The Kurds and Their "Others": Fragmented Identity and Fragmented Politics

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The Kurds constitute the largest stateless nation in the contemporary world. Some thirty million Kurds live in Kurdistan under the national jurisdiction of the four sovereign states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, which in various ways deny Kurdish national identity and suppress its political and cultural manifestations by the force of arms. The division of Kurdistan after the First World War and the consequent structural diversity of Kurdish societies, administered by different political and economic regimes, have deprived the Kurds of political unity and cultural cohesion. Kurdish political organizations and movements, proliferating in the divided Kurdistan since 1918, have assumed different forms and pursued different objectives, but opposition to the denial of Kurdish identity and resistance to the imposed "national" identities remain the fundamental cause of Kurdish rebellions. This dialectic of denial and resistance defines the political form and character of Kurdish nationalism.**1**

Kurdish nationalism is the politics of the affirmation of Kurdish national identity. Kurdish national identity is a product of modernity, albeit a specific form of it, associated in a close and specific way with the institution of the modern nation-state.**2** It has its roots in the political and cultural processes and practices of the construction of the modern nation-state and national identity in the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria in the inter-war period. The denial of Kurdish ethnicity and ethnic and national identities was the necessary condition of these processes in these societies. But the emergent national states in these countries, and the official nationalist discourses which were constructed to legitimize their authoritarian rule and hegemonist political culture, varied substantially in form and character. Their structural dynamics charted diverse paths of modernization and development, with diverse effects on the general political and cultural processes of denial and exclusion of Kurdish identity in their respective national territories.**3** Kurdish national identity has borne the mark of this political and cultural diversity of the "other;" it has been deeply fragmented since its inception.

This diversity of the "other," however, defines not only the fragmentation of Kurdish national identity but also its specifically transnational character. The dialectic of denial and resistance assigns a specifically transnational character to Kurdish nationalism which, given favorable regional conditions, may surpass the political and cultural fragmentation of Kurdish identity. But this has never been more than a theoretical possibility. For the transnational ethos of Kurdish nationalism, too, has its structural limitations in the internal conditions and diverse development of Kurdish societies. These conditions — most significantly the underdeveloped social structure and the weakness of the bourgeoisie in urban areas, coupled with the entrenched power of landlordism and tribalism in the countryside — have seriously debased the transnational character of Kurdish nationalism, effectively undermining its centripetal tendencies. Kurdish nationalism, too, remains deeply fragmented. Deprived of its structural, political and cultural unity, it is reduced to local autonomist movements driven with parochial interests and clientelist relations.

The persistent failure of Kurdish nationalism to transcend the structural limits of this political and cultural fragmentation, and its metamorphosis into abortive regional autonomist movements, is rooted in the chronic weakness of civil society in Kurdistan. This weakness, perpetuated by the violence of the "other," is the primary cause of this undignified metamorphosis in Kurdish

politics. It defines, more acutely than any other factor, the abyss separating nationalism from regional autonomy and "ethnic collectivism," and is a poignant reminder of the bitter lesson of modern European politics, that there is a necessary link between civil society and nationalism: a thriving and active civil society is the "condition of possibility" of the concept of popular sovereignty in modern society, ensuring its articulation in the democratic political process in the face of the centralizing tendencies of the modern state.**4** The practical logic of this originally West European lesson on nationalism perhaps applies to the divided Kurdistan more clearly than anywhere else in the contemporary world, with the notable exception of the troubled lands of the post-communist Balkans where civil society had been no less systematically undermined. Now, more than ever before in its history, Kurdish nationalism needs to be grounded in an active and growing civil society not just because it has to overcome the centrifugal tendencies of a deeply fragmented politics, but also, and more importantly, because it has to create a nationalist political culture to enable it to withstand the crushing force of four violently aggressive official nationalisms.

The autonomist movements which currently dominate the Kurdish political scene are neither willing nor able to create such a culture; on the contrary, they thrive on the persistent weakness of civil society in Kurdistan. Characteristically parochial in ethos, they only affirm the fragmented nature of Kurdish national identity; they cannot overcome it. In fact, when they are patronized, maintained and used in cross-border politics by neighboring sovereign states against their own fragmented self, as is often the case in the region, the autonomist movements seriously obscure the political and cultural boundaries separating ethnic and national identities. They characteristically have an ambiguous identity, vacillating between nationalism and ethnicism, often changing form and direction in pursuit of parochial interests and "immediate" political objectives. This ambiguity defines the discourse and practice of the autonomist movements, witnessed by their farcical politics and tragic history. The ambiguous relationship of the autonomist movements to their respective "others" on the one hand, and their conflict of interest with and opposition to the Kurds and Kurdish movements across the national borders on the other, cannot but exacerbate the fragmentation and diversity of the Kurdish national identity. Driven by parochialism and clientelist interests, the autonomist movements too often evoke the grotesque image of Kurdish identity turned against itself, torturing the tormented parts of its own fragmented self.

Foreign patronage and internal clientelism, the two fundamental elements of Kurdish autonomist movements, are both opposed to Kurdish national identity. They feed on and bolster ethnic relations and ethnic identities in Kurdistan, perpetuating the structural weakness and cultural backwardness of Kurdish nationalism. The periodic rise and demise of the autonomist movements in parts of Kurdistan testifies to this political truth. But beyond the retarding effects of the autonomist movements on the structural development and cultural formation of Kurdish nationalism, their persistence as the dominant mode of expression of Kurdish identity seems to point to a more grim conclusion; it looks as if modernity has bypassed Kurdish politics altogether.

This conclusion derives from the internal logic of the stagnant politics pursued by the autonomist movements in contemporary Kurdistan. These movements are essentially "reactive" rather than proactive, and like all reactive politics, their dynamics are characteristically "external;" they are located outside their geopolitical boundaries, in the power and capacity of the central governments to establish and exercise territorial centralism in Kurdistan. Hence their rise and fall always stands in an inverse ratio to the power and capacity of their respective central governments. The specific internal logic and dynamics of autonomist politics are by no means new in Kurdish history; they have a long and well-established pre-modern ancestry. They are strictly in line with the "reactive" nature and "external" dynamics of the "center-periphery"

politics which defined the relationship between the Kurdish principalities and their Persian and Ottoman overlords. In this sense, therefore, the fundamental ethos and characteristic features of Kurdish politics have hardly changed for nearly two centuries. This ominous historical continuity is not just in spite of modernity but in the face of it. It signifies the historical stagnation of Kurdish politics.**5**

It would, however, be a grave theoretical oversight, as well as a political folly, to attribute the political specificity of Kurdish nationalism solely to the internal conditions of Kurdish societies. True, the power and persistence of premodern and anti-modern political and cultural forces and relations in the existing Kurdish societies account for the fragmentary character of Kurdish national identity, but only in part. For a rapid survey of recent theoretical writing on the politics of identity reminds us that identity, national or otherwise, always presupposes difference and is inconceivable without it. Identity is a relationship of the self and the other in difference; it always entails the trace of the other, and is ever haunted by it. Never fixed or stable, it changes in response to the difference(s) which defines the identity of the "other."**6** This preliminary definition contains a simple theoretical point: identities stand in a relationship of "difference" with one another and change according to the change in the system of difference(s) which defines this relationship. They are always relational.

The implication of this theoretical point for our argument is clear: the political specificity of Kurdish nationalism is also defined in part by the changing relationship of Kurdish identity to its "others." This relationship, which is already implicit in the dialectic of denial and resistance, is one of violence, of political exclusion and suppression of "difference." The perpetual suppression of Kurdish identity is the condition of the Kurds' "otherness" in these societies, their position as strangers in their own homes. That the Kurds remain unrepresentable is the fundamental cause of their obsession with their identity. This dialectics of violence defines not only the ethos of Kurdish national identity, but also the modality of its relationship with its others. It assigns a specific character to Kurdish nationalism, setting it apart from classical nationalism in Western Europe.

For while classical nationalism in Europe was inaugurated by modernity and accompanied by the birth of civil society and democratic citizenship, Kurdish nationalism, precipitated by the denial of Kurdish identity, rests by contrast on the suppression of civil society and democratic citizenship in Kurdistan. It is a modern politics which thrives on the suppression of the conditions of modernity in Kurdistan: a paradox characteristic of the politics of forced assimilation systematically practiced by its others.

This paradox, more than anything else, accounts for the ambiguous relationship of Kurdish nationalism to modernity; an ambiguity which clearly lies at the root of its political weakness. True, the structural conditions of Kurdish nationalism have not allowed it to appreciate the political and cultural achievements of modernity. This was so in the formative period of Kurdish nationalism and it holds true today. The Kurdish nationalists' enthusiasm for and appreciation of modernity has seldom surpassed the limits of a positivist belief in modern science and technology. This positivist belief in modern scientific-technical knowledge, characteristically encapsulated in mo dernist propositions for social "progress," easily overlooks the most radical function of "reason" in modernity; that is, the critique of tradition, and in particular of traditional authority, political and religious. Hence the by-now common, though still largely mute, ambivalence of the nationalist intelligentsia towards tradition and traditional authority, voiced, if at all, in the banal language of self-justification in the wake of the political-military defeats repeatedly suffered by the autonomist movements. This ambivalence is the logical corollary of

the ambiguous relationship of the nationalist intelligentsia to modernity. They presuppose each other, running in tandem through the very core of nationalist discourse, and undermining its internal cohesion.

Although the ambivalence of the nationalist intelligentsia towards traditional authority effectively emasculates "political reason," it is by no means the only cause of the chronic weakness of modernity in Kurdish nationalist politics and culture. This, we have seen, has another and more important reason. The violence of the "other" and the suppression of difference and of civil society in Kurdistan, which perpetuates and reproduces the fragmentation of Kurdish national identity and nationalist politics, also effectively undermines the political and cultural conditions of modernity. So the story is more complex than it seems: modernity did not bypass Kurdish nationalism, but rather created it without affirming it in discourse or in practice.

The paradoxical outcome of this historical process is still with us; we have Kurdish nationalists without Kurdish nationalism — a historical anomaly which is nevertheless true.**7** However, here we are not dealing with this historical anomaly but with the specific political and cultural process which created it, that is, the process of the construction of the nation-state in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, which began soon after the second division of Kurdistan. This process assumed a different form in each one of these four cases. But its strategic objective everywhere remained the same: to construct states whose identity was defined by the collective identity of their populations. This was deemed essential for the legality and legitimacy of political power.

Theoretically, political authority in the new states was constitutional and democratic; it was derived from the collective will of the people, not from the whim of the reigning despot. Constitutionally, the democratic doctrine of "popular sovereignty" provided the juridical ground for the making of this modern identity, but the ensuing political and cultural processes were very different.

The identity of the new states, their assumed unity with their respective nations, was forged by military power and new "official/national" ideologies. The process of territorial centralism which followed the formation of these states ensured that the popular will embodied in the executive and legislative authority was exercised throughout their designated territories in a uniform manner and without regional and local opposition or insubordination. But the new states soon found out that the realization of their modern claims to authority and legitimacy required more than an effective control over their recognized "national" territories. Modernity had shifted the traditional locus of political power.**8**

Thus the exercise of effective control over territory became increasingly tied to the exercise of effective control over its population, the "subjects/citizens" of the new state. In fact, the population became the strategic objective of political power, which sought to affirm that the state and the nation were not only coterminous but also indivisible. This assumed "organic" unity of the nation and the state was simultaneously reiterated by official nationalisms, which became the ideological component of the processes of the construction of the nation-state in these entities. The official discourse held that the nation and the state were the same, that they had the same identity; they were both sovereign and indivisible. The will of the state and its capacity to rule signified the will and power of the nation, the conditions of its independent existence.

The processes of state formation in these countries were modern, as were their intended and unintended outcomes. It is the democratic identity of the state and the nation, the ruler and the ruled, which changes the strategic objective of political power. The modern state defines the identity of its citizens by targeting and suppressing "difference," that is, ethnic and cultural

difference, thus bringing them in line with the identity of the sovereign, the national identity. Modern national identity is usually, though not always, the ethnic identity of the majority writ large by politics. In this sense, therefore, the nation-state and statelessness are both products of modernity. They are the dialectical opposites of the same historical process.

Although the institution of nation-state and its associated political and cultural processes and practices are widely hailed as the most impressive achievement of modernity, statelessness and its consequences are seldom accorded the same privileged position in modern philosophical and political discourse. The stateless person is seen as a relic of the past fighting against modernity, or merely as an accident of modernity fighting against history; either way the result is the same: the stateless and his/her claims cannot be represented in or by the political and philosophical discourse of modernity, at least not as politics.**9** In the political discourse of modernity statelessness is conceived as a humanitarian issue, evoking compassion and mercy, on a par with famine, hunger and homelessness. This is because a consideration of statelessness as politics and the stateless as a "political subject" immediately invokes the thorny issue of rights, which, in the political discourse of modernity, is intrinsically linked with the institution of the nation-state and national sovereignty. Little wonder therefore that the stateless have no modern political identity. The identity and the claims of the stateless are denied by the modern nation-state, which turns the stateless into the historical other of modernity. This leads us back to the plight of the Kurds and their fragmented identity.

The sovereign states which suppressed Kurdish identity claimed popular-democratic legitimacy, and their claim, like all universal claims of modernity, was rooted in the Enlightenment and capitalist production. But liberal culture and the capitalist relations of production were still fairly rudimentary when the violent processes of state formation started in these countries. This meant that the uniform identity of the nation and the state, presumed and asserted in their constitutions, had to be forged by the force of arms. In practice, therefore, the process was reversed. It was the emergent states which defined the identity of their respective nations — both the outer boundary and the inner core of their national identities — in uneven historical processes in which cultural relations almost invariably lagged behind political relations. Hence the ideological weakness of official nationalisms in Turkey, Iran and (later on) Iraq, which had to be bolstered by intensifying the use of political violence in the processes of construction of uniform sovereign nations and national identities in these countries.

This reversal of process, however, was by no means a unique feature of nationalism in these societies. On the contrary, the pivotal role of the modern state in the construction of the nation and national identity, much noted in contemporary scholarship, is the hallmark of nationalism worldwide. The nation is the "political form" of modernity, but almost everywhere in the modern world it was beaten into shape by the state which also gave it its history and identity.**10**

This universal truth of nationalism also means that the political form of modernity is universal, but only in its particularity; that is, the modern states which make modern nations and define their identities vary in form and character, and these variations are historically constituted by the articulation of pre-modern forces and relations in modern political and cultural processes and practices. The strategic use of the past is intrinsic to the political and cultural processes and practices of the construction of the nation and national identity, but it is never without a cost. The cost is particularly high when nationalism is obsessed with the past and mobilizes it in order to create a modern future. For this obsession with the past undermines the relationship of the nation to modernity. Ethnicity replaces political reason as the main, if not the sole, principle defining the boundaries of an integrated national space in which the business of government is conducted.

This displacement of political reason by ethnicity is a perversion of modernity which, against a background of chronic economic backwardness, engenders monsters.

The sovereign nations which were thus constructed by the modern states in Turkey, Iran (and later on) Iraq and Syria were the political forms of this perverted modernity. Their relationship with modernity had been interrupted by authoritarian states which embodied reason. But reason driven by sovereign ethnicity could hardly create the necessary conditions for rationalization in their multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies. No wonder therefore that their violent drive for secularization led to armed opposition by the Kurds, who quickly turned against their authoritarian strategies of modernization. The perversion of modernity had seriously undermined the socio-cultural space which mediates between modernization and secularization in society.

It was this disarticulation of the strategies of modernization and secularization in the new "national" political field which drove "official reason" into a war against religion and tradition. The "official reason" embodied in the new states was a pillar of their authoritarian rule. It was mobilized to legitimize their strategies of modernization and secularization, but in "national" political fields defined by sovereign ethnicities. The result was the marginalisation of non-sovereign/subordinate ethnicities, whose opposition to the new states was heavily colored by religion and tradition. The early Kurdish rebellions in Turkey and Iran were precisely reactions against this marginalisation. The modern states had constituted national political fields in which they were unrepresented and unrepresentable.

Nor was the crucial incongruity between politics and culture just a historical accident belonging to the infancy of these nation-states; it was rather a permanent feature of their political processes, having its corollary in the constitutional definition of citizenship in the emergent nation-states. The doctrine of popular sovereignty, which defined the nature of authority and legitimacy in the constitutions of these states, was seriously undermined by notions of citizenship which bore the identity of their dominant ethnicity. Those who did not qualify as ethnic Turks, Persians or Arabs were also excluded from citizenship of the emergent national states unless they renounced/denied their own ethnic and cultural identities. Those who failed to do so were forced to comply, and comply they eventually did, though often after initial acts of resistance, insubordination and revolt. For them membership of the new states was far from being free or voluntary; it was sanctioned by political compulsion. In fact, there was, and still is, in the constitutions of these states an essential incongruity between the conditions of sovereignty and the conditions of citizenship. This gap between popular sovereignty and "ethnic" citizenship is bridged by political coercion, the main regulator of the relationship between the sovereign and the Kurds in these four national states.

This last point is particularly instructive. It suggests that political coercion and violence will persist in Kurdistan in so far as the conditions defining the relationship between the Kurdish and the sovereign identities remain unchanged. The most important issue in this respect, repeatedly witnessed by the brief but violent history of this relationship, is the modern conception of political sovereignty enshrined in the constitutions of these states. This conception has defined the boundaries of the Kurdish and sovereign identities, informing the conduct of these states vis -a-vis their Kurdish communities. This conception of sovereignty entails a trans-historical view of political power, beyond the realm of concrete politics as "management of conduct" in the "relations of force" in society. The notion of politics informed by the sovereign conception of political power remains outside the shifting boundaries of the existing relations among the actual political forces, and hence insusceptible to their dynamics and change. It is detrimental to the

conduct of good government. The conduct of these states, their government of the Kurdish communities, should therefore be effectively detached from the issue of sovereignty. The administration of the Kurdish communities should instead be treated as a political process, belonging to the general realm of power and administration of the citizens.

A few words by way of explanation are in order. The modern conception of sovereignty is problematic: it defines the identity and legitimacy of political power while remaining external to the conduct of the state. It entails a juridico-political principle for the codification of political power which presupposes no reference to civil society. The modern concept of sovereignty as such signifies a unified "national political field" inhabited by individuals as "unified subjects" whose identity is defined by the identity of political power, which is always uniform, fixed and ethnic. In principle, therefore, it recognizes no difference, and the existing political, economic and cultural differences and interests in civil society are either excluded from the "national political field" or subsumed in the totalizing reason of the state. In both cases, however, the result is the same: the exclusion or suppression of identities which do not conform to the uniform ethnic identity of political power codified in the constitution, and hence the designation of their expressions in the national political field as unconstitutional and illegitimate. The conduct of political power geared to sovereignty leads to the *"etatisation"* of civil society, inhibiting its growth and development.

Crucial in this respect is the concept of citizenship, which regulates the relationship of the individuals, groups and communities within civil society to political power.**11** The concept of citizenship associated with sovereignty always bears the ethnic identity of political power. It is the primary locus of the unifying functions of the state within the juridical framework of sovereignty, and hence the primary means of the exclusion of non-sovereign political and cultural identities from the political process even if they express their demands for the recognition of their "rights" in peaceful and constitutional ways. In so far as sovereignty remains the fundamental principle of the conduct of politics in the modern state, the concept of citizenship cannot provide a basis for the articulation of the democratic rights and interests of the non-sovereign identities — individuals, groups and communities — in the "national" political process.

These identities, rights and interests, it was argued, have their roots in modernity, but no concept of modern politics which is derived from or associated with sovereignty can understand or explain the "lived experience" of the non-sovereign in the juridico-political framework of the modern state. The paradox calls for an understanding, if not a solution.

Sovereignty, Governance and Civil Society: The Argument

The first step in this direction, this explanation suggests, is the implementation of radical constitutional reforms whereby the prevailing "ethnic" conceptions of citizenship are replaced by democratic notions of citizenship which exclude all ethnic, racial and religious or cultural qualification for membership of state and society. But this proposition is not effective in isolation; in fact it will subvert its own theoretical premises if the proposed constitutional reforms do not at the same time include a radical redefinition of the uniform ethnic identity of political power in these states: that is to say, a redefinition of the relationship between government and the legal unity of the state, which in effect involves a redefinition of the objectives, methods and tasks of political power in these societies. This is imperative for the proposed constitutional reform to succeed. But the critique of the juridical unity of the concept of sovereignty points to another, and more important, condition which lies at the root of the radical redefinition of the conduct of the state. This condition concerns the relationship between political power and civil society: the

redefinition of the conduct of the state requires a new juridical framework for the codification of political power which necessarily involves a reference to civil society. It must take into account its ethnic, racial and cultural diversity, ensuring effective representation for all groups in the juridical codification of political power.

A consideration of the specificity of civil society is of vital importance in the attempt to redefine the identity of political power and the conduct of the government in the modern state. It is, in this sense, the correlative of the conduct of modern government; an essential prerequisite of a radical departure from the increasing *"etatisation* of society," perpetually reinforced by the discourse and practice of sovereignty, and the transition to the "governmentalization of the state" which could ensure a genuine democratization of the political process in the modern state. For a redefinition of the identity and conduct of political power in terms of the political "technology of government" requires a civil society capable of representing forms of ethnic subjectivity and difference as invariables of a democratic political process in which governmental tasks and objectives are the sole principle of political struggle and contestation.**12**

The above argument refers to the unique position civil society occupies in the definition of the functional limits and boundaries of political (sovereign) power in the modern
state. This is because civil society signifies an entity which is located in the unifying framework of the legal regulations of the state but is inaccessible to its centralizing functions.**13** It is in this sense both "internal" and "external" to the modern state, a "transactional" domain at the frontier of political power and all that which eludes its centralizing effects.**14** As such the boundaries of civil society define the limits of the centralizing functions of political power, the range of their efficacy in the modern state, hence creating the crucial space for the government to deploy appropriate techniques for its conduct in pursuit of national security. The point, however, is that when the techniques of government involve a reference to civil society they also involve a redefinition of the relationship between the subject and political power — that is, a redefinition of the rights and liberties usually associated with the concept of citizenship — which means that the freedom of the subject-population vis -a-vis the state becomes a central component of the predominant rationality of government, an essential condition of its conduct in society.**15** In this sense, therefore, civil society enables the government to address political problems without requiring forms of legitimacy which are derived from a prior obligation on the part of its subjects-citizens to obey its authority. In other words, the conduct of the government no longer requires sources of legitimacy outside its own functional efficacy.**16**

The argument for separating the Kurdish question from political sovereignty is, in effect, a quest to redefine the character of this question in the "national" politics of these states. The ransformation of the Kurdish question from a question of national security to a practical political issue in the daily conduct of the government, we have seen, above all requires a corresponding change in the identity of political power in these states, a proposition which is effectively inconceivable without reference to civil society and its pivotal role in the restructuration/reconstruction of the political process. The order of reasoning thus points to the political "objectification" of civil society as both the means and the condition of the requisite transition from sovereignty to governmentality in these states.**17** The political objectification of civil society, in a manner discussed above, can ensure the autonomous rationality of government whereby the central question of how to govern, that is, of finding the appropriate techniques for dealing with problems of state-national security, can be posed and answered without invoking notions of authority and legitimacy associated with the concept of sovereignty.**18**

Civil Society and Kurdish Identity in Turkey and Iran

But what of the actual state of civil society in Turkey and Iran?**19** Is it mature enough to ensure such a transformation in the identity of political power? Debate on the nature and boundaries of civil society in Iran and Turkey indicates a wide range of opinion. The current arguments largely bear the mark of the political and cultural conditions which precipitated them, that is, the struggles for the democratization of the political process, which clearly involve redefinitions of the limits of political power and hence of the boundaries of civil society. In this sense, therefore, the arguments for civil society in Turkey and Iran are inseparable from the popular quest for the democratization of the political process: civil society is conceived as a means of delimiting the boundaries of political power, enhancing popular participation in the political process and ensuring democratic accountability.

This relationship with democratization defines the political and theoretical contours of the debate on civil society. The competing conceptions of civil society, and the attempts to define its character and boundaries, are closely related to the strategies of democratization and mobilization and the forms of struggle which they involve. The point is of particular importance in this context. For it means that the character and boundaries of civil society and the actual degree of its development and maturity would clearly depend on the outcome of the prevailing forms of struggle for democratization of the political process, which are contingent upon the changing balance of forces in the political field in Turkey and Iran. In other words, the politics of democratization which defines the contours and shifting boundaries of both political power and civil society is not only inseparable from the quest to redefine the identity of political power but identical with it. They constitute the two sides of the same process.

The strategic question in this respect is therefore, how democratic are the quests for democratization of the political process in Turkey and Iran? Or in other words, how democratic are the arguments for civil society in Turkey and Iran? The answer to this question involves a swift survey of the conceptual formations of the current debates in Turkey and Iran. In view of the subject matter of this essay, the survey will be concerned particularly with the issues of ethnicity and ethnic and national difference in the democratic process. While in Turkey ethnicity and the ethnic issue in non-official and semi -official discourse in the academy and the media are veiled references to the Kurdish question, in Iran the issue is more complex. Iran is composed of many non-sovereign ethnic communities; numerically the Azari community is by far the largest of them, with the Kurdish community in second place. But in political terms, the Kurds continue to occupy the forefront of opposition to the sovereign identity, and the suppression of Kurdish identity has played a more important role in the construction and definition of the uniform Iranian national identity, at least since the collapse of the Azarbayjan republic in 1947, when Azari nationalism lost its political cohesion and direction.

It is thus justified, in political terms, to say that in contemporary Iran the discourse and practice of ethnic and national difference refers primarily to the Kurds and Kurdish identity.

Arguments for civil society in Turkey vary widely in form and character. Nonetheless, they share common theoretical presuppositions. It is assumed that civil society and democratic order are interdependent; they are the conditions of the existence of each other — a mature democracy presupposes a mature civil society, and vice versa. This mutual interdependence is required to delimit the boundaries of political power and ensure public accountability, a condition necessary for the survival and development of both civil society and democratic order. These presuppositions thus serve as points of reference for these arguments. It is commonly agreed that there exists in Turkey a limited though quite vibrant civil society alongside a weak but functional

democratic political process. A strong interventionist state and an aggressive nationalist ideology are held responsible for this mutual weakness of civil society and democratic process in Turkey, especially in view of a steady rise in the executive power of the state at the expense of the legislative and judiciary, precipitated by three successive military coups and the growing power of the military in national politics since 1960. The accent of the argument here is on the autonomy of civil society, perceived as an institutional field outside the juridical domain of state power, but increasingly violated by the expanding range and increasing efficacy of its centralizing functions within the Turkish society at large. The arguments for civil society, then, are arguments for the expansion and consolidation of the democratic process but within the juridicopolitical framework of Turkish sovereignty as codified in the 1980 constitution.**20**

The arguments for civil society in Turkey seldom exceed the confines of this framework, which, as was seen, is the intersection of sovereignty and official Kemalist ideology. In fact, they mostly involve conceptions of political power, authority and legitimacy which are intrinsic to Turkish sovereignty, and notions of political agency and practice which are defined by the principles of Kemalism. The commitment to secularism, the Turkish nation-state and Turkish civilization required by Kemalism and demanded by its civil and military guardians within and outside the state apparatuses in effect delineates the boundaries of the contemporary discourse on democratization and civil society.

Kurdish and Islamic identities are thus by definition outside the domain of constitutional politics. They exist, if at all, as "extra-political" issues requiring extra-political means of expression and solution. There is therefore a closure, a silence, in the discourses of democratization and civil society on the questions of Kurdish and Islamic identity.

This closure/silence, which amounts to the denial/exclusion of these identities from the discourse and practice of civil society and democratization, is justified within the normative framework of the constitution, which sanctions violence against the non-sovereign others. The persistence of this anti-democratic closure/silence, and the legitimation of the denial of the difference and violence against the other in the discourse of democratization and civil society in contemporary Turkey, confirms above all the practical truth of our theoretical argument: the development of civil society is inconceivable without changing the identity of political power. They are the two sides of the same process; they presuppose each other. A mature civil society implies democratization of the political process through which the change in the identity of political power in Turkey can be thought.

This general overview is by no means an exhaustive survey of the contemporary debate on civil society in Turkey. There are also a few, and more radical, contributions which manage to break out of this normative framework, though only partially. For they go only as far as recognizing the necessity of including the Kurdish and Islamic identities in the discourse of civil society and democracy in Turkey, without taking into account the implications for either Kemalism or the identity of political power in the Turkish polity. Hence a recognition of the cultural identity of the Kurds and the associated cultural rights and liberties also forms the basis of their prescribed solution to the Kurdish question in Turkey. According to these arguments, political decentralization and a redefinition of the limits of political power thus suffice to ensure the democratic development of civil society. They are never extended to include the question of sovereignty and the identity of political power. Notwithstanding the radicalism of these arguments in the Turkish political scene, this shortcoming must significantly reduce their political import.**21**

There are different reasons for this shortcoming, both political and theoretical. There can be little doubt that political prudence and the fear of state persecution are major considerations in this regard, as is commitment to specific essentialist theoretical discourses which remain oblivious to the relationship between civil society and the identity of political power. The main reason, however, is the political ambivalence of the democratic intelligentsia towards Kemalism and its commitment not only to modernity, but above all to secularism and the rational organization of the state and society. This ambivalence, which is nurtured by the commitment of the democratic intelligentsia to modernity and the supremacy of reason, looms large in the contemporary democratic evaluation of Kemalism. It is no exaggeration to say that Kemalism continues to define the limits of democratic argument in Turkey, especially with respect to the Kurdish identity and rights.

In Iran the current debate on civil society has a different political context, conceptual framework and strategic objective. It is an important aspect of political factionalism and power struggle within the Islamic regime since the presidential elections in 1997, and a vehicle for the discursive representation of the contending positions on the character of political authority, government and legitimacy in the Islamic Republic. The political specificity of the debate gives it an immediacy which is lacking in the Turkish equivalent. But as in Turkey, in Iran too the boundaries of the civil society debate are defined by the sovereign discourse, that is, political Islam, and more specifically radical political Shi'ism identified with the person of Khomeini and the revolutionary leadership**.22**

The centrality of Islam and Islamic institutions and identity to the debate assigns a strategic character to it. This is mainly due to the fact that political Islam defines not only the ethos of the regime but also the identity of political power in the Islamic Republic. But Islam and Islamic identity feature on two different levels in the current civil society debate in Iran: a general historical level and a specific political level. Although these two levels are not fully delineated, conceptually or politically, and mostly complement one another in the argument, they are nevertheless distinct in that they entail different notions of political power, authority and legitimacy, and hence deploying and privileging different definitions of the concept of civil society in the discourse.

On the general level the argument is historical and comparative. It is concerned mainly with the compatibility of Islamic juridico-political and cultural processes and practices with modern secular political and cultural processes and practices historically associated with the rise of civil society in the West. The underlying assumption therefore is that civil society is an aspect of modernity presupposing determinate discursive and non-discursive processes and practices which are given to the histories of the modern Western societies. This assumption defines the historicist character and comparative perspective of the debate. The bulk of the arguments against the presence or the possibility of the development of civil society in Iran are informed by essentialist conceptions of Islam and modernity. These are perceived as incompatible if not mutually exclusive: Iranian society is essentially Islamic, and this uniform Islamic essence which defines the course and direction of its history cannot provide for the development of civil society, which is essentially a Western and hence alien institution. These essentialist arguments entail a very ambiguous notion of civil society, which is hardly explained, let alone conceptualized, in either Iranian or Western historical and political contexts.

But the essentialist Shi'i opposition to the concept of civil society is seldom confined to this argument alone. The comparative historical argument is more often than not compounded with another, strictly political, which derives its authority from Khomeini's doctrine of *Wilayat i Faqih* and the conceptions of government, power and sovereignty entailed in it. These conceptions are

repeatedly invoked to oppose and reject the notions of political power, sovereignty and legitimacy historically and conceptually associated with the rise and development of civil society in the West. So what actually warrants the essentialist rejection of civil society as non-Islamic and alien, however, is not so much its Western historical ancestry as its association with democracy and democratic governance, especially in the current phase of power struggle in the Islamic Republic.

In the particular context of the Islamic Republic, the discourse of civil society questions the identity of political power; it is democratic. It is, above all, democracy and democratic rule which is at stake in the power struggle and in the political orientation of the contending forces within the regime and the society at large. This point is particularly noteworthy, for it testifies both to the strategic character of the concept of civil society and to its instrumentality in the current political conjuncture in Iran.

The arguments for civil society and the need to develop and expand its domain in the Islamic Republic, on the other hand, find it compatible with Islam. The advocates of civil society do not form a homogeneous bloc politically or ideologically; Islamists and secularists are grouped together in a broad reformist alliance, which is sustained by their common opposition to the hardline Islamists identified with Khomeini's doctrine of *Wilayat i Faqih*, and especially its insistence on the indivisible unity of the religious political authorities in the sphere of government and the unassailable supremacy of the Sharia in the social and political o rganizations of the Islamic community.**23**

The secular intelligentsia almost invariably deploy the comparative historical framework, but their point of reference is mostly Iranian history rather than Islam. The latter, though remaining central to the argument, is taken to form only an aspect of the complex process of the historical development of Iranian society. Broadly speaking, in the secular argument civil society is variously conceived as an autonomous institutional ensemble outside the domain of political power but capable of delimiting its boundaries.

The autonomy of civil society and its role in delimiting the boundaries of political power both presuppose a democratic political process which is the essential condition of existence of civil society in the secular argument. The secular argument for civil society, in its various forms, is an argument for the democratization of the political process, but within a normative framework which by definition excludes non-sovereign identities and rights. The secular critique of the Islamic political sovereignty, implicit or explicit, is an argument in favor of national Iranian sovereignty in which the ethnic, i.e., the Persian, identity of the sovereign is never questioned. The secular democratic discourse on civil society hardly includes any reference to ethnic difference and identity. It clearly affirms the Persian identity of political power, and its imposition on non-Persian identities in Iranian society is seen as unproblematic, not violating the democratic character of the proposed secular alternative.**24**

The Islamist protagonists of civil society in Iran adopt a different approach which further confirms the strategic position of this concept in their reformist discourse. The Islamic reformists, both within and outside the government, use the concept of civil society to refer to the "rule of law" which, from their point of view, is coterminous with democracy.**25** The autonomy of the civil institutions from the state and their role in delimiting the boundaries of political power are also emphasized, but they do not define the conceptual contours of the reformist discourse, which are heavily coloured by the notions of "legality" and "responsibility" of power. The Islamic reformist preoccupation with these notions is an indication of the nature of political struggle and the hegemony of hardliners in the state apparatuses in the Islamic Republic. For the reformist

quest for "legal and responsible government" is but a thinly disguised attack on the doctrine of *Wilayat i Faqih*, the supreme principle for the organization of the state and politics advocated by their conservative adversaries. But despite its pivotal position in the debate, the concept of law remains rather ambiguous and little defined in the Islamic reformist discourse, especially with regard to the role of religion and religious authority in the process of legislation. The reformist argument for the "rule of law" is couched in the most general terms, leaving its content almost entirely unspecified. Hence the ambiguous status of religious authority in the reformist conception of civil society.

Nonetheless, the reformist emphasis on the legality and accountability of political power, and especially its identification of the rule of law and responsible government with democratic order and constitutional government respectively, may help throw some light on the issue. The expositions of the institutional form and juridico-political processes of the rule of law, often attempted in the context of Western historical development, indicate that the concept of law in the Islamic reformist discourse is secular, predicated on the sovereignty of reason. It is also secular law which defines the character of political authority and the boundaries of political power in the reformist discourse. The protagonists of the reformist discourse invoke the constitutional law to refer, though in quite different ways, to the source and limits of political power. Although in a normative political framework this could be taken to account for the democratic character of the reformist discourse, in the Iranian context it is quite different. This is due mainly to the specificity of the constitution of the Islamic Republic.

The constitution of the Islamic Republic contains two different and diametrically opposed conceptions of political sovereignty and authority, each entailing different notions of the source and boundaries of political power: the divine and the popular-democratic.**26** This conceptual diversity does not only undermine the political coherence of the Iranian constitution, but also turns it to a highly strategic ground for political contestation in the civil society debate.

The divine conception of sovereignty, which underpins the doctrine of the *Wilayat i Faqih*, essentially recognizes no limits to political power other than that which is prescribed by the Sharia. Nor does it allow for the expression of difference — national, ethnic or socio-economic. Muslims are subsumed under the general category of the Umma, denoting a uniform community defined by faith. The divine conception of sovereignty therefore entails a conception of polity which is coterminous with society; it leaves no room for any conception of civil society.

The popular-democratic conception of sovereignty, on the other hand, entails a conception of political authority and power whose boundaries are defined by law, which is also the basic principle of the legitimacy of the state. It does therefore clearly provide for the existence of civil society, legally delineating its boundaries and protecting it against the centralizing functions of political power, but without being able to recognize or respect national or ethnic difference in society at large. This grave anomaly in the populardemocratic conception of sovereignty has been discussed in some detail in the preceding section of this essay and need not be repeated here. It suffices to say that the ethnic identity of political power defines the boundaries of the demo cratic political process, thus marginalizing or excluding all non-sovereign national and ethnic differences from it. The non-sovereign nationalities and ethnicities are by the same token excluded from the juridico-political conditions of citizenship and hence from the democratic political process.

True, unlike the Turkish constitution, the constitution of the Islamic Republic recognizes ethnic difference; Iran is perceived as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, and this perception

unambiguously informs the relevant parts of the constitutional law. This amounts to the recognition of non-sovereign ethnic minorities in the Islamic Republic. But the notion of ethnic minority in the Iranian constitution is strictly cultural, designating a cultural community of language; a community of custom and tradition bound together by a common history. The ethnic community and its history are "local," they lack polit ical and discursive autonomy which, in the constitution, is only accorded to the sovereign, the Persian ethnicity. Thus, although ethnic identities are onstitutionally recognized, they remain strictly local, and juridico-political relations play no role in defining their boundaries. The concept of ethnic minority in the Iranian constitution is strictly cultural; it has no juridico-political identity, bearing no political rights vis - a-vis the sovereign, which defines the means and conditions of its access to and participation in the constitutional political process. In the constitution of the Islamic Republic the identity of political power is uniform and ethnic; Persian ethnicity defines the identity of the sovereign, the conditions of citizenship and hence the boundaries of the state and civil society.

The uniform ethnic identity of the sovereign and the citizen in the constitutions of the Kemalist Turkey and the Islamic Iran, though conceptualized differently and involving different discursive and political processes and practices, has important implications for the democratic ethos of the current debate on civil society. It indicates, above all, that the sovereign Turkish and Persian ethnicities which define the conditions of citizenship and political and cultural participation also specify the ethnic boundaries of civil society in these states. In so doing they function as an ethnic bar on civil processes and practices, thus excluding nonsovereign ethnic differences from the juridico-political boundaries of civil society. The existence of non-sovereign ethnic communities and identities in civil society is either completely denied, as is the case in Turkey, or recognized solely in cultural terms, as is the case in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In both cases, however, they have a non-civil existence, remaining outside the juridico-political boundaries of civil society in an extra-constitutional political space inhabited by force.

This excursion into the current debates on civil society in Turkey and Iran clearly illustrates the simple truth of the earlier theoretical argument regarding the retarding effects of the concept of sovereignty on the democratization of the political process in the modern state. The exclusion of nonsovereign identities and the associated political and cultural rights from consideration is a clear indication of the domination of these debates by the discourse of sovereignty — the hegemonic political discourse in Turkey and Iran since the formation of the modern state, perpetuated by the active consent of both the reformist and the conservative participants, who refuse to question the ethnic identity of political power in these societies. This consensus, which amounts at best to silence and at worst to denial of non-sovereign identities and their civil and democratic rights, is antidemocratic.

It seriously undermines the radical thrust and democratic ethos of the civil society debates in Turkey and Iran. The civil and democratic political forces in Turkey and Iran must redefine the juridico-politcal boundaries of the debate; they must abandon their modern obsession with the pre-modern discourse of sovereignty.

Conclusions

This discussion suggests that the discourses of civil society and democratization in Turkey and Iran must be predicated on a democratic quest for changing the ethnic identity of political power, to ensure the representation of non-sovereign identities and rights in political, social and cultural processes. This is essential if civil society is to be representative of difference and dissent, capable of bolstering the democratic process and ensuring popular participation and accountability. But the quest to change the identity of political power is also the central plank of the proposed solution to the Kurdish question in Turkey and Iran. In both cases the theoretical

proposition results from a radical critique of the concept of sovereignty, and hence the demand for a radical constitutional reform involving the de-ethnification of the conditions of citizenship. This common theoretical foundation inextricably ties the Kurdish question to the development of civil society and the democratization of political process in Turkey and Iran. It thus points to a common political direction which should be recognized and appreciated.

In the present circumstances in Kurdistan, in the aftermath of the repeated failures of the autonomy plans, there are many who would readily recognize this common direction and appreciate its political import, but only a few would wish to support it publicly. To many who are genuinely interested in the proposed political solution, the underlying theoretical proposition is sound but highly impractical. The reasoning is sad but convincing: it seems highly unlikely that the four sovereign states ruling the divided Kurdistan would ever want or dare to detach Kurdish identity from the conditions of political sovereignty, at least not in so far as their prevailing official nationalist/statist discourses and the requisite "national" institutions remain in force. This is because Kemalism, Khomeinism and Ba'athism, despite their fundamental *differences*, all insist on the denial of Kurdish national identity as a prerequisite of their national sovereignty. This view is intrinsic to their self-perceptions as sovereign and independent states. It lies at the root of the distrust, fear and paranoia which have thus far endorsed political violence against the Kurds and rejected their demand for a political solution. But the current alternative to the recognition of the Kurdish national identity, in so far as it is an alternative at all, is no less utopian. The military solution variously practiced by these states is irrational and unsafe. It is less likely to ensure their "national sovereignty," especially when democratic process and civil society in their sovereign domains are still weak and underdeveloped.

Notes

1- Before 1514 the bulk of the territory known as Kurdistan was administered by the successive regimes ruling Iran. This had been the case at least since the Buyid times in the tenth century A.D., when the territory was referred to by its current name and its geographical limits within the shifting boundaries of the state were delineated. In 1514 the newly founded Safavid state lost the greater part of its Kurdish territory to its powerful neighbor, the Ottoman State, and this division, which was ratified in the Zahab treaty of 1639, remained in force until the dissolution the Ottoman empire in 1918. During this period, the Ottoman Kurdish territory was ruled indirectly from Istanbul through a tributary structure involving the semi-autonomous Kurdish principalities; these eventually fell victim to the process and practice of territorial centralism that followed the advent of state-managed modernization, culminating in the Tanzimat reforms of 1837. By the late 1870s the last Kurdish principality had fallen to Ottoman centralism and the Ottoman state was in full control of its Kurdish territory.

In Iran, too, the semi-autonomous Kurdish principalities, which had sustained the military and fiscal structures of an uneasy tributary relationship with the state for nearly four centuries, fell victim to the combined force of internal decay and the growing external pressures brought to bear by the declining Qajar state in need of revenue. The destruction of the Kurdish principalities by the Ottoman and the Qajar states seems to have had the same effect on the political and administrative structures in Kurdistan before 1918: in both cases the power of the princes was replaced by the authority of the religious leaders, who were closely associated with the Sufi orders, the tribal lineage and landed property, and who played a decisive role in the organizational structure of the Kurdish movements for the decades to come (notably Sheikh Ubaydallah's movement in 1880-1882).

Sheikhs and Aghas continued to dominate the leadership of the Kurdish movements after 1918, when the eastern possessions of the Ottoman empire were partitioned by Britain and France, and parts of the Kurdish territory were attached to the newly created states of Iraq and Syria. Uprisings led by Sheikh Said (1925) and Sheikh Reza (1937) against the Kemalist State in Turkey, the rebellions of Sheikh Mahmoud (1920s) and Molla Mustafa Barzani (1940s, 1960s, 1970s) against the Iraqi state, and Semko's rebellion (1920s) and the movement culminating in Mahabad republic (1947) in Iran all show this specific though quite uneven articulation of religion, tribal lineage and landownership in the leadership of the Kurdish movements before recent times. This structural specificity of Kurdish movements has changed significantly in Turkey and Iran since the 1970s, largely due to growing urbanization, the

development of commodity production and the modern middle class, and the influence of secular ideologies, especially Marxism -Leninism: the emergence of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Socialist Party of Kurdistan and the People's Democractic Labor Party (HADEP) in Turkey, as well as the emergence of a socialist leadership in the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and the formation of the Revolutionary Association of the Toilers of Kurdistan (KSRKI, now CPI) in Iranian Kurdistan, all testify to this shift. In Iraqi Kurdistan, by contrast, the formation of the predominantly urban, socialist -orientated Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in the 1960s has not been able to dislodge Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) or undermine its power in its traditional constituencies of support, where tribal lineage and religious affiliation have proved remarkably resistant to external influence and change. General histories of the Kurds and Kurdistan are scarce, both in European and Middle Eastern languages. For informed but highly descriptive modern political histories see: W. Jwaideh, "The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: its Origins and Development," Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University 1960; D. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996).

2- Modernity is an elusive concept, remaining ambiguous despite its wide currency in contemporary post -Marxist and post-liberal discourse. This ambiguity is largely due to the association of the concept with the philosophical foundations of post-structuralism and postmodernism, which are diverse and heterogeneous. They assume or propound different conceptions of modernity informed by their critical evaluation of the conditions of the construction of the "subject" and "subjectivity" in Western political and philosophical discourse since the Renaissance. These conditions vary widely but are defined, in various ways, by the triumph of "reason" and its intrinsic relationship to "freedom". The relationship between reason and freedom has been a central theoretical presupposition of the discourse of modernity, especially since the Enlightenment, when it was inextricably linked with the idea of "progress." Thus the current concepts of modernity, despite their variations, share a common trait; they signify the "sovereignty of reason" in discourse and practice, emphasizing its intrinsic link with freedom and progress in the domains of history, politics and culture. Hence the crit ical association of modernity with modernism as both the ideology and strategy of an "endogenous" modernization, ensuring freedom and progress. The contemporary critique of modernity rejects this central theoretical presupposition. Reason, it is variously argued, has failed to ensure freedom; nor has it been the real locus or agent of modernization, which was for the most part carried out by polit ical and economic agencies with scant regard for human freedom and happiness. The history of the development of Western societies since the Enlightenment is thus held to demonstrate this failure. Although this argument clearly refers to a fundamental inconsistency in the conceptual structure of the political and philosophical discourse of modernity, its critical value should not be exaggerated; it raises more theoretical problems than it proposes to solve. The case in point here is the conceptualization of the relationship between the discourse and practice of modernity in postmodern discourse, which almost invariably leads to the conflation of modernity with the historical experience of modernization in the West. This assumed identity of the "concept" with the "real" is firmly grounded in essentialism; it is underpinned by the assumption that the modern West is not just the locus of reason and rationalist discourse and practice but identical with it, albeit in the context of a failed historical experience. Hence the failure of the West is the failure of reason. The implications of this essentialist assumption for Eastern/Oriental societies are clear: they fall outside the domain of reason experiencing a problematic relationship with an exogenous modernity.

This essentialist assumption has an uneasy coexistence with the antiessentialist argument which informs the postmodern critique and rejection of the universal claims of modernity. The concept of modernity informing this essay is different. It signifies a "discursive formation" in the Foucauldian sense, that is, a specific discourse and its non-discursive conditions of existence; in this case the discourse of "reason" and its economic, political and cultural conditions of possibility. The relationship between the discursive and non-discursive, that is, the possibility of modernity, is defined by strategies of power which are also constitutive of the "subject" in modern society. It is in this sense that the conditions of modernity and the conditions of the constitution of the "subject" in modern society coincide: they both presuppose the articulat ion and dominance of reason in societal processes and practices engendered and sustained by strategies of power in society. This means therefore that reason/power has no specific locus or agency, nor can any general or uniform conception of modernization, endogenous or otherwise, be deduced from the conditions of its articulation in society. The relationship between reason and freedom, too, remains contingent upon the conditions of the constitution of the subject defined by the prevailing strategies of power and modes of "resistance" to them. Modernity so defined cannot be identified with any specific traits of modern society — be it capitalist economic form, rationalization or the nation-state — in a historicist manner, whether Marxist or Weberian. Nor can it identified with the historical experience of "modernization" in any specific society. This is because the strategies of power and the forms and conditions of their operation vary widely from one society to another. For example, the idea of modernity and the discourse of reason, science and technology, secular education and the rule of law, were introduced to the Ottoman and Iranian societies by a modernist intelligentsia in the early to mid-19th century. But the institutional processes and practices of modernity were created by modern constitutional states almost a century later. The modern state in Turkey and Iran — and later on in Iraq and Syria — became both the institutional representation of reason and the agent of modernization. Although there was little new in this transformation, it produced some specific effects defining the characteristic features of modernity in these societies, which will be explained in the course of this essay. Two interesting but quite different accounts of modernity are found in C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the*

Modern Identity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and A. Touraine, *Critique of Modernity* (London: Blackwell, 1997).

3 - The new states which emerged out of the ruins of the old in Turkey and Iran, and those which were founded by colonial powers in Iraq and Syria, were fundamentally different formations. Their structural developments were diverse, having diverse consequences for the economic, political and cultural developments of Kurdish territories in their jurisdictions. This crucial diversity can be illustrated by the contrasting political development and conduct of the Kurdish landowning class in Turkey and Iran. In Turkey, the Kemalist policy of total denial of the Kurd and Kurdish identity and the brutal suppression of Kurdish movements led not only to the suppression of Kurdish language and culture but also to the polit ical and cultural decline of the Kurdish landowning class, both tribal and non-tribal, which was thus expelled from the ethnically defined spheres of political rights and representation. The introduction in 1948 of the multi-party system, confined to the ethnically defined political process, though it still denied Kurdish representation, turned Kurdistan into a market in which Turkish parties competed for Kurdish votes by dispensing political and economic favors. This led to the political revival of the Kurdish landowning class, albeit in the framework of a new clientelism, which formed the mainstay of Turkish parliamentary politics in Kurdistan before it was undermined by the appearance of the PKK in the political scene. In Iran, by contrast, the politics of territorial centralism pursued by Reza Shah involved detribalization, which significantly weakened the political organization of the Kurdish tribes in the 1930s. The sudden (though temporary) revival of tribal political power in 1941 contributed both to the rise of the Kurdish republic and to its swift demise in 1947. In the following decade, the Kurdish landowning class especially the tribal leadership was largely co-opted into the precarious power structure in Iran which, owing to the over-centralization of power and the absence of a genuine pluralist political process, failed to generate an effective clientelist structure in Kurdistan. The implementation of land reform in the early 1960s undermined not only the economic foundation of the Kurdish landowning class but also their political power base in the countryside. In the upsurge of nationalist politics which followed the 1979 revolution, the landowning class was largely absent; with few notable exceptions, it played little role either in nationalist politics or in opposition to it. For discussions of aspects of diverse structural developments of Kurdish societies in Turkey and Iran see the following: M. van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Press, 1992); R. Olson (ed*.), The Turkish Nationalist Movement in Turkey in the 1990s* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996); H. J. Barkey and G. Fuller,. *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (New York: Roman & Littlefield, 1998); A. Vali, "The Making of Kurdish Identity in Iran," *Critique*, 3, 7, Fall 1995; A. Vali, "Kurdish Nationalism in Iran: The Formative Period, 1942-1947," *The Journal of Kurdish Studies*, II, 2. 1997; McDowall, op. cit. For a detailed discussion of diverse state linguistic and cultural policies in Kurdistan see: A. Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan* (San Francisco: Mellon University Press, 1994).

4- This point is explained by, among others, Calhoun and McCrone, both drawing on modern European history. See: G. Calhoun, "Nationalism and Civil Society," G. Calhoun (ed.), *Social Theory and Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); D. McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

5- Kurdish principalities were semi-autonomous juridico-political entities within the boundaries of the Ottoman and the Iranian states. Little is known about their conditions before the early 16th century, when the military conflict between the Ottoman and the Safavid states and the subsequent partition of the Kurdish territory gave them an unprecedented prominence in regional politics. It seems that the Kurdish principalities officially recognized and submitted to the supreme authority of their Ottoman and Iranian overlords in Friday *khotbas* which were read in the names of the reigning monarchs. In practice, their relationships with their respective authority were regulated in a tributary structure which at tim es closely resembled feudal vassalage. The mutation in the form of this tributary relationship depended largely on the political and military powers of the Ottoman and Iranian states and the effective range of their centralizing functions, which defined, though in an inverse manner, the actual boundaries of the political and administrative power in the Kurdish principalities. Hence the "reactive" nature of their politics vis-a-vis the two states, which quickly degenerated into armed conflict when the balance of power was disturbed in periods of acute centralization or decentralization of state power. For explanations of the structures and organizations of the Kurdish principalities in different periods of their development see: van Bruinessen, op. cit.; Hassanpour, op. cit.; C. J. Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, 2 vols. (London: Cape, 1836).

6 - Recent years have witnessed an explosion in discourse on identity, largely as a result of the growing academic interest in the works of the post-structralist philosophers, especially Jacques Derrida, and the post -modernist appropriations of them. But despite the academic fashion, serious theoretical writing on the subject is rather scarce. See: J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970); E. Laclau (ed.), *Writing and Difference* (London, 1976); "The Making of Modern Political Identities," (London: Verso, 1994); *Emancipations* (London: Verso, 1997); W. E. Connoly, *Identity and Difference: Democratic Negotiation of a Political Paradox* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); G. Bennington, *Negotiations* (London: Verso, 1995).

7 - A discrepancy between discourse and practice is a common feature of modern political movements. In the case of Kurdish nationalism the issue is more complex. It is not so much a discrepancy as a total absence of nationalist political practice; the nationalist discourse enjoys popular appeal, but lacks popular political existence, that is, the means and conditions to translate it into political practice. It is a popular political idea rather than a mass political ideology. But this crucial difference cannot be reduced only to the absence of an effective mobilizing force in Kurdistan; it amounts to the fundamental difference that exists between sovereignty and autonomy, so deeply rooted in the structural conditions of Kurdish nationalism. The formation and development of the PKK bears witness to the truth of this argument. It is the only significant modern Kurdish political organization which started its campaign with a clear nationalist strategy demanding independence for Kurdistan. But in March 1993, after barely a decade of active nationalist politics, it changed its strategic objective, asking for the creation of a federal political system in Turkey; this demand was further modified to autonomy in November 1998, when its leader came to Europe in search of a political solution to the armed conflict with Turkey. However the radical change in the strategic objective of the PKK does not seem to have affected its nationalist discourse, which appears side by side with arguments for a political solution in the framework of Turkish sovereignty. This paradox testifies not only to an ambiguous political identity, but also to the curious case of nationalists without nationalism, which characterized the discourse and practice of the Mahabad republic five decades earlier. For the political development of the PKK see: Barkey and Fuller, 1998, op. cit.; Olson, 1996, op. cit. For the discourse and practice of the Republic see: Vali, 1997, op. cit.

8 - This point invokes Foucault's argument in his much-quoted essay on governmentality. Foucault, however, does not explore the full implications *Vali: Fragmented Identity and Fragmented Politics* 93 of his own argument for the conceptualization of modern politics and governmentality, largely due to his problematic approach to and treatment of some of the fundamental philosophical premises of liberal political theory. This point has been noted by some recent critics of his writings on power and governmentality. Foucault's essay on governmentality appears in G. Burchell, et. al. (eds.), *The Foucault Effect* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991). For critical analysis and commentary on Foucault's essay see: B. Hindess, *Discourses of Power from Hobbes to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) and "Politics and Governmentality," *Economy and Society*, 26, 2, 1997; C. Gordon, "Governmental Rationality," and G. Burchell, "Peculiar Interests: Civil Society and Governing the Sy stem of Natural Liberty," both in Burchell, et. al. 1991; A. Barry, et. al. (eds.), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government* (London: University College London Press, 1996).

9 - The changing ethnic and racial composition of West European societies and the associated problems of social and political marginalization and exclusion have led to a revival of scholarly interest in the concept of cit izenship. Social and political theorists have rightly pointed out the short - comings of the normative concept of citizenship in the increasingly multiethnic and multi-cultural societies of Western Europe and North America, and the failure of these societies to ensure democratic representation of the ethnic and racial groupings. They have thus argued for a redefinition of the conditions of citizenship and political participation in democratic societies, to ensure the representation of the "marginal" and "excluded" in political and cultural processes. The recent "revisionist" works on citizenship and ethnicity clearly pose important questions regarding the nature of democracy and democratic process in the contemporary West, but fail to provide appropriate answers to them. The often-quoted work of Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), is a prime example: for him the inability of the democratic process to represent ethnic and cultural difference is rooted in the inadequacies of the concept of cit izenship, that is, the rights and conditions of its realization in society.

But in so doing he fails to relate it to political sovereignty and its restrictive effects on the democratic political process, thus arguing for a change in the conditions of citizenship without a change in the "ethnic" identity of the sovereign, the identity of political power. The discourse of rights within which Kymlicka poses and answers his questions is defined by the discourse of sovereignty which leaves no room for non-sovereign identities; the marginal, the excluded or the stateless remain unrepresented and unrepresentable. Political theory must break out of the narrow ethnic confines of the discourse of sovereignty if it is to represent the unrepresented.

10 - This idea is hardly new; it has been around since Renan's seminal essay "What is the Nation?" a new English translation of which appeared in H. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1988). In recent years it has informed an increasingly influential body of literature which entertains "constructionist" conceptions of the nation and nationalism, exemplified best by the works of Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London:Verso, 1983). For a critical discussion of the idea and a theoretical evaluation of the constructionist conceptions of the nation and nationalism, its political and methodological significance and theoretical limitations and wrongs, see my essay "Nationalism and Kurdish Historical Writing," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 14, Spring 1996.

11 It is widely held that the concept of citizenship regulates the boundaries of the state and civil society in the democratic order. This is clearly argued by David Held and Bhikhu Parekh in their contributions to a collection edited by Geoffrey Andrews, *Citizenship* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991). The truth of the argument notwithstanding,

it largely exaggerates the autonomy of the regulatory function of citizenship in the democratic process by overlooking the limitations that the ethnic identity of political power imposes in the development of civil society. This issue will be discussed in the following section of this essay. See also B. S. Turner (ed), *Citizenship and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 1993), esp. contributions by Hindess, Kalberg and Turner.

12 On this point see Graham Burchell's discussion and development of Foucault's concept of governmentality in his essay in G. Burchell et. al., op. cit., 1991.

13 Civil society always functions within the unifying framework of the legal regulations of the state, which clearly dispels the myth of its autonomy widely held by its contemporary enthusiasts. This point is forcefully put by Althusser in his brief but incisive critique of Gramsci's concept of civil society. Althusser's conception of social totality structured by the dominance of the economic level leads him to the other extreme, arguing for the total dependence of civil society on dominant class relations, and hence subjected to their centralizing functions through the medium of the state. See L. Althusser, *Reading Capital* (London: New Left Books, 1970), p. 168; also his "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy*. (London: New Left Books, 1971).

14 The concept of "transactional domain" is borrowed from Graham Burchell; see Burchell, op. cit., 1993.

15 - This argument is developed by Barry Hindess in his discussion and critique of Foucault's concept of governmentality and political reason; Hindess op. cit., 1997 and op. cit., 1996.

16 See Hindess op. cit., 1997.

17 On this point see Burchell op. cit.. 1991.

18 Ibid.

19 The discussion of civil society and democratic process in the remaining part of this essay will be confined to Turkey and Iran, excluding Iraq and Syria. Syria is excluded because of the absence of democratic process and the dearth of information on the state of civil society, especially with regard to ethnicity and ethnic difference; while the social, political and cultural conditions of Iraq after the Gulf War of 1991, and the complete concentration of political power in the coercive and security apparatuses of the state, renders absurd any discussion of civil society. In so far as civil society and democratic process are concerned the current situation in Iraq is only a culmination of the process which started under Ba'ath rule, which by definition implied the closure of civil society.

20 There is a growing body of literature on civil society and democratic process in Turkey, which mostly remains within the normative framework of constitutional politics, thus excluding consideration of nonconstitutional issues such as Kurdish and Islamic identities. Only a few writers break out of this narrow political and methodological framework. See for example: B. Toprak, "Civil Society in Turkey," and N. Gole, "Authoritarian Secularism and Islamic Participation: The Case of Turkey" both in A. R. Norton (ed.), *Civil Society in the Middle East,* 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994); E. Ozbudun, "Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation in Turkey," and L. Koker, "National Identity and State Legitimacy: Contradictions of Turkey's Democratic Experience" both in E. Ozdalga and S. Perrson (eds.), *Civil Society and Democracy in the Muslim World* (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1997), vol. 7.

21 Toprak (op. cit., 1995) and Gole (op. cit., 1995) are examples of the partial recognition, but the crucial break with the normative constitutional framework is not carried to its logical conclusion. Koker (op. cit., 1997) provides a more radical analysis, clearly departing from the normative premises of the constitutional framework. His radical approach to Kurdish identity is premised on his rejection of the Kemalist contours of the discourse of civil society and democratization in contemporary Turkey.

22 Civil society (*Jame-yeh Madani*) was the battle cry of Khatami in the presidential elections of 1997. The concept was used to refer to the rule of law, which was identified with democratic order. As such it became the central plank in the reformist platform attracting the active support of both religious and secular sections of the population. The reformist platform was opposed by the conservative hardliners in the regime who rejected the discourse of civil society in the name of the *wilayat i faqih* which, they argued, represented the revolutionary legitimacy and the ethos of the Islamic repubic. The debate on civil society and democratic order has continued more rigorously since Khatami's victory, signifying the persistence of political struggle between the reformists and the conservative hardliners which is now clearly centered on state power. This struggle, and in fact the debate on civil society, is still fought in terms of the competing definitions of Islam and their associated notions of political authority and legitimacy in which Khomeini and his concept of *wilayat i faqih* remain the point of reference. For the Islamic reformist argument for civil society and the rule of law during and since the presidential elections see the issues of the Tehran daily *Salam* **,** and the weeklies *Jame-*

eh, Toos, Keeyan, Neshat. The conservative opposition to the reformist platform see the issues of the Tehran daily *Resalat* since Jan.1997.

23 The volume *Jame-eyeh Madani va Iran-e Emrooz (*Civil Society and the Present day Iran), Tehran 1377/1997 contains a collection of articles by religious and secular writers who put forward different arguments in defense of civil society, see especially Abdul Karim Soroush's contribution: *Din va Jame-eh* (Religion and Society). See also *Iran-e Farda*, special issues on civil society, Tehran, 1997, and *Iran Nameh* (A Persian Journal of Iranian Studies), special issues on civil society in Iran, XIII, 4, Fall 1995 94 *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Vol. XVIII No. 2 (1998)* and XIV, 1, Fall 1996.

24 See for example Hussein Bashiryeh's contribution to the debate in *Jameeyeh Madani va Iran-e Emrooz (*op. cit., 1997) and articles by Farhad Kazemi and Gholam Reza Afghami in special issues of *Iran Nameh* (op. cit., 1996, 1997).

25 See for example Soroush (op.cit, 1997) and various speeches by Khatami before and since the presidential elections in June 1997 printed in issues of *Salam* . and the brief but rather interesting contribution of Hashemi Nejad in *Jame-eyeh Madani va Iran-e Emrooz* (op. cit., 1997).

26- For a detailed and informed study of the politics of the preparation and ratification of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its democratic and authoritarian contens see the recent work of Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997).