

An anti-history of a non-people: Kurds, colonialism, and nationalism in the history of anthropology

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In this article I seek to contest certain aspects of the 1960s revisionist history of the discipline of anthropology, narratives that can be accused ironically of an autocentric overestimation of the power of the imperial West in their very uncovering of its more or less hidden influence over the genre of ethnography and anthropological practice. Taking as my focus in this regard the case of the anthropology of the Kurds, I suggest that not only have Western ethnographic texts been relatively un-influential in the wider scheme of discourse about Kurds, but also that the recent decision of Kurdish publishing houses in Istanbul to translate and re-publish them indicates where in the present many Kurds feel an active 'colonial project' is continuing. The role and development of anthropology in Turkey, then, complicate this by now decades-old examination of the embeddedness of ethnographic discourse in Western modernist projects of political transformation.

The status and politics of ethnographic representation have for nearly forty years been a subject of intense debate in anthropology. Kick-started by regionally specific processes of decolonization and a more general Marxist-inspired critique in the 1960s of anthropology's relationship to colonial governance, the discussion has spiralled through a range of vital issues, from the influence of colonial sponsorship of research on anthropological knowledge (Feuchtwang 1973) to analysis inspired by literary theory on the correspondence between ethnographic representations and colonial discourse. None of these analyses has restricted its examination of the influence of anthropological representations to the immediate historical period in which those texts were written. For many, studying colonialism has implied 'studying anthropology's context, a broader field of ethnographic activity that existed before the boundaries of the discipline emerged and that continues to influence the way they are drawn' (Pels 1997: 165). Among other things, this work has entailed a re-reading of the ethnographic canon and the giving of alternative meanings to many of its foundational texts.

In this article I seek to continue such a re-reading. My intention, however, is to contest certain aspects of this now orthodox Western history of the discipline, containing narratives that can ironically be accused of an autocentric overestimation of the power of the imperial West in their very uncovering of its more or less hidden influence

over ethnography and anthropological practice. This revisionist history takes for granted that anthropology is a Western project. To anticipate my conclusion, in the case under focus in this article, the anthropology of the Kurds, I suggest not only that Western ethnographic texts have been relatively un-influential in the wider scheme of discourse about Kurds, but also that the recent decision of Kurdish publishing houses in Istanbul to translate and re-publish them indicates where in the present many Kurds feel an active 'colonial project' is continuing. The politics at issue here take us beyond the post-colonial critique of classical anthropology, specifically because a much more politically efficacious anthropological discourse, articulated with Turkish nationalism, has been extremely reluctant to acknowledge, let alone engage with, any self-description of Kurdish difference. The role and development of anthropology in Turkey, then, complicate this by now decades-old examination of the embeddedness of ethnographic discourse in Western modernist projects of political transformation.

Colonialisms

Since the institution of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq after the First World War, the centres of power primarily responsible for violent mastery, both ideological and political, over the Kurdish regions have been these three nation-states. Nevertheless it would be perverse to deny that European ethnographic representations of Kurds and Kurdish society written before or during this period were somehow immune to the ideology and practice of Western imperialism in the 'Middle East', especially in today's northern Iraq. To substantiate this claim it would be enough to analyse various exemplary ethnographic accounts of Kurdish society, in particular those accounts written in what is now seen as the heyday of evolutionary and functionalist anthropology, two theoretical paradigms that have been heavily scrutinized by historians of the discipline for their various complicit relations with Western colonial power. An examination of the contrasts among these different accounts would open up a range of important questions regarding not simply the textual and rhetorical qualities of such representations, but also, much more importantly, the issue of their efficacy in contributing to a colonial project.¹

In brief, reflection on the determinate historical conditions of anthropology has forced a new encounter with its classical texts. But what are those conditions and in which ways do they impinge upon our interpretations? What a standard critique of this early Kurdish ethnography might fail to account for is the present enthusiasm among many Kurds precisely for these social analyses. For example, Vladimir Minorsky's work on Kurdish origins in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1927a; 1927b) is consistently cited by writers in their narratives of Kurdish history, as is the work of other European philologists and Orientalists. In the section titled 'Anthropology, sociology and ethnography', Minorsky argues that contemporary Kurds are an amalgamation (of Arab type; Mukri type; biblical Jew type; Nestorian and Hakkari types), so that 'any idea of finding a general formula for the "Kurd type" is quite illusory' (1927b: 1150). Yet rather than accept the disaggregating and potentially racist tendencies of the anthropological quest for types, the discourse on origins by Kurdish writers seeks to identify a continuing Kurdish essence amongst this cultural and linguistic variety. In 1996, Doz Publishing House printed a Turkish translation of the entire entry 'Kurds and Kurdistan' from the 1981 revised version of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, giving as its authors Minorsky, Bois, and MacKenzie. The publishing house's very brief introduction simply says:

The Kurds, an Iranian people in the Near East, live in various numbers in Turkey, Shia Iran, Arab and Sunni Iraq, Northern Syria, and Soviet Transcaucasia. The economic and social importance of these lands or Kurdistan cannot be denied. Since the end of the First World War the Kurdish people have lived, as have their neighbours, through as much significant change in their political order as they have in the economic, social, and cultural fields. In every country a swollen list of books exists that deals with the innumerable problems facing the Kurds (1996: 9).

Similarly both Edmund Leach's 1940 and Fredrik Barth's 1953 ethnographies were translated into Turkish in 2001, Leach's text accompanied by a new introduction. After a brief intellectual biography of Leach's place in the development of the discipline of anthropology, the introduction's anonymous writer argues that the distinguishing virtue of the work is its break from romantic or exotic portrayals of Kurdish society. This is important because in response to the

continuing denialist policies of the Turkish Republic, Kurds have looked sympathetically upon any Western work that has confirmed their existence ... Yet it is dangerous to show much fondness for works that are stamped with the seal of Orientalism. The perceptions of Kurds that emerge from these works are an invention of the works themselves. For example, the image of the 'Wild Kurd' that has been sketched out in travel accounts is actually a creation of Western travellers. In response to this, a romantic Kurdish history writing that has neglected primary archival documents or analysis of the existing social structure, while seeking to prove that Kurds are not primitive but on the contrary are the sole source of a Mesopotamian civilization that has existed for thousands of years, has not succeeded in transcending the much-criticized categories of Orientalist discourse, producing a flawed national image that doesn't conform to reality (Leach 2001 [1940]: 12).

Equally interesting, on recent visits to Istanbul I have been struck by the appreciation of many Kurds not only for the ethnographic material but also for those very Western travellers' and missionaries' narratives criticized in the introduction to Leach. In 2007 a friend took me to a small business in Sultan Ahmet where high-quality photocopies of nineteenth-century books were made. The prize was James Fraser's 1840 book *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia, etc.: including an account of parts of those countries hitherto unvisited by Europeans. With sketches of the character ... of the Koordish and Arab Tribes*. In like vein, in 1997 in its 'Kurdoloji' series, Avesta Publishing House translated into Turkish Ismet Vanlı's 1973 French text *Kurds and Kurdistan through the eyes of Western travellers*.² Avesta gives no explanation for the publication of the text, merely affixing Vanlı's own 1973 foreword to the book. In it, and in words sure to annoy post-colonial theorists, Vanlı warns Kurdish compatriots (*yurttaşlar*) that they might be disappointed at some of the comments written by Western travellers about their forefathers. 'But there is one consolation: other ethnic groups in the Middle East received their share too, not escaping the harsh judgements of the travellers. Besides it is true that in some cases these types of sharp and insensitive evaluations may have been warranted' (Vanlı 1997: 7).

How should we understand this publishing trend? Is it a case of 'self-Orientalism', warned against by Edward Said at the end of his book on Orientalism? There Said notes how the use of Western-derived Orientalist tropes by 'Orientals' themselves is flourishing in the 'Orient', so that now we find that 'the pages of books and journals in Arabic (and doubtless in Japanese, various Indian dialects, and other Oriental languages) are filled with second-order analyses by Arabs of "the Arab mind," "Islam," and other myths' (Said 1978: 322). Or might we understand it in terms of Partha Chatterjee's (1993) argument about colonial nationalism in India, seeing an equivalent constructing

by Kurdish intellectuals of a Kurdish 'tradition' represented as untouched by the ravages of colonial transformation? Both of these arguments assume Western colonialism and its associated ideologies to be the major interlocutor for indigenous or 'non-Western' politics. Their European-centred models of modernity downplay or ignore the influence of other sovereign forces in the process, overlooking the power of partially autonomous imperial or nationalist regimes and the full battery of modern strategies of governance at their command.

Nevertheless, it is true that this Kurdish appreciation of ethnographic texts indicates just how long the political half-life of Western anthropological publishing can be. But discernment of the varied audiences emboldened or abashed by such anthropological writing is particularly vital in the case of Kurds. In his study of the changing keywords of what he calls Turkish state discourse on the Kurds, Mesud Yeğen (1996; 1999) notes that throughout the first seventy years of the republican period the one unvarying aspect of state discourse has been a categorical denial that Kurds constitute a separate ethnic element in Turkey. Given its refusal to talk about the 'Kurdishness' of what was designated as the Eastern problem, knowledge about 'Kurds' took the form of a discourse on 'reactionary politics, tribal resistance or regional backwardness' (Yeğen 1996: 216). This strict control over the production of representation of Kurds by the state has resulted in the historical *enunciation* of Kurdish identity in very limited and gendered ways, so that Kurdish men are marked not just as rural and uncivilized, but also simultaneously as victims of exploitative landlords and *tarikats* leaders, and as oppressors of women. The same applies to women, except that they are victims of male domination.

In the first instance, then, this contemporary Kurdish enthusiasm for even lesser known anthropological texts needs to be contextualized in relation to a multiplicity of colonial projects, and not only (or even mainly) in relation to Western colonial rule. Long before the 1920s it was the centralizing Ottoman Empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century that brought a violent end to the three hundred years or more of forms of autonomy in the Kurdish regions. Accordingly one key producer of 'colonial discourse' about Kurds was the bureaucratic and military elites of the nineteenth-century Ottoman regime. In his analysis of late Ottoman colonialism, Selim Deringil remarks how curious it is that the Subaltern Studies group ignores the existence of a major non-Western sovereign state that 'came to perceive of its periphery as a colonial setting' (Deringil 2003: 311, 312). The same omission occurs in Said's work, as well as in much of the more recent anthropology of colonialism, with its focus on *Western* governmentality. For example, in Peter Pels's article cited above there is a single brief mention of non-European colonialism (Japanese), but nothing on the new order of Ottoman policies and administration initiated by the *Tanzimat* reforms. Similarly there is no mention of the Soviet Union, despite Cornelius Castoriadis's rhetorical question about how a language (Russian) that five centuries ago was only spoken from Moscow to Nizhni-Novgorod had been able to reach the shores of the Pacific (Castoriadis 1997: 19).

In a separate work Deringil notes further how the institutions of the modern state – mass schooling, a postal service, railways, lighthouses, clock towers, lifeboats, museums, censuses and birth certificates, passports and parliaments – were all aspects of, or followed soon after, the *Tanzimat* reforms of 1839 (Deringil 1998: 9). If none of these innovations appears on the surface to be particularly threatening, we should remind ourselves of one facet of their underlying logic, the attempt to increase the

'infrastructural power' of the Ottoman state. Citing Michael Mann, Eugene Rogan defines infrastructural power as 'the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm' (Rogan 1999: 3). In the wake of territorial losses elsewhere, *Tanzimat* reformers placed a new importance on consolidating control over the eastern peripheries of the empire, including the extension of direct rule over the Kurdish and Arab provinces.

Curiously there is a similar omission too in James Scott's (1998) analysis of what he calls 'high modernism', his discussion of a number of disparate yet connected processes whereby modern states attempt both to make society legible and to enhance their own capacity to refashion it. Scott also ignores the Ottoman regime. Yet every item on his list of the simplifying instruments applied from above and intended to map and transform the social order had been enacted by Ottoman or Republican officials in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. Thus the creation of permanent family names was legislated in Turkey in 1934; the standardization of weights and measures was re-ordered by the *Tanzimat* reforms in 1839; the establishment of population registers and cadastral surveys was carried out in the form of the first modern Ottoman census in 1831 and in the establishment of a Cadastral Department in 1858; the standardization of language, first attempted in the 1870s with the making of Ottoman Turkish the sole language of Ottoman administration, was achieved much more thoroughly in 1933 with the Turkish language revolution; the standardization of legal codes, begun with the rationalization of shariah law in 1869 throughout the Ottoman domains, was completed in 1924 with its total abolition in Turkey; the design of cities, seen most spectacularly in the building of modernist Ankara in 1929, was preceded by urban transformation throughout the nineteenth century; and finally the organization of transport, imagined romantically for many in the completion of the Orient Express in 1888, was pursued more prosaically and efficiently in the development of highway networks to facilitate military movements in the 1930s. I might add that many of these developments were completed by Reza Shah's regime in Iran at exactly the same time, including an identical language purification campaign. The only difference of course was that whereas the Shah's Language Academy sought to purge Arabic and Turkish from the Persian language, the Turkish Language Society expelled Arabic and Persian. Kurdish was proscribed as a language of education in both countries. It is for this reason that the vast majority of Kurds in Turkey cannot read Kurdish.

This list of dates gives us an indication of the century-old modern imperial project that was begun by the Ottomans, remodelled by the Young Turks, and continued by the Turkish Republicans and the new Turkish state in 1923. None the less, the official ideology of Kemalism in Turkey has nearly always emphasized a definitive break between the Ottoman reformers and its own Turkish revolution. For that reason perhaps, the Ottoman bureaucrats are not usually analysed as carriers of the ideology of 'high modernism', prime actors of an authoritarian mission seeking to shape and transform peripheral forms of subjectivity and personhood.

Colonialism in 'Kurdistan' has therefore been a multi-polar political project. Yet in acknowledging its Ottoman form – 'the White Man's Burden wearing a *fez*' says Der-ingil (2003: 312) – is this all that can be said for the Kurdish enthusiasm for texts that the Marxist critique of ethnographic practice would charge as being tainted by their Western imperialist context, and in Said's analysis would count as classic Orientalist discourse? Clearly one issue for Said's critique, as well as with approaches that contextualize anthropology within colonialism as a way of discerning an alternative 'meaning'

for ethnographic representations, relates to those texts' multiple receptions. Said's warning to 'Orientals' about the dangers of adopting the literary tropes that inform Orientalist discourse implies that the correct meaning of the texts he critically de-codes resides in their organization of language (more prosaically, in what their authors wrote). On the other hand, of course, his warning reflects the meaning (de)posited in those texts by Said himself as critic and reader. Not everyone injects the same meanings into the writings of Oriental scholars.

In her 1993 stock-take of the sociology of literature, Wendy Griswald notes how reception aesthetics, as the most important new initiative in the sociological study of literature, has opened the door to a better appreciation of the reader as producer of literary meanings. Again, the situation with Kurdish readers' responses to the classical ethnographic literature is particularly complex. It is an irony that Barth and Leach's decisions, typical of functionalist anthropology, to limit their objects of analysis and elide broader political state frameworks is the key to why their ethnographies are now appropriated as cultural resources by present-day Kurds starved of a separate history. On the other hand, this appropriation is not a simple reproduction, strategic or otherwise, of essentialist claims about the Kurds, as the anonymous new introduction to Leach's text shows. In her haste to champion the 'reader as hero', Griswald neglects one particularly important area of literary production: the politics of translation in Kemalist contexts where state dissemination of European fiction has played a key role in the project to produce a new national culture. Kenan Cayır (2007) gives us as a case study, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The little prince*, which has been honoured with at least twelve(!) different translations by various publishing houses.³ His discussion of the contrasts between Islamist and secularist translations is extremely illuminating in terms of the insertion of the translator as ideological mediator between text and reader.

Perhaps even more than that of readers, then, the creativity of translators is surely the *ur*-experience of agency *vis-à-vis* the text, given their ability not merely to interpret but also to transform it, through their explanatory comments, additions, omissions, embellishments, and deliberate mistranslations. Despite their own ongoing meaning-making activity in relation to the translation, readers generally cannot assess or check the translator's work. In the discretion, too, of Kurdish publishers to channel works for translation, we see another experience of agency, whereby the publisher connects a new readership to selected ethnographic texts, one not written for by the author. Translators and publishers, then, are two important 'authors' of Kurdish identity and history, gatekeepers of the presentation of material to the 'subjects' of the studies themselves. Their capacity to intervene in the circuits of knowledge production about Kurds is considerable.

For example, the blurb on the back cover of the Barth ethnography takes pains to instruct the reader on how to approach the book in hand. After a brief sociological description of the main themes of the study, the publisher neatly puts Barth in his (or a) place:

As well as being one of the most important anthropological works about the Kurds, Barth's book also sketches out Kurdish society in classical anthropological concepts and terms. However, when we take into account the extremely ideological formation of classical anthropology, a knowledge produced in the shadow of the political relations of colonialism and about colonized political systems, this book can be read with a critical eye and therefore better understood. As with every book, in this book too there is as much said as is unsaid (Barth 2001 [1953]: back cover).

Yet probably the best example of the power of the translator over against the text is Vanlı's treatment of the narratives of European travellers. The reason for their re-publication is made clear in his introduction. Vanlı writes that his selection of anecdotes was made 'not so that [we] can learn how Europeans saw and valued our ancestors, but so that in the light of this past we can think clearly and better establish our future' (Vanlı 1997: 7). But it is in the book's format that the real control over the words of the European travellers lies. Vanlı introduces each of the writers in turn, fragments the flow of their text by interposing his own editorial comments upon places and events, and often summarizes the meanings of individual sentences. His commentary is sometimes longer than the actual extract. And as the introduction promises, the principle of selection implicitly directs readers towards some form of Kurdish autonomy as the preferred political future, because the extracts focus on travellers' descriptions of Kurdish rulers' independence, Kurdish relations with other ethnic groups, and differences of language or religion. The concluding paragraph of the book is exemplary, aimed as it is at the discourse of the Turkish Republic that claims the Kurdish language is a dialect of Turkish, while demonstrating the use made of Orientalist texts to lend support to Vanlı's own position.

There is no need I think to remember that ever since the time of Volney and Garzoni [two of the travellers cited in the book] Kurdish has been scientifically proven to be close to Persian but a different and independent language. Kurdish and Persian are members of the Indo-European language family ... As Russian scholar Vladimir Minorsky says, 'Without a doubt Kurdish is connected to the northwest Iranian languages. And despite its many dialects it can be seen as possessing a unity in its Mede foundation' (Vanlı 1997: 86).

Despite the truth of Talal Asad's (1986) argument that, given colonial history, translation from 'stronger' to 'weaker' languages (i.e. English to Arabic) involves the transformation of the weaker language to conform to the semantic and grammatical forms of the more powerful, translation here also involves the bestowing of new meanings on the original text according to the ideological predilections and projects of the translator and publisher. In his essay, Asad's disinterest in the much more influential 'forced' transformation of Arabic by Arab nation-states in their standardization of the language is a significant omission, as will become clear in the section below.

In sum, analysing the production, dissemination, and consumption of anthropological knowledge about Kurds involves consideration of a complex web of power relations: a history of Western *and* Ottoman colonial projects; continuing (self-)interest and intervention in the region by imperialist superpowers; varied critical appropriation, transformation, and contestation of these projects and their discourses by Kurds themselves; and most importantly the assimilating imperatives of Middle Eastern Kemalist nation-states. It is the imperatives of this last dimension that I now want to concentrate on, as it is clear that the continued relevance or use made of Western anthropological material for and by Kurds in Turkey is understandable only in relation to the nationalism of the Turkish Republic and its own anthropological discourse.

Nationalisms

Functionalist Western anthropology from the 1920s to the 1950s had no hesitation in isolating and making an object of analysis what they claimed were culturally specific groups, and indeed according to Stephan Feuchtwang (1973) may have had a vested

political interest in reducing wider social systems to more manageable sub-units based on perceptions of groups' shared 'ethnic' traits. By contrast, anthropology in Turkey in those same years pursued the opposite policy, at least *vis-à-vis* non-Turkish Muslim groups in Anatolia. Kurds and Kurdish society were denied any indigenous structure or autonomy, and were 'studied' as degenerated components of the greater Turkish nation. As we have seen, for Yeğen, official state discourse on Kurds since the founding of the Republic has been characterized by an 'ethnocidal' logic, in its determination to Turkify those 'who think themselves Kurdish'. Those words are from a 1961 report on the 'Eastern problem' commissioned by the Turkish military after the coup in 1960, which refused to use the word 'Kurds'.

But in fact this discourse predates the founding of the Turkish Republic. According to Fuat Dündar (2001), the thesis that the Kurds had no separate language, history, or culture, and thus could not be considered a legitimate nation, was sketched out by intellectuals of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP, or the Young Turks) after 1910. The timing confirms the periodization of Eric Zürcher made in his book *The Unionist factor* (1984), in which he reassesses the official Turkish historiography about Atatürk and his relationship to the CUP. Despite the authorized version that discredits the 'Unionists' as usurpers of the Turkish revolution and justifies their purging in 1926, for Zürcher 'the whole national movement and the Kemalist state itself were built on Unionist organizations and initiatives' (1984: ix). Zürcher's dating of the origins of Kemalist policy and ideology to the Unionist movement after their coup in 1913 is correct, at least in regard to its anthropological discourse on Kurds.

Dündar's analysis of what he calls the 'ethnic research' of the intellectual cadres of the Unionists makes it clear that it was intimately connected to the Party's nationalist project. Fieldworkers were sent to collect information and write reports on the social, cultural, and political arrangements of different ethnic groups in Anatolia, including studies on the Türkmén, Armenians, Greeks, Alevi, and Bektaşî. For Dündar, the primary purpose of the research was to facilitate and support the mass re-settlement programme aimed at the Turkification of Anatolia:

In order to Turkify Anatolia the non-Muslims needed to be expelled and at the same time Muslims who were not Turks had to be assimilated. For this reason the most important political strategy was a programme to force mixed settlements. But first Anatolia's ethnic distribution needed to be known. The distribution of groups could only be made on the basis of which ethnic groups were in the majority in which districts, and which ethnic groups were in the minority in others. At the same time that the population movements were being realized, the areas to be resettled had to be prepared with the required 'scientific' mechanisms so that they could be assimilated (Dündar 2001: 43).

Dündar's analysis gives us a clue as to the policy of the CUP towards the Armenians at the same time (1915). More importantly for us here, the Young Turks also published a book on the Kurds, based on the fieldwork of one of the most important architects of the ideology of Turkish nationalism, Hâbil Adem. For Dündar, Adem's text became the prime source of Kemalism's anthropological discourse on Kurds, reiterated by Kemalist academics throughout the Republican period.

Briefly, how does Adem's argument proceed? As with Minorsky, Adem begins his book with a discussion of the origins of the Kurds (*Kürtlerin Kökeni*). But his enterprise is calculated to demonstrate the absence of any Kurdish *national* myths, values, religion, history, language, or literature. His discussion resides on a knife's edge: while he admits the existence of a group of people who call themselves Kurds, those people are claimed

to possess no abiding national or indigenous cultural system of their own. Adem, under the name 'Dr Fritz', writes, for example, that the internal variety amongst Kurdish tribes reflects the characteristics of those who have governed different parts of Kurdistan: the Turks, Iranians, Romans, Arabs, and Byzantine Greeks (Dr Fritz 1992 [1918]: 12). Similarly Kurdish poetry is derivative, the work of certain mullahs who came under the influence of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian literature (1992 [1918]: 16), while in Kurdish folklore (tales or fables) 'there is no order of Government, no victories that have been won, no theory of law or moral values that is *proper to independent nations*' (1992 [1918]: 11) (my emphasis). The Kurdish language, too, is parasitical on the language of other nations, both for its grammatical structure and for its lexicon. 'Because [Kurdish] has developed under the influence of others, it is not a national language in the true sense ... Of course, a national language develops its own sentence structure' (1992 [1918]: 15). (Note the similar argument to Asad above, but the radically different political conclusions.) The Kurds were a people who were unable to establish a government (*hükümet*), founding only rival chieftainships (*beylikler*) in periods of imperial power vacuum. Accordingly they have played no important role in history, nor does their history have any 'order' to it: indeed

their history belongs to the history of other nations. It is impossible to constitute an independent Kurdish history ... Because of these different rulers Kurds have been much more influenced by outside relationships than by their own internal structures. If we don't agree to this, how else can we explain the cultural differences between the Kurdish tribes? (1992 [1918]: 57).

The theory of nationalism at work here is clear: a people who are not self-instituting are not a nation, being neither politically or culturally autonomous nor autochthonic. Adem's 'history' of the Kurds is an anti-history of a non-people. The Unionists and Kemalists applied the same plumb-line to the Turks, necessitating the 'discovery' and formalization of a national history and culture that would document and assert the historical self-constitution of the Turkish nation. Turkish anthropology, with its obsessive emphasis on folklore studies, has been the discipline dedicated to proving Turkish cultural autonomy and hence nationhood. Beginning with the intellectuals of the CUP and continued by the Turkish Republic, anthropology in Turkey became an intimate contributor to the project to trace out the nation's self-generating genius amongst the other world-making nations of the globe. In this enterprise, folklore is vital because its creators are individually anonymous, but identifiable as a collective. More precisely,

folklore is an expression of and represents a nation's spiritual-social life and their cultural creation. Folklore is one of our national culture treasures, a national and spiritual treasure that for thousands of years has been born and preserved in the heart of Turkish societies. In the treasury of folklore everything originates with the people. In particular it is possible to identify the people's social order, appreciation of art, worldview, religious understanding, way of thinking and belief systems and the traditions and customs related to all of these ... Turkish history and Turkish folklore are the basis of Turkish social life (Halıcı 1985: 1, 11).

Readers will have to take my word that similar sentiments are expressed in nearly all introductions to the voluminous studies of folklore produced in Turkey.⁴ Folklore studies show how in Turkey, along with the People's Houses, it was state-related agencies that sponsored the anthropological quest.⁵ In the process, rural *Anadolu* (Anatolia) was claimed as the pure heartland of living Turkish culture, in contradistinction to the cosmopolitanism and

anti-nationalism of the urban Ottoman past. Not just the material culture (from rug-weaving to handicrafts) but the spiritual culture of the different regions of Anatolia was construed as a variegated local manifestation of a single ethnic Turkish genius. (This spiritual culture encompassed folklore, including proverbs, folk songs, riddles, folk tales, word games, poems, and rhymes.) Forcibly *included* within this inventory of the Turkish people were 'Kurdistan' and 'Kurds', renamed and constituted as Eastern Anatolia and lost Turkish tribes, respectively. Forcibly *excluded* from this Anatolian inventory were Greeks. The discipline was intimately connected with the Division of Culture's 1924 charter to 'conserve our national culture and to raise our youth within the national culture' (cited in Ülkütaşır 1972: 46).

Nationalism as a theory and practice of political and cultural self-institution required a language revolution too. Although rarely commented upon by commentators on the Turkish language reform, the nationalistic logic that informed the linguistic engineering project of the Turkish language revolution in 1933-5 is the same logic that denied to Kurdish any capacity for literature. The existence in Ottoman-Turkish of thousands of words from other languages placed the self-instituting capacity of the Turkish nation in doubt. How could a nation culturally *sui generis* have the words of the other in its vocabulary? A language purification and word-mobilization campaign was the logical response. And what better way to prove the mettle of the new national language than the Ministry of Culture's decision at the same time to translate into the purified Turkish a canon of classic works from 'Western' literature? Kurdish was deemed undeserving of such treatment by the state, as it still is today.

Alongside support for what we may call problematically this 'positive' ethnographic representation of Kurds, the Turkish state also sought to short-circuit alternative representations of Kurdish history and society through censorship. Let me give just two brief examples of censorship proceedings to give readers a sense of the legal process. One of the earliest texts explicitly devoted to the Kurds, Şeref Han's 1597 manuscript *Şerefname* (On the history of the Kurdish principalities), was translated into Turkish for the first time in 1971. Upon publication the Public Prosecutor immediately opened a case against the book, charging it with the constitutional offence of 'making propaganda aimed at destroying or endangering [Turkey's] national feeling on the basis of race' (Bozarslan 1990), and asking for its collection. The court convened an expert panel of Turkish professors to advise it as to whether the book should be banned or not. After a brief description of the contents of the book, the expert witnesses concluded their report by stating that:

It is necessary to ascertain whether the true aim of those publishing this book is to make certain ethnic groups in this country remember a history and to show them the way to found an independent state. However, it is outside the purview of this committee to decide whether this was the purpose of publication (Bozarslan 1990).

The court decided that the translator's intention was not to encourage ethnic separatism in Turkey, and allowed the book to be sold. The public prosecutor appealed, and a second expert panel was convened to study the text and to advise the court as to its political ramifications. The court ruled again that the book was merely a historical Ottoman document, and decided against its banning. Regardless of the court decision, the translator was arrested and imprisoned for three years.

A second example concerns İsmail Beşikçi's 1969 book *Doğu anadolu'nun düzeni: sosyo-ekonomik ve etnik temeller* (The order of Eastern Anatolia: social-economic and

ethnic foundations), the first sustained sociological treatment of the Kurdish region in Turkish. Despite not mentioning the word 'Kurdistan', Beşikçi was first sacked from his university post and then taken to court, charged with communist and Kurdish propaganda (Beşikçi 1992 [1969]: 24). The result was a thirteen-year jail sentence and the banning of the book. The two examples show how both historical material about the Kurds and anthropological analysis of the Kurdish regions that do not conform to the state position that the Kurds are a Turkish people have been susceptible to censorship. The publishing of Western Orientalist material into Turkish, too, has received a mixed reception. For example, the translation into Turkish (in 1955) of the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* by the Ministry of Education cut out Minorsky's two long concluding paragraphs from his entry on the Kurds, in which he gives information on Kurdish nationalist newspapers. Where it ends abruptly in the Turkish edition the translators simply wrote: 'Bu makale aslından tadilen alınmıştır' ('This article has been modified from the original') (*İslam Ansiklopedisi* 1955: 324).

The second and revised edition of the Leiden *Encyclopaedia of Islam* has never been translated into Turkish. Instead the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Diyanet Bakanlığı) has since the mid-1980s engaged in a massive rival intellectual enterprise of its own, the production of a Turkish *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, now up to volume 32. The foreword to the first volume, written in 1988, makes it clear why the state wished to sponsor such a work:

As is well known, as a genre of writing an *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is a work in which is collected essential and reliable knowledge about the religion, science, philosophy, art, and cultural works of Muslims as produced throughout their history, including knowledge of those nations' history, geography, and ethnography. The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* produced by Europeans between the years 1908 and 1938 and published in English, French, and German is just such a work. However, in that encyclopaedia the knowledge given about the Turkish world, an important part of Islam and of the Islamic universe is often extremely abbreviated, sometimes deficient and sometimes wrong. For this reason in the *İslam Encyclopaedia* prepared by the Turkish Foundation of Religious Affairs ... a proper space is given to Turkish-Islamic civilization and to the Turkish science, ideas, literature, art, religion, and statesmen who contributed to this civilization's development (*İslam Ansiklopedisi* 1988: i).

Unlike in the European *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, there is no entry on the Kurds (although there is on the Arabs). Censorship here is exercised through the simple expediency of silence about Kurdish Islam and its history.

In brief, it is not only Kurdish translators and publishers that have appropriated either the methods or the prestige of Western Orientalism for their own purposes. Most strikingly, Habil Adem's fateful book on the Kurds was not published in his own name but rather under the pseudonym of 'Dr Fritz', accompanied by the claim on its front cover that it was a translation into Ottoman of a work published by the Oriental Institute in Berlin. In short the book is a fake, its authority over the reader aided by its status as a 'translation'. The work was translated into Turkish and republished in 1992, still attributed to Dr Fritz. It is often cited by Kemalist intellectuals as a reliable source of evidence about the origins and history of the Kurds.⁶

Histories

Clearly, then, the Republic's post-war creation of the history of a sovereign Turkish ethnicity – both in practice and discursively – has been accompanied by the incorporation of the Kurds within it and the censorship of rival or unauthorized Kurdish ethnographies and histories. This nationalist crafting of a unique Turkish culture and

ideological system should not only be understood as a cultural antidote to Western racism or in relation to Europe's superiority complex (i.e. in reaction to Western colonialism and Orientalism) but also be analysed in connection with the Kemalists' policies and discourse towards Kurds. This point is extremely important, as an influential contemporary stream in Turkish politics, connected to key institutions of state power with a legal monopoly over the means of violence, is unable to critique Western imperialism except by becoming even more nationalist and pro-Kemalist. The result is a Turkish nationalism today that is both anti-American and hostile to any assertion of ethnic difference by Kurds. Indeed Kurdish self-institution is denounced as being a creation of the imperialist West or opposed in the name of the Kurds' essential Turkishness. Even liberal Turkish scholars sometimes cannot temper their admiration for the modernism of the Kemalist revolution, particularly its institutionalization of Islam as a state religion, with a critical analysis of its relationship to Kurds. Too often a nationalist take on the fostering of Turkish by the language revolution ignores its related ban on the speaking and publishing of Kurdish.

With these claims in mind, in this final section I want to return to some of the issues gestured to in my introduction, to questions about how the history of the discipline has been narrated in the post-1960s critique of anthropological representation itself. What conclusions about the discipline might we draw from the appropriation by Kurds of Western anthropological analysis of Kurdish society as antidote to the Turkish state's own fabrication of ethnographic knowledge about them? As we have seen, Pels emphasizes how *European* colonialism encompassed a 'broader field of ethnographic activity' in relation to which anthropology pursued its more specific intellectual aims (1997: 165). Similarly, for Nick Thomas, 'travel, modernity, anthropology and colonialism are constitutive of each other', partly because colonial government required 'ethnographically specific knowledge of particular populations' for its desired new order of welfare domination (1994: 7, 4). Equally generally, Joan Vincent has claimed that '[a]nthropology is a discipline more immediately familiar and hence more immediately implicated than other disciplines with the transformations produced by European power upon the non-European world. For a long intellectual moment, colonialism's primary object of control constituted anthropology's primary object of investigation' (1990: 10). There is also a well-established critique of anthropology that privileges a connection between changing anthropological paradigms of social life and evolving practices of colonialism. Both Feuchtwang (1973) and Patrick Wolfe (1999), for example, discuss how the change in British and French colonial policy from direct to indirect rule was a mediating factor in the paradigm shift in anthropological theory in the 1920s from evolutionism to structural functionalism. In his introduction to *Colonial situations*, George Stocking (1991: 4) notes, too, the ready availability of a 'schematized outline history' that articulates anthropology and colonialism in the emergence of functionalism.

For all of these writers the colonial power referred to is Western. Yet the history of fieldwork and ethnographic representation in Turkey, Iran, the Soviet Union, and perhaps elsewhere (Greece, the Balkans?) does not conform to this narrative, given its emergence within the context of nationalist regimes that had their own long and evolving pre-history of colonial governance over varied language-speakers (the Ottoman and Qajar empires, for example). The ethnographic work produced in those countries in the years we now denote as 'classical anthropology' was composed under the tutelage of independent and revolutionary nation-states. In those regions for a long

intellectual moment, it was not colonialism's but the *nation-state's* 'primary object of control that constituted anthropology's primary object of investigation'.

I would argue, then, that many analyses of the relationship between anthropology and colonialism obscure the influence over anthropology not of the colonial system but of the nation-state one – that is to say, not of colonialism but of nationalism. Certainly, Leach's ethnography on Kurds in Southern Kurdistan (1940) can be accused of overlooking the partial dominance of the British in Iraq (as has been Meyer Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard's *African political systems*, published in the same year). But more importantly Leach's functionalist holistic treatment of Kurdish society is silent both about the history of modern *Ottoman* colonialism in the region, and about the growing presence there of the emergent Iraqi nation-state. In particular, Leach ignores the twin processes of universal military conscription and attempted Arabization of the population through the new national education system. Sati al-Husri, the Director-General of the Iraqi Ministry of Education between the years 1921 and 1941, was a 'renowned Ottoman pedagogue' (Simon 1997: 93) before his conversion to Arab nationalism. He was also a friend of Turkish nationalist Ziya Gökalp, and strongly impressed by the Turkish nationalism of the Young Turks he observed in his years of training in Istanbul before and during the First World War. The same criticism can be made with even greater force of Barth's ethnography on the Kurds in northern Iraq published in 1953. Rather than a change in colonial policy from direct to indirect rule being an influence in the paradigm shift in anthropological representations in the 1920s, for ethnography in and about Turkey, Iran, and Iraq it is the new theory and practice of nationalist cultural revolution that conditioned theoretical change in the discipline.

In brief, it is striking how the focus on European colonial power and the importance of its influence over the discipline of anthropology has detracted from analysis of nationalism as simultaneously generative of ethnographic activity. The cultural relativism of the classical anthropological imagination possesses a shared vocabulary or vision of society with nationalism, imagining cultural difference through categories such as authenticity and indigeneity, social boundedness and autochthonic cultural production. The influence of the outside world upon the integrity of the local cultural whole is a cause of anxiety for both, minimizing as they do inter-societal cultural creation. In both the colonial (Western) and post-colonial (nationalist) contexts anthropologists were engaged in the same project – the collecting, documenting, and publishing of knowledge about the folklore, peasant culture, music, crafts, and social organization of the identified ethnic group or the nation. The regular research trips by Kemalist urban intellectuals (in the 1930s) to rural areas to record and analyse 'peasant life', so as to produce new synthetic forms of Turkish national culture, attest to a common theoretical heritage shared by anthropology and nationalism in the heroic period of each. Nation-states such as Turkey are still massively involved in this creation and propagation of a national culture, which includes of course the constant censoring of its 'non-national' forms.

These links between classical anthropology and nationalism are obscured precisely because in some parts of the world there was an extended period of overlap between indirect colonial rule and the first flush of ethnographic fieldwork. In the territories of the successor regimes to the Ottoman Empire, however, the paradigmatic triumph of structural functionalism in anthropology coincides exactly with the era of nation-states. And the nineteenth-century independence of Greece and various territories in the Balkans via a mobilization of a discourse on ethnic/national identity provided an even earlier inspiration for anthropological theorizing.

What we might consider, then, as a constituting relation between nationalism and anthropology in many parts of the world takes on a particular configuration in the case of the production of ethnographic knowledge about Kurds. Post-colonial theory and its critique of that knowledge identified as Orientalism has long interrogated the way much Western writing about the Orient (in the first instance the Arab world and Islam) has served both to denigrate it and to generate a Western self through this representation of the 'Other'. Thus one relatively recent book begins its investigation by stating: 'This book explores the discursive dynamics that secure a sovereign subject status for the West. It is about the cultural representation of the West to *itself* by way of a detour through the other' (Yeğenoğlu 1998: 1, original emphasis). But the overly focused nature of this and similar analyses neglects a range of other circuits of knowledge that secure a sovereign subject status – for Turks, Persians, and Arabs, for example – through their representations of Kurds. For this reason I would argue that the production of anthropological knowledge about Kurds should *not* be assimilated to this general Orientalist critique, as Kurdish publishing houses' decision to re-issue Leach and Barth's ethnographies and other European travellers' texts shows. Here the 'post-colonial' giving of new meanings to foundational texts of the ethnographic canon continues, but in this case Kurds produce an alternative self-knowledge in the face of Turkish nationalism's production of anthropological knowledge about them.

In brief, my polemical claim is that the nation-state as an 'institution of government producing culture' (Ong 1999: 50) has been a neglected influence in many narratives tracing the historical development of the discipline. We need to supplement (supplant?) this stereotypical narrative of the history of the discipline, as seen in various exemplary texts, with an investigation not only of the historical 'colonial situation' of anthropology but also of its 'national situations' in all their variety. *Contra* Vincent, anthropology in many places 'is a discipline more immediately familiar and hence more immediately implicated than other disciplines' with the transformations produced by nation-state power upon society, and not only with European power over the non-European world.

Let me conclude by summarizing one final thumbnail sketch of the discipline's history, that presented by James Clifford in his introduction to the volume *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography* (1986), a book described as a 'watershed' in anthropological thought by its follow-up publication, *After writing culture* (Allison, Hockey & Dawson 1997). Clifford begins by asserting that the ideology claiming the 'transparency of representation' for cultural accounts has crumbled at the time of writing, leading to an acknowledgement of the literary qualities pervading those texts. Ethnography is now widely asserted as involving the 'invention, not the representation, of cultures' (Clifford 1986: 2) and ethnographers are tricksters and artists who make things up (1986: 6). But how or why has this realization occurred? Clifford's first and only explanation for the cause of the current state of the art is *de-colonization*: the end of empire means 'a series of historical pressures have begun to reposition anthropology with respect to its "objects" of study' (1986: 9, 10). Further, 'a new figure has entered the scene, the "indigenous ethnographer"' (1986: 9). There had been none before, at least in Clifford's account of the discipline. Note the assumption: anthropology is the enterprise of the West. The undermining of the West's 'ability to represent other societies' (1986: 10), combined with a more general critique of representation itself, leads to a crisis of confidence in anthropology and to Clifford's many 'modest' proposals for its reconstruction, including the 'rejection of "visualism"' (1986: 10). In the essay thereafter the indigenous ethnographer disappears, and the dilemmas facing the individual

Western anthropologist in the new era of reflexivity and collaboration once more occupy centre stage. 'Here the ethnographer no longer holds unquestioned rights of salvage' (1986: 16), Clifford pronounces.

For me this recited history is completely Eurocentric, implying that if the particular development of anthropology in the West (and Britain or America in particular) is not the general history of anthropology everywhere, it does at least comprise its golden thread. In Clifford's take, the politics of ethnography in the crisis of the present is reduced to its poetics, and then again to the poetics of the Western anthropologist in their literary invention of another 'culture', and not even to the poetics of the nation-state in its institution of society through the writing of ethnography. My historiography of anthropology in Turkey suggests Clifford's narrative of confession, repentance, and justification is a partial history, not untrue but regional. In keeping with that historiography, perhaps we should adapt Stocking's claim about the diversity of the discipline (1984: 3) and ironically identify this now-common construction of anthropology's history as a component of a 'national tradition', if also an imperial one.

NOTES

I particularly wish to thank Joel Kahn and Kalpana Ram for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. Translations from the Turkish are my own, as are any mistakes in interpretation.

¹ For just this extended discussion of a number of ethnographic accounts of Kurdish society, see my *Kurdistan: crafting of national selves* (Houston 2008), which includes an analysis of the work of Sykes, Minorsky, Leach, Barth, Beşikçi, and van Bruinessen. This article takes off from that analysis to follow up on various issues I was unable to explore in that work.

² In 2007 Avesta also published Sloane's accounts of his 1909 travels through the region.

³ Readers might be familiar with the sentences that have been fought over in the Turkish translations:

I have serious reason to believe that the planet from which the little prince came is the asteroid known as B-612. This asteroid has only once been seen through the telescope. That was by a Turkish astronomer, in 1909. On making his discovery, the astronomer had presented it to the International Astronomical Congress, in a great demonstration. But he was in Turkish costume, and so nobody would believe what he said.

Grown-ups are like that ...

Fortunately, however, for the reputation of Asteroid B-612, a Turkish dictator made a law that his subjects, under pain of death, should change to European costume. So in 1920 the astronomer gave his demonstration all over again, dressed with impressive style and elegance. And this time everybody accepted his report (Saint-Exupéry 2000 [1943]: 9-10).

⁴ For example, Prof. İbrahim Kafesoğlu writes in the foreword to his book *Türk milli kültürü* (Turkish national culture) that it researches the

four-thousand-year-old national culture that Turks possess, and the varied dimensions of that culture that was born and developed in the steppes of Asia. Although this culture changed and developed according to the constraints of time and environment, its essential qualities have always been protected. This book's main aim is to demonstrate how Turkish national culture has preserved its true qualities for hundreds of years (Kafesoğlu 1977: 111).

More recently the philosopher Ayhan Bıçak from Istanbul University published his *The idea of the state in pre-Islamic Turkish thought*, in which he seeks to explain the origin and structure of the Turkish 'system of thought'. Despite admitting the difficulties in such a task – such as the close relationships of Turks with other great civilizations, and their spread over huge geographical areas without having left much sign of their presence there – he is confident that the Turkish conceptual system left its mark on those civilizations. In brief, 'it [Turkish culture] is a culture which spread throughout the largest continent, Asia, affected Europe a great deal, and made important changes in the basic values of the civilizations it had relationships with' (Bıçak 2004: 18). In the book he repeats an older nationalist claim that before conversion to Islam the Turks had independently arrived at a monotheistic religion.

⁵ The People's Houses were the equivalent of the Soviet's 'Culture Houses', and were created by the Kemalists as a country-wide institution in the 1930s to disseminate Republican reforms to the people. Indeed, what is now taught in Turkish universities as 'Turkish national culture' (*Türk milli kültürü*) follows, in large measure, the intellectual structure created by the People's Houses in the 1930s (see Öztürkmen 1994).

⁶ To give just two examples, in Professor Orhan Türkdoğan's book *Etnik sosyoloji* (Ethnic sociology), he cites word for word Dr Fritz's notorious claim that of 8,307 words in an 1856 Kurdish-Russian dictionary, only 300 were authentically Kurdish. Not to be outdone, Türkdoğan claims these 300 words were old Turkish anyway (1997: 117, 118). Kızıoğlu Fahrettin's 1963 book *Kürtlerin kökü* (Origins of the Kurds) attacks Minorsky's article on the Kurds in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, drawing attention to his Russianness and the 'propaganda' intent of Soviet Kurdology, as well as explaining how the article made its unfortunate way into the Turkish translation in 1955 without even more 'correcting'. By contrast, referencing Dr Fritz, Fahrettin argues that the Kurds are Turkish, descendants of the Bogdüz and Becen sections of the Oğuz tribe.

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Anti-histoire d'un non-peuple : les Kurdes, le colonialisme et le nationalisme dans l'histoire de l'anthropologie

Résumé

L'auteur de cet article cherche à contester certains aspects de l'histoire révisionniste de la discipline anthropologique qui avait cours dans les années 1960 et que l'on peut accuser, avec ironie, d'une surestimation autocentrée de la puissance de l'Occident impérial alors même qu'elle démasquait l'influence plus ou moins voilée de celui-ci sur l'ethnographie et la pratique anthropologique. Centrant son approche sur le cas de l'anthropologie des Kurdes, l'auteur suggère que non seulement les textes ethnographiques occidentaux ont eu relativement peu d'influence sur le discours général concernant les Kurdes, mais que la récente décision des maisons d'éditions kurdes d'Istanbul de traduire et de republier ces ouvrages indique dans quel domaine beaucoup de Kurdes sentent aujourd'hui encore un « projet colonial » à l'œuvre. Le rôle et le développement de l'anthropologie en Turquie vient encore compliquer le problème, avec des dizaines d'années d'étude de l'inclusion du discours ethnographique dans les projets modernistes occidentaux de transformation politique.

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