place in nightclubs, though disguised as simple debaucherous fun, is still embedded in political processes when DJs are paid to be there: “Ali's aspirations for increased fame and social recognition are set against the backdrop of insecurity associated with sectarian political fragmentation and the weak Lebanese state.”

King argues that the Kurds of Iraq exist in a “low-intensity panic,” referencing Green’s 1999 ethnography which argues that “fear as a way of life” changes the bodily experience of the fearer (2014). Extreme, constant fear sediments into individual and collective memory and disperses into the body. One is expected to carry on a quotidian life despite constantly fearing for that very life. Many Kurds throughout Syria, Turkey and Lebanon likely live in this state for various reasons. Kurds in Turkey face cultural genocide and, if history is continuous, are constantly in danger of being targeted by their own government. Kurds in Syria are at war against rebel and insurgent groups, while also attempting to fend off a Turkish invasion. Kurds in both countries have faced

protracted displacement, severe poverty, dispossession, and intermittent war for a century.

Lebanon's decentralized nature suggests safety from persecution by the state. However, it is likely that Kurds in Lebanon do not feel secure. Though much of Lebanon's historical Kurdish population became naturalized citizens in 1994, it is highly unlikely that the most recent wave of displaced Kurds from Syria have received state recognition in meaningful amounts. Syrian refugees in Lebanon felt unsafe in 2015, even prior to the collapse of the Lebanese currency and the series of crises that followed, and eighty-eight percent identified lack of residence papers as detrimental to their safety (Haddad and Nayel 2014). Many Lebanese held resentment toward Syrians prior to the outbreak of widespread violence in Syria due to the occupation that only ended in 2005, since this operation is so fresh in collective memory. Lebanon's inundation with Syrian refugees since 2011 undoubtedly contributed to the decline of the already precarious economy, and both groups are very aware of this. The Lebanese "weak state" situates the country as a poor receptor of refugees; welfare, emergency aid and even essential services like electricity must be secured through "connections," which refugees, being new arrivals, typically do not have. The prevalence of the phrase "Lebanese only" in hiring fliers makes it obvious even to a casual observer that Syrians are not desirable to hire, so Syrians resort to taking informal jobs, rife with rights abuses, to make enough wages to live and depend on support from the UN to bridge the gaps. But poor Lebanese and other refugee populations like Palestinians may see this as wage undercutting, and some have reported that employers threaten to fire them and hire two Syrians in their place (Ibid.; Andersen 2016, 17).

The current plight of Lebanon is furthered by its economic crisis, which became visible in 2019, and its truly countless implications. A collapsed economy limits imports, meaning lifesaving medications became unavailable or hard to find. “Brain drain” means that the majority of Lebanese with sufficient economic, educational or occupational mobility have left the country, following the pre-established routes of the Lebanese diaspora to pursue stability elsewhere. Those without mobility pursue attempts to leave anyways, or have plans to be “pulled” by family members. Medical doctors are amongst the most mobile, which led to a lack of health infrastructure that was especially harmful during the coronavirus pandemic and the Beirut port explosion. Meanwhile, the continued degradation of the state’s electricity schedule has led to high rates of food poisoning, another blow to public health.

To King, the Kurds of Iraq live in a low-intensity panic because the constant displacement, war and betrayal they faced throughout history has proven to them that they should never trust assurances of security, and that there is always a threat of violence and deprivation waiting. In this state of being, the panic becomes subconscious and “diffused throughout the body” because the consciousness cannot handle constant, unavoidable fear. The fight-or-flight response exists to prompt its experiencer to remove themself from a dangerous situation, but becomes integrated into the physical body as a permanent tension when that situation is life itself. Perdigon (2015) writes similarly about the state of life in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, citing Bourdieu to elaborate how Palestinians live “at the mercy of what each day brings” as “people without a future.” To Perdigon, that poverty removes one from a conceptualized future brings about “disordered selves,” a state in which “Bourdieu’s central theoretical hinge, the *habitus*, seems to come apart at the seams” (Ibid.). This is because the turbulence

presented by each day in poverty robs one of any ability to predict how things ought to go; extreme deprivations mean that nothing is guaranteed. Nothing is "ready to hand" for the impoverished, and the unpredictability of everyday deprivations – fixing the wires that transport "stolen power," jump-starting the car with a dead battery that is too expensive to replace, sniffing perishables left in the refrigerator to see if they spoiled when the electricity went out overnight – leads to "a generalized and lasting disorganization of behavior and thought" as one is unable to conceptualize what tomorrow may bring (Ibid.).

While a refugee in Lebanon is more likely to face precarity of survival in this manner, I see much of the Lebanese population living in this state due to protracted deprivation. The instance in which the American University of Beirut, known as amongst the most stable institutions in the country, nearly shut down its hospital due to lack of electricity and gasoline threw into sharp relief the unpredictability of tomorrow. In the context of extremely limited resources, *wasta* is more important than ever because resources must be actively sought out. The denser one's personal connections are, the more likely one is to witness any semblance of stability because they can ask for assistance in finding a pharmacy that still has a box of necessary medications, for example, or in finding a bakery that still has bread in stock. Refugees, being newcomers, do not necessarily have a secure role in a kinship, social or political patronage network to leverage. Syrians feel unsafe and are vulnerable to violence. Syrian Arabs in Lebanon who align with the regime may have absorbed the marginalizing state rhetoric that informed the illegalization of Kurdishness, and may even refer to Kurds derogatorily as "*nawar*." Turkish Kurds in Lebanon may hold resentment toward Syrian Kurds due to their conflict with Turkey, since much of

Lebanon's established Kurdish community fled Turkey due to intermittent violence between the regime and Kurdish militias throughout the 20th century.

These layers of precarity mean that Syrian Kurds face an echoing type of insecurity. They face severe deprivations of basic necessities and are not allowed the emergency routes that many Lebanese and even some refugees may follow as a last resort. In this chapter, I have focused on King's outstanding ethnographic contributions that have fundamentally altered conceptions of kinship within the field of anthropology as a whole, and also brought Kurdish studies back to the fore as a method of consolidating "old" and "new" ideas of kinship's parameters. In the next chapter, I examine how Kurds may be re-articulating their identity in their new lifeworld situated in Lebanon, despite their particularly precarious positioning in an already endangered social fabric.

CHAPTER IV

"ASCENDING" IDENTITY

In this chapter, I review two major contributions to Kurdish ethnography that have been published after, and informed by, King's 2014 ethnography. The ethnographies, by Elisabetta Costa and Marlene Schäfers, take King's articulation of Kurdish patrilineal identity as truth, and leverage it to show how gendered parametrizations of agency in Kurdish communities interact with state institutions and technology in the process of "ascension." Both of these ethnographies position Kurds as relevant to major themes in Middle Eastern anthropology, especially studies of globalization, media, gender, agency, and urban studies. I frame these ethnographies as part of a new "wave" of popular Kurdish anthropology that was enabled by King's piece, and suggest a specific significance to the examined themes in the Lebanese context.

No academic literature has discussed the specifically Kurdish wave of migration from Syria into Lebanon since 2011 in significant depth. Since the outbreak of widespread violence in Syria, only NDU's Dr. Guita Hourani has published academic literature about Kurdish communities in Lebanon, but her work explicitly focuses on Kurds who migrated from Turkey during the French mandate rather than the recently displaced (2012; 2013; 2022). Perhaps the developments most relevant to the need for fieldwork are the swelling of Lebanon's refugee population to the extent that Lebanon hosts the most refugees per capita globally, and the founding and continued influence of Rojava, a second Kurdish autonomous region with unique, PKK-led politics that consistently comprises between a quarter and a third of Syria's landmass. The

unprecedented degree to which Rojava assets its secular leftism along with its geographic proximity to Lebanon has significantly altered the Kurdish media landscape and, therefore, the manner in which diasporic Kurds encounter Kurdishness itself.

As noted, the intensely fractured nature of Kurdistan means that, in many ways, the story of Kurds over the last century is also the story of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. All these states have historically maintained a tight grip on domestic media through nationalization, censorship and the persecution of dissidents. Furthermore, the sheer population of Kurds has threatened power hegemonies within their borders since those borders were drawn. The same motivations that spurred regimes to maintain divisions in Kurdish groups through violence and forced displacement also presented repression of Kurdish culture as an effective method of power consolidation. If print media allows the development of an imagined community by helping individuals form horizontal solidarity, then an entity trying to consolidate itself into a modern state would naturally choose to deprive minorities within its borders of the ability to identify with each other if the minority in question is not aligned with the state. This simple, direct relationship has plagued Kurdish access to media production since the mandate era.

Authors across fields (Sheyholislami 2011; Houston 2008; Hassanpour 2012) concur that the lack of unity amongst Kurdish groups is a crucial reason for the ethnicity's continued statelessness. In Lebanon, this lack of unity is particularly formative to the Kurdish experience because of the patronage system. For the purposes of voting, nearly all Kurds in Lebanon are considered Sunni, and have been unable to run representative Kurdish candidates for parliament because the candidate would need widespread support from both Kurds *and* other Sunni groups such as *Mustaqbal* (Hourani 2022). Thus far, no Kurd has even filled the first condition. In her 2022 study

of naturalized Lebanese Kurds, Hourani argues that Kurds make up a large enough portion of the electorate that Sunni candidates acknowledge Kurdish interests while campaigning, but face no incentives to follow through on campaign promises since the Kurdish voting bloc is not powerful or unified enough to alter results. Even Kurds who were naturalized as Lebanese in 1994 do not feel free to support Kurdish candidates at risk of angering the Sunni bloc due to the "fragility of their citizen status"; the very *most* enfranchised Kurds in Lebanon are, therefore, "imprisoned by the need to be clients to the Sunni" (Ibid.).

Repression of Kurdish media as a method of slowing Kurdish nationalism was successful, but not at its stated goal. Indeed, Kurdish media was *birthed* in exile. In 1898 the first Kurdish periodical was published in Ottoman Cairo, since "it was not granted permission in Istanbul" (Sheyholislami 2011). Ottoman Istanbul was so powerful that it was able to push the press out of the Empire entirely, and was even able to exert its influence to oust the Kurdish press from Geneva and London as well. Turkish hegemonic power was well aware of the mobilizing abilities of print, and relied on periodicals and pamphlets to construct its own identity. Hassanpour, amongst the most prolific authors in the subject of Kurdish media, calls Kurdish press "the organ of Kurdish nationalism," and Sheyholislami argues (in 2011, via Ahmadzadeh 2003) that "the emergence of journalism among the Kurds marks the beginning of their movement for national rights." Following motifs in modern Kurdish history, this repression acted as a double-edged sword. Depriving Kurds of printing rights seemingly did slow down Kurdish nationalist mobilization by slowing the bridging of fractured Kurdish areas and thus the development of a common identity that a nation might have.

However, this deprivation proved unsustainable due to technology and globalization. The Turkish role in the Kurdish diaspora has detracted from their own control over Kurdish media in modern history. For one, though Turkey has successfully leveraged its role in NATO to shut down Kurdish media producers in Europe by portraying them as terrorist sympathizers, this process is naturally much slower and convoluted than it would have been within Turkish borders. Censorship has also pushed Kurds to establish more direct and less regulatable (or even detectable) methods of communication such as direct satellite broadcasting from constantly changing locations (Ibid.). More recently, online streaming has allowed Kurdish media to flourish since it does not require licensing as a pluralistic space. Finally, and predictably, the repression of Kurdish media in Turkey, Syria and Iran has contributed to the saliency of ethnic divisions, reinforcing perceptions that Kurdishness is inherently opposed to the administrations that control portions of Kurdistan and preventing Kurds from identifying with other local populations, contributing to insularity. Especially because media became accessible for Kurds relatively late, the conditions under which Kurds established Kurdish media continue to shape Kurdish lifeworlds today since, for many, Kurdish media channels and their shape are a primary way of interacting with the global Kurdish community.

Kurdistan's horizontal positioning as well as the Kurdish diaspora make local media important as well, since it both determines and reflects attitudes about the role of Kurds within the state or region that they reside. The Kurdish grapple against local powers to establish their own media channels is, in its own way, a fight to inhabit uncondoned space that accompanies Kurdish nationalism's fight for tangible space. Ultimately, the PKK's seizing of its own media space and its assertion of its right to that

space, condoned or not, echoes the uncondoned seizure of the Dalieh. Media reflects, produces and *reproduces* dynamics between individual Kurds, Kurdish communities and parties, and local powers and global powers and, due to diaspora, can be central to the Kurdish identity. Created by agents with ascribable motivations, a major function of media is that "the dominant ideology in society is naturalized and is made commonsensical" (Sheyholislami 2007, 96).

A. Kurdish Media

Although the repression of Kurdish media was never going to remain indefinitely successful, Kurdish language, culture and institutions have been repressed or outright illegal in Kurdistan throughout much of modern history. This repression, combined with illiteracy and poverty associated with displacement and rurally-situated lifeworlds, meant that, especially in Turkey and Syria, Kurdish print media was "characterized by the absence of enduring dailies, low circulation, poor distribution facilities, dependence on subscription and single copy sales, lack of or insignificant advertising revenue, poor printing facilities, shortage of newsprint, and limited professionalization and specialization" through the 1980s (Hassanpour 1992, 276). Multiple authors (Sheyholislami 2011; Hassanpour 2012; van Bruinessen 1999 and 2000, for example) argue that the lack of pan-Kurdish sentiment prior to the 1990s can be attributed to the general lack of engagement with Kurdish print media. Since nationalism is a response to exile, and repression from recognized states is the source of Kurdish exile *from* Kurdistan *within* Kurdistan, a lack of widespread communication with other Kurds about that repression naturally prevented the development of the "horizontal solidarity" that would have allowed Kurds to imagine their community.

Kurds were so isolated from each other that Kurds outside of Iraq were largely unaware of the Anfal campaign and the chemical weapons used in Halabja; in fact, "[e]ven many Iraqi Kurds did not realize the magnitude of the atrocities perpetuated by the Iraqi regime until months and years later" (Hardi 2011). Media already requires capital to produce, a factor that limits populist access, but the potential of Kurdish media producers to face harsh penalties for writing in a Kurdish language or about Kurdish issues increased the means needed for production. Thus, through much of its history, Kurdish media was exclusively produced by political parties or their associated organizations, since these were the only Kurdish groups with sufficient political will and capital to make production both possible and worthwhile.

The same three authors identify an uptick in Kurdish solidarity beginning in the mid 1990s and coinciding with increased Kurdish engagement in media as satellite TV became more accessible. Sheyholislami (2011) adds two interlinked observations of his own. Firstly, Syria became a center of Kurdish nationalistic discourse for the first time. Kurdish armed organizations have warred intermittently against the regimes of Iraq from the 1960s forward, and in Iran and Turkey from the 1980s forward. Kurds in Syria face repression, statelessness and occasional violence, but had never formally warred in Syria prior to 2011. Wars and forced displacement campaigns in Iraq and Turkey made borders porous, leading to a swelling of the Syrian Kurdish population through the second half of the twentieth century. Since politically activated Kurds tend to be most targeted by regimes, they made up a large portion of this swell, and developed "a tacit agreement between the Syrian government and the Kurds by which the sanctuary given the PKK in Syria served to 'keep a lid on Syrian Kurdish unrest.'" (Tank 2017) That

Syria tacitly allowed PKK operations within its borders through 1998 allowed for the development of PKK-affiliated media.

Secondly, Kurdish media proliferated culture more and increased the rate at which it did so. Television broadcasting not only requires capital, but also government licensing and, when on behalf of a persecuted minority, political will. Kurdish TV therefore developed along political lines, since only Kurdish political parties had the means and support to broadcast continuously. Not coincidentally, the three Kurdish satellite TV channels that developed a significant audience were affiliated with Iraq and Syria, the two areas of Kurdistan in which Kurdish parties could legally operate. The KDP, eastern Kurdistan's "big tent" nationalistic party, founded the first satellite TV channel to operate within Kurdistan called "Kurdistan TV" in 1999. This was shortly followed by "KurdSat" in 2000, founded by the PUK, the KDP's center-left partner in the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government. Since both of these parties have been "legitimized" in Iraq after the Gulf War, both of their satellite channels have been allowed to remain in operation and still broadcast today (Sheyholislami 2011).

The first satellite TV channel by and for Kurds, founded in 1995 in European exile by "Kurds closely associated with the political wings of the PKK," vaguely affiliated itself with western Kurdistan (Soguk 2008, 181). The channel, entitled MED-TV, took advantage of satellite technology to broadcast into Syria and Turkey, where broadcasting was tightly controlled by the government. The Turkish state quickly took action when the channel began to regularly broadcast speeches by the founder and leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan (Ibid.). The CIA worked in tandem with Turkey's comparable intelligence organization to oust Öcalan from his haven in Syria, "persuade nation after nation to refuse him sanctuary," and finally apprehend Öcalan in Kenya

(Weiner 1999). The resultant outcry by MED-TV was leveraged by the Turkish state to convince multiple western European countries to revoke MED-TVs licensing, eventually forcing the channel to stop broadcasting.

However, the intertwined progressions of technology and globalization in the 21st century made tight control over media nearly impossible. MED-TV's license revocation simply transformed the channel into MEDYA TV, which, after *its* license revocation, became Roj TV. The channel's current iteration, Sterk TV, not only continues to broadcast via satellite, but also continues to face legal threats by the Turkish state. Despite Kurdistan's increased "glocality" and changing media landscape over almost three decades, this pattern has remained surprisingly consistent. The Turkish state's fear of Kurdish nationalism spreading and its tendency to leverage its role in NATO to stifle Kurdish voices has not abated, but neither has Kurdish resilience. Today, a dense Kurdish internet exists in which Kurds across Kurdistan, as well as diasporic Kurds, speak different dialects to each other on social media sites, chatrooms and forums (Sheyholislami 2011). However, linguistic and political divides mean that Kurds often consume news as framed by the party that they associate with, and participate in social media semi-publics that are populated by their own kin (Ibid.).

Early endeavors to repress Kurdish culture by prohibiting the production of media ensured that any media Kurds *could* consume was party-linked. Though much of this media espoused a pan-Kurdish ideology, the shape of their pan-Kurdism always necessitated a government controlled by whichever party produced the media. The Kurdish media landscape is now changing in Rojava, though. Since the Kurds consolidated administrative power in the region, and especially since a tacit agreement between Rojava and the Assad regime was struck, independent journalism has begun to

flourish in the Kurdish world for the first time. Ironically, the trajectory of its development shows that the repression of Kurdish voices was counterproductive for regimes and contributed to the saliency of ethnicity; by making Kurdishness subaltern, regimes made Kurdish media an important marker of cultural identity, prompting Kurds to form solidarity through a shared righteous indignation. Meanwhile, when independent journalists began to operate with relative freedom in Rojava, Kurdish-produced media began to take on a "Syrianized" shape rather than a pan-Kurdish one. Kurds no longer need to assert to the regime their right to space and survival in areas like Qamishlo, so the discrepancy between "Syrian" and "Syrian Kurd" in journalism disappeared (Badran and DeAngelis 2016). Many reporters found that the numerous dialects of Kurdish, which vary so greatly that they even use different scripts, made it difficult to tailor their language to audiences and began using Arabic and English out of simple utility (Ibid.).

The speed with which Kurdish media took on a Syrian slant in Rojava when it became free to promote pan-Kurdism implies that Vali is correct when he argues that the history of Kurdish movements and insurgency depicts "Kurdish nationalists without Kurdish nationalism" (1998). That Kurds were disallowed from establishing Kurdish media channels in any part of Kurdistan led to the impetus to establish MED-TV as an act of resistance, which advocated for an autonomous Kurdistan in response. Political repression meant that the first Kurdish channel was likely to be secessionist regardless of which actor founded it, since Kurdish channels could only continue to exist without persecution in a Kurdistan. Until 2003, the Hussein regime maintained tight control over Iraq's domestic media, but relative Kurdish autonomy due to the Gulf War allowed for the establishment of Kurdistan TV and KurdSat (Sheyholislami 2011). These two

channels also naturally advocated secessionist autonomy, since the Kurds of Iraq had been the target of genocide, including by use of chemical weapons, and had therefore fled into the mountains. The influence of these three major party-owned Kurdish news routes, in turn, had their effect on the political aspirations of their audiences. In his 2011 study using Critical Discourse Analysis to understand Kurdistan TV's broadcasts, Sheyholislami found that weather, news and even serial broadcasts went beyond simply advocating pan-Kurdism and used subliminal messaging to portray the KDP as the rightful administrator of the Kurdish state. MED-TV (along with some of its successors) was shut down after Turkey was able to convince European host countries that the satellite channel was PKK-funded; whether or not this was true, their airing of interviews with PKK-founder, secessionist writer and insurgent Abdullah Öcalan presents the channel as affiliated at least (Kinzer 1999).

MED-TV achieved its goal of spurring Kurdish resistance, and its immense popularity in Kurdish communities meant that "probably more than any other factor, [MED-TV] served to promote ethnic consciousness amongst Kurds today" (Romano 2006). Had Turkey allowed space for Kurds to create media domestically, even if that media was subject to censorship by the government, media producers would not necessarily have needed funding and support from political parties and non-separatist Kurdish nationalism may have prevailed. In other words, Kurdish nationalism did *not* historically necessitate Kurdish secession, just as a nation does not necessitate a state. In contrast, Kurdish media almost always advocated a secessionist ideology (prior to "Syrianization") due to the feedback cycle of social structure and media representation. The emergence of this "mediated nationhood" marks the politicization of the Kurdish identity (Smets and Fuat Sengul 2016). The "Kurdish question" is not just external to

the Kurdish identity, but is heavily disputed in Kurdish communities today. The growing influence of Kurdish media channels both reflects and encourages the conversion of Kurds to secessionist ideologies, specifically in either the Iraqi or Turkish vein. It is for this reason that Sheyholislami (2011) argues that Kurdish media came about too late to be helpful to the pan-Kurdish project and instead contributed to factionalism.

Somewhat paradoxically, this politicization of the Kurdish identity along two mainstream routes may be extra influential in Lebanon due simultaneously to the state's proximity to, and distance from, Kurdistan. Sheyholislami (2011) argues that news and weather reports use geography in an ideological manner and points out how the KDP uses maps that portray Kurdistan as a country with Hewler (the Kurdish name for Erbil) as the capital; the Sterk TV website lists Amed (the Kurdish name for Diyarbakir) instead. Sheyholislami points out that the capital is generally seen as the most relevant location and that relevancy emanates outwards, growing weaker the further it travels (Ibid.). If this is the case, it can be expected that Lebanon holds a relatively high amount of relevancy for the Kurds, especially in the last decade, due to its physical proximity to Kurdistan. On the flip side, Kurds in Lebanon are still displaced externally from Kurdistan, perhaps granting Kurdish media more salience within Lebanon because members of the Kurdish diaspora rely more on media to feel "in touch" with Kurdish issues since Kurdish civil society is less comprehensive.

B. Media and Identity

Media is typically a collection of signs to be "consumed." The radio listener knows that the singer of a song is not in their car with them, just as the television

watcher knows that they are at home rather than whatever exotic location is on their screen. To Baudrillard, "consumer culture" came about as an extension of pervasive capitalist ideology. Prior to the establishment of currency, goods theoretically had a "'natural' use-value" and only had "worth" insofar as they could be *used* (Featherstone 1993). In a market, goods have a quantifiable worth in currency, and therefore symbolize an "exchange-value" rather than embodying a use-value. According to social theorist Featherstone (Ibid.), the global ubiquity of capitalism, then, "resulted in the commodity becoming a sign in the Saussurean sense, with its meaning arbitrarily determined by its position in a self-referential system of signifiers. Consumption, then, must not be understood as the consumption of use-values, a material utility, but primarily as the consumption of signs."

Media, only a collection of signifiers, does not carry a natural use-value. Therefore, we can only make sense of the indescribably huge global media market in Featherstone's world, in which individuals primarily desire to consume signs. Individuals conceive of their identity in terms of what about themselves strikes them as particular; for example, if a stranger asks me today who I am, I will likely not include "resident of Earth" in my description unless I am speaking ironically. Identity is inherently intersubjective, then, because only our interactions with others grant us the context to identify particularities within ourselves. Strelitz (2008) argues that, prior to currency, individuals would have identified with what they *produce*, since their method of adding value to the world was by creating goods with tangible use-value. To Strelitz, that the worker is alienated from what they produce since they do not control means of production precipitated the shift to the paradigm of identifying with what one *consumes*: "whereas a century ago the identity of individuals was rooted in production

– as workers or owners – today it is consumption which confers identity because this is the one domain over which they feel they still have some power" (Ibid., 64). Therefore, it is often those who are furthest from owning means of production who seek outside validation of identity most – the poor and marginalized. Finally, media directs and circumscribes within parameters who we identify with, or who shares those particularities by which we define ourselves. Traversing geography effortlessly, media can provide individuals with a much broader spectrum of signs to identify with than interpersonal interaction alone. If one can acknowledge that populations from other global regions may conceive of meanings differently, or use different signs to symbolize meanings, then it becomes clear that media is the most accessible and effective way to encounter those signs. If the extent to which we rely on media consumption to shape our identity increases as the market that we participate in becomes more convoluted and the laborer more alienated, then it makes sense that the new types of media made accessible during the "ascension" of a glocality may become central to lifeworlds very quickly.

Regardless of the exact mechanisms by which media and identity take turns shaping each other, the relationship is evidenced by simple cause-and-effect. Way and Kaya (2016), also using Critical Discourse Analysis, show how different newspapers whose owners had strong, divergent political alignments represented a skirmish between the government and PKK militants. In 2015, the HDP (a moderately leftist, pro-Kurdish party in Turkey) organized a tree-planting event as part of *Newroz*. When PKK members arrived, a skirmish ensued between the militants and the Turkish Armed Forces, killing six Kurds (five militants and one civilian) and injuring four soldiers. The far-right, AKP-affiliated newspaper *Sabah* ignored the fact that Kurdish civilians (likely

HDP members) had assisted the wounded soldiers, portraying *all* Kurds as PKK militants despite the HDP's political moderacy. Another newspaper, entitled *Sözcü* and affiliated with Turkey's other major party, the CHP, blames both the AKP and the Kurds (who are, again, portrayed homogeneously as entirely PKK militants); the latter are violent terrorists, but the former entertain them with peace talks rather than taking harsher action. Finally, a PKK-affiliated newspaper, *BirGün*, portrays the Turkish regime as despotic, murderous liars: "What happened in Ağrı yesterday was *not* a conflict *but* pre-planned, pre-rehearsed, fake and a fictional operation" (Ibid.). On the other side of the binary, "*while* HDP members helped the wounded soldiers the government did not even send an ambulance" (Ibid.). Here, the HDP is portrayed as dedicated to the peace in a noble manner, since they purposefully "went to the area as human shields," whilst the PKK are the heroic "wounded soldiers" (Ibid.). Ultimately, this incident piqued the public's attention because, as more information came out, it became clear that Kurdish civilians aided the wounded Turkish soldiers despite nearly a century of intermittent identity-based conflict between the two groups.

The HDP, which has taken responsibility for facilitating disarmament talks between the PKK and the state, claims to be dedicated to peace and minority rights, and this incident granted legitimacy to their claim. As a result, the HDP surpassed the ten percent of votes needed for parliamentary representation in Turkey, claimed eighty seats and remains the only major party in the Turkish parliament that is neither conservative nor Kemalist (Ibid.). The shift in attitude toward sympathy for minority rights is rather consequential; the HDP is the *only* party elected to the parliament that advocates for Kurds (straightforwardly, i.e. outside of the loophole by which one may run independently and claim a seat with less than ten percent of the vote). This shift is very

significant in Turkey in particular, where the state was built and its power consolidated based on exclusionary, inflexible conceptions of Turkishness.

C. Costa's Ethnography

The Why We Post project posits that digital anthropology is crucial to understanding life today in a huge portion of the world, regardless of whether social media consumers live in the global core or periphery. King's ethnography (2014) opens with an analysis of the Kurdish "glocal," by which she means the uneven sites at which communication technologies proliferated Kurdish life, and the juxtaposition between the accessibility of those technologies and the offline "traditional" cultural practices that remain influential in Kurdistan today. To King, this juxtaposition is reminiscent of the Kurdish encounter with the liberal "mood" of global orgs such as the UN and the WHO, while maintaining its practice of lineal masculinity that leads to honor-based violence (Ibid.). A similar theme can be seen in the Why We Post project's handling of southern Turkey, in which individuals choose to participate in the dense and indiscriminate connectedness introduced by social media and messaging apps, primarily Facebook and WhatsApp, while also attempting to maintain the patrilineal parameters that strictly circumscribe women's social worlds.

Anthropologist Elisabetta Costa (2016) focused on social media localities populated by residents of Mardin, which lies along the border of Turkey and Syria, because its population is a healthy mix of Arabs, Kurds and Turks. As such, the manner in which social media links (or does not link) these ethnic groups can greatly enlighten understandings of how cosmopolitan communities, similar to Beirut and Lebanon as a whole, conceive of their intergroup relatedness. In fact, amongst Costa's conclusions is

that social media usage in Mardin did not reflect the particularities of Mardin, but was consistent with social media usage in other nearby urban centers with large Muslim populations (Ibid.). Costa even draws upon her PhD fieldwork, which culminated in an ethnographic dissertation about foreign journalists in Beirut. The "social ecologies" of Mardin and Beirut do sound strikingly similar, as they both contain many groups of ethnic minorities devoted in the public eye to rigid, traditional conceptions of identity, but who feel freer to bend and flex traditional practices to navigate around prohibitions in private. Costa's work can therefore be seen as a direct successor to King's for two reasons. Firstly, Costa finds continuing significance in kinship for Kurds even after the proliferation of the internet, an intense channel of globalization. That Kurds themselves consider kinship structures when posting online substantiates King's argument that turning away from kinship in the Kurdish case is preemptive and reductive, an overeager misunderstanding of decolonization initiatives. Secondly, Costa agrees that the interaction of gender with the public/private divide is amongst the most impactful considerations in Kurds' choices of what and why to post (or *not* post, or post on a private or anonymous page, etc.).

The density and manner of communication between members of identity-based groups can depict to what extent solidarity between or within those groups is possible, extant and actable. Specifically, that the internet is populist and dynamic, accessible to all and constantly changing, makes it a crucial site of interaction for marginalized groups. Costa examines the "local media ecology" of Kurds in southeast Turkey (Ibid.) and details the manner and implications of intensive social media usage amongst groups targeted by the state in which they live. Mardin's geographic positioning makes this study, published in 2016, particularly timely. Costa's fieldwork was in progress in early

2014, when Rojava declared its autonomy. To Costa, the Kurdish outpouring of support for the Rojavan cause and their associated anger toward ISIS represented the first time that Kurds chose *en masse* to post about political interests, despite possible danger. Costa even reports the existence of two distinct realms of Kurdish social media – "public" Facebook pages, in which Kurdish individuals represent themselves as upstanding and conservative to maintain their reputation, lay in opposition to private internet usage, in which individuals can discuss their honest political views and even flirt and date (Ibid.).

The idea of hiding one's true self on public online pages is not novel. Western youth often refuse to add their parents on Facebook or create a "finnsta," an anonymous Instagram page in which the poster can be honest since they cannot be identified. However, maintaining internet privacy can carry much higher stakes for Kurds. Costa details the ways in which Kurds maintain a strict border between their formal public lives online, which is often dedicated to upholding one's honorable reputation, and their private self-expression, the form of which may deviate from how the social media user wants to be perceived by their family in their "real life." However, that Kurds so consistently choose to maintain public feeds that depict only family events and portraits and refrain even from engaging in politics may be particular to marginalization because kinship structures have historically proven inextricable from political persuasion. Members of a patriline tend to maintain similar political allegiances since they secure ties in a patronage network based on the identity of the patriline.

In other words, refraining from political engagement on public profiles is not necessarily linked to kinship, since political allegiances are often kinship-based. Though Kurds in Mardin are situated near borders they are still unmistakably in Turkey, where

expressions of Kurdishness are either expressly illegal or present a risk to the expressor of being associated with the PKK, for which Kurds get murdered and arrested frequently. A Kurdish parliamentarian for the HDP, Semra Güzel, was dismissed from the parliament, arrested and jailed in December 2022 after a newspaper published a photo of her with her arm around a known member of the PKK who had been killed by the army in 2017 (Yeğen 2022). The photo had been found on the man's phone, which security forces took from his body, then leaked to the press through back channels. The state claimed that Güzel was found in disguise, while attempting to flee the country with a fake passport. From jail, Güzel stated that she had met the militant in college and that the pair had been engaged at the time that the photo was taken – in 2014, during peace talks between the government and the PKK (Ibid.). She claimed furthermore that she was arrested in Istanbul (i.e. not attempting to flee, since she was nowhere near an unsecured border), undisguised and carrying *no* passport, real or fake (Bişkin 2022). The state claimed that this was irrefutable proof of the HDP's secret ties to the PKK, despite the HDP's continuous assertion that its goal is peace, regardless of identity, and that it therefore does not maintain ties to the PKK. Finally, the Turkish state has frozen the HDP funds and accepted an indictment of the HDP that seeks to ban all party members from politics for five years. In the meantime, as Turkey's June 2023 election looms, Erdogan's regime is in the process of charging *thousands* of HDP members with terrorism-related charges. Güzel could receive 15 years in jail if the court rules that she is, in fact, a PKK member.

This story is a compelling example of why Kurds may not choose to make their political allegiances known in public channels in a state that is as socially policed as Turkey. Seemingly, the Turkish state will take any opportunity to portray Kurdish

nationalistic attitudes as inherently terroristic. This imbues the public/private divide with life-or-death stakes, online or offline. Costa tells the story of "Bilal", a PKK-affiliate whose communication was tracked by Turkish intelligence, landing him in jail three times (2016, 131-133). He asserts that some eight thousand Kurds have been arrested and jailed after having their communications illegally tracked. Abdullah Öcalan's calls, emails and meetings with his *lawyers* were secretly recorded by the state through planted "bugs," illegal on two counts since Turkey recognizes attorney-client privilege as a right. However, upon encountering Güzel's story within Costa's context, I wondered about another danger. The photo of Güzel was found locally on a device, had not been posted anywhere, and was taken in Iraqi Kurdistan, so the state knew no context about Güzel's relationship to the militant. Why was Güzel so willing to admit that she was engaged to the militant in the photo, when that engagement would seemingly portray her PKK ties as deeper, further endangering her political career? It is possible that she was preempting that information from leaking from another source to avoid being accused of withholding the truth, but Costa's ethnography suggests another possibility.

Costa sees the public portion of sites like Facebook and Instagram as *extremely* conservative amongst residents of Mardin. She recounts an instance in which a woman was shocked and appalled that her friend "posts photos of herself with her husband hand in hand" (Ibid., 168), and points out that the vast majority of photos posted publicly in Mardin are of men alone, with male friends or with their family *in a public space*. A photo of a married couple, even without physical contact, is considered improper as it suggests to the public that they have a physical relationship. A photo of a family member at home rather than in public is improper, because it portrays the private

environment that a married couple shares, and that a woman maintains. Any version of intimacy is not to be publicized, even if the photo only *implies* the intimacy instead of portraying it. This can be weaponized. King pointed out that only a *rumor* of a woman's dishonorable behavior can result in honor violence in Iraqi Kurdistan, where the photo was taken.

Indeed, the same AKP-affiliated newspaper that lost the rhetorical battle to the HDP prior to the 2015 elections, *Sabah*, reported on Güzel's photos with the headline "HDP lawmaker under fire for *intimate* photos with PKK terrorist" (*Daily Sabah* 2022). That the two had a photo together in which they were touching may have ostracized Güzel within her social fabric to the extent that she chose to concede a more formal relationship with the militant to justify their touch and deepen suspicions of her PKK involvement rather than risking being seen as a promiscuous destroyer of *namus*. Perhaps relevant to Güzel's decision to disclose her engagement was her family's reputation, or even her own safety amongst her kin. Though social life in Turkey has multiple conservative influences, the fixation on *namus* is specifically Kurdish to the extent that the Islamist AKP will target expressions about *namus* even when it aligns with the AKP's conservatism. Costa recounts a conversation with a man she calls "Savaş," who encountered a video of preacher Adnan Oktar, a leader of a religious sex cult that trafficked minors and a man who, today, is serving an 8,658-year prison sentence. Oktar positioned himself as an Islamic preacher but posted videos with "sexualized, half-naked women," under one of which Savaş commented "*Namussuz*" – meaning immoral or, specifically, *namus*-less. Savaş then received a call from his local police officer informing him that he would be prosecuted in court and levied a fine for defamation (Costa 2016, 133-134).

Above, I've detailed how party-based media fractures Kurdish identities, and how public social media is another stage on which patrilineal kinship norms operate, such as lineal masculinity and the all-important protection of *namus*. State surveillance for the purpose of power consolidation via forced homogenization is another consistency between online and offline life in Turkey. However, crucial to Costa's argument that the internet is a novel space that does not simply reflect extant social norms are the ways in which the internet *expands* freedom in unpredictable ways (Ibid., 103, 165, 173). For Kurdish women, whose social worlds have historically been purposefully restricted to two patrilines and the home, the internet offers infinite routes of socialization that can be pursued under the condition of anonymity. For Kurdish men, the internet offers an opportunity to speak to women through direct messages, without a third party present. Though Muslims are often totally prohibited from ever being alone with a non-related member of the opposite sex, direct messaging can be justified through an easy suspension of disbelief. After all, the Quran doesn't mention Facebook.

The extent to which social media facilitates communication and expands social worlds thereby, especially for women, illuminates the complexity of identities, beliefs and practices in Muslim communities. That men and women can socialize via direct message may seemingly endanger *namus*, but the manner in which Kurdish youth interact with *namus* on social media is far more complex than immediately evident. Islamic gender segregation can be interpreted different ways and is valued to different extents across communities and individuals. For example, some Muslims view a lack of physical proximity as solvency for the problem of impropriety since a man and a woman who only message cannot be accused of engaging in premarital sex. Many Kurdish youth are swayed by the secularism espoused by the PKK, the HDP and

Rojava, and may practice Islam for the sake of their family or their community, but disregard Islamic propriety in private. Still others may practice Islam but believe that it ought not drastically affect their social life, or may disregard the rubric of Islam in certain instances simply because they want to. Ethnographer John O'Brien (2017) detailed how Muslim youth in America encounter a "cultural contest" between youth culture and the moral restrictions of Islam and take turns switching between moral rubrics in some cases and compromising them in others, downplaying the centrality of Islam to their identity in what he calls "low-key Islam." A similar dynamic seemingly exists in Mardin, where some Kurds excitedly plunge into courtship via Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp, which a pious culture denied them before. Others avoid social media flirting entirely, and still others message the opposite gender on social media not to flirt but to find a spouse. The traditional method of Kurdish matchmaking involves a man meeting his potential wife (a candidate selected by the man's mother) for the first time with relatives from both sides present. While Costa points out that some youths are now spurning this process entirely, others still follow it but integrate social media as a tool to help ensure the success of the marriage.

Costa mentions a young woman she met who was seeking a husband through traditional matchmaking channels but utilized Facebook to do research on a candidate after a name was suggested to her (2016, 122-123). She decided that she liked his photos, so she informed her neighbor who was acting as matchmaker to proceed with coordinating the family meeting. This method uses modern technology claimed by youth to promote structures linked to the strategies of traditional, patrilineal kinship, showing the cooperation of two rubrics that tend to be portrayed in opposition to each other. Furthermore, this piece of ethnographic evidence substantiates my assertion that

depictions of "old" kinship ties in ethnography flatten relationships, artificially depriving them of intersubjective human sentiments such as love and solidarity in favor of portraying them as strategic nodes of exchange between patrilines. After all, even a woman who is dedicated to maintaining traditional matchmaking practices knows that she is entitled to a partner who she finds attractive and whose personality she enjoys, showing that romantic love *is* present and impactful even when pursued through traditional practices.

If flirting is the primary use of the *private* corner of the internet that is dense with semi-anonymous social connections between Kurds, then communicating subaltern expressions of Kurdishness is the secondary use. Sheyholislami (2011, 91-92) argues that the internet has "nurture[d] nationalism" much more than "advocate[d] internationalism," and points out that many studies of the Kurdish internet are insufficient since they examine only websites run by diasporic Kurds that are meant to appeal to western elites "who might somehow benefit the Kurds by influencing their countries' foreign policies" and are, therefore, written in English or European languages. With his research, Sheyholislami shows that the parts of the internet that are written in Kurdish dialects allow Kurds unprecedented access to Kurdish media, such as Kurdish nationalist newsletters that encourage dedication to the Kurdish identity through political mobilization. The proliferation of internet access has allowed Kurdish media to be produced pluralistically for the first time, since anonymity means that producers cannot be targeted and, therefore, do not require special access or capital to distribute their media. The internet also allows Kurds to stream TV channels without a satellite, which makes consumption a lot safer since Kurds in Eastern Turkey are often arrested if state forces see a satellite on their roof (Romano 2002, 141).

Within Turkey's Kurdish-majority areas, smartphones allow for Kurds to consume media without the massive, public marker of ethnic engagement that satellites once represented. Furthermore, individuals no longer just *consume*, but participate in chatrooms, blogging and forums and do so in Kurdish languages, ensuring the insularity and resultant safety of the Kurdish corner of the internet (Sheyholislami 2011). Communicating in Kurdish languages about cultural symbols and ideals, and constructing a Kurdish reality by referring to Kurdish areas simply as "Kurdistan," Kurds have occupied a corner of the internet in which Kurdistan is, for all intents and purposes, *recognized*. The Kurdish internet is a unique site, perhaps the only place that Kurds in urban parts of Turkey can safely celebrate Kurdishness, or that diasporic Kurds can encounter Kurdistan. Unable to understand Kurdish languages, outsiders are excluded and the Kurdish internet is purposefully made inaccessible and even *peripheral*. "Core," altern, public parts of the internet often require identification; it is in the periphery of the internet that Kurds can ensure their own safety. Rather than espousing honest beliefs on public profiles, Kurds choose to maintain professional profiles but engage with politics and romance in the private periphery.

Kurds can therefore access modes of sociality on the internet that are forbidden and dangerous in other settings, substantiating claims made by both Costa and King about the centrality of the digital world to populations that are, to paraphrase King, ascending to meet the global mood. King's prediction that the unevenness of the proliferation of the global into the local would only become more crucial to life in Kurdistan after 2014 proved true, since the juxtaposition between the two has introduced to Kurds the ability safely to balance moral rubrics to practice "low-key Islam," which the importance of *namus*, restricted social worlds and lack of access to

privacy or anonymity had previously made dangerous. Costa's argument that the internet is a unique space that does not simply replicate social structures that are present elsewhere is evidenced ethnographically. Though Kurds in Turkey are aware that public pages online are subject to surveillance just like tangible public sites, private domain online makes it possible, firstly, for individuals to engage in unprecedented forms of communication without fear of being exposed and, secondly, for relationships to extend to strangers outside of their kinship network.

D. Sound and Space

Composer Schafer initialized the "soundscape" as a concept in 1977, but determined the desirability of the soundscapes by "the extent to which 'noise'—primarily, for him, mechanical and electric—had been exiled" (Helmreich 2010, 10). This value judgment has since been derided by academics as elitist, since it inherently privileges the removed, pastoral rural over the industrial urban soundscapes in which poorer laborers tend to live. Aiming to explicate soundscape studies from this binary, Hirschkind popularized the concept as an ethnographic method in 2006 with *The Ethical Soundscape*, which positioned the role of Islam in public life by examining some traits of the urban soundscape in Cairo. For example, Hirschkind notes that a busy urban soundscape can be more desirable in Muslim cities, since many believe that the call to prayer and Quranic recitations on cassette grant tangible physical or material benefits to those who *hear*, even if they are not *listening* (64).

Etymologically, the suffix *-scape*, meaning something like "scenery view," entered English only as an abstraction of "landscape." The word is inextricable from spatiality, and derives its very utility from its imagery. The concept of the soundscape

begs one to imagine their immediate area with an intense level of "connectedness," since every object or person around them contributes to the soundscape by making, muffling, amplifying, echoing, or in some other way interacting with all sound in the scape. Some anthropologists aim to de-emphasize the normative, primary role of vision in ethnographic observation by contributing to soundscape studies, but the term itself detracts from this initiative somewhat since the dependence on sight in the social studies is so overriding that even a conglomerate of sound must be visualized in a "scape."

Academia's recent focus on the political assertions of Rojava, especially with regard to gender, tends to equate voice with agency. Much of Abdullah Öcalan's writing focuses heavily on what he calls "jineology," a Kurdish feminism that recognizes women's labor within the home as valuable while also calling for gender parity in political representation. Since Rojava's constitution is based on Öcalan's writing, the administration takes great care to promote women's involvement in government councils and even strips councils of their voting rights if women do not constitute at least forty percent of their membership (Tank 2017, 422). The special focus on gender equality in Rojava has led many to praise the state as unprecedented for the region, espousing rhetoric that portrays Rojava as delightfully progressive in a western sense since women *finally* have a voice *in the Middle East*. This rhetoric is a descendent of the Orientalist view of Islam so criticized by Talal Asad (2003), Saba Mahmood (2011) and Lila Abu-Lughod (1986, 2002) for portraying women as under-embodied, precarious and in need of saving from the over-embodied Muslim man. Instead, jineology emphasizes the importance of women's *practices*, since women's contributions to labor have historically been ignored inside the home and disallowed

outside the home (Piccardi and Barca 2022). It is to the benefit of colonial powers to portray "voice" as the end goal of social movements, since allowing for voice does not necessitate power redistributions. Voicing one's situation frequently does not lead to change just as a voice in the soundscape takes up space but does not alter the auditory properties presented by the soundscape.

This is not to say that voice is not significant. Gaining voice can feel empowering when an actor has historically been limited to silence, and the ability to voice a deprivation often facilitates meaningful change. Access to Kurdish media has significantly contributed to the mobilization of Kurdish interests, as discussed above, but this media has not significantly reduced state violence against Kurdish communities in Turkey, for example. Against the historical background of the Kemalist city, in which power consolidation made state censorship so intense that Kurds were *not* allowed voice in the mainstream on threat of violence, it is an assertion of a right to space that has led Kurds to linguistically and culturally claim corners of the internet for themselves, for example, or form subaltern Kurdish civil society groups despite danger. But to imply that the Kurdish question is resolved and the battle won because the Kurds are now sometimes allowed a public opinion cruelly ignores the severe threats that Kurds in Turkey and Syria face daily.

E. Schäfers's Ethnography

Marlene Schäfers's 2022 ethnography reads almost like a sequel to Diane King's. Schäfers utilizes King's description of Kurdish patrilineal *namus* as a foundation, and looks specifically to the ways in which women negotiate with the restrictions that their culturally-conceived duty to their patriline demands. Furthermore,

Schäfers looks to the transformation of cultural practices and their associated meanings in a setting that is grappling with an ascension that is greatly accelerated in comparison to King's setting, since her field is more urban and her fieldwork was conducted a decade later. Typically, Kurdish women engage in freedom and joy by claiming the home as their domain, and this betrays an agency that is *not* linked to the western rhetoric of "voice." Indeed, Schäfers critiques the concept that silence is subjugation, as well as the flip side – that voice is agency (2017). To Schäfers, agency operates *independent* of voice. That many in the west choose to use their voice to *communicate* agency has led to improper assumptions projected onto the east by the west that have been detrimental to real lifeworlds by feeding the narrative of the under-embodied Muslim woman that must be saved by the over-embodied Muslim man. Schäfers evidences the discrepancy between signifying voice and operative agency by conducting an ethnography of female *dengbêj*s, women who sing songs that tell stories and communicate emotions.

Kurdish conceptions of history represent the bardic profession of *dengbêj* as essentially pluralistic. The role of the *dengbêj* is to preserve and assert the continuity of Kurdish oral history; *dengbêj*s perform various stories which, together, construct a world that is ultimately semi-fictional but evokes a collective memory of insular Kurdish village life through its references to historical events. By perpetuating cultural mythologies, *dengbêj*s are largely responsible for transgenerational reproductions, not only of individual tales, but of the operative meaning of Kurdishness itself. Elderly men are the most typical *dengbêj*s, but many women have pursued the profession in the last two decades since *kilam*s (songs that follow a Kurdish oral tradition) reemerged in popularity in Turkey as part of an intensive effort to lift Kurdish culture from the

subaltern. Schäfers met interlocutors at a Kurdish-run NGO that was newly founded to support women who take the risk of singing professionally in eastern Turkey. In *Voices that Matter* (2022), Schäfers recognizes and honors her interlocutors' stated desire for voice by examining the politics that have simultaneously imbued voice with value and excluded Kurdish women from the soundscape. She concludes that, while a desire for voice is a rational reaction to being silenced, the relative increase in Kurdish women's access to public voice in recent years has not accompanied an increase in agency as their utterances get purposefully misheard, derived of meaning for the purpose of palatability, stolen for profit, or simply ignored. Therefore, portraying the assertion of voice as valuable in and of itself disservices Kurdish women by homogeneously ascribing that goal to them despite the fact that the process can be imminently dangerous and anxiety-inducing, and often does not provide a direct benefit to the asserter.

The success of a *kilam* is evaluated by an artistic rubric that is more Middle Eastern than western, one that values creative reinterpretations of established patterns of sound over simple originality. *Kilam*s are "products of a proliferating network woven by a variety of actors, materials, and ideas" (Ibid., 124), so Schäfers saw interlocutors' quest to be recognized as the authors of their recorded works as an attempt at "cutting the network" (a term she borrows from Strathern) to claim authorship of their distributed cassettes. Retroactively enriching King's work, which concluded that Kurdish women face strict restrictions on their activity because they have a *negative* duty against endangering the *namus* of their bloodline, Schäfers endeavors to describe the *positive* duty that the logic of cumulative patrilineal identity demands of women. Indeed, Schäfers attributes the newfound popularity of the *dengbêj* profession amongst

women to a collective realization that expressions of intense emotion through "*kilam*s form part of a distinctly female sphere of labor that is key to the nourishing of social and kinship relations" (Ibid., 65). By maintaining a home that is sensorily catered to their husband's preferences, women perform the emotional, domestic labor that supports their husband's wellbeing, ensuring that he is able, in turn, to perform the manual or occupational labor that supports the household economically. If a collective emotion is so intense that it *must* be expressed before those who feel it can proceed, it makes sense for the duty of expression to go to those responsible for maintaining sensory and emotional comfort. To demonstrate the strength of these shared sentiments, Schäfers's book contains an account of lamentations that women sang after Turkey's 2011 earthquakes, which contains reprisals of traditional rhythmic patterns that indicate tragedy (Ibid., 130). These patterns are likely being reprised again today in response to the widespread death and destruction caused by 2023's series of earthquakes that hit areas heavily populated by Kurds.

As the belief that *dengbêj*s *ought* to be women spreads, women *dengbêj*s strive to "cut the network" by claiming authorship of their works. Schäfers argues that this quest to gain recognition makes sense, as women are an especially silenced, marginalized group within a larger silenced, marginalized ethnicity. But Schäfers means to prove not that women should not desire voice, but rather that Kurdish women should not be expected to *seize* the voice that they are deprived of, because doing so can be genuinely dangerous to their safety and often presents lots of anxieties with little to no upside, especially to the individual. Using a voice contributes to a soundscape by taking up space, but does not alter the reality of the soundscape nor the dispositions of those who encounter the soundscape. Using a voice does not ensure that the utterer has a

message, or is allowed to communicate a message, or can do so honestly without fearing for their own life afterwards. Voicing something does not prevent it from being misheard, purposefully misinterpreted, or ignored entirely. Finally, voices can be confused or insecure; just because someone has a strong belief or political motivation does not mean that it is *clear* or sensical, or that they can communicate it well. This is especially true in instances of anxiety or deprivation, in which the possessor of a voice struggles to communicate due to a lack of education or fear of consequences. Ongoing violence, especially after Erdogan's recent consolidation of executive power, means that it may be more sensical for a politically motivated Kurd to be afraid of state sponsored violence than not.

Historically, the amount of pressure put on Kurdish-produced media led Kurds to subscribe to divergent, cohesive political camps. However, Turkey's EU candidature has greatly impacted how the country must deal with Kurds formally and legally. As the Turkish "strategy of domination" against Kurds shifted from total exclusion to marginalized assimilation (Ayata and Yükseker 2005, 5-6; Houston 2009), the Turkish regime has begun to allow Kurds to produce media domestically, exerting pressure on institutions to regulate media and deprive it of all political messaging prior to publishing. Schäfers points out that this pressure is implicit and ubiquitous, to the extent that all institutions bend to its weight to ensure their own continued existence. She recounts an event she attended with her singing interlocutors – "the first time a Kurdish music concert took place as an official university-endorsed event at a Turkish state university" – held to mark International Women's Day (2018). Leading up to the event, the administration of the university where the concert took place repeatedly urged

Schäfers to ensure that the women she accompanied "won't sing anything political," despite the explicitly political nature of women's unequal access to security (Ibid.).

Many utterances are implicitly imbued with danger in the intensely surveilled public urban spaces in Turkey; when women are invited to perform, they recognize "the limits of the pluralistic space offered to them in Istanbul" and sanitize their language preemptively for their own safety (Ibid.). The silent threat of violence is leveraged against Kurdish media toward the end goal of *erasure*, in which "[f]acts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away" (Irvine and Gal 2009, 404). Already operating on the implicit level, the pressure of erasure influenced not only the institution, but the individuals as well, to ensure that *kilam*s were "manageable," not overly long, intense or morose (Schäfers 2018). Schäfers's usage of "manageable" is particularly enlightening here; depicting a lifeworld to the Turkish public is only acceptable to the extent that, to the interpreter, the depiction does not demand meaningful or specific social restructuring. That *interpretation* matters most in whether voice is silenced means that the mechanism of implicit censoring extends beyond *explicit* demands for change and also includes depictions of lifeworlds that portray significant deprivations based identity. Regardless of intention, performing or publishing media that spurs compassion to the extent that a Turkish audience may question the status quo endangers the performer, their family, and every institution that they are affiliated with. To Schäfers, this purposefully incubated threat is so insidious that it is inescapable for a performer that embodies a marginalized identity. Her interlocutors even know to moderate their voices on a *sonic* level, avoiding songs that are too sorrowful, long or particularly unique to avoid any accusation of performing politically. This primary anxiety disallows Kurdish women

from communicating *honestly* within public soundscapes, ensuring that, even when women *can* access the soundscape, their voices are modified to preempt the development of the solidarity necessary to change the properties presented by the soundscape that inherently push subaltern voices to the margin.

This mechanism by which voices are modified to be less "radical" in any and every sense is only one of the many anxieties purposefully instituted by regime interests in Turkey to avoid reallocating power. In other instances, women's voices are silenced outright, ignored, or collectively misinterpreted or misheard. For Kurdish women, this is a state mechanism of silencing that operates above a *cultural* mechanism that shames women as immodest for pursuing the "emotional sphere of labor" in public rather than inside the home. Kurdish women grapple with silencing opposition from Kurds *and* Turks – opposition that, by its very nature, prevents them from adequately *expressing* the accumulation of those pressures. Ultimately, Schäfers advocates for her interlocutors by disavowing the line of rhetoric that portrays raising one's voice as a morally positive action that marginalized populations *ought to do* for the greater good. All rational actors rely on a cost/benefit analysis to make their decisions that takes into account the expected benefit of potential actions, the potential drawbacks if actions should "fail" and the likelihood of both of those outcomes in order to decide if an action is worthwhile. To frame speaking out as a moral good disservices Kurdish women who rationally choose to prioritize their own safety instead, and, furthermore, shows ignorance of the results of "success," since Kurdish women's voices that reach the public soundscape are *necessarily* watered-down.

Though Schäfers steadfastly opposes an *expectation* that Kurdish women use their voice, she maintains a great amount of respect for her interlocutors who, caught

between two opposing forces of censure, raise their voice in public regardless. Indeed, they often do so *because* of their history of forced silence. Through the last century, regimes controlling every part of Kurdistan have used sensory and spatial deprivation as specific tools to intensively target and eradicate any perceptible markers of Kurdishness. In Syria, the Ba'ath conducted Arabization campaigns and asserted to the public that the Syrian Kurds aimed to transform the Jazira region into "a second Israel" to justify murders, forced displacement and the express illegalization of all things Kurdish (McDowall 1992, 473). In Turkey, Iraq and Iran, regimes consolidated power over urban centers through similar Kemalist campaigns that rhetorically asserted the homogeneity of their citizenry to legitimize the regime in turn.

Anthropologist Christopher Houston (2004, 2008, 2020) argues that post-Ottoman regimes of these three states aimed to consolidate their power, particularly in urban spaces, by ensuring that the constant presence of, and populist support for, the state should be evident in sensory encounters. Kurdishness was purposefully pushed to the subaltern in all these states primarily through Kemalist policy that restricted minorities from altering any sensory sphere of the city, since doing so would indicate the presence of heterogeneity in identity. Houston (2004) elaborates:

> In sum, my interpretation of the Kemalist city in Turkey draws attention to its multisensory arranging and enlivening as sites signifying the Turkish nation, through the performing and disciplining of what we might call an *excess* – in the spatial sphere, a hypervisuality – of Turkish nationalist identity. Here I include the physical or directive design of public space, its symbols, its sensory order (sounds and smells), its rituals and its expected conviviality. I include also the more informal and temporary mobilizing of space via the practice and performance of nationalist Turkish citizens themselves. Last we should include the explicit censoring of all symbols, sensory phenomena and performances that might be perceived as generating or signifying any unauthorized ethnic difference, a prohibition that attains exaggerated proportions in the case of Kurds.

The hyperfixation of Kemalism on the sensory encounter of the public meant that markers of heterogenous identity were forbidden from sensory "scapes," and sensory experiences indicating state devotion were *necessarily* encountered in the public throughout Kurdistan. That Kemalism operates on "both official and semiofficial" levels means that is nearly inescapable as its goal of marking state identity *excessively* is steeped into the very nature of socializing in states like Turkey, and it evolves alongside social worlds (Ibid.). It is this motivation that has led Iran, Iraq and Turkey to illegalize Kurdish languages and aspects of Kurdish culture in an attempt to remove them from the private eye – the same motivation that leads individual members of the Turkish army to tear down satellites on houses to erase markers of engagement with Kurdishness, that leads institutions to censor Schäfers's *dengbêj* friends *while* those *dengbêj*s preemptively censor themselves, and that transformed a Persian spring equinox celebration called *Newroz* into a crux of conflict for which Kurds still gather despite life-or-death stakes.

F. Gender and Agency in the State of "Ascension"

Through the past few decades, anthropologists have endeavored to decolonize ethnographic accounts of women's agency by expanding parameters to better locate where and when agency is accessible to women in the global periphery. Marilyn Strathern began to advocate for an expanded view of gender as fluid and dynamic rather than static and bioessentialist in 1988, and argued that a reconceptualization of the type of agency prescribed by gender ought naturally follow. Furthermore, Strathern (2000) pointed out that the intensely individualistic persuasions of the cultures of "core" western liberal democracies had caused anthropologists to overlook agency within more

collectivist cultures, within which individuals may *choose* to subjugate their own needs or desires for the sake of others or to maintain cultural norms, even if the visibility of that choice to (western) outsiders is obscured by the presence of institutions. Saba Mahmood criticized the field in 2001 for typifying Egyptian women as inherently resistant to the Islamic revival but powerless and stifled by Muslim men, since many women had chosen to dedicate themselves to piety to pursue their own goals of pious self-enlightenment. Mahmood evidences this argument with cross-cultural ethnographic case studies of women who have faced protracted deprivations or displacement; strategies of domination often target families and communities, so Native and African American women in the US strove to establish stable families and households "in the 1970s, in contrast to white middle class feminists who had called for dismantling the institution of the nuclear family as a key source of women's oppression" (2001, 208). Similar agency-expanding arguments topical to the region include that put forth in Rayya El Zein's 2017 chapter "Resisting 'Resistance'," which criticizes the reduction of all Palestinian rap to political resistance and makes any intended message, political or otherwise, "ignorable," and that put forth in Amelie Le Renard's 2014 book *A Society of Young Women*, which argues that Saudi women do not allow formal restrictions on their activity to preempt access to agency and instead exercise agency by "negotiating" with restrictions on a near-constant basis, often jovially and with the support of solidarity from other women.

Current conceptions of women's agency in the region, then, tend to concur, firstly, that women can and often do prioritize security via reliance on traditional, collectivist structures, even if that means forgoing the post-Enlightenment ideal of individualistic liberty that is idealized by the global mood, and that this is a rational

choice especially when alternatives are considered. Secondly, regardless of whether women choose tradition or are coerced into it, the placement of parameters on their activity does not indicate the extinction of agency in their lifeworld. Women who do experience social coercion like Costa's Mardin interlocutors now have more avenues than ever to pursue a double life that only looks pious, and often do so by establishing secret online relationships. The significance of Schäfers's and Costa's ethnographies therefore lie in their continuation of King's project, which aimed to better understand the logical origin of duties that kinship ties prescribe to Kurdish women. King elaborated on patriliny, the logic underlying the circumscription of women's movement and social worlds in Kurdish communities, to illuminate the dispositions and social structures that Kurds embody and replicate today. Equipped with the understanding of the mechanism of patriliny, Schäfers and Costa ethnographically evidence specific instances in Kurdish women's lifeworlds in which they assert creative agency that diverges from social expectations. Read together, these three ethnographies show that Kurdistan's ascension toward the global mood has not made traditional structures obsolete but has expanded access to social worlds for all, opening brand new routes of solidarity for subaltern groups but also encouraging divergences in and of identity that the Turkish regime readily exploits.

In this chapter, I've looked to dense, complex ethnographic accounts of Kurdish lifeworlds encountering "ascension" and attempted to synopsize their influence on academic understandings of Kurdishness, identity groups in the Middle East, and anthropology as a whole. I've also emphasized the significance of Beirut's *Newroz* celebration in the urban context, as well as in the regional context. To conclude, I will

consolidate anthropological conclusions about the operation of Kurdish agency with the nested crises that the displaced encounter in Lebanon.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Since the uptick of Kurdish nationalism in Syria began, the bulk of its activity has seemingly occurred with some relation to *Newroz*. In 1986, at possibly the very first instance of large scale Kurdish *Newroz* celebrations in Syria, state forces killed at least four Kurds and illegalized the holiday outright, following the Turkish example. The 2004 Qamishli riots that many identify as the beginning of Syria's Kurdish nationalist movement began two weeks before *Newroz*; though the Kurdish side was provoked by touted images of Saddam Hussein, Kurdish political will may have been more readily available, allowing for mobilization, due to preparations for the upcoming holiday. After Syrian forces indiscriminately killed dozens of unarmed Kurdish demonstrators, Kurds celebrated 2004's *Newroz* at home in mourning. The Syrian revolution of 2011 that would lead to over a decade of protracted violence in Syria saw high levels of Kurdish participation in the northeast demanding increased rights, and began around a week before *Newroz*. When Rojava gained autonomy, *Newroz* violence shifted to Turkey. Both states still officially enforce the illegalization of *Newroz* today. Clashes between celebrating Kurds and Turkish police occur almost yearly, with such frequency that resultant violence is sometimes no longer treated as newsworthy.

Despite their geographic proximity to this violence, Kurds in Lebanon face a different set of threats. Poverty dispels the ability to rely on expectations, exposing existential absurdity, robbing populations of stability and condemning them to nomadism in a protracted borderland desert with few oases. If one is unceremoniously dropped into this setting, their initial response will always be self-preservation by

seeking a route *out*, a return to an area where water is readily accessible, even should they plan to return later. It is an inalienable motivation of the human condition to seek a situation in which needs are consistently met, both for the seeker and for their loved ones. Years later, the population that remains consists of those who lack *any* means whatsoever, who have perhaps been forced out of not only their home, but *multiple* borderlands before, being deprived even of what temporary, makeshift shelters they were able to construct for protection from the elements in the meantime. The daily situation of those left in Lebanon is undoubtedly rife with deprivation. It is clear that many refugees conceive of Lebanon paradoxically, simultaneously a space "in between" two others that must be traversed to reach "home," *and* a purgatory that they, like their parents, may never manage to leave. If lifeworlds require *some* sense of stability, then Lebanon may even act as a permanent borderlands for those who desire to leave but cannot. Though Kurds elsewhere are targeted, Kurds in Lebanon navigate deprivation and stagnancy, and face severe economic constraints that limit their access to meaningful agency.

A. Kurdish-Lebanese Identities

In 2012, forty percent of Kurds in Lebanon did not hold Lebanese citizenship. Over a decade later, this percentage is likely higher as more Kurds have entered the country and no significant number of them have been granted citizenship. Kurds identify as Lebanese to different extents, depending on how long their family has been in the country, where they originate, to what extent their politics align with those of the Sunni representatives that are meant to represent them, and infinite other constraints and motivations particular to lifeworlds and the bridges between them. Generally, the extent

to which Kurds in Lebanon identify as Lebanese depends on their positioning in the clientele-patronage system upon which the country's political system depends, both formally and informally. Lokman Meho, the most vocal and academically prolific Lebanese Kurd, stated in 2012 that "[a]ll Kurds are proud to be Kurdish and Lebanese. They feel both identities equally" (Anderson 2012). The same year, Fadia Mahmoud Ismail, a now middle aged Kurdish woman who came to Beirut as a 13-year-old bride, stated: "I don't feel Lebanese [...] My culture and language are Kurdish. I know I'm Kurdish, and that won't change." These statements directly conflict with each other, implying not only that some Kurds view Lebanese-ness in a more positive light than others, but also that the Kurdish community in Lebanon is deeply divided in how they relate to, or conceive of, Kurdishness. Meho's impressive academic career began at AUB, where his studies were funded by a scholarship from the Hariri Foundation that he qualified for after benefitting from Lebanon's 1994 Naturalization Decree.

Meho's achievements show a well-exercised mobility that should give hope to Lebanon's hosted population of roughly forty thousand *naturalized* Kurds. Amongst the country's most disadvantaged ethnic groups, they are monitored and expected to turn up for the Sunni bloc during elections like other registered Sunnis (Cammett 2014, 63). Hourani notes that naturalized Kurds are actually amongst the most active voters in Lebanon, which should theoretically lend them political clout *now* since Lebanon's 2022 election saw the lowest turnout rates since 1992 (2022, 189; Abed, Sawaya and Tabbal 2022, 8; Azhari 2022). However, Sunni patrons do not believe that the formation of a cohesive Kurdish voting bloc is realistic precisely because of Kurdish political fragmentation. Hourani identified two Kurdish political "camps" in Lebanon with "irreconcilable differences" – those with allegiance to Barzani, who support the KRG's

development into an independent Kurdistan, lie in opposition to those who back Öcalan and the PKK-affiliated non-separatist confederacy that is Rojava (2022, 179). Rather than relating to each other, these groups may be diverging further after displacement from Kurdistan to Lebanon since the Barzani/Öcalan divide gets reinforced in Kurdish media, which is especially important to diasporic communities. Hourani notes that her research encountered major difficulties as members of different Kurdish civil society groups would not even enter the same room as one another, lending some unfortunate truth to Sunni patrons' prediction. As relative newcomers to a system that only grants mobility through the leveraging of social connections, Lebanon's freest Kurds are bound to patrons in a "most unfree" manner: their only path in the current system is to work toward *forging* long-term connections in hopes that they may one day earn clientele status. Hourani concludes that Lebanon's naturalized Kurds are "prisoners of the one thing that should have freed them" (Ibid., 196).

Though Lebanese Kurds are currently in an extremely adverse political situation that will likely remain stagnant unless the outlook of the entire country improves, I see the Kurdish commitment to *Newroz* as a unique and historically significant node of socio-political solidarity. While struggling to find any Kurdish groups willing to participate in focus group sessions, Hourani found that only one agreed: the very same *Newroz* Cultural and Social Association responsible for the yearly celebration on the Dalieh. The quintessential Kurdish holiday, the equinox ritual of Newruz cuts across today's identity divide since it originated in Iran, got "claimed" by the PKK in Turkey and Syria, and is recognized by the KRG as an official holiday in Iraqi Kurdistan. Although Kurds fundamentally disagree on how the full extension of Kurdishness looks and operates, *Newroz* remains an important performance in each iteration.

The reach and power of the Kurdish diaspora has increased dramatically in the last decade after Kurds displaced to Syria got displaced once more. The largest diasporic celebration of *Newroz* will likely occur in Germany in coming years, but the holiday's Lebanese iteration holds special significance. Though the Dalieh is "peripheral," rocky, uneven, dirty, and lacking infrastructure, it is also one of the most visible, recognizable, and beautiful parts of Beirut, and of Lebanon at large. Perhaps most importantly, Beiruti *Newroz* is *safe*. Though poverty endangers the Kurds of Lebanon, they face no realistic threat from state forces, nor from extra-state militias. Kurds prove every year that they will mobilize for *Newroz* even if it *does* risk their life, which is likely why many gathered on March 21, 2021 despite the government's arbitrary prohibition against public gatherings. This prohibition was nonsensical, since the lockdown had been lifted, and super-spreader venues like nightclubs opened that day as well. But on that day, thousands of Kurds risked arrest without legal residency and seized a public space without condonation, pursuing their newfound ability to *take up sensory space* in a forefront area of a capital city.

Ultimately, the ability to celebrate *Newroz* publicly in Beirut is comparable to accessing voice; like the singers in Schäfers' ethnography, Kurds in Lebanon can assert their right to a Kurdishness that is visible, audible, and generally disrupting to the senses without fearing a direct retaliation. But also like Schäfers' ethnography, the reasonable level of security in expression does not correspond to a significant increase in agency. Economic constraints in Lebanon are so severe that many locally produced basics, like meat and fish, are now prohibitively expensive, while many imported necessities, like medication and gasoline, simply do not exist in the country. The vast majority of Kurds in Lebanon cannot vote and many are unemployed. Celebrating under

these circumstances is radical, not because it *changes* the circumstances, but because it shows a population-wide commitment to expression of a collective identity *despite* living each day in some of the worst conditions globally.

The daily situation of those left in Lebanon is undoubtedly rife with deprivation. It is clear that many refugees conceive of Lebanon paradoxically, simultaneously a space "in between" two others that must be traversed to reach "home," *and* a purgatory that they, like their parents, may never manage to leave. If lifeworlds require *some* sense of stability or consistency, then Lebanon may currently act as a borderlands even for some "native" Lebanese. Poverty dispels the ability to rely on expectations, exposing existential absurdity, robbing populations of stability and metaphorically condemning them to nomadism in a protracted borderland desert with few oases. But shared deprivations have spurred the development of solidarity before, and has the potential to do so again in Lebanon. Kurds may be able to overcome stale, outdated resentments between identity groups if they can form solidarity with other groups by beckoning to shared grievances.

Hajj details solidarity of this type amongst the migrant musicians of Istanbul (Kurtişoğlu, Öztürk, and Hajj 2016; Hajj 2016). The diversity of this urban setting, the relatively high ratio of recently-displaced Syrian refugees alongside established, even multigenerational refugee populations, and the severe economic constraints due to Turkey's currency collapse all echo social dynamics present in Beirut. To Hajj, shared expressions of "common otherness" allow refugees to forge intense interpersonal ties with each other, based on a feeling of compassion logicked by relatedness. Articulating ties of solidarity in performances, the refugee musicians of Istanbul "perform the immigration" not only for the emotional catharsis that honest expression can provide,

but also to forge and nurture the dense network of kinship ties that form a community. Though these performances are an act of "voicing" particular experiences of migrancy and do not inherently accompany an increase in agency or mobility, Hajj details a method of clarifying the voice and dispelling confusion from its message. Political stifling is still obviously a problem, but is minimized by the self-sufficiency of the community; though these musicians aim to make a living by performing, they also support each other by frequently attending performances even when the performer speaks and sings in a language that they do not understand. In this group, musician migrants share the "spiritual substance" of art and expression despite poverty and the need to compete for the same jobs, and form relationships that are arguably *more* meaningful in the lack of a biological basis. The power of relating to others through the voicing of shared grievances can seemingly evoke such interpersonal sentiment that it can overwhelm economic motivations.

Both intensely political spaces with diverse, refugee-heavy populations, Beirut and Istanbul are cities currently that face some similar issues despite developing along very divergent trajectories. The type of solidarity network that emulates kinship networks in subaltern communities of musicians in Istanbul has also been ethnographically evidenced in Lebanon. Amongst the limited field of anthropology discussing friendship, within the few pieces that propose, as I do, that discussions of kinship belong within a larger rubric of interpersonal relatedness, is a brief ethnography of Lebanon's Arsal, which Michelle Obeid portrays as a town that acts like a village (2010). In Arsal, social connections are privileged as comparable and, most importantly, *compatible* with kinship ties; both can be referred to as '*ishra*, which Obeid (via Abu-Lughod) calls "the bond of living together or sharing a life." Even though Arsalis do

ultimately privilege their relationships with kin over their friendships, *'ishra* is present in relationships if they achieve "a kin-like status with equivalent value and prospects of permanence" (Ibid.). This implies that relationships with kin are privileged since they are *automatically* ascribed a permanence that cannot be helped, but also that kin and non-kin ties are evaluated by the same rubric, one that demands, firstly, a profound "seeing" of each other, and secondly, "the sharing of bread and salt" (amongst the "substances" that may be shared to form kin ties in Ladislav Holy's definition). Though kin relationships in Arsal tend to do better when evaluated by this rubric due to the assumption of permanence, all *'ishra* assigns enduring social obligations to both parties involved. At the point where Obeid articulates friendship as "part of an all encompassing ideology of sociality at the heart of which lies kinship," I fail to see a meaningful difference between the operation of kin and non-kin solidarity, nor between "relatedness" and *'ishra*.

The network of relationships between Kurdish refugees and other inhabitants of Istanbul operates in a very similar manner to Obeid's *'ishra*. Kurds like Hajj share what few resources they have with other members, since they relate so intensely with each other that they *choose* to take on social obligations to each other. "Shared otherness" forges a solidarity so intense that it can dissolve the meaningful boundary between "me" and "you," so if you suffer, I do as well. Though Lebanon's Kurds currently have little hope of gaining economic mobility, I see a possibility of a *social* mobility forming that may help dispel resentments between refugee groups in Lebanon at the very least. More optimistically, though the forging of these relationships may only increase the population of *listeners* to the voice of Kurds, a resultant solidarity may allow for the consolidation of Kurdish civil society into one less confused voice. Furthermore, the

ubiquity of the "low-level panic" in the country brought on by extreme, stagnant poverty means that "shared otherness" may, in fact, be the most populous way to communicate. Grievances with the deepest, most inherent structures of Lebanon's government means that even many Lebanese citizens feel "other" to the government, and the decline of support for the state's "traditional" parties means that many Lebanese currently feel that *no* part of their government is *for* them, or *represents* them. Today, it seems likely that a Kurdish appeal to "shared otherness" may not just be effective in forging solidarity with other minority or refugee groups but with Lebanese communities as well, who may be able to empathize with the deprivations faced by Kurdish refugees more now than pre-hyperinflation.

Though I am far from the first to advocate solidarity between identity groups to pursue expansions in agency, I see a particular amount of yet-unaccessed social compatibility between Kurdish and Lebanese communities. Lifeworlds present in both have been reduced to grim absurdity as individuals are unable to pursue meaningful goals and even struggle to stay alive as overlapping crises and shortages continue to eat away at security and sanity. It is the interpersonal solidarity that can be cultivated from the ubiquity of the country's stagnancy that may be leveraged into hope. A shared fixation on occupying public space may help bridge groups in Lebanon. Kurds, denied a homeland for a century, empathize with the anti-Solidere movement and framed *Newroz*'s occupation of the Dalieh as a contribution to the popular movement against the exclusionary private development of city spaces as early as 2015 (Battah). But broader and more compelling sentiments of resistance can be shared as well. The Kurdish celebration of *Newroz despite* economic circumstances is a practice of *resisting* absurdity through juxtaposition, a performance that demonstrates the resilience of the

human condition by pulling joy to the fore and pushing the suffering, which is expected to override all else, to the background. Perhaps the *Newroz* tradition of jumping over the bonfire, still practiced on the Dalieh today, reminds Kurds of the previous generations' devotion to the Kurdish identity and the reproduction of meaning itself, and their own commitment to the same goal despite the constant danger of getting burned.

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