Politics, Ethics, and Complicity in Turkey's Kurdistan: Anxieties of an Era

by

Özge Korkmaz

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Anthropology)
in the University of Michigan
2022

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Webb Keane, Chair
Associate Professor Francis Cody, University of Toronto
Professor Fatma Müge Göçek
Assistant Professor Yasmin Moll
Professor Andrew Shryock

Özge Korkmaz
ozgekork@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0001-7807-7639

© Özge Korkmaz 2022

Dedication

To Mum and Dad

Acknowledgements

This is the hardest part of all, the part I am less confident with. Are there enough words to properly thank each and every person who helped me with this dissertation? Do I even have the memory to remember every act of kindness and generosity that I have encountered over the last eight years?

In this journey, I have been lucky to have the most amazing teachers who always heard me, who listened to me struggling with new ideas which I was yet to properly explain to them, who read my grants and chapters that later became – somewhat thanks to them – something else, and who told me that they trusted my insights without ever letting me feel too comfortable with them – "work harder, Özge, you still have a long way to go," they told me, again and again. I am forever grateful for everything they have done for me. I will talk about my dissertation committee members in a minute, but here I want to name – in no specific order – those who were not in my committee yet nevertheless never any less generous: Bruce Mannheim, Michael Lempert, Barb Meek, Judith Irvine, Alaina Lemon, Mike McGovern, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, Matthew Hull, and Kriszti Fehervary. Likewise, Constantine Nakassis from University of Chicago has left his marks on this dissertation, as well as Alex Pillen from University College London.

My dissertation committee did an extraordinary job – they did an extraordinary job, in particular, in understanding me, even when I did not make any sense to myself. Francis Cody was the most helpful human being. In his own words, he performed his role as an external reader, who stepped in at the right moment to make sure my work was able to communicate itself to its

audience. I reached out to him because I loved his style and writing, and the fact that he was doing exactly what I was trying to do, working at the intersection of political anthropology, linguistic anthropology, and social theory, and he taught me a great deal about what situating one's work at some intersection entailed – that it entailed a certain kind of awareness and a necessity for confidence. Fatma Müge Göçek was amazingly supportive. She brewed me Turkish tea and let me sit and talk for hours on every interesting observation and argument that I could think of, letting the conversation flow freely until I put it all out there. Her curiosity was endless, so were her questions. Yasmin Moll, throughout the whole dissertation writing process, continued to provide deep and always fun intellectual conversations. The best way I can put it is that she is deftly smart – Yasmin would always see my next step and I never knew how she did that. She would fill in the blanks whenever I seemed to be at a loss with words, but also always note other possible pathways that were available to me, and possibly equally rewarding, had I wanted to take a different approach. She was *the* committee member who could most directly relate to my position as an insider/outsider in my field-site; she recognized the labor that this position demanded and she recognized that I was trying to do it right, when I was indeed trying really hard to do it right.

The last two committee members deserve special mention; both have been there for me since the very beginning of my doctoral training. Andrew Shryock was a true mentor. He is the person who made me see that there was something unique about doing fieldwork in the Middle East and that I should cherish the experience and defend it to outsiders. He taught me, above all, that this is a region of the world where the weird, funny, not-normal, absurd, ironic, witty, and scandalous things are the truly historical substances of everyday life, and that I could, in fact, even craft a full PhD dissertation out of them. Indeed, I would like to confess that this

dissertation is full of ethnographic details that are there to make Andrew smile, because I know that Andrew will know – he will know why those details matter and the unique sense of place that those details summon into being. He is the one who taught me that speaking to the anthropologists of the Middle East is not necessarily speaking about Islam, violence, gender, and so on. It is speaking from within a place that has produced its own ways of making knowledge. The last committee member is Webb Keane, my advisor and the chair of this dissertation. Now that it is confession time, I want to say that the primary reason I even applied to Michigan was to work with Webb – though Webb, for a long time, had no idea. I spent my first year in the program trying to impress him before I was finally able to reach out to ask whether he would like to be my advisor. Even this dissertation itself is in part a product of my never-ending desire to impress Webb. He was the most extraordinary teacher and I wanted to be deserving of that. He read and edited every page of this dissertation, and provided constant encouragement, criticism, and inspiration. He spent many hours teaching me English semantics. He was not easy. He endlessly asked me to be more clear, more empirical, and more precise. I revised and reframed, Webb reread and re-edited, and this cycle kept going on until we were both happy with the result. His thumb prints are all over what follows, although I know there still are many things that Webb would want me to improve and strengthen. I promise him that I will.

My graduate student colleagues at Michigan were equally supportive, especially – again in no specific order – Andrew Foster, Georgia Ennis, Rachna Reddy, Randeep Hothi, Nishita Trisal, Amanda Kemble, Ainash Childebayeva, Prash Naidu, Mike Prentice, Kevin Donovan, Scottie Maclochlainn, Adrian Deoanca, Sheng Long, Zehra Hashmi, Aaron Sandel, and Amelia Frank-Vitale. Special mention must go to Haydar Darıcı, Saquib Usman, and James Meador, who have become constant intellectual collaborators and sparring partners over the years.

For financial and institutional support, I have benefited from a Wenner-Gren Dissertation Fieldwork Grant, and funding from Michigan's Rackham Graduate School, Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies, Armenian Studies Program, and Department of Anthropology.

Most important to this dissertation's successful completion were the people in Kurdistan – my interlocutors. I omit the names of those who were most helpful to protect them from bearing any responsibility for what follows. But all of them are now family and friends to me. They took care of me when I was sick, they cooked for me, and they shared everything they had with me. They made me laugh and cry. I will never be able to repay my gratitude to my interlocutors who were an amazingly hospitable, generous community of people.

I have dedicated this dissertation to my parents, Ayten and Veli Korkmaz. I owe them the world. Baran, my brother, taught me what it means to care for someone, and I cannot imagine this world without him. Abass, my partner, gave me a home to return to. This is the most precious thing on earth. I love these four people immensely.

All mistakes are my own.

Table of Contents

Dedication……ii
Acknowledgments……..iii
List of Figures……..…….....xi
Abstract ……xii
Chapter 1 Introduction ……1
Complicity, A Dictate of Circumstances……...……6
Moral Luck and Agency……...……12
Political Ethics and Reflexivity…….……..….17
A Linguistic Anthropology of Political Ethics or A Political
Anthropology of Communication……24
Note on Methodology……..27
Summary of the Chapters……34
Chapter 2 Ethics and Politics of Complicity……39
Accommodation and Guilt……...39
Complicity, the Concept……...……...50
Two Approaches to Complicity……...54
Wrongs that Inspire……....59
Conditions of Complicity in Turkey's Kurdistan……63
A New Time, The Same Old Problem…….....69
Autonomy and Political Ethics……72
Public/Private: The Bounds and Sources of Complicitous Accountability…….….79

Living a Morally Compromised Life……...82

Chapter 3 Kurdistan: A History of Circumstances……...85

A Remote Place……85

Finding the Right Company……94

Perspective……96

Kurdistan in Maps……..100

No Map for a Non-State……107

Making Sense of the Geo-Material……112

The Wise Wanderer……114

A Strange Orderliness……122

The Tribe, A Peculiar Thing……..128

The Genealogical Impulse……..131

Governance via Other Means……135

What of Autonomy? ……..142

Chapter 4 Politics: A Communicative Edifice……...147

Authoritarianism……147

Ever-Presentness……153

A Thick Encounter…….....158

From-Within-Ness…….…….164

A Tale of Two Sons……...177

Anxious Movements……...187

Mistrust……...192

Non-Channeling……...…….…197

Not a Normal Place……201

Chapter 5 The *Leaf* Problem and Complicity…….……205

Ethics, A Situation…….205

The Leaf Problem……...212

Truth and Confession…….225

Luck, A Problem……234

Politics……240

Difference……...246

Agency……252

Chapter 6 The Traitor at the Court…….257

"This is a *cehş*" ……...……...…257

The Strange Case of the Brukîs…….263

The *Dischargeds* …….……..275

Traitors and Solidarity …….……..279

Betrayal: It is All-Too-Familiar…….283

Whirlpools of Debate…….287

Chapter 7 Self-Governance: An Ideal of Sociability……...293

Self-Governance ……...294

A Short History of Peace and War…….,……296

A New Political Model…….…….…….301

Cizre: First Impressions…….306

Return to Cizre……...312

Accountability……....315

The Work of Accounting……322

Chapter 8 Conclusion……...329

Appendix……..335

Bibliography……341

List of Figures

Figure 1: A map of my primary field-sites……28
Figure 2: An inter-village meeting……..…….……. 87
Figure 3: A village in Bahçesaray……..… 89
Figure 4: A map of great Kurdistan from the archive of the Kurdish Institute of Paris……..102
Figure 5: Another map from the Paris Institute. This map shows the designated territory where an independent Kurdistan shall be formed……...…103
Figure 6: Another map from the Kurdish Institute of Paris. This map demonstrates the non-articulation with one another of different historical iterations of an independent Kurdistan…….…….104
Figure 7: A map of Northern Kurdistan. This is created by a social media user called "shilani"……...108
Figure 8: Xalo Bewar (right) with two other village men……..119
Figure 9: Xalo Bewar's wife……120
Figure 10: 2019, Newroz Celebrations. The women wearing all white are all from the Balîyan tribe……..134
Figure 11: A portrait of Kinyal Kartal……142
Figure 12: My host-mother reciting the Quran……149
Figure 13: The Senegalese flag (lower right) together with Kurdish flags…….166
Figure 14: Xaltî Saliha (right) and her daughter-in-law …….268

Abstract

How do we live with the consequences of our actions? And why do consequences matter? While Western morality and much of classical theory have long pointed out the significance of intentionality to social life, underscoring the intensity with which humans evaluate one another, as well as themselves, based on the perceived intentions of social actions, this dissertation centers its analysis on the question of consequences, most significantly, unintended consequences. It explores the ethical and pragmatic life of the consequentiality of social action in Turkey's Kurdistan, where Kurds commonly ethically problematize "complicity in systemic injustices" as an ongoingly reproduced consequence of their everyday accommodations to politics. With close attention to these problematizations, I argue that an anthropological narrative that draws from an attention to consequences brings new and valuable insights into how broader theoretical categories of politics, agency, and morality are lived on the ground.

In Turkey's Kurdistan, since the mid-19th century, and increasingly so since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, local Kurdish communities have tended to conceptualize their political condition as not-normal, and unlike any other part of the country, due to historical circumstances of colonial indirect rule and state authoritarianism. Likewise, contemporary Kurdish political movement, from the early days of its inception in the 1970s, has centered its political critique of Turkish rule around the same problem, that it differently, unjustly, and unequally treats Kurdistan and the Kurdish populace. At stake in this framework is a cultural logic that sees Kurds' everyday accommodations to the demands of politics as

pragmatically and historically consequential to their own political subjugation, even though Kurds do not intend that.

Using materials from twenty-three months of ethnographic research, which followed three summers of preliminary work in the predominantly Kurdish populated southwest and east regions of Turkey, I examine the variety of reflexive forms and habits that come to shape and govern social relations, and ways in which Kurds imagine and scale their own historical journey in Turkey. Although I touch on a broad range of ethical and evaluative practices that shape the Kurdish everyday life, the empirical focus of this dissertation are the problems, sensibilities, and anxieties that seem to derive their everyday force from being recognized as circumstantial and somewhat *given*, yet deeply rooted in and constitutive of face-to-face interactions and the dynamics of communication. Most significantly, I reflect on the social lives of a list of key ethical categories such as luck, misfortune, collaboration, and betrayal, as well as categories construed as the opposite of the first group, such as autonomy and solidarity, theorized in this dissertation as functions of a life where consequences are made to matter. The dissertation ultimately demonstrates a wide range of consequences that unintended consequences create for our notions of politics, ethics, and agency, with which they coexist.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Roza[1] was born and raised in Van, a predominantly Kurdish city in east Turkey. At age 27, she started working as an architect at the urban planning department of the Van Metropolitan Municipality, which was at the time run by the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Not only did she get a respectful and well-paying job as a first-generation college graduate, and a Kurdish woman she would add, but the fact that she was now serving in the local government of Bekir Kaya, a Kurdish politician she admired, was a source of great pride to Roza as well as to her family.

Bekir Kaya's career traces the sweep of Kurdish political history, but there is something definingly particular about him that the veteran activist has become a grassroots symbol of Kurdish resistance and good governance. In 2009, Kaya was elected as the mayor of Van, promising the city's roughly one million residents that he would empower local voices. Within a few weeks of his election, it was already obvious to everyone that Kaya was no ordinary politician. In recognition of the city's Armenian roots, for instance, he made a historical visit to Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, advocating for dialogue and open borders between the

[1] In this dissertation, given the politically sensitive nature of my field-site, and to ensure the anonymity and safety of my interlocutors, I changed every personal name, and when necessary, other biographical markers such as occupation, age, tribal affiliations, and so on. I do not give the names of the villages I stayed in, just the names of towns, cities, and provinces. A few elders consented to have their pictures added to this dissertation. Figure 2 is a group picture from an inter-village meeting in Bahçesaray, a district of Van Province, which I was invited to take, which the people in the meeting told me that I could use in this dissertation. I use the real names, however, of public figures, such as leaders of tribes, politicians, poets, novelists, and religious leaders.

countries. The people of Van deeply venerated Kaya for being "one of us," a hands-on type of politician, who loved spending time out in the community. His popularity worried the Turkish government, however, and Kaya got arrested in 2012 over allegations of "being a member of a terrorist organization." The indictment filed by a top prosecutor cited his political activities as evidence. Thousands took to the streets to protest his arrest. In 2013, Kaya was released from the prison pending trial, and then got re-elected as the mayor in 2014. Roza started working for Bekir Kaya at the beginning of his second mandate, which came to an end in 2016 when Kaya got dismissed from his position and arrested for the second time, along with four other high-ranking members of his team. Governor Ibrahim Taşyapan, a bureaucrat of Turkish origin and an appointed civil servant, effectively replaced him as the proxy-major, which, to the supporters of Kaya, was an outright violation of their collective will. All this put Roza in an uncomfortably difficult position. It felt like her entire world turned upside down overnight (*adeta dünyam karardı*); all of a sudden she was affiliated with an administration that conflicted with her political views and ethical commitments. She grew restless and eventually quit her job.

I met Roza a few months after her resignation, a decision which she described both as an easy and a hard one: "I know I was just an architect doing her job, and I needed that job, but in the final analysis I am a Kurd and I could not serve under the same people who stole my vote, even though none of that was within my control." She added that doing so "would simply be wrong." Unemployed and struggling with the consequences of her quest to do the right thing, Roza was also admittedly very much in distress. "You need to understand the importance of having someone with steady income to Kurdish families," she explained. Roza was referring to the state-sponsored de-development of Turkey's Kurdish majority southeast and east regions

(hereafter, “Kurdistan”), which has rendered Kurds highly dependent on kin relations and traditional support networks (Yadırgı 2017).

In Kurdistan, it often takes an entire family to support one member’s education (or marriage, or political activism), while the others have to wait for their turn. Roza was the youngest of her six siblings, all of whom supported Roza during her college years by working in informal and seasonal jobs, and none had a permanent salary. As soon as she received her first paycheck, Roza applied for a bank loan (*kredi*) to help her family rehab their house and pay for her brother’s wedding. When she lost her job, she lost the only means by which she could make payments towards that debt. It thus seemed natural to me to ask whether she had any regrets. Roza took a moment to reflect on my question and then gave me the following response: “It is just how life is here” (*burada hayat böyle*).

What initially sounded like a formulaic expression thrown out just to fill the silence, “it is just how life is here,” did pack quite a punch. Should we pause to explore the layers of meaning in this phrase, and care enough to seek its full significance, then we may well ask, what does Roza’s story have to do with this “here” and what does it say about this “life?” What does it mean to speak of a particular moral experience having a place to it, and why did the life Roza inhabited, in Roza’s own formulation, almost ordinarily contain such experiences? How could a choice between ethical commitments and financial interests become a part of Roza’s world, the same world that was also the context of that choice? With Roza’s help, I was able to ask these questions, which became the building blocks of the following ethnography. Reviewing my fieldnotes, I also remember how hard it was for the young woman to describe her experience entirely from an internal perspective, and how little that perspective mattered. For Roza, notwithstanding the hardships, the whole ordeal was an opportunity to realize that moral

experience had a politics of its own, that one could trace the political connections to draw out one's moral habitus. "I can only hope," she told me, "if I ever have to choose between finding myself without money (*parasızlık*) or betraying my people (*halkıma ihanet etmek*) again, I will have the strength to make the same choice as I did today. Believe me, it is better than becoming an accomplice (*suç ortağı*) to this government's bottomless crimes."

Rosa's story was not unusual; the unusual part was its ubiquity. Throughout my time in Kurdistan, I observed that the lives of my interlocutors entailed a tangle of obligations towards the self, family, community, and the broader category of Kurdish people. Even the fact that these people were willing to talk to me, and contribute to my research, was linked to the same idea of obligation, that it was a moral duty to tell the inconvenient truths of Kurdish suffering to the world. Early in my research, I thus committed myself to recording stories similar to that of Roza, which were practically everywhere. I sat with interlocutors, collected testimonies, and learned how to properly speak about their shared troubles and aspirations for a just, moral political community. Our conversations were saturated by discussions about real and ever-present quandaries shaped by a range of predicaments at play in social life, on one hand, and a desire for more solidarity and trust, on the other. To properly understand the problems that this life really entailed, as I was repeatedly told, one needed to cultivate a conscious orientation to certain aspects of the political context – only sensibilities trained this way could reveal the full range of conundrums and aspirations that permeated Kurdistan. While all this was presented to me as a constant and essential part of the Kurdish condition in Turkey, that it was essentially an ethical and reflexive project to begin to imagine a Kurdish society, what I witnessed was, at the same time, a re-articulation of established ideas of political responsibility at a particular historical moment.

My primary dissertation research was undertaken between the years 2017 and 2018, but the bulk of my research on political ethics spanned the years 2014 and 2019, conducted in the midst of what the opponents of the Turkish government described as a new era of populist authoritarianism. Much transpired in the country during this time: the peace negotiations between the Turkish state and the Kurdish guerrilla group PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) collapsed, a military coup was attempted, a state of emergency was declared, three elections happened, and the political system changed from parliamentary democracy to presidential rule. The new regime established itself in Kurdistan as a bulky machinery of securitization, surveillance, and arbitrary punishment which saw large-scale military operations and the arrest of roughly 10.000 Kurdish politicians and activists. The entrenchment of this machinery was palpable. Kurdish civil society and media outlets were either shut down or put under intense scrutiny to the point that their operations came to a standstill. Turkish security forces were everywhere, on every interchange and every road and every side-street. House raids were so common that one would think they were being conducted out of mere curiosity of what was happening inside. Traveling from any point A to any point B meant that Kurds would have to stop at several checkpoints along the way to inform the Turkish state about their journey. And it was pretty common for ordinary citizens to get a phone call from their local police station for reasons often unknown or vague ("someone saw you in the hospital yesterday with a young man, who was it?"). Understandably so, very little, if any, organized dissent took place under these circumstances, for the smallest criticism of the government could easily land an individual in jail. Kurds were given no other choice than keeping their heads down if they wanted to avoid becoming a target of the Turkish state, but keeping one's heads down was a moral act defined as a cardinal sin by Kurdish political ethics. In chapter two, I sketch a summary of this ethics and

how it evaluates Kurdish political condition, which Kurds often call "Kurdish reality" (*Kürt gerçekliği*), partly as a function of Kurds own accommodations to the Turkish rule.

All these transformations in the political field, therefore, produced among Kurds more than a wave of collective fury against the government. Much of what the Kurdish political movement had invested in for decades was themselves contested in these very transformations, which produced new forms of self-awareness. Just as Kurds were struggling to brace themselves for a dizzying descent into political defeat, they began to discern patterns in the picture, realizing that their collective situation was posing an insuperable dilemma: Should they oppose an oppressive regime at great risk to themselves or surrender to its demands for cooperation and silence and thus become complicit with the Turkish state? The following work, Anxieties of an Era, challenges scholars to consider what this recurrent dilemma means in larger theoretical and methodological terms.

Complicity, A Dictate of Circumstances

I should say right out of the gate that this dissertation is a collection of moral trivia. It tracks mundane exchanges and everyday, silent worries of Kurds over their fears of "becoming complicit with the Turkish state," which are often too uncertain to have any binding force. Yet, as each chapter demonstrates, the seemingly trivial issues studied here are full of anthropological significance, not least from the vantage point of those living on the margins of power.

The relevance for the margins should be clear, especially in a context like Kurdistan, where Kurdish communities have been struggling for a more desirable form of governance since the 19th century. This is a struggle with a long history behind it, one that took on a new and much enhanced significance in the late 1970s with the establishment of the Kurdish political and

guerrilla organization PKK. Openly advocating for independence, the PKK started its armed insurgency in 1984 and has since established itself as one of the most important actors of contemporary Kurdish politics. Most importantly, and I shall have more to say about this later, it has done so by pointing out the political necessity of rethinking the relations among Kurds as a way to inspire their search for alternative modes of governance. What Kurds see in the PKK-led movement, in other words, is the promise of not merely a new political model but a different and more ethical life that can produce new social relations. While "Resistance/Power" is one kind of language to analyze this story, this research points at the complex task of developing others as well. It examines complicity accusations as a language from which Kurds draw great inspiration so as to properly reflect on the morally troubling effects of their encounters with the Turkish state on group-internal dynamics. In examining this language, my goal is to show the ways actors' unequal positioning within shifting power fields evokes their capacities for moral response and thus provides a context for ethical inquiry. I will come back to this question later. For now, I would like to note that these seemingly trivial cases of complicity also shed light on some of the most fundamental questions in moral philosophy, social theory, and anthropology of ethics. Let me explain.

When Kurds like Roza talk about their fear of betraying other Kurds, they do more than just express an anxiety; they frame these anxieties as a defining architectural feature of what they consider to be the sphere of the political. When they claim "complicity with the Turkish state" is pervasive in Kurdistan, they teach us something important about this architecture which is not always readily known – that politics, by design, is a convergence of contradictory conditions affecting a large number of people in similar ways. And when they dismiss a person's claim of

lack of intent in face of complicity charges, they provide a contrast between people's intentions and the unintended consequences that ensue. They say unintended consequences do matter.

The ethnographic and theoretical focus of much of this dissertation is the contrast (or gap) between intentions and consequences. The purpose here is not to fix this gap, nor to make a choice between the primacy of intentions versus that of consequences as a way to endorse an existing tradition in legal or moral philosophy. The purpose is to show that the very contrast between intentions and consequences has a politics of its own. And this is where the category of complicity comes into the picture.

In Kurdistan, it is commonly assumed that complicity is circumstantial. The basic conditions of complicity with the Turkish state, so the argument goes, consists not in people's intentions but in the extraordinariness of the political and historical circumstances that render Kurds functionalities within the state's governance apparatus. To put it differently, complicity in Turkish rule is not something a person could possibly entirely create for herself. As I observed throughout my fieldwork, what most explicitly disquiets Kurds about the whole business of complicity is their disquiet at having to live under these circumstances. And behind this disquiet with circumstances lies an ethical argument that one's intentions and the effects in the world – one's inner self and how one appears to others – should ideally be one and the same. The circumstances of Turkish rule, however, turn this kind of moral unity into a luxury that most Kurds cannot afford to have.

In accusing one another of complicity, Kurds, by virtue of having an interest in their own world, inevitably make claims about the historical sources and reproduction of these circumstances. Chapter three approaches the notion of circumstances with a strong theoretical interest in the co-indexical relations between everyday operations of judgment and reasoning,

and the historical contingencies that make these operations relevant to group life. Yet, pointing out the circumstantial nature of the topic, that Kurds' complicity with the Turkish state has a structural dimension to it, risks making "complicity" appear to be a direct and authentic correlate of these structures, something of which we can attain firm enough a grasp by simply focusing on its constitutive other, the Turkish state. So, I raise a flag of caution here and my reason for caution is twofold.

First, I need to make clear the semantic and pragmatic differences between two ways to say "complicity" in Kurdish, the second of which being the subject matter of this dissertation. The first word is the more generic way of describing an actor's involvement in someone else's crime: "*li hevkarî*." This word means "doing together," but in cases of a crime or wrongdoing, it denotes the aiding and abetting of a second party to the principal. The second word is "*hevparî sûcî bûm*," meaning "partnering in a crime," but this word is semiotically indexical in Kurdish political discourse of a certain kind of partnering, or collaboration, with the Turkish state, with actors and institutions in some capacity representing the state. The principal wrongdoer, in this latter case, is thus a political actor with power and dominance, and the accomplice is a Kurdish actor who colluded with, aided and abetted, or accommodated the apparatus of political repression. *Hevparî sûcî bûm*, therefore, as opposed to the generic word l*i hevkarî*, has emerged out of its own socio-political history of ethical problematization, registering the speaker's, or the accuser's, stance vis-à-vis how she recognizes and situates herself in that history. *Hevparî sûcî bûm*, in other words, draws a connection between the accuser's accusation, in whatever form the accusations is being made, and her broader socio-political position, *and* recognition of that position as a special kind of historical and situated witnessing that comes with its own ethical entailments. As Kurdish political discourse also heavily draws from Turkish language, I also

need to mention the Turkish word "*suç ortaklığı*," here. Kurdish activists, writers, and parliamentarians, when they switch to Turkish, use the word "*suç ortaklığı*," meaning "the partnership in crime" in lieu of *hevparî sûcî bûm.* Both *suç ortaklığı* and *hevparî sûcî bûm* provide similar pragmatic possibilities, metapragmatically defining the context and the broader dynamics of complicitous accountability as accountability for the actor's mediated relationship and contribution to the wrongs of the political sovereign.

A popular ethical category that has profoundly reconfigured social and political relations in Turkey's Kurdistan, *hevparî sûcî bûm* is not something that stands on its own. It is a by-product of a common perception among Kurds that their everyday accommodations to the state, no matter how mundane or explicit, help materialize the state's control over Kurdish lives. This was apparent, for instance, when Roza chastised her former colleagues for working in the new administration all along, which in essence was aiding and abetting – they were guilty of acting as a lookout while the Turkish state was robbing Kurdish votes. We should also take into account, as Roza later told me in a somewhat resigned and admitting tone, that Kurds live their lives and make their living under such adverse circumstances that they are often vulnerable to the state's political and economic inducements to accommodation. Consider the labor market. Turkey's Kurdistan is an economic periphery with little to no private sector investment. While public employment appears to be the gold standard, it is not free of contradictions, leaving Kurds weltering deep in the dirt of politics. In this dissertation, I identify the sociological factors that force accommodation into Kurds' hands as the rule of exception, the suspension of legality, and the de-development of Kurdistan. But I do not necessarily study these factors. I learn about these factors by studying complicity accusations as sites of collective inquiry wherein Kurds reflect on structural realities as affordances for "complicity" to happen. My reservations about a strictly

structural framework, to put it differently, stem from the gap between the inclination to understand social phenomena as products of "external" conditions and the methodological imperative to weigh those conditions as semiotic affordances sustained in particular habits and practices of construing phenomena.

Second, a crucial point in the study of ethical life, ethical categories, especially the ones with punitive weight, are seldom straightforward. They are more than a person's gut feelings about right and wrong, and surely more than taxonomies of norms and rules. There is not one ethical category, as many in the anthropology of ethics have variously argued (Keane 2016, Laidlaw 2002, 2013; Lambek 2010, Lempert 2013, 2014; Zigon 2007), that does not testify to the cluster of dilemmas, choices, uncertainties, regrets, and doubt confronting social actors in everyday life. A person might have her reasons, for instance, to think that a friend is committing a wrong by working for the Turkish government, or by answering a police officer's questions about a neighbor's peculiar nocturnal activities, but her thinking so is not enough to establish the latter's complicity with the Turkish state. In making a claim as such, the accuser cannot limit herself to a view of complicity defined largely in predetermined ways. Rather, she will be expected to assemble a sound argument, understandable by her relational others, that reflexively ties her claim to its own facts realistically described. She will need to show, as she acts on, what ethnomethodologists call the "unique [conceptual] adequacy" (Garfinkel and Wieder 1992) of "complicity" to the particularities of a situation, that is, what any member of her society would (or should) readily and reasonably know about that situation. One important task of this dissertation is to grasp the making and conditions of this adequacy, which is never a simple operation.

As will be documented in each chapter, complicity accusations are products of considerable communicative labor. They hold particular relevance for Kurds who believe that the prevailing political climate makes it a necessity to be especially alert to and observant of complicitous behavior. High relevance means, borrowing from the jargon of social media, more clicks, followers, replies, reposts, interaction, friction, and, of course, more debate. Further, establishing a case of complicity, that is, framing someone's actions as making a positive contribution to the crimes of another, is by no means an easy task. It requires a consistent and adequate theory of complicity, a receptive audience, lots of talk, and then some. Any satisfying account of "Kurdish complicity," therefore, must also be an account of the semiotic distinctions, modes of reasoning, and technologies of address that Kurds make use of in order to moralize accommodation in terms of its consequences. With close attention to this semiotic work, I am able to suggest that complicity accusations are often prompted by an anxiety over the inevitable excess and slippage that result from accommodation: its ability to reproduce Turkish control within Kurdish spaces in ways that exceed the limits of the actor's awareness. This, in turn, suggests how an analysis of complicity may contribute to our ongoing rethinking as anthropologists of our theorizations of human agency vis-à-vis its purported intentionality (Keane 2016, Laidlaw 2010, Latour 2005).

Moral Luck and Agency:

At a certain point of its history, anthropology greatly benefited from invocations of agency, mainly through contributions from scholars who underscored the constitutive relation of human conduct to socio-political processes (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Giddens 1984, Ortner 1984). In this formulation, talking about agency was a way to recognize the creative and intentional

capacities of human beings in face of structural constraints. It was a key move, and a welcome correction, that enabled anthropologists to portray humans not as passive receivers but as active choice makers. By the end of the day, what was the point of doing anthropology if not to account for people's most authentic responses (their agency) to the hard facts of the social and political milieu?

Yet, as both Webb Keane (2003, 2016) and James Laidlaw (2010) have argued, there arises a cluster of problems with this conception of agency. As Keane (2003) reminds us, to begin with, even if we accept that agency results from intentional and authentic human conduct, we still need to be able to come up with a viable way to measure these intentions and their authenticity, which is at best a methodological muddle. Further, while intentionality is deeply related to human psychology and sociality, what people make of the fact that they are indeed intentional depends on both culture and context – "context" as the socio-political circumstances and "context" as the particular setting of an interaction. For an anthropologically sound analysis of intentionality, Keane (2016) proposes a semiotic approach that addresses the practices and modalities by which one's intentions are interpreted by the others as explicit signs of her agency. Laidlaw, in a similar vein, writes that establishing intentions is an important but insufficient step towards constructing agency. For the most part, people operate in everyday life with a more complex notion of agency that does not categorically distinguish between intentional acts and their unintended effects as the two mutually exclusive domains of moral experience. As is often the case, individuals are treated as perfectly capable and responsible agents in situations that are well beyond their control, situations they never in a million years intended to happen. Complicity accusations in Kurdistan provide a good example of this. In accusing one another of complicity with the Turkish state, Kurds define agency as involving different degrees of control, awareness,

and commitment, precisely by embedding agency in a narrative of luck. In pursuing this matter, this dissertation draws inspiration from philosopher Bernard Williams's theory of "moral luck" (Williams 1981, see also Nagel 1979).

At face value, according to Western and modern articulations of human morality, a subject is morally responsible only for her individual actions that are undertaken deliberately to achieve specific ends. Related to this view is a dominant strain of moral thought that takes immunity to luck as the essence of moral experience (*sensu* Kant 1784 [1998]). When luck makes a difference to our lives and actions, in other words, the difference will have no moral overtones because the element of contingency that it derives from has no moral overtones – we are free to call it an accident or a coincidence. It is against this picture of morality that Williams proposes the theory of moral luck. He rightly observes that in everyday life people often have very powerful reasons to include luck to their ethical assessments of what they have done, and how they might have done it differently had they known better. Consider, for instance, the case of a Kurdish public employee, let's call him Mahmut, who grudgingly attended an election campaign rally of president Erdoğan after having a threatening conversation with his superintendent, and despite calls from his many colleagues not to do so. As Mahmut was repeatedly told, public employees were under no contractual obligation to support a particular political candidate or party. Another employee, Ömer, did not have to make a similar choice as he had recently been assigned to a field duty station. When the superintendent opened an investigation against the absentees which culminated in their dismissal from the profession, Mahmut judged himself differently than how Ömer judged himself – and the same goes for everyone involved. The former regretted his actions and acknowledged the need to address his friends' broken trust, who were outraged by his "betrayal." The latter, on the other hand, was

morally lucky and could comfortably join a chorus of people slamming Mahmut over his alleged complicity with the superintendent. The argument being made against Mahmut was that his obedience was a form of influence that encouraged the superintendent to adopt punitive measures against disobedience. But how could Mahmut realistically predict that this would happen? The superintendent loved throwing threats at employees, who never knew how far he would be willing to go with them.

Cases like this suggest that moral luck grows out of the ordinary conditions of ethical practice. As it happens, real life is often too complicated, and actors frequently find themselves thrust into situations of unintended harm and antagonism. In situations so assembled, others will take it that they can correctly assign blame to these people as it gradually becomes clear to everyone that "actions are events" (Nagel 1979: 68) that fundamentally occur under certain circumstances. Thus, just as it is essential to include luck to our conceptions of ethical life, it is essential to be able to envision a notion of moral agency that includes unintended consequences. This kind of agency, in Michael Lambek's words, is a "function of specific kinds of arguments concerning [people's] liability and responsibility" (2010: 31) for their effects on multiple others. This is a kind of agency, as was said above, that also provides ground for rethinking some of the prevailing myths about human agency that we have inherited from twentieth century social and anthropological theory.

First, a few words on what this rethinking entails. Whenever anthropologists pursue a new take on a vintage recipe (let's say a concept or idea), it is generally to make it more complicated, contingent, and culturally diverse than previously assumed. This tendency, something that has become a defining feature of the discipline, is not entirely theoretical. It is largely governed by a methodological justification of studying phenomena from the inside out,

from microsocial data to macrosocial analysis, from practice to concepts. This is why anthropologists are often at pains to record brief field encounters in their utmost detail; the goal is to more rigorously, and with critical empathy, connect and compare local precepts with conceptual ones. As with many other purchases that seem wasteful to observers, the discipline derives great intellectual gratification from its purchase of details, so we do it, efficiency be damned. Surely things are no different when it comes to agency.

As I argue at the end of chapter five, much work in recent anthropology has treated agency as distributed, emergent, negotiated, assembled, and intersubjective, against claims that purify human agency as a fixed object that lies in a single individual (Enfield and Kockelman 2017, Kockelman 2007, Latour 2005, Sidnell 2017a, 2017b; Strathern 1991, 1996). Why should this be the case? Because, if people's sense of who they are and what they have done depends so deeply on luck and circumstances, on how their actions appear to and are judged by others, then agency cannot be the sort of thing that classical social theory, in particular Kantian ethics, has told us it is.

While I cite and make use of this argument throughout the dissertation, I do not wish to entirely do away with the idea of the unity of agency, that is, the unity of one's intentions and one's effects in the world. Rather, I wish to think with this unity, as it is my interlocutors' preferred form of being in the world, something they are struggling daily to achieve and maintain, and the one thing they are constantly asked and forced to compromise. Next to my interlocutors, anthropologists look like a negative and overly critical folk who fail pretty badly in thinking normatively. In this sense, this dissertation examines moral unity as a useful and positive measure of value, by which Kurds judge aspects of their socio-political circumstances, from the most ordinary to the most salient, as regretful and unfortunate. These people may at

times doubt whether a person can realistically maintain such unity, but the idea that any person should be able to do so remains a principal and ordering element of their everyday interactions and evaluations of one another. So, the notion of moral unity, both as discursive content and metapragmatic frame, is real and it is specified in Kurdistan through the very regime of value that it generates. These "regimes," as Judith Irvine so aptly puts, "are high on the list of what we study as anthropologists" (2011: 16).

Political Ethics and Reflexivity:

To be sure, Bernard Williams has a more straightforward approach to the question of luck than the author of this dissertation. He examines luck as an ordinary element of ethics; I consider it more so as an expression of the extraordinary. He conceptualizes luck as an omnipresent feature of human existence; I look at the sensibilities and forms of reason that Kurds bring into their articulations of luck so as to make it appear unique to their collective existence.

Ask any Kurd about the simple facts of their lives and you will get pretty much the same response, that "things are anything but simple here." Quite likely, you will also hear them using the words "*bext" (luck or fortune)* "*bedbext*" (ill-fated) to properly thematize this absence of simplicity. Indeed, the word "*bext*" is something that this dissertation approaches as an area of reflexive activity, a key mode of thought and discourse by which Kurds frame social action, everyday relations, and their exposure to the political conditions. Throughout this dissertation, I stress the significance and situated use of *bext* repeatedly, but let me give here a quick explanation: *bext* can be luck that is fated to happen, or one's overall fortune in life, thus requiring a different kind of awareness than the possibility of random luck – random luck is *treş* in Kurdish; bext is also something Kurds reflect on, implicitly notice or signal, or explicitly

problematize as they try to depict and make extra sense of their socio-historical group-conditions, the idiosyncratic circumstances and characteristics of their lives that seem to have defined their political-historical journey, and the specific mode of apprehension and assessment that these conditions, circumstances, and characteristic do require.

When they speak of bext, Kurds also say that "Kurdistan is not a normal place" (*Kurdistan ne cihé ji birézikî ye*) and that people in other parts of the country, namely the Turkish Turkey, do not have to live like this (remember Roza's words, "it is just how life is here"). Kurdistan is not normal, they will insist, because any theory of a "normal life" should include relative security, predictability, consistency, and autonomy. Between such rhetorical remarks and longer detours into recent history customarily offered in daily tea-drinking rituals, Kurds adumbrate a vision of a resilient society in haggard appearance. While doing so, they also always point out the everyday, the mundane, the things that are continuously happening in the background, presenting them with daily challenges about how to go with their daily routine – the basic, concrete realities of the authoritarianism and security-paradigm under which their communities across Kurdistan live. It is precisely in such accounts that they register occupation, political violence, poverty, vulnerability, surveillance, and, more than anything, living with a constant fear of Kurdish security forces who historically have had full discretion in Kurdistan as the major elements of their group condition.

Here, I want to take note of, moreover, that while this dissertation is inspired by Williams's approach to moral luck, its empirical starting point and focus is always *bext* – that there is something wrong, not-normal with the kind of fortune *given* to Kurds, the kind of life they are fated to live and seem to be stuck with for a rather long time. In the chapters that follow, this dissertation unpacks for the observer what *bext* really entails for Kurds, what kinds of ethical

problems it creates, the notions of politics, morality, agency, and accountability that it picks and coexists with.

Now, let me very briefly linger on the idea of "not-normal," to which I return in chapter four, so as to clarify the specific sense in which *bext* presents itself in Kurdistan as an object of attention that invites reflection, and also adjustments in how people calculate, behave, think, make plans, evaluate one another, thus in effect creating a context in which my interlocutors felt like they had to and did live in a state of hyper caution.

For a long time, I took the statement, "Kurdistan is not a normal place," as somewhat of a truism, something I was obviously aware of and, in theory, understood quite well, but one that I was far too frequently being reminded of at the same time. The eye-opening moment, what made me finally think more attentively about what this statement really meant, however, came in 2016, in the midst of intense fighting between the Turkish military and the PKK. I was living in a small Kurdish village, located in one of the rather more remote corners of Van Province. It was commonly understood that our village was just one node in a complex archipelago of interdependencies, which comprised a total of eight villages of the same tribe. As is always the case in Kurdistan, this was an archipelago that was largely defined in political terms and with reference to locals' more or less settled assumptions about allegiance. In plain language, I was living in a strongly pro-PKK area.

My hosts were an elderly couple and their youngest child, Leyla, who was also the only child out of eleven yet to leave the family home. Most days, I would rarely step outside of the house, leading a confined domestic life with its many unexpected joys and tribulations. This was in large part out of respect for my hosts. Throughout my fieldwork, I had a couple host families with whom I lived sometimes for months on end, and thus spent enough time to become like

parents and daughter. These people would all exhibit various degrees of protectiveness, which I had learned to accept early in my research, but this particular couple was a special case. In a cultural context where many conveniently believed that babies needed not much help to become what God intended for them, such that they would eventually learn how to sleep, walk, and speak, I was not even allowed to introduce myself to a random house guest. Hardly anybody was to be trusted and nearly everybody could hurt me and my research. So, I did what any quasi-daughter would do in that position. I rebelled.

To be perfectly precise, the fact that I was a woman had relatively little bearing on all this. As far as I am concerned, Leyla was living her life and minding her business just fine. The problem was my visibility as the new person, and that I was attracting a large audience who would arrive unannounced to offer help with my fieldwork. According to my host family, however, none of these people were reliable partners. None knew the dangers of knowing and talking too much, neither did I. As my host father, Xalo Salîm ("*Xalo*," meaning maternal uncle), did warn me, after witnessing a rebellious interview in which all sorts of political taboos were broken, which covered topics ranging from armed insurgency and jailed Kurdish leaders to the real-life possibility of an independent Kurdish state, I could not act as if all these things were just normal. It was arguably impossible to know beforehand what these acts would causally produce. What if someone I talked to one day would get arrested the next? What if a neighbor whom I considered trustworthy had a propensity to yakety-yak? True that mistrust should have had no place among relatives, friends, and neighbors, but ours was not a normal life and mistrust was a valid and legitimate stance to take.

I find this story quite pertinent to this dissertation, for it testifies to a rather common perception among Kurds that their world lacks a normative structure which they can comfortably

take for granted (like how people normally do). As my interlocutors often ask (the wording is mine, the argument is theirs), how can a person maintain moral unity with even the most integral aspects of the political circumstances bringing her into a mediated relation to harms and injustices? If one is constantly forced to disclose herself to the Turkish state without knowing what it is that she reveals, what does this make her and where does her responsibility lie? How can she know, for instance, how to talk to a police officer while having no ability to calculate beforehand the consequences of her doing so or to undo a harm that is already committed? All this points to a particular kind of extraordinariness, a particular kind of moral luck, that Kurds consider an explicit and defining feature of their collective existence, something they have to live with but also cannot wait to be moving on from for good.

Luck is also a main target of the PKK-led Kurdish political movement and has influenced the group's political ethics of self-awareness. This political ethics, and the whole history of the Kurdish political movement, requires more space and a few more words. For now, it should suffice to note that one important objective of the PKK – a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla organization founded in 1978 – has been to create stronger awareness among Kurds of their material circumstances as a people. This has been done, in part, by way of reframing accommodation – collaboration, tacit approval, indifference, silence, and so on – as a politically charged and structurally reproduced ethical problem. This reframing is grounded in a set of critiques towards the structural circumstances that force accommodation into the Kurdish everyday, which then feed into an ethical and highly public stance against its ill-effects in Kurdistan. What comes out of this politico-moral narrative is a semiotic re-evaluation of the relation between "accommodation to injustices" and "complicity in injustices" as a relation of likeness. Accommodating the Turkish state is like helping the Turkish state. Further, there is a

tragic irony to all of this, the basis of which lies in Kurds' unwitting or knowing participation in an unjust system that affects, more than anyone, Kurds themselves, effectively breaking their sense of unity and solidarity with one another. Just as the success of the PKK is contingent upon the success of its supporters in resisting accommodation, its failure too comes from their failure. This is why complicity accusations are all replete with references to traitors (*bêbext*, *xayîn*) and spies (*ajan*) as figures from within. I discuss these figures at length in Chapters five, six, and seven with particular attention to their communicative figurations in talk, as well as the ethics of such talk.

Recently, anthropologists have been drawn to studying ethics in its own right, which involves a renewed attention to the notion of "reflexivity." Webb Keane describes reflexivity as a capacity for self-distancing (2016: 23), and Jarrett Zigon as a self-conscious stepping-away from one's moral habitus, from the "unreflective and unreflexive dispositions of everyday social life" (2008: 17-18). Zigon goes on to suggest that this stepping-away is often occasioned by "breakdowns or problematizations" that compel actors to "reflect upon an appropriate ethical response." Whether one agrees with this bifurcation of morality and ethics aside, what Zigon points at with some convincing force is that people become more reflexive when they struggle with the choices available to them. I take complicity accusations as a variant of this reflexivity, shaped by what philosopher Sarah Buss (2000) calls the "demands of morality."

Buss's discussion takes us to a key issue in moral philosophy, which is also crucial to Kurdish political ethics: the vulnerability of individuals to the dictates of politics. Kurds link this vulnerability to a common yet discomforting perception that Turkish rule, by design, is an architecture of contradictory conditions that continuously force on individuals a choice between their most earnest demands, such as security and shelter, and the broader demands of their moral

ideals, such as loyalty and solidarity. As Buss convincingly argues, there is no easy answer and certainly no shortcut here, just hard work. At times, subjects do find ways to avoid acting wrongly. At other times, perceived costs of sticking to one's moral ideals override the desire to do the right thing. Although Buss rejects the possibility of categorical solutions, she goes to great lengths to appreciate the intense semiotic work that people engage in to find an appropriate one. She describes her essay in similar terms, as an expression of her own struggles "to understand what distinguishes reasonable accommodations to injustice from morally unacceptable accommodations" (Buss 2020: 1).

This dissertation observes that Buss's struggles do suffuse Kurdish lives in a myriad of ways. I study complicity accusations as an expression of these struggles, conjoining ethical exercise with political debate. In particular, I interrogate these accusations as instances of creative estrangement, productive of new problematizations and new styles of reasoning for expanding the space of reflexive discourse on acceptable behavior, group standards, and community ethics. In fact, a key point of this dissertation, complicity accusations permeate the everyday lives of Kurds so deeply that discussing complicity ineluctably becomes a training in the pragmatics and meta-pragmatics of reflexivity itself – a training to cultivate a certain sort of reflective disposition. An additional stake of my research, then, is to recognize the ways reflexivity, an otherwise distinctive property of language, depends on a set of conditions for its exercise. Kurds learn how to be properly reflective of their political circumstances from one another, in and through talk, with reference to a set of interpretive frameworks, and for being dedicated students of a particular ethical project: the Kurdish political movement. This, in turn, suggests the possibility of reimagining social/political movements as duty-based schools of reflexivity. In Anxieties of an Era, I take this shift in perspective as a welcome opportunity to

think more deeply and imaginatively about what social movements do and how people engage with them.

A Linguistic Anthropology of Political Ethics or A Political Anthropology of Communication:

Throughout this dissertation, my methodological approach to complicity cases is grounded in semiotic theory and an analysis of communication. When a person accuses another person of complicity with the Turkish state, the goal is to create and establish a relationship of co-responsibility between the accused and the state, which is a semiotic operation. My general contention is that we cannot possibly understand complicity accusations without a clear comparative study of the various ways in which these accusations are semiotically produced – defined, described, evaluated, explained, debated, problematized – in interaction. We need to observe and document the very moments in which Kurds' reflexively engage with the meanings and effects of their transactions with the Turkish state, for these engagements are the principal mediating ground within which complicity cases are being enacted.

I have said earlier in the introduction that complicity accusations are a kind of language. Surely, if these accusations could talk (and have an army and navy), they would make their own language with its own grammar and lexicon. Just like any language, this one too comes with a capacity to encode agency (Ahearn 2001), or index epistemic certainty (Kockelman 2004, Paz 2019). Without a situated grasp of how this language is put in use, complicity accusations, like the one made against Mahmut, might seem to the reader, hopefully not totally incomprehensible, but somewhat fabricated and certainly out of proportion. This is also true for Kurds themselves. If an accuser has no firm knowledge of this language, or does not pay enough attention to its

proper use, the allegations made against the accused will look to everyone like fabricated or out of proportion.

Let me illustrate my point with an example. The majority of complicity accusations that I observed in the field had something to do with a certain semiotic distinction that Kurds make among types of accommodators: subjektif ajan (subjective spies) and objectif ajan (objective spies). It was Abdullah Öcalan, one of the founders and the de-facto leader of the PKK, who first introduced these terms into Kurdish political discourse, which have since gained significant purchase on Kurdish public culture. Both categories are frequently invoked by Kurds in everyday life, striking them as especially compelling. "Subjektif ajan" is a person who openly and knowingly cooperates with the Turkish security apparatus for which she or he is compensated, monetary or otherwise. A case in point are the village-guards (korucu), who are Kurdish paramilitaries overseen and sponsored by the Turkish Ministry of the Interior. These people have salaries, social security, retirement, and the option to pass their job on to younger family members. As of 2020, according to a government statement, there were 55,000 village-guards in Turkey.[2] The same statement also revealed that between 2016 and 2019, a period of intense fighting in Kurdistan, 3 thousand village-guards were awarded with fully-paid family vacations as a token of appreciation. "Objektif ajan," on the other hand, is a person who internalizes her or his subordinate position in society and thus acts in the service and reproduction of Turkish hegemony. Mahmut's actions fall into the category of "objektif ajan." In linguistic anthropological terms, this category shows the subtle ways in which accommodation plays itself out in Kurdistan performatively and beyond the actor's intentions (Austin 1962, Bauman and

[2] The government statement and more details can be found here. https://vicdaniret.org/4-ilde-daha-koruculuk-baslatildi-emniyet-jandarma-ve-korucu-sayisi-579-bin-446ya-ulasti/

Briggs 1990, Butler 1993, Lee 1997, Silverstein 1976, 1993). It shows the performative power of accommodation to reproduce Turkish control over Kurdish lives, materializing and signifying particular acts as acts of complicity in Turkish rule.

As scholars have shown, typifying everyday conduct in strictly ethical terms is a project common to political movements, in particular to those with revolutionary character, whose job is partly linguistic (della Porta and Diani 2015, Evans 1995, Marston 2004, Zuckerman 2020). In this relation, we can think of the domain of political ethics, which I believe is central to the self-organization of these movements, as a set of distinct linguistic strategies regarding the adequate classification of all sorts of political and everyday behavior as good or bad, virtuous or vicious. Likewise, the political ethics of the PKK, too, derives its intelligibility and force from a vast repertoire of ethical categories that are put in public circulation, such as sacrifice versus betrayal, revolutionaries versus spies, unity versus collaboration. Over the following pages, I follow these categories and provide details about their social life. I show the ways Kurds invoke these categories in describing and taking a stance against the ubiquity and consequences of Kurdish complicity in Turkish rule. Further, I understand these categories as categories of valuation, rather than taxonomic labels, that Kurds draw on in order to determine the instinct meanings of their actions as well as the broader ethical implications of their membership in a shared public. This should explain why I sometimes choose to describe my work as a linguistic anthropology of political ethics. Yet, at other times, I call it a political anthropology of communication. Here is my reasoning.

At its very core, accommodation is a kind of interaction wherein a Kurdish actor and a state actor meet under unequal terms and cooperate on a task. The specifics of such tasks aside, Kurds know very well that these interactions also have the function of creating information for

the state's security apparatus. While incessantly demanding accommodation from Kurds, the state practically institutes a communicative context with a very simple yet effective participatory framework: state actors ask the questions and Kurds answer. This framework formalizes the conditions in which "accommodation" produces "complicity." The result is an overabundance of information, mediated by various kinds of "middle people," who knowingly or unwittingly become police informants, traitors, or local collaborators in the process (remember "objektif ajan"). The proof, however, is rarely in their intentions, nor in their actions; it is in the pudding. It is luck that determines this.

Out of these observations, I extract the following argument. Luck is anthropologically relevant because it has a grounded and micro-interactionally calibrated reality with critical consequences. In Kurdistan, this situated experience of luck is deeply shaped by the politically charged vicissitudes of an already fickle enterprise – human communication. Because of the intensely citational and interdiscursive nature of words and actions, Kurds need to be especially alert to the ever-looming possibility of their words and actions ending in the wrong place. They need to be particularly deliberate about the way they communicate with the state, and with one another, so as to better resist luck, the essence of which consists in making the right choices, using the right words, knowing what information to guard and what to reveal. This is precisely why the main locus of many complicity accusations between Kurds is not the intrinsic moral qualities or intentions of the accused, but his or her communicative dispositions in life – a shy friend is better than a fervent comrade who does not know when and where to shut up.

Note on Methodology:



Figure 1: A map of my primary field-sites.

I conducted this research in two different provinces of Turkey's Kurdistan. The first year of my two years of ethnography, I lived in Van Province, in particular in its Bahçesaray district and in the provincial capital, also called Van. Coincidentally, Van was the first place I saw in Kurdistan after my hometown, Dersim. I went to Van for the first time in 2008, as a second-year undergraduate sociology student to attend and present at the Annual Undergraduate Sociology Students Congress. Even though Van was the first place I visited in Kurdistan years ago, it was never my intention to conduct research in Van. I had been planning for a long time to undertake the first leg of my main research in Diyarbakir, the would-be capital of Turkey's Kurdistan, from which I would move to Cizre for the second part of my research. But the state of emergency, which was declared in the summer of 2016 changed my plans, as many interlocutors in

Diyarbakir told me not to come. The conditions of the state of emergency, they said, were really suffocating and the people of Diyarbakir were living under intense scrutiny and pressure. So, somewhat at the last minute, I decided to start my research in Van, and this happened after I contacted two fieldworkers who were in Van at the moment. Both of them, having been in Van since the beginning of the emergency, assured me that, and although life in Van was not necessarily easy, I could still find it more plausible and possible to travel around, talk to people, and live in villages in Van compared to Diyarbakir.

Van Province is situated in the Eastern Anatolian region of Turkey, and it is a province of more than 1,000,000 people. The provincial capital is also named Van, and it is the second largest Kurdish city in Turkey after Diyarbakir, the would-be capital of Turkey's Kurdistan. The province has a long border with Iran and border-trade makes an important economic activity. Van is predominantly populated by Kurds but there are Turkish inhabited areas in the northern parts of the province. The majority of the population is bilingual, speaking both Kurdish and Turkish fluently. Van Province used to be a major population center for Armenians who consider the area a part of Western Armenia. Its Armenian population perished during the 1915 Genocide, however. As of today, there are no Armenians living in the area. But the memories and material remnants of that history are still very much present, available to be seen, problematized, ignored, or taken up anew, depending on what these acts do for people and in particular situations.

During the second year of my fieldwork (the last 10 months of it, more precisely), I lived in the Cizre district of Şırnak Province, located in the Southeastern Anatolian Region of Turkey. Cizre borders Iraqi Kurdistan and Syria, with a population of approximately 120,000 people. While I lived in Cizre, I also regularly traveled to and stayed in Nusaybin, a town about an hour drive from Cizre. Nusaybin is on the border of Syria, neighboring the Syrian Kurdish town

Qamislo. The border between Nusaybin and Qamislo has been closed since 2011. While, during the second year of my fieldwork, I primarily stayed in Cizre, I was able to visit Nusaybin a lot as my host-family in Cizre had close relatives living there. In chapter four, I explain in detail the conditions that allowed and at times demanded me to move between locations. For now, I want to stress that those movements were a function of the multi-place organization of kin and family life in Kurdistan.

Nusaybin and Cizre were quite similar in size and population. In both places, while residents were all bilingual in Kurdish and Turkish, there was a strong preference for Kurdish in private and public settings, especially in comparison to Van. Locals would explain this as an expression of their stronger political commitments to Kurdish movement and the PKK. Both towns lived under heavy, round-the-clock curfews for months during 2015 and 2016, during which Turkish armed forces conducted large-scale military operations. In the summer of 2015, I conducted summer research in Nusaybin and Cizre, right before the operations started in September 2015. That summer was also the final days of the peace process, which came to an end in August 2015. In chapter seven, I sketch a during-and-after ethnography of the peace process from the lens of Cizre and use that discussion to shed light on the ways my interlocutors reflect on the shift from the peace process to post-emergency era authoritarianism as a shift deeply ethically textured, changing the moral character and habitus of society.

As was said, prior to the start of my long-term field-work in August 2017, which lasted twenty-three months, I also conducted preliminary research in various other Kurdish provinces, in particular in Diyarbakir and Mardin, between 2014 and 2016. As part of my master's thesis, I conducted six weeks of research in the summer of 2013 in Urfa and Diyarbakir Provinces. I was in Diyarbakir in the summer of 2014 and again in the summer of 2016. In addition, I repeatedly

traveled to Turkey's Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Syrian Kurdistan and spent considerable amounts of time in these areas between 2009 and 2012, either due to personal reasons, such as visiting a friend or touring around, or to attend student conferences, demonstrations, or public events.

My preliminary visits to and research in all these different locations in Kurdistan led me to design my primary fieldwork as a multi-place one with specific focus given to rural sites. I had three primary reasons for this. First, almost every Kurd I know, including myself, has a village, where they were born, or their fathers were born, or their grandfathers were born, and which they accept and refer to as *their* village. It is commonly said in Kurdistan that Kurds are *gundî*s – meaning "villagers," with *gund* meaning "village." It is also said that Kurds are *koçer*s – meaning "nomads" – seasonally migrating to different pasture sites. Socio-historically, as anthropologists Zerrin Özlem Biner (2010) documents, Kurds have identified themselves as *gundî*s vis-à-vis their various neighbors, Arabs in the southern provinces of Turkey's Kurdistan, and Armenians in southern and eastern parts, who have been referred to as *bajarî,* meaning "city dwellers" (*bajar* means "city" in Kurdish). Second, many Kurds today pursue a multi-place life, one in which they have their attachments and commitments to multiple places, having an apartment in the city, for instance, and also ongoingly investing and staying in houses in villages. Ethnographic research that begin and center on cities, as more experienced fieldworker friends also warned me before I started my fieldwork, tend to get caught up in the rhythm of urban life, neglecting Kurds' ties with villages, nowadays mostly populated by old people and grandchildren left behind by their parents who work elsewhere. But why do Kurds have this multi-place living pattern?

Kurdistan has experienced rapid urbanization in the last fifty years, which accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s, an era marked by a violent counterinsurgency campaign that mainly targeted Kurdish countryside, resulting in the destruction of more than 3,000 Kurdish villages, whose inhabitants became internally displaced (Çelik 1995, Çelik A. 2016, Işık 2021, Yılmaz 2015). As a result, Kurdish society experienced an exodus from the villages to urban areas, culminating in the creation of many immigrant neighborhoods at the outskirts and the poorest sectors of many Kurdish cities and towns. In 2002, when the regional state of emergency of fifteen years (OHAL) during which Kurdistan lived under a martial law came to an end, a majority of the villages evacuated in the 1980s and 1990s were repopulated. But when villages were being repopulated, not every family member returned back, and many returning families had properties and businesses in urban areas, dividing families into units living in cities and those living in villages. The counterinsurgency police and the repopulation of rural areas have thus left their legacies on the social organization of Kurdish society, turning Kurdish family into a more sophisticated, complex institution than it had ever been. These processes, in other words, handed down to the next generations of Kurds a habit of seasonally moving to urban areas, chasing economic opportunities elsewhere, and overall preferring a lifestyle more conducive to maintaining material and kin ties across locations.

Third, the ethnographic story that I hoped to glean on the moral habitus and ethical consequences of occupation and authoritarianism could not be complete without the voices and lives of the people inhabiting villages and Kurdish countryside, who have been somewhat left out of the political narrative since the 2000s. As I specifically wanted to focus my ethnography on the overall experience and realities of living in Kurdistan, I chose to live just as my interlocutors, maintaining throughout my fieldwork my personal connections and commitments

to village life, hoping to understand the enactment of Kurdistan through the connectedness and mutual articulation of different locations as the "here" of people's lives, as well as ethical problems.

Whether for research or personal reasons, I always stayed in Kurdistan with families and friends, living at their homes. Over the years, and during the twenty-three months of ethnographic research that I conducted for this dissertation, I had many host-families with whom I became very close. While I was never allowed to pay for accommodation, I tried in my best capacity to financially be of help to these people. But that generally entailed me showering kids with gifts and supporting the college education of family and kin members. While I always stayed at a certain household in each location I conducted fieldwork, and thus was treated like a family member of that household, I also developed very close relationships with neighbors who were almost all kin or tribespeople to my host-families. It was a part of my communal responsibilities to attend the weddings and funerals linked to those people, make regular visits to their homes and in return host them at mine, and pay attention to important life events and political problems that affected them at a given time.

Typically, this is how I ended up with living with certain host-families: I first met their children or kin living in cities, in Van city for instance, who then put me in touch with their parents and relatives living in villages and small towns. The first step would be to visit these family houses with the daughters, the sons, the nephews, and so on in order to introduce myself, and stay for a few days to a few weeks. These stays were crucial to allow my future host-families to know me and learn about my family and my upbringing. I would then say thank you and leave. Following the first visit, depending on the reaction I got, and how comfortable the hosts looked while I was a guest in their houses, I would ask the family member who introduced me to

those people whether their families or relatives would be willing to host me for a while, whether they found me trustworthy or pleasant enough to live with for an extended period of time. In this step, I was very careful in explaining that the duration and the terms of my stay were completely up to the families, whose safety and comfort were of utmost importance to me. With some host-families, like Xalo Salîm who warned me about how Kurdistan was not a normal place, I only lived for a short amount of time but remained in contact over the years. These host-families and neighbors whom I met through them were another reason why I traveled a lot during field-work, as I was invited to weddings and funerals, or because I felt obligated to visit them and see if they were alright. The last week of February 2018, for instance, I visited and then decided to stay with Xalo Salîm and his family for almost a month, after Leyla, their youngest daughter, lost her first child during labor. Leyla needed support at the time, but her mother was really old and unable to walk much, and her three sisters were not able to offer any help. Two of the sisters lived in Istanbul, already busy with their own families and three children each, and the third sister was in jail on terrorism charges. With some other host-families, I lived together for a year, and their homes were my primary homes in the field. In the following pages of this dissertation, I will introduce these people to the reader.

This dissertation, lastly, was conducted in Kurdish and Turkish, as a big majority of Kurds are bilingual, shifting between in everyday discourse these two languages. For a detailed examination of the politics of bilingualism, pragmatics and ethics of shifting between Kurdish and Turkish, and broader linguistic landscape of Kurdistan, see *Appendix: A Note on Languages Used*.

Summary of the Chapters

Anxieties of an Era consists of six ethnographic chapters, bookended by an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter two, "Ethics and Politics of Complicity," provides theoretical and ethnographic background to the notion of complicity and situates the concept in its social history in Kurdistan. It sketches the history of the emergence and the political ethics of the PKK and Kurdish politics in Turkey as these things pertain to my analysis of the moral habitus in which accommodations to political power transform into complicity accusations, or fear or insinuations of complicitous behavior. Chapter two is designed to give an overall context to the chapters that follow, laying the groundwork for the discussions of political governance, betrayal, and ideals of sociability which I unpack between chapters three and seven.

Chapter three and Chapter four take their inspiration from Roza's statement, "this is how life is here," each focusing on a different component of this statement. Chapter three, "Kurdistan: A History of Circumstances," focuses on the "here" of Kurds' lives, unpacking for the observer the semiotic enactment and representation of Kurdistan as a place unique to its own historically traceable and reproduced circumstances. It takes note of certain aspects of this geopolitical territory, unpacking the ways Kurdistan presents itself to Kurds and gives context to Kurds' self-understandings of their historical trajectory, social organization, and overall political status in Turkey and the broader region of the Middle East. The empirical focus of the chapter is on the ways my interlocutors narrate and scale Kurdistan as a distinct kind of place that produces its own distinct problems, ethical worries, representational forms, types and patterns of behavior, social roles, and political status as a non-state, historically situated for a long time in-between various regional powers and nation-states. Ultimately, the goal of the chapter is to lay out the reasons and formulations with which Kurds narrate Kurdistan as a place that has been

historically governed via other means, always situated differently and enacted in imagination and practice vis-à-vis its different political status.

Chapter four, "Politics: A Communicative Edifice," examines the "life" of Kurds. In this chapter, I introduce and describe many basic everyday issues of living under the state's security-paradigm, with the core of the paradigm explicitly aimed at creating a communicative edifice in which Kurds live with constant surveillance, forced to fully submit their lives to the state's desire to know everything about how Kurds live and how they are connected to one another. As I explore this edifice, I draw out my interlocutors' criticisms of it, and I also show the ways the security-paradigm institutes itself into a context wherein moral luck – the impossibility of knowing the consequences of one's actions, which, in Kurdistan, seem destined to find their ways to the state's security apparatus – becomes a constitutive feature of the life Kurds live. With moral luck, I refer to the ways the circumstances of political governance shape in Kurdistan the very moral habitus wherein it is impossible to calculate beforehand the consequences of one's action, due to the ever-presentness of the Turkish state in everyday life and the deeply penetrated security apparatus. This chapter shows the ways moral luck becomes in Kurdistan a unique feature of life, one that is rooted in its own material, historical, ideological conditions of possibility. It is a constitutive feature, in other words, of what Kurds' lives look like to Kurds, the overall shape it has, and how they form relationships, make decisions, talk, connect, or even avoid becoming enemies.

Chapter five, "The *Leaf* Problem and Complicity," returns to the ethical argument which I introduce in chapter two, that Kurds' accommodations and various transactions with the Turkish state are tantamount to becoming complicit in the regime's crimes in Kurdistan. It explores this argument as an implicitly gleaned feeling and sense of wrongness that Kurds

witness. This argument overall describes and ethically weighs a certain kind of behavior necessitated by the circumstances of political governance, one that has in Kurdistan a sense of givenness and everydayness to it, which then opens into broader questions about politics, ethics, and moral agency. This chapter asks what consequences the givenness of accommodation and thus of complicity in Turkish rule has for Kurds' understandings of their broader ethical condition.

Chapter six, "Betrayal: The Traitor at the Court," interrogates the notion of betrayal as a concept that is privileged by Kurds in their articulations and accusations of complicity, which [meta]pragmatically clarifies and brings the notion of complicity into its proper moral framework. The chapter examines Kurds' semiotic calibrations of *betrayal* as a historically reproduced and empirically traceable form of behavior tied indexically to certain ongoing idiosyncrasies of their society. It argues that talking about betrayal renders complicity a problem that diminishes group solidarity, all the while giving empirical weight to what forms and styles of action and relations that complicity really entails. Chapter seven "An Ideal of Sociability," takes a different approach, and focuses on a particular ethnographic case, Kurdish self-governance, a social movement of self-rule and self-defense experimented by Kurds between 2013 and 2015, during the peace process, The chapter aims to bring this episode from recent history into a during-and-after analysis with respect to the ways my interlocutors evaluated the consequences of the end of self-governance. The chapter, in other words, studies a popular practice among my interlocutors of looking back at self-governance, remembering, evaluating, and longing for it two years after its collapse, and from the point of view of the ethical crisis of complicity in which they found themselves. The analysis centers on the mutually reinforcing complaints about the normalization of collaboration with the Turkish state and the erosion of

solidarity in the post-emergency era. It argues that these complaints cohere to re-describe self-governance as a social architecture of accountability, which presented a communicative model for political unity, and an antidote, according to my interlocutors, to the erosive effects of Turkish rule in Kurdistan.

Chapter 2 Ethics and Politics of Complicity

The present chapter seeks to clarify the connections between the categories of accommodation and complicity as political ethical constructs that are according to Kurdish political discourse in a mutually clarifying relation to one another. It argues that in a surprising variety of ways, this relation helps Kurds articulate a powerful vision of Turkish rule: one that finds Turkish rule *theoretically* inseparable from "Kurdish complicity" and "Kurdish complicity" practically inseparable from its concrete, omnipresent medium: accommodation. This vision finds us in considerations of the relationship between accommodating behavior and its political consequences, wherein "complicity" comes to take the role of a rough heuristics that names a morally compromised association between a Kurdish actor and a state actor. In developing and occupying this vision as an ethical position, Kurds are also articulating the conditions in which they are called to use their capacities as moral agents and reflect on their political condition in certain ways. Ultimately, this chapter points to some key issues and themes that will make a return in the following chapters, thus setting the scene for the ethnography that follows.

Accommodation and Guilt

Adult friendships are tricky to maintain. Adult friendships in grad-school are tricky to maintain because nobody has the time to maintain them. Adult friendships built during fieldwork in Kurdistan, on the other hand, did maintain themselves pretty well, such that the anthropologist did not even need to do much, but this sort of friendships were demanding in other ways. While

my interlocutors were generous companions and always fun, they were also formidable ethicists, and they expected me to learn a great deal about a wide range of issues – autonomy, compliance, solidarity, or betrayal, to name a few – that eventually deeply aided my understanding of Kurdistan. And a part of this training took place virtually, over WhatsApp groups of three to a hundred people, some of which admittedly had too unconventional of an embrace of ethics; had I not known their true function, I would have mistaken them as platforms for empty gossip, trash-talk, or even misinformation. Yet these WhatsApp groups had a specific ethical import. My friends liked spending time on these group chats, and they took the conversations seriously, where they had the opportunity to perform the role of a spectator or a witness – the word used most often by my interlocutors being "*şahîd,*" "witness" in English, also written as "*şahit*" in Turkish. But the primary pragmatic import of the term was that it registered the present moment as a moment of witnessing and being aware of one's being a witness to all sorts of injustices and wrongs happening in society, and that this witnessing required talk and debate. In a way, therefore, the notion of witnessing came with a focus on obligations, general principles, and participant roles of being a member of a group, problematizing what scholars have called a bystander effect.

The idiom of bystander has been essential in scholarly discourse regarding the question of individual responsibility for wrongs witnessed (Fischer et al 2011). It defines a disposition or a reaction common to people, more than prescribing an ideal, highlighting the ways social actors tend to ignore wrongs that they encounter if there are other people present. A famous example is the case of Kitty Genovese (Darley and Latané 1968), a murder victim who was killed in 1964 in New York City by an assailant who repeatedly attacked Genovese before he eventually killed her, while more than thirty people heard her screams and did not even report the police, let alone

do something themselves. Genovese's murder triggered both public and scholars to discuss and start paying attention to what is now known as bystander effect. This has thus never been a scholarly debate that remains secluded in the ivory tower, however, but one that has escaped from the beginning the academic realm to become an effective social mainstay – and, of course, for reasons themselves socially relevant. In my case, in the case of Turkey's Kurdistan, the idea of being a bystander, or the very notion of being a witness to injustices and harms and not doing anything about it, vividly distills an important ethical question: are we complicit in wrongdoings that we witness happening and turn a blind eye to under conditions of systemic political violence? But this question itself distills and acts on another distinction of a great ethical import: the difference between witnessing and *being* a witness. The distinction here articulates the subtle ways the experience of witnessing calls actors into a different ethical position, into a different political subjectivity produced under circumstances specific to it. More importantly, the real weight of being a witness for Kurds was that it worked on a very intuitive, everyday level. It didn't require them to dig into the analytical limits of the category of witness (*sahit*), or bystander for which I cannot even think of a local term, but head on tackle the pragmatic and ethical purchases of being one, of seeing bad things, injustices, and harms happening around, and reflecting on one's own position and awareness of being a witness, as well as that of the others, as a position with its own political history. This is a kind of awareness, I want to argue, that was borne out of its own political ethical reflexivity towards conditions of power and being a member of political society. It asked important questions about politics and solidarity, and the limits and necessities of being a moral agent.

Thus, when Kurdish friends of mine invoked on a private WhatsApp group chat an account of a certain wrongdoing that they encountered, when they spoke of political wrongs

happening in front of other Kurds, they were in effect describing something with which the audience was pretty familiar: finding oneself in the midst of witnessing, coincidentally standing next to a political crime scene that came with its responsibilities. The empirical focus of the interactions in these group chats were two-fold. First, the focus was most immediately on the political climate – rising authoritarianism and the state of emergency – in which really bad things, worse than before, were happening. Of course, saying that this moment was worse, more suffocating, or less free than a particular moment in the past was an evaluation itself. It was a metapragmatic stance that framed the present situation as relatively more urgent, thus worthy of starting new WhatsApp groups everyday, or reconsidering one's friendships, or, like Roza, reconsidering the moral meaning of working at the municipality when it was run by a government appointee. Not everyone saw the situation this way, but a good majority, in my opinion, did. And this led to its own effects on the social organization and channeling of talk. The youth of most villages I stayed in Kurdistan, for instance, had WhatsApp groups among themselves. I was added to a few of them. A lot of talk was devoted to reporting, describing, and evaluating concrete incidents with political nature that transpired daily. During the 2018 wedding season, it became an urgent point of debate that Turkish armed forces were not allowing Kurdish folk music and traditional attire in weddings. Group chats were full of witness and hearsay accounts of Turkish soldiers or police intervening in weddings, or taking into custody the hosts and the newlyweds the next day based on anonymous complaints regarding "showing support for terrorism" in weddings. Second, many used these group conversations to stress a particular problem that fascinated yet also scandalized them: the quiet readiness of *some* Kurdish actors to accommodate the increasingly tricky pressures of the political moment – *i.e.,* a Kurdish couple that requested from their guests not to wear traditional attire in their wedding. These interactions

were sort of a critical-hermeneutical exercise, pointing the way to questions of how Kurds needed to think of and theorize their silent complicity in the political system, with a view to imagining what accommodation *made* the accommodators, what it created for other Kurds, and what it meant both politically and ethically. WhatsApp users were not only reporting their own witness accounts, but they were also reporting bystanders, people who deliberately turned their backs to what was happening, remained quiet, avoided getting involved in things, and thus, in effect, aided and abetted the assailant.

To be clear, this dissertation is not an ethnography of these WhatsApp groups, but it recognizes the extent to which these groups were taken as a virtual arena by many Kurds at the time to criticize and frame a set of ethical concerns. Besides, WhatsApp was an easy, direct way to begin a conversation which would later spill into other spheres of everyday life. Here is an example, which involves a Kurdish elementary school teacher, Ayhan, who lived in Van. Sometime in November 2017, I woke up to find half my friend group split off in WhatsApp into splinter chats, discussing Ayhan's recent post on Facebook. The alleged post was about a school event to which the governor attended, and it included a flattering picture of the governor taken in front of the school building. Around that time, the governor of Van, an appointed civil servant and a Turkish man, was the center of people's anger and criticism for replacing Bekir Kaya, an elected politician. He was also the most powerful man in the city with enough power to hire and fire public employees, throw out the policies of his predecessor, re-design entire municipal departments, or swiftly implement "necessary measures" to "clean the municipality from terrorist elements." Basically, he was free to take any decision as he wished, and to say that those decisions were unpopular among Kurds would be an understatement.

I could understand why my friends were upset with Ayhan's social media activity. The post that Ayhan shared on Facebook, which was originally posted on the governor's professional Facebook account, included a picture of the governor in front of the elementary school that Ayhan worked, with a quote underneath about the positive impacts of his administration's educational policies. The quote said: "I'm, as your governor, visiting a new school every week, listening to the problems of our educators and students. I tell them the state is here now, on your side. Together, we will make Van the educational mecca of the east region." Surely, it was discomforting and alarming to many interlocutors that someone they considered a friend, relative, and comrade did share something like this, but those kinds of things were happening all the time.

One fifth of the city's workforce, especially the educated folks, were carrying out their jobs under the direction of appointed civil servants and in the employment of the government at a time the government's primary goal was to establish the Turkish state's unmistakable rule over Kurdistan. The state was conducting itself in ways that sought to showcase the full breadth of its resources and power, which turned Kurdish public life into a political spectacle. Buildings that housed a branch of government were surrounded by thick concrete blocks and heavily armed special forces. There was a huge trend for luxurious and bullet-proof armored cars among high-ranking government officials with preference given to BMWs. Boulevards, main streets, and even side roads were all adorned by Turkish flags and other state symbols. Regularly, city's workers would cover billboards with new quotes and aphorisms by Turkish politicians. Colorful posters of President Erdogan were such a common sight in the streets that one would think that the president specifically wanted his face plastered on every concrete surface.

In retrospect, however, I can see that the governor was the key actor that kept this spectacle running and not only because he held the main executive position. Every day was a new story with him. He would either debut a new project, host a meeting, or make a seemingly desultory and rather uncreative visit to a local institution or business. Being the great performer he was, the governor loved a receptive audience, and he had a thing for conducting impromptu interviews with citizens about how they were liking his policies, sometimes in front of the cameras. Yet this was precisely why his style and whole personality were an affront to the residents of the city, who not only had to accommodate his capricious and technically unlicensed liberties in making policy changes, censoring local actors, disclosing private information against people's will, and asking his staff to snitch on their colleagues, but also were forced to become crowd artists in a show where the governor played the lead role.

In Ayhan's case, therefore, there was no need to "investigate" the situation to appreciate the kind of pressure under which Ayhan was performing his duties as a teacher. Admittedly, moreover, Ayhan's case was a minor incident that paled in comparison to the steady parade of scandals about police informants and Kurdish actors in great, open relationships with state actors that colored everyday life. Nevertheless, Ayhan's many friends and neighbors still expected to see some emotion in his behavior, a humble regret, for instance. He was asked to give self-justification and prove his "private" disapproval of the governor.

While his friends clearly did not consider Ayhan intentionally guilty of a crime, perhaps even more importantly, they still thought that Ayhan was responsible for the consequences of his actions. Ayhan was considered to have caused harm through his mediated relation to the governor, because, as many of Ayhan's friends were quick to note, Ayhan's compliance was costly on other Kurds. And this was the biggest problem. One of Ayhan's colleagues, for

instance, told me that by submitting to the wishes of the superintendent, Ayhan in effect pushed the others who had not done that under the bus. “The superintendent doesn’t care what Ayhan thinks,” this colleague told me, “he wants some people like Ayhan to obey so he can sort out the ones who rebel; his job, what Ankara wants him to do, is to sort good Kurds and bad Kurds.” In chapter six, the reader will see stories similar to this where I show how the Turkish state uses the job market and its own position in Kurdistan, the economic periphery of the country, as the primary employer to establish a system of arbitrary punishment and constant threat, in which Kurds trade economic security or temporary economic gains for support and silence. Ayhan’s colleague was right in that Ayhan’s compliance *could* be a tool and excuse for the governor to stage an attack on those who did not show the same compliance. So, the cost – either already realized or potentially realizable in the future if the governor wished – that incurred on others, who were now labeled as troublemakers, was part of Ayhan’s ability to show compliance, which was not an individual action of support but something that found political meaning in the specific social regularity that it reproduced, the regularity for Kurds of living in two groups, one of which the Turkish state supported, which, therefore, were strategically pitted against one another. This was, in certain respects, an essential aspect of governance, that every complying Kurd would have to produce one who did not. Ayhan’s compliance helped sustain, therefore, the state’s control over other Kurdistan, which was in fact the very function of compliance for the Turkish state to begin with. Importantly, this argument was held to be relevant for two reasons. First, it was relevant to Ayhan’s friends and colleagues’ moral decisions vis-à-vis Ayhan’s action, who expected Ayhan to *feel* guilt and waited for Ayhan to acknowledge their sense of injury and that his behavior was wrong and harmful. Second, it committed these people to a particular thesis about politics, that the very design of Turkish governance, its theory, if you will, lay in an ability

to turn accommodation into complicity with the sovereign, making accommodators to perform and enable its crime of ruling Kurdistan. The crime of ruling Kurdistan, moreover, was a crime in practice of dividing Kurds into camps of opposing interests and options, with one side winning only when the other side loses. I would like to put some emphasis on this particular thesis here, which the reader will encounter multiple times throughout this dissertation, and which makes specific demands on Kurds' capacities as moral agents in terms of how they view their history, social position, everyday relations, and interactions with the political apparatus.

The debate was further troubled when Ayhan's cousin, Selim, who was a known figure in Van, learned that he was dismissed from his municipal job at the order of the governor, only about three weeks after Ayhan's Facebook drama. Selim was a young doctor who had served as a physician volunteer in Iraqi Kurdistan during the armed conflict between Kurds and ISIS, for which reason he believed that the Turkish ministry of health blacklisted him. Turkey feared and opposed the advancement of ISIS but not any more so than that of the Kurds. For a while, Selim worked off the books in private hospitals, but he was underpaid, and due to a robust system of internal audits by the ministry he was unable to keep a job for more than a few months. Much to his dismay, he realized that he was never going to be able to pursue a medical career in Turkey and became an independent contractor at the municipality. He would often joke about how he could almost feel the Turkish state rejoicing in his troubles, watching an aspiring Kurdish doctor having to work as a landscape gardener.

So, it was not like Selim was caught off guard. He was always going to lose his job at the municipality; it was only a matter of time. To my knowledge, he was already taking language lessons to apply for a medical license in Germany, which was a popular route to exit for many Kurdish and Turkish doctors who found the authoritarian atmosphere in Turkey suffocating.

As a representation of the everyday predicaments Kurds had to live with, however, Selim's story was a testament to the heavy encumbrances and injustices of the political context and thus it was fundamentally a political problem, which made argument and reprimand necessary. The venue of Selim's choice was not WhatsApp but Twitter, where he targeted the governor while *some* Kurds took a fair share of slams. Without giving any names, he first tweeted about "optimists among us" who "believe bending to the whims of this incompetent governor will solve their problems." He then tweeted again accusing "some people" of "bringing decay into our society with their cowardice," which was followed by a third tweet accusing the same people of "playing stupid about their responsibilities for the worsening situation of Kurds in Van." Despite the cloudy rhetoric, it was clear that Selim was reprimanding local actors for keeping ostensibly amicable relations with the governor, hiding behind the fact that they had no other choice. All eyes turned to Ayhan who had recently got himself into trouble for this exact same issue.

The stories of Ayhan and Selim deliver a number of important lessons about a certain kind of public deliberation that was very popular in Kurdistan. Note, to begin with, how the issue here was not so much a debate about intentions, but a juxtaposition of a few conflicting problems: the conditions of governance and the political circumstances of the era were unjust and unacceptable; opposing these conditions or pursuing a life outside the boundaries prescribed by the Turkish state was costly and rife with risks; not opposing, on the other hand, was intrinsic to the crime itself which was designed to make Kurds not oppose to their own subjugation and unjust treatment to begin with. This juxtaposition created a contest between two different interpretations vis-à-vis accommodation, between whether it was morally undesirable but nevertheless acceptable to swallow the compulsions and pressures of politics, *or* whether it was

both morally undesirable and unacceptable to do so as it turned Kurds into the accomplices of the regime. The problem was political, but the vocabulary was ethical. Importantly, such debates about accommodation helped manifest as it challenged a narrative of complicity in the sovereign's crimes as an important theoretical component of the political system, as well as a device of inquiry and public deliberation. Much of people's conversations centered on whether the consequences of Kurds' accommodations to the Turkish state were taking the form of the criminal actions of the latter. What was at stake was how to count and assess, in determining the ethical weight of Kurds' accommodations to state practices and policies, what was being *enabled* as a consequence. That those consequences were never intended to begin with was pretty much not a part of the conversation.

Drawing on these initial observations and arguments, this dissertation observes that accusations of complicity set within this socio-political frame are inescapably complex. The puzzle in instances of social or political complicity of this sort is that neither the typical requirement of causality nor that of intentionality is sufficiently present to establish volitional wrongdoing. Accusations of complicity pretty much never coincide with the personal perspectives of those who are accused either, creating a tragic deadlock that threatens the possibility of a solution or mutual agreement. This work is not trying to decide, however, whether Kurds are right or wrong in their claims, or whether complicity with the Turkish state is an apt or inappropriate framework for inquiries about socio-political responsibility. Rather, the purpose is to argue how each pragmatic gesture to the concept of complicity can be treated as a contribution to an ongoing single conversation about the relationship between accommodation and personal guilt. This dissertation is built on the background of this observation, that individual cases of complicity with the system often come and go, with names and details shuffling, but the

conversation looks and feels just the same. The [meta]pragmatic gesture to the problem of complicity, then, is more centrally to find a way to link individual actions to broader impacts to raise an awareness about how certain wrongs are in fact wrongs of a specific kind, that emerges out of specific conditions, and thus they must be witnessed, questioned, narrated, problematized, and challenged accordingly.

Complicity, the Concept

While this work tries to understand the conditions of possibility and social life of a certain family of ethical worries, and the culturally thick meanings and functions with which they are inscribed, the notion of complicity demands some analytical, conceptual unpacking. When I looked at social scientific literature, I saw that the idea of complicity has been variously taken up in law, ethics, and critical thought and political theory. Underpinned by very specific articulations and questions of causality and intersubjectivity, I argue that complicity is a productive and hard-to-pin down category that unsettles some of the basic assumptions of morality and law. It is helpful to think with this category, especially with regards to the deep sociality of human actions and the fuzziness of intentionality, but the promise of the category, I shall suggest, lies not in its clarity but in the notion of the social connectedness of human lives that it privileges.

Complicity accusations, according to legal and moral philosophical theories, are to establish an accomplice's personal guilt and co-responsibility for the wrongs of a principal (Buss 2020, Gardner 2007, Kutz 2000). While, at face value, many of us tend to think of morality, in the broadest sense possible, as creating something positive in the world, the behavioral model that refutes "complicity" is to make sure that a person is not implicated in someone else's wrongs. Surely, as a general rule of thumb, nobody wants that. But people's everyday lives are

so irreducibly entangled with other people's virtues and vices that it is impossible to disentangle one's own sense of selfhood from that of others. As social and political animals, humans are associated with groups, ideologies, and institutions, and they find themselves morally responsible for all sorts of regrettable things brought about through these associations (Kutz 2000: 1-2).

In the introduction, I already mentioned that the meaning of complicity – *hevparî sûcî bûn* – in Kurdistan is almost exclusively overdetermined in the single act of accommodating the Turkish state; it is thus a political act. In this account, *hevparê sûcî*, an accomplice, denotes a political actor, not any accomplice but an accomplice who performs in a political narrative, as well as the broader circumstances and social history that summons that actor into being. The primary rationale for this equation is that accommodation brings Kurds into a mediated relation to the wrongs of Turkish rule, which, as an action and a specific form of making a relationship, works in effect to encourage the Turkish state and aid it in its efforts to control Kurdistan. In this dissertation, more than what accommodation and complicity mean separately, I focus on their semiotic and pragmatic equation to one another, and the weight of this equation on my interlocutors' moral arsenal, becoming a part of their language of moral and political responsibility.

Exploring an issue as overdetermined as "complicity" comes with its own challenges, however. One immediate obstacle is the ironically indeterminate nature of accommodation as an everyday condition of governance. There is hardly any area in Kurdish life wherein the Turkish state does not have a palpable presence, sustained by the pervasive political economy of war, as well as the institutional workings of state surveillance and rule of exception. To reiterate, Kurds consider themselves vulnerable to the state's inducements to accommodation. If they want to be able to peacefully go about with their lives, Kurds find that it is somewhat necessary to

accommodate the demands of political power. While the whole idea constitutes a categorical "no-no" in Kurdish political ethics, many acts of accommodation thus escape condemnation precisely for being unavoidable.

Another important challenge comes from the apparent oddity that Kurds' accommodations to power are not causally determinant of the Turkish state's unjust practices in Kurdistan. For surely they do not hold an equal ground with the state, there is not much that Kurds can do to direct or determine the operations of political institutions. Their individual contributions to these operations are somewhat marginal and nothing significant, not to mention mostly involuntary. So why the guilt? Why accusations?

And a final and related challenge is the valorization of the category of complicity within social theory as an attribute primarily of the privileged. Take the debate on "German complicity in Nazism," that flourished following WWII, problematizing Nazi onlookers and their silent complicity in the crimes of the regime (Arendt [1987] 2003, Jaspers 1961). Arendt, for instance, argues that witnessing was a completely acceptable, unproblematized behavior in Nazi Germany, serving to bind witnesses as a community of privileged insiders. Most existing studies, in fact, are very careful about excluding marginalized groups from the overall complicity debate, showing a preference to connect actors' complicity in political and structural injustices to their privileged position as the beneficiaries of these injustices.

This framework does not help me much in my analysis of "Kurdish complicity," but functions as a reminder that I need to be careful and particularly deliberate about the way I approach the subject. I need to be cognizant of the unique power dynamics at play. And I need to refrain from accidentally placing primacy on the role of Kurdish culpability in the Kurdish-Turkish conflict, in particular from painting a false narrative that exaggerates the Kurdish gains

from accommodation or disregards the long and costly history of Kurdish dissent. If Kurds seem to be getting on with the demands of power, it is mostly to protect themselves and at little to no personal gain – not to mention that the primary advantage for Kurds of accommodating behavior is avoiding harm. Also obvious to me, however, that Kurds commonly pick out and problematize their own accommodations to power as one of the root causes of their subordinate status, such that accommodation warrants moral response and debate. This problematization makes an argument about the curiously peculiar tensions of their collective condition in Turkey. I will return to this argument shortly.

I thus bear a responsibility as many other students of "complicity" for ensuring the locus of liability is not shifted from political institutions to individual actors with limited power, while giving enough credence to the sheer abundance of complicity accusations in Kurdistan. This is indeed a responsibility intrinsic to and constitutive of the public discourse around the question of individual or collective complicity in systemic crimes, yet one that gets trickier in situations where the target population is themselves severely persecuted. While Kurds' silent or internalized complicity in Turkish rule is a question variously taken up in public life, with significant purchase on Kurdish political discourse, the question is deeply at odds with other, important moral frames – utilitarianism, for instance. What kind of utility does problematizing Kurdish complicity have for Kurds? Or will it aid, accidentally, Turks themselves again? It is thus important to understand complicity accusations as emergent elements of everyday life that coexist, and are mutually elaborative of, the broader moral habitus in which they are produced and made to exist. It is essential to build an ethnographic narrative that is attentive to the worries, incapacities, anxieties, and limitations that come with the very problem of complicity itself. And it is necessary to show the ways Kurds engage critically with these accusations, turning them into

sites of inquiry wherein one can theorize and make use of "acting together with the Turkish state" as an important component of ethical practice. The eloquently formulated statement of Christopher Kutz is worth repeating here:

> "Reflection on complicity teaches us what it means to act together, when acting together goes badly. But the collective project of living ethically may find as great support in what it deplores as it prizes. The hidden promise of complicity is the conception of community upon which it draws: a world where individuals shape their lives with others, in love mixed with resentment, and in cooperation mixed with discord." (Kutz 2010: 258-259)

This work follows Kutz's suggestion and focuses on Kurds' reflections on the idea of complicity, in particular on the widespread claim that even the subtlest forms of accommodation to the state, by design, are tantamount to being complicit with its crimes in Kurdistan. I will offer an analysis of the manners in which this claim is formulated and understood vis-à-vis Kurdish political history, on one hand, and the practical realities of everyday life, on the other. My discussion will tackle how the hard facts of socio-political context shape and reproduce the category of complicity as a legible and legitimate framework to debate, establish, and enforce acceptable behavior. It will trace this category as it is brought into being through a whole spectrum of agents, acts, circumstances, and harms. In addition to describing the reproduction of the category of complicity, I will also show how this category comes to occupy a crucial role in the reshaping of the bounds of accountability and responsibility, in other words, in the reshaping of the conditions of moral agency in contemporary Kurdish society.

Two Approaches to Complicity

Before a more focused and ethnographic discussion of what "complicity" means to Kurds, I want to come to the issue through its broader theoretical and methodological implications for the

analyst herself. A glance over the existing literature shows that the category of complicity is most extensively studied in criminal law and ethics, and in each framework, the analyst needs to settle a host of challenging issues to determine the basic facts and elements that comprise the domain of complicity. If thinking about complicity within this framework of two approaches is helpful, I believe that is the case primarily due to the distinctly opposing styles and tools with which law and ethics approach the issue, providing a point of comparison from which we may ask new questions. It is through this comparison, in other words, we can unpack the specific notions on intentionality and causality on which theories of complicity draw, or which they unsettle and thus bring forth for discussion.

To begin with, complicity is not a method or property of action. It is an attribute considered applicable to a particular joint-undertaking and attribution itself is done by specific people whom Bruno Latour (2010: ix) calls legal/moral "connectors." In dealing with complicity cases, or with cases of aiding and abetting as they are sometimes called, a connector essentially comments on the participatory construction of a wrong by more than one person. She is tasked to decide, based on received principles and conditions of accountability, whether the acts of an accomplice made a difference to the acts of a principal, more specifically, a positive contribution to the commission of the principal's crime. In this sense, the following statement, "you are complicit in Turkish crimes," is the result of what has been produced by various legal/moral typifications of the connections between actors, acts, intentions, and consequences. A connector, in other words, is a person whose job is to label acts, connections, and people as a crime, a joint undertaking, and a principal and an accomplice.

However, it turns out that the category of complicity has no straightforward application, generating especially for modern law all sorts of frictions and tensions, which every legal

opinion article I have read on the topic invariably attests. While the entire enterprise of law rests on a semiotic ideology that legal certainty is married with the world of material evidence, when it comes to the notion of complicity, there always exists an inner pluralism and all sorts of "subtleties divorced from conceptual foundations" (Latour 2010: 17). Note, for instance, that accomplice liability is not always very clearly intentional at the same time. While shooting and killing someone in a targeted attack constitutes murder, it is much harder to locate where accomplice liability lies. Should we consider the owner of a gun store who sold the offensive weapon an accomplice to the crime? What about the friend who knowingly provided drugs to the suspect despite the latter's proclivity for violence? These questions haunt legal theorists. It even annoys them. Because, as anthropologists Lawrence Rosen so aptly puts (2017: 135 – 136), people "who employ [a legal style of reasoning] come to believe that they are exceptionally good at determining facts," which relates "to the idea of the individual as a free agent leaving traces of his will in a moral and commercial universe of his own contracting." This points to a conception of intentionality as lying in a free acting individual, whose complicity in a crime should be his own doing.

Then why, if it is so hard to work with the notion of complicity, if it is such a challenge to convincingly argue in most cases that an accomplice has indeed intentionally contributed to a wrong or had a real stake in it, why do we still have this notion? Why do we still feel the urge to condemn those accused of being complicit in wrongdoings? Why do we feel like there is something wrong about their unintended involvement? As criminal law scholar Sanford H. Kadish wrote some time ago, I believe this urge testifies to "the [underlying] moral justification of punishing people for both their conduct and the results of their conduct" (Kadish 1985 :326, see also Kadish 1997).

And then there is a special case of complicity, which is essentially the topic of this dissertation, that is predicated on common membership to a collectivity, wherein individuals commit a wrongdoing that none of them can possibly commit alone (Appiah 1987, Arendt 1987, Jaspers [1947]2001, Gilbert 2000, Kutz 2000). The basic idea is that people's political associations with a country, institution, or group extend the bounds of their moral responsibility and guilt to all sorts of harms done by these entities. Every instance of "complicity" as such involves giving appropriate weight to one's participation in these harms mediated through her silence, indifference, practical contribution, support, or fanaticism. Here are some examples: employees of a company operating in prison industrial complex that relies on the hyper-incarnation of black Americans; representatives of a political party whose leader incites violence; citizens of a country that manifestly persecutes a religious minority; an accountant working for a firm that sells parts to the Turkish arms industry; a Kurdish doctor who serves at a hospital where wounded Kurdish militants are denied treatment.

In all these cases, social actors conveniently expect the accused parties to have their regrets and feel somewhat tainted by association with the harmful effects of these entities on human lives. They want the latter to accept these harms as their individual problem, without necessarily questioning their general personal virtues in life, whether they are inherently good or bad people, or whether or not all these bad things are happening because these people have chosen them to happen. In fact, the idea of free choice has relatively little bearing on the *ethics* of complicity, because the ordinary conditions of ethical life disrupt the legal mechanism of relating consequences to the choices that produce them. One does not need to come up with a situated argument about intentionality or causal contribution to be able to recognize the pertinence of this

kind of complicity to personal and community ethics. So, the issue is really about how to include public sentiment into claims of complicity.

A friction of another kind between ethical and legal practices comes from a major difference in their means and styles of addressing "external" factors – or structures. Law, in particular, is in an uncomfortably tight situation. It derives legitimacy from a distinctive style of reasoning that follows a hierarchy of norms. This is a style of reasoning exquisitely adept at perceiving the facts of a crime, facts that shall remain unspoiled by public expectations, bias, and personal standpoints with regard to external factors such as structural inequalities. Not that structural inequalities do not matter, or maybe they do not matter but nobody openly says that. The question is how legal verdicts can adequately be reasoned with reference to these inequalities. Ethical practice is a whole different story. It follows a different style of inquiry that embraces popular public reason and social critique, which show great debt to people's beliefs, attitudes, and strategies about their broader circumstances.

Major disagreements aside, a main point of conversion between legal and ethical approaches is the punitive substance that each necessarily contains in itself. In both ethics and law, "complicity in harms and injustices" disrupts people's sense of justice and thus merits punishment. Legal debates articulate the conditions of law to qualify intentionality and causality so as to establish a ground for penal practice. Ethical debates articulate the broader conditions of legal, moral, and practical reasoning for the *required degree* of intentionality and causality so as to justify the punitive consequences for those involved. In this dissertation, I understand the category of complicity as an ethical problem and an ethical device for inquiring into broader questions of moral life and the connections between morality and politics. I view the category as an object of lived practical reason, grounded in its own conditions of possibility and social

history. To me, the primary value of thinking with the category of complicity, of being involved in or feeling responsible for the crimes' of the political sovereign, is that it gives a locally articulated theoretical depth to Turkish rule that one can only study by listening to how Kurds problematize their accommodations to the sovereign, as well as presenting these people with a concrete pragmatic and ethical ground on which they come together and build on their interrelated past and present experiences – in fact name those experiences as interrelated to begin with – in order to imagine a better future, invest in emotionally in the fact of being a a group and a political community with shared circumstances and shared moral habitus with similar worries, dilemmas, and choices, and influence one another on how they should navigate the muddy waters of structural, unintentional wrongs that are more or less like complicity.

Wrongs that Inspire

In this dissertation, I study how Kurds construct their ethical arguments vis-à-vis specific complicity cases, as well as the whole formula of "complicity with the Turkish state." The bulk of my research documents the trajectory of this formula in Kurdistan as it surfaces in and around face-to-face interactions, public debates, political activism, and the media. Over the course of my fieldwork, I observed that complicity accusations provide Kurds with a ground for simulating their true feelings about structural realities. When in safe company, Kurds like talking about "complicity in Turkish rule" as a way of providing a new moral narrative to their encounters with these structures, such as public institutions of power. They say, for instance, that having to speak Turkish, receiving education on Turkish national history, performing compulsory military service, smiling to a police officer, refraining from giving their children Kurdish names, warning one another of behaving well in public, or lying about which political party they voted for taints

them, makes them feel guilty. Narratives like this are clearly not transparent windows onto people's psyche, but they make a strong claim about how Kurds' encounters with political structures invoke their sense of agency. These encounters are said to disrupt yet also intensify and expand one's sense of being a moral agent, to the point that not doing something about it is not an option anymore, all the while facilitating affective affiliation among actors across disjunctive events and practices of statecraft.

Here, in such invocations of agency, arises a key problem of the Kurdish political movement: What kind of agency lies in Kurds' membership and participation in the political everyday of this country? This is also a key problem of modern political thought, yet it is hard to make an argument that will sustain itself in real life and across contexts. For one, the set of structural problems which an agent discovers herself to be responsible for depends on the prioritization of certain issues for certain reasons at certain times. There needs to be a fit between ethical sensibilities and styles of reasoning, and if this fit reveals a problem, if seeking a previously unrecognized connection brings new awareness, then we can give a conscious attention to our agency. And like every aspect of our ethical condition, our agency too does not live in a place of its own making. The more we understand about structures, the better we know who we are and where we stand. It is even possible, in fact pretty common, that individuals come to terms with their responsibility for regrettable things way after the fact. We see this quite often in our contemporary world; people immerse themselves in guilt for untried perils of another century, such as indigenous suffering at the hands of settler communities, or genocidal campaigns that targeted one group and spared the other. These "discoveries," to put it differently, await the interpretive occasion, which might come the next day or the next century. They only begin to emerge as actors slowly become better trained in particular reflexive projects, such as

feminism or abolitionism or Kurdish political movement, that greatly benefit from member's newly acquired competence in ethical inquiry.

Note that, most importantly, all these are social processes. An excellent place to see these processes at work are ethnographic monographs that center on real people, situated examples, and concrete ethical practices. We cannot possibly understand how ethical discoveries work without an understanding of the terms, techniques, and attitudes with which these discoveries are made. We cannot take moral rules as people's sole source of guidance, either, without paying attention to the delicate interplay of moral rules and personal discomfort that provide a basis for problematizations of previously neglected arrangements. In this dissertation, I thus follow Kutz's suggestion and study the ways in which Kurds find ethical inspiration in what they deplore as much as what they prize: their accommodations to the Turkish state.

It is my observation that Kurds make use of and invite one another to conduct ethical inquiries about the nature and reproduction of accommodation for seeing it as an activity primarily aimed at realizing one's moral relation to harms and injustices and shaping of moral agency for the better. In this picture, ethical discoveries about Kurdish reality are being made possible due to an unease with how one's moral agency is implicated in certain wrongs, not merely out of a recognition that these wrongs are, well, wrong. In fact, my interlocutors view it that the prospect of ethical renewals are often grounded in a realization that they cannot possibly eliminate their individual agency from all the bad and regrettable things that surround their lives anymore. Put simply, it is important to recognize one's moral mistakes, problematize them, and learn from them. Moreover, if we also remember that talk on the relationship between accommodation and complicity is generally mapped on a political ethical framework, learning from one's moral mistakes is something Kurds also *owe* to their relational others. It is a way to

show what those relational others are to them politically, and what that political relationship entails.

Right after advocating for an anthropological lens, it may seem odd to turn for help to yet another philosopher here, Kwame Anthony Appiah, but my advocacy for a careful study of ethical practices finds great support in his eloquent historical account of moral revolutions (Appiah 2011). The project that Appiah advances is one that looks at how people engage in active collective inquiries about the ongoing facts of their lives and realize that they have been on the wrong side of things the whole time (for a discussion of "knowledge-making" as a group activity see, Brady and Fricker 2016). Appiah presents us with long and nuanced analyses of not only Atlantic slave-trade but also dueling in Britain and foot-binding in China, to which I cannot do full justice in such short space. I will thus only focus on his account of the end of slavery and admittedly in a strategically narrow way.

The key point that I find of great salience to my discussion is this: Abolitionism was not the result of a change in moral rules. The advancements in moral terminology had some pertinence to the debate of slavery, but with new codes came not an immediate and easy end to slave-trade. In fact, the arguments being made against slavery, such as equality and dignity of labor, had been in circulation for some time as popular ideas of Enlightenment and Christian ethics. What gave abolitionism its warrant and import was the increasing realization of different groups, such as Anglican Quakers and British working-class leaders, that their sense of moral agency was deeply troubled and tainted by the sin of slavery, which inevitably became a matter of honor. While defending the dignity of the British working class at home, for instance, socialist journalists, union leaders, or religious organizations could not possibly support and become complicit to the undignified conditions of black slaves abroad. All this gave the real push that

finally turned anti-slavery into an all-encompassing public campaign, into which different techniques of inquiry, such as opinion articles, parliamentary resolutions, public debates, or petitions, were recruited.

In a similar fashion, I ask what kinds of rediscoveries and reformulations were called for to make "complicity" a public problem and a matter of moral integrity in Kurdistan. And what did these rediscoveries and reformulations have to do with people's sense of agency?

Conditions of Complicity in Turkey's Kurdistan

This research owes to many willing and enthusiastic interlocutors who all directed me to think seriously about the problem of complicity with the Turkish state, for this is what they seemed to be doing a lot. Often I asked my friends and neighbors whether they really considered "complicity," or "*hevparî sûcî bûn,*" to be such an urgent problem, one that penetrated Kurdish lives so deeply that it became impossible to avoid it. There never was an easy "yes," never a short answer, and almost never a readily applicable model for the required degree of certainty about intentions vis-à-vis assessments about complicitous accountability. To be perfectly precise, it would usually take a great deal of thinking and talking even to justify the urge to bring the issue up so repeatedly. This research, in fact, is a record of all these thoughts and conversations. Each chapter, much like the following one, bears the marks of my interlocutors' reflections, aspirations, good faith, and humor that helped them live with the rather discomforting idea of Kurdish complicity in Turkish crimes.

In the context of Kurdistan, it is particularly hard to deal with the category of complicity on its own terms. The whole issue is complicated by a competing and equally widespread belief that, in the decades long history of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict, Kurds have been playing their

part with true moral dignity. There are many reasons why Kurds assume a higher moral ground. Not only that they are the oppressed group in this conflict, but also that they are the *only* group actively working on and transforming their deeds and lives. Kurds are not alone in this. Many people I met in the US over the years have expressed similar views and told me about their appreciation of Kurdish people and their resilience and dedication. A moderately informed Uber driver told me it was a "big plus" that Kurds had a Western take on gender and women's rights, unlike their many neighbors in the Middle East – Arabs, Persians, and nowadays even Turks. A political scientist whom I met in Ann Arbor some years ago characterized Kurds as "the only reasonable people in the Middle East." I actually remember this interaction pretty vividly. I also remember having mixed feelings. While the anthropologist in me felt discomforted, the Kurdish side of me inevitably felt proud and wanted to say, "hell yeah!". "Hell yeah," not because I believe Kurds are inherently better people than their neighbors. "Hell yeah," because, as a Kurd, I too have been raised to appreciate the Kurdish political movement in quite similar terms.

When Kurds talk about their journey as a people, they proudly emphasize how the Kurdish political movement never resorted to, in fact explicitly rejected, religious fundamentalism, advocating for a left-wing political vocabulary and agenda instead. Across various segments of the population, ranging from the most urban to the most rural, I find a common belief that Kurdish politics is progressive, fair, and compassionate. Many describe Kurdish political history through favorable and concurrent moral and political transformations. These accounts archive the sweep of revolutions in the organization of Kurdish society such as the increasingly grassroot character of its mobilization, the embrace of multiculturalism (in particular the recognition of Armenian and Assyrian histories that are silenced in Turkish official discourse), the growing participation of women in politics (as activists, voters, and guerrilla

fighters), or the massification of secular ideals (which does not necessarily cancel piety). The perception of Kurdish politics as ethical is reflective of the positive image of the PKK and Kurdish political leaders as selfless and self-sacrificing exemplars of their time. But then there is another set of cases, where there seem to be *bad* Kurds, instrumentalist actions, and ongoing harm, where Turkish control within Kurdish spaces is reproduced with the help of *some* insiders. The struggle with complicity is in some important respect a product of this dilemmatic situation.

Though there are variations, the most popular and familiar articulation of the problem of complicity finds us in the trope of betrayal (*bêbextî*). The word is a very peculiar one. First, note that its root word is "*bext,*" which, as explained in the introduction, means luck fated to happen, and one's general fortune in life. This luck is a kind of luck that social actors are to take personally and embrace as a luck of theirs, something that belongs to them, contextually bound to other qualities and attributes of their lives. In this sense, *bext* is close to the word "fate," for it describes something somewhat predetermined, a function of a certain individual's or group's conditions, something not entirely arbitrary or spontaneous but *given*, or experienced in its condition of being a given. *Bext*, moreover, is also in everyday speech indexically tied to the political history of Kurdistan – as the ill-fortune *of* Kurds. Take the popular saying, "*bextê romê tunne ye*," literally meaning "the occupier has no luck," or "the soldiers of the west have no luck." *Romê* means "Roman," as in the Eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantine Empire. In contemporary Kurdish, *romê* is used for soldiers coming from the west, namely Turkish soldiers and police, but also for anyone representing Turkish political authority in Kurdistan, such as the governors. And the saying "*bextê romê tunne ye*" implies that one cannot work with Turks, that they bring ill-luck. The saying is most typically used when a Kurdish actor and a state actor collaborates on an issue, or act together in some fashion. If a Kurdish politician, for instance, is

heard to be secretly collaborating or having talks with a Turkish actor representing the state, Kurds say that the former is making a mistake, that he or she should not hope for any good coming out of collaboration, because *bextê romê tunne ye*.

Bêbextî, therefore, meaning "betrayal" and coming from the word *bext*, also means the deliberate, ill-intended undoing of luck, getting into a situation that scares the luck away, messing up with fate, or working against fate. A man, for instance, who is always lying to her mother, wasting his life on gambling or alcohol, is a *bêbext*, a traitor, who not only betrays the trust of his mother but also brings ill fortune to his own life, turning his life into one that will never lead to any good. My host mother in Bahçesaray would regularly describe her youngest son this way, as bêbext, for he refused to get married, spending his days in the city chasing improper women, all the while lying to his mother about how he would get married soon, promising that he would come to the village to start the marriage arrangements with his uncle's daughter, whom everyone in the family wanted him to get married. My host-mother, whenever she described her son as *bêbext,* thus would call her son a traitor, someone who says one thing and does another, someone non-trustable and never true to his words, but she would also indicate, and sadly regret, that her son was wasting his fortune, creating a misfortunate, accursed life for himself.

If considered as a political act and a function of being complicit in the harms incurred on Kurdish people, at work implicitly in the notion of betrayal is a belief that relates Kurdish misfortune to the somewhat somber idea of intra-communal backstabbing. Kurdish epics, myths, and political history all variously center around heroes of unbelievable stature betrayed by an insider who cooperates with the enemy. This is in fact such a common plot twist that people start to expect it all the time. When Kurds talk about traitors (*bêbext*), spies (*ajan*), and collaborators

of the state (*işbirlikçi*, *hevkarên dewletê*), which they do a lot, they thus aim to convey a moral story thick with recurrent episodes of misfortune and treachery, mutually constitutive of one another.

The words of one of my closest friends and perhaps the most willing partner in this research, Nazım, a carpet-master in his forties, are quite characteristic: "It is as if our great God created these people [Kurds] yet created them with their own damnation" (*Sanki Allah teâlâ bu kavmi yaratmış, ama onu kendi lanetiyle yaratmış*) – the reader will learn more about Nazım in chapter six. The following, taken from a novel of the late Mehmed Uzun, one of the most famous Kurdish authors of the 20th century, articulates a similar view:

> "I do not understand… Why is this ancient and numinous land kneaded with so much suffering and hatred? Why are these people who all live along the basins of Fırat and Dicle, all chained into the same captivity, being so hostile and merciless toward one another?" (Uzun 2014: 16, translation is mine).

Not all Kurds, of course, take such unyielding positions on their ill-fated history, nor do Kurds take the conception of treachery as something that must hinge on a coherence of accounts. What seems like an act of treason might easily appear to another person as a necessary compromise. The issue here is that things that *look like* treachery happen all the time, allowing for a very specific moral vocabulary to develop. As such, Kurds become able to *name* certain human behaviors as instances of a moral and political kind, while simultaneously debating whether those names are apt, necessary, helpful, right, just, or not. This, the fact that moral vocabulary is debated, referred to, and used, without necessarily being carved on stone as ultimate truths of a sort, forces us to pay attention to contextual and intersubjective dynamics of ethical life in which things may seem life betrayal, but not always. This is where ethnography differs from moral and

legal theories in that it studies ethical concepts in situated, concrete encounters and interactions where they are *made* to exist and thus become [meta]pragmatically consequential.

On the other hand, despite the heterogeneity of ethical life, I also find that Kurds *do* share a general perspective that there must be "something" about this place allowing for treachery to so frequently emerge as an object of intense concern. That "something," according to Kurds and scholars alike, is in part a function of certain structural idiosyncrasies of Kurdish society, such as its organization into atomized tribes with competing interests, or its territorial concentration along borderlands, which have all historically positioned Kurds as local auxiliaries of various political centers – Ottomans, Safavids, Russians, and Turks (Bozarslan and Güneş 2021, Klein 2011). That "something," in other words, appears to be a product of historical contingencies and complexities that have clearly taken the Kurdish society down a different path than it otherwise would have followed.

More than anything, Kurds' responses to this "something" are usually to acknowledge the schizophrenic nature of their historical journey as a people, filled with big achievements and massive losses, historic gains and huge sacrifices. The trope of treachery, which figures in many discussions of spies, collaborators, or cowards as figures from within, helps them isolate "complicity with the Turkish state" as one of the key reasons why Kurdish society seems to be recursively going back to square one whenever it starts to feel closer to achieve its political goals.

I think it is fair to say that the domain of complicity is grounded, first and foremost, in an evaluation of the historical persistence of a set of structural conditions that turn "cooperation with political power," in this case, the Turkish state, into a pervasive social reality. Facing these conditions does not of course mean that Kurds cannot make a choice between alternatives, nor

that cooperation is the inevitable option. Indeed, most of my interlocutors would argue that the whole trajectory of the Kurdish political movement in the past fifty years is a testament to the possibility of doing the right thing. But there being some people who do make the right choice, even if these people make up the majority, does not alter the morally flawed environment in which these choices are pressed upon individuals. Even after a choice is made *against* becoming complicit with the state, there remains "a kind of moral residue... left over to stain or tarnish what would otherwise be a praiseworthy accomplishment" (Parrish 2007: 4). In this relation, that "something" in Kurdistan corresponds to this residue. As philosopher Bernard Williams says about ethically dilemmatic situations in general, in complicity accusations we face a problem that is "neither systematically avoidable, nor soluble without a remainder" (1973: 179).

A New Time, the Same Old Problem

While I have been conducting research in Kurdistan since 2010, it did not take me too long to pick out the relevance of the categories of complicity, cooperation, and betrayal to Kurds' understandings of politics and social life. Still, I never expected that I would end up studying these issues until I began my long-term ethnographic research on political ethics in 2017. Only a few weeks in fieldwork and I could already see that people's concerns with others' complicitous behavior had taken a much sharper focus due to a range of important changes underway in Kurdistan.

The historic and widely celebrated peace negotiations between the government and the PKK had already collapsed in 2015, followed by sweeping security operations that killed thousands and displaced hundreds of thousands of people. In 2016, in response to an abortive coup attempt, the then-Prime Minister Erdoğan declared a nation-wide state of emergency and

introduced draconian measures. The emergency saw a truly astonishing rise of authoritarianism in Turkey, which further intensified the political crackdown on Kurdish activists and institutions. Across Kurdistan, communities find themselves having to live under both new and residual forms of oppression. As my interlocutors commonly argued, the weightiest consequence of the emergency was that it brought a wholesale integration of state surveillance and arbitrary punishment into Kurdish society to an extent that many considered to be unprecedented. Especially among Kurds who lived in and around conflict zones, who were practicing the trade of politics or were active in public life, it became somewhat of a truism that this widening entrenchment of Turkish rule was forcing Kurds to accommodate to the demands of political power even more regularly and somewhat randomly.

Consider the following example: a Kurdish shop owner sees a man standing right outside of his restaurant. He keeps watching the man for a good fifteen minutes, during which the man continues standing there with his eyes fixed in a certain direction as if he is waiting for someone. The shop owner is not happy with the situation. Why? Because only a week ago, two police officers came to his shop and told him that he had to report individuals – customers or pedestrians – acting suspiciously. If not, the police warned him, the shop owner himself would get in trouble. Eventually, the shop owner decides to report the unknown pedestrian to the police, eased in his consciousness that the pedestrian would probably be okay after answering a few questions. What else could he do anyway, he thinks to himself, he doesn't have a choice; he has to protect his business. While I was in the field, such examples were abundant, posing great challenges to the coherence of the most prominent political and ethical modalities that governed Kurdish public life, which were, in theory, accepted without argument: Don't make the job of the police any easier than it already is. Don't be afraid of showing your true colors. Support and

protect local actors and institutions. Resist to be assimilated into the mainstream Turkish culture. Speak Kurdish. Vote Kurdish. Live Kurdish.

Yet, in practice, these shared pronouncements were followed by a host of divergent assessments about their real-life feasibility. If the unknown pedestrian in the above example is really up to something, for instance, the shop owner will quite possibly be accused of aiding and abetting. Thus, in assessing the actions of the shop owner, or the actions of those who found themselves facing similar predicaments, Kurds needed to answer whether it was realistic to expect what seemed manifestly for the public good from ordinary actors with limited power. These deliberations also delivered important lessons about how to distinguish acceptable accommodations from unacceptable ones. Even the most ardent proponents of moral excellence, those who believed there was no such thing as an acceptable accommodation, were prepared to acknowledge that sometimes real-life conditions *do* weigh in so heavily that they must hold sway. If my time in Kurdistan has taught me anything, it is that living in a politically volatile place is to live through, almost daily, a series of conflicting philosophical experiments, which, unlike the experiments of the sort we find in textbooks, have very real consequences.

Equally important, Kurds had their reasons to believe that these conflicts were arising with more frequency and potency within Kurdistan than they were in other parts of the country, namely, the Turkish Turkey. This was a point of great resentment and criticism toward the Turkish state. Many considered ethical conflicts as intrinsic to the discriminatory logic of governance, a logic that compelled Kurds to betray, compromise, abandon, keep quiet, or otherwise act in ways that, had they not been so vulnerable to the dictates of politics, would appear to be completely unacceptable. Here, I want to point out that this criticism is also an ethical statement. Behind people's disquiet with the dictates of the political context was an ideal

that addressed itself to the question of value conflicts: an ideal wherein Kurds could remain true to themselves. In the next section, I will call this ideal "autonomy" and trace its origin in the emergence and popularization of the Kurdish political movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

Autonomy and Political Ethics:

As was previously mentioned, I met countless people who variously painted the PKK in a good light, describing it as a grassroot campaign for moral progress. When I think about these conversations, I also realize that one of the promises of the PKK that I heard the most was that it could finally resolve the issue of value conflicts. This promise concerned the reclaiming of everyday life as an arena wherein important and morally troubling things were going on. In this relation, the PKK seemed to have successfully established the common ground -- the everyday -- as a key resource for its political ethics.

It was not like the PKK made an invention, however. As linguistic anthropologist, linguists, and sociologist of communication have long argued, it is impossible to disconnect broader issues of moral and political significance from the everyday where they are inconspicuously and conveniently transmitted and learned (Goffman 1971, Grice 1989, Levinson 2000, see also Bourdieu 1990). Everyday life functions as an "open stockpile" of shared presumptions, information, and moral codes that "fuel inference in communication" (Enfield 2011: 223). It is also an important source of social and moral affiliation for individuals who often reason about their relatedness to one another by pointing at the state of affairs, practices, dispositions, values, beliefs, and habits that constitute their common ground. Perhaps for this exact reason, ethical projects, such as the feminist consciousness raising movement that was popular in America in 1960s and 1970s, view the everyday as a reservoir of shared and often

under-examined experiences of which one needs to become aware so as to change them (Keane 2016: 36-38 and 196-198).

When I was in Kurdistan, people's critical reflections on everyday life generally pointed at a shared perception of a lack of "autonomy." Of course, worries about autonomy were naturally high at a time it was at stake. Yet this emphasis on autonomy was not merely a product of recent events. It also reflected a deeper and more permanent concern that has long commanded a good deal of attention in Kurdish politics. There is a very direct reference to autonomy in Kurdish political discourse as "*otonomi*" or "*öz-yönetim*" (self-governance), which corresponds to the designated political goal of the PKK (Biehl 2012, Akkaya and Jongerden 2012). And then there is another and broader sense in which autonomy is articulated as the state of being oneself, a capacity for remaining authentic to one's reason, desires, and values. In fact, the framing *and* democratization of autonomy as a matter of "being oneself" constitutes the moral impetus behind the idea of "otonomi" as a political goal.

In certain strands of moral philosophy, specifically in Kantian ethics (1983), autonomy is viewed as a capacity of individuals, and it describes their immunity to external influence (see also Keane 2010). In Kurdistan, on the other hand, autonomy figures as an attribute of groups, idealized as their shared capacity for flourishing and self-actualization as a people. In this usage, autonomy connotes the ability of group members to reflect wholly on who they are and to create spaces for acting out these reflections. This is a certain kind of ability that is collectively achieved and very much publicly oriented, characterized as a way of living freely and together with your own kind. But more than anything, Kurds view autonomy as something of a moral revolution, for it began its career in Kurdistan as a new hype.

Hype indeed was characteristic of the emergence of Kurdish political movement as a whole, of which autonomy was a formative element (Günes 2013). This hype started to shape up above all in the experiences of a wave of first-generation Kurdish college students in the 1970s (Bozarslan 2012, Öcalan 1999). Although there is no shortage of proponents of Kurdish autonomy, the topic holds a particularly dear place in the ethics of PKK, where self-actualization of Kurdish people carries an exceptional importance. It thus seems especially pertinent to refer to Abdullah Öcalan here, one of the founding figures of the PKK and its de-facto leader.

Like many Kurdish activists of his time, Öcalan, too, initially found refuge in Turkish socialist organizations. And, just like the others, he soon became restless from the Turkish left's structural blindness to Kurds and from the overbearing trivialization of Kurdish concerns and voices in these circles. In the spring of 1973, he brought together a small group of Kurdish activists "in the name of studying the Kurdish reality" (Öcalan 1999: 108). What was technically a reading group later developed into a guerrilla movement, which has produced generations of aspirant revolutionaries. On August 15, 1984, PKK fighters launched a large-scale attack on the Turkish military and officially started an insurgency that has survived to this very day.

The goals and strategies of the PKK are many and varied, but what seems salient to my analysis is that the whole movement emerged out of an unease with the cleavage between Kurds' private selves and permissible public appearance. The PKK took this cleavage very seriously, arguing that Turkish colonialism (note that the PKK refers to the Turkish state as a colonial project) was founded in the mundane ways of rendering Kurds invisible in public life.

Examples can be endlessly multiplied. Kurdish clothes, names, and language were banned until the 1950s. Kurdish people were classified as "Mountain Turks" until the 1980s. Between 1980 and 1991, Kurdish language was yet again prohibited in public *and* private life.

To hold public office, Kurds had to renounce their identity. Or else, they were jailed. Kurdish students were (and still are) being schooled in state-accredited institutions that taught state-accredited curriculums with no mention of Kurdish existence. The *civatî* (Muslim community) had to (and still does) pray in state-erected mosques run by state-appointed imams who performed state-approved sermons that were often tinged with a Turkish nationalist rhetoric (for an analysis of "Turkish state religion," see Kaplan 2006).

Most importantly, the everydayness of these practices worked to exclude any recognition of the official ideology that enabled them. According to the PKK's founding figures and early cadres, this everydayness created something like a wall of mist that obscured how Kurds' uncaring or habitual accommodations to the state became a necessary component in the reproduction of this ideology. All this motivated an argument for how assessing and countering the effects of Turkish rule required some effort to inquire about what went unnoticed: the structuring of everyday life around practices and institutions that demanded Kurds to quietly deny their private selves. Someone's self-denial became fundamentally everyone's concern, and everyone should care about the cumulative effects of their accommodations to power for they made a difference to their collective condition. Therefore, the general boundary of moral responsibility was effectively extended to merely failing to pay attention to Kurds' unknowing or deliberate resignations to the will and pressures of power.

Another way to put all this is to say that the PKK's political ethics demanded greater ethical reflexivity. This demand also reflected a belief that the reorganization of ethical inquiry was key to the prospect of changing the moral and political ground of Kurdish collective condition. Taking a perspective that saw moral progress as primarily an epistemological issue, the PKK argued that if Kurds could orient to their asymmetrical position and lack of autonomy

within the fields of power as a matter of awareness and knowledge, so that they could say "we know better now," progress and improvement would inevitably follow.

Indeed, as documented in many autobiographical narratives that I collected in Kurdistan, Kurds often place the hype of the Kurdish movement in opposition to the former, regrettable, and unrecognized arrangements and patterns of behavior in Kurdistan. This can be illustrated through the story of Hamza, an independent researcher and activist in his sixties from the predominantly Kurdish populated Van province. I met Hamza in 2010 when I first traveled to Van to attend an undergraduate conference for sociology students; he was among the audience. For years, he continued to be a good friend and contributed greatly to my research and grasp of Kurdistan.

Hamza was fluent in four languages and would carry around this big old briefcase full of books that he translated to Kurdish. He had an outstanding knowledge of genealogies of Kurdish tribes and the history of Kurdish people in the Middle East, but the all-time favorite subject of the veteran activist was his own life. He would often portray his adolescence and youth as the most formative years of his political awakening. The youngest son of a notable family, Hamza received extensive training in a *madrassa*, a traditional religious Kurdish school secretly operating in rural Van. As young as ten years old, he was already accompanying his father and uncles to Iran and Iraq. Considering himself ready for the world out there, sometime in late-1970s, Hamza said goodbye to his village and moved to the city as a handsome youth of twenty, imbued with a graceful feeling of motion. His quest for a breakthrough, however, was quickly spoiled when Hamza realized urbanites were not speaking Kurdish, listening to Kurdish music, or wearing Kurdish clothes. And much to Hamza's dismay, life was simply continuing, unaffected. This experience deeply shaped his decision to channel his skills and activism to the promotion of mother tongue as the primary medium of political and everyday communication.

Or take Veli, the father of a friend, who told me about his childhood experiences at a state-run regional boarding school (*bölge yatılı okullari*). These residential schools were massive institutions with a well-earned reputation for the ill-treatment of Kurdish students and their primary function was to assimilate them. Yet these institutions were also, in most cases, the only option for pursuing secondary education. Likewise, Veli, the eldest son of a family of eleven, was sent to a boarding school, where he was indoctrinated for six years into the belief that Kurds did not exist. He would go back home in summers to "educate" villagers and his parents about the non-existence of Kurdish identity (Kurds were essentially Turks made to think they were not) and language (it was essentially Turkish mixed with Persian and Arabic words and syntax). As he relayed these memories to me, Veli's regret and indignation was palpable. It was only when he started college to obtain a law degree in 1973, where he met other Kurdish students with similar stories, Veli found the opportunity to de-familiarize and re-familiarize himself with Kurdish reality (*Kürt gerçekliği*). Years later, when his daughter started to take Kurdish language classes at a privately run school in Diyarbakir, the would-be capital of Turkey's Kurdistan, Veli joined her to "regain his mother tongue" (the school later was shut down by the government in keeping with its ironclad posture towards Kurdish cultural expression). It was not that Veli did not know any Kurdish, but he found shame in his "inferior" linguistic skills due to years of willful negligence.

The experiences of these men have much to contribute to my discussion of the modes of appraisal and evaluation that inevitably accompany the obligation for ethical inquiry. First, both of them are autobiographical stories about cultivation of reflexive skills and about the conditions that simultaneously curtailed and demanded such reflexivity. They both demonstrate clearly how

ethical reflexivity informs the manners in which people take a morally and politically informed position on their everyday dealings with one another and with certain structures of power.

Moreover, and this is very important, both show how Kurds judge the grounds of their relations to certain wrongs – wrongs they witness or personally produce – with reference to a list of feelings and reactions that taint and thus invoke their sense of moral agency: shame, guilt, embarrassment, resentment, indignation, shock, or regret. When I think about Hamza and Veli, I can see that neither man took these feelings in passivity but turned them into resources for serious contemplation, which shows us the force of such affective exercises in facilitating something of a sensory skill to realize and detect possibilities for self-reflexive transformation. What decisively imposed a change in their assumptions about political duty was a realization that Kurds' various accommodations to the Turkish state were an affront to their communities' dignity. Indeed, one of the central arguments of this work is that the affective registers of political engagement honed through powerful ethical encounters are as formative to people's causal reasonings abouts moral responsibilities as high-order debates and received codes, precisely because these registers speak some truth to their sense of agency.

It is also important to point out that the significance of the stories of Hamza and Veli lies in part in their ubiquity. In Kurdistan, such stories are everywhere – stories about the loss of culture, assimilation, and various forms of social inhibitions that all manifestly shape public and private behavior, or about moments of sudden epiphany and corollary renunciations of former patterns of behavior. And these stories all variously resonate for millions of Kurdish men and women with ordinary or not-so-ordinary lives – students, activists, urbanites, villagers, dissidents, housewives, children, former guerrillas, PKK supporters, or pro-government families. The ubiquity of these stories has helped power the "common ground" upon which the PKK was

able to build its political ethics, and it helped sharpen the group's rhetorical push for active opposition and non-compliance as matters of national honor. Against this background, the Kurdish political movement effectively turned itself into an ethical campaign, which was tasked to disturb the smooth running of this micro-culture of self-denial. This was a campaign for autonomy, which has proved for Kurds to be a bumpy risky ride.

Public/Private: Bounds and Sources of Complicitous Accountability:

Imagine you are in a car with friends, taking a trip to a nearby town to attend a wedding. Chances are very high that you will be questioned at one of the hundreds of ID-check points across Kurdistan. What follows is one of those everyday ceremonies of power in which you are expected to surrender to the will of your oppressor, participating in, rather grudgingly, a random and excessive act of surveillance so as to navigate your way past the capricious creature which you know as the state.

Now imagine that you own a restaurant, and a group of men from the governor's office walk in one afternoon. It is at that moment you are presented with a series of opportunities and challenges: Should you serve them immediately, as a token of [forced] respect, or have them wait while you are taking care of another customer? Would you be okay with offering discounts or free goods, which is conveniently expected by high-ranking public employees, or ask for full payment in defiance of this custom? How about treating the police protection team that wait outside with some tea, who seem rather busy with terrorizing civilians within a hundred meters radius of your restaurant?

To be perfectly accurate, Kurdish political ethics has always been one for big actions and bold statements. This ethic has propagated an image of Kurdish autonomy that finds its true

colors in guerrilla warfare, self-defense, civil disobedience, and mass demonstrations. Yet, given the limitations of the political context around the time when I was in Kurdistan, autonomy came in the form of an ordinary achievement, such as not smiling at the police, whose entailments for individuals could, and often would, reach extraordinary proportions: rebellion, dissent, supporting terrorists, being a terrorist oneself, and so on. One might also recognizably "overdo" the smiling, and it would be enough to have that individual transmuted into someone unrecognizable to herself: a traitor, informant, collaborator, coward, and so on.

Within the context of rising authoritarianism, it was thus a grim predicament of Kurds that they had to fake rapport with the state, while privately reminding one another of who they really supported. The cleavage between private and public realms, therefore, had a strong moral charge to it, insofar as the gap between what individuals felt or believed and how they acted continued to benefit and maintain the Turkish rule, all the while undermining the values and principles, such as autonomy, that sustained their community's wellbeing.

This distinction between public and private is nothing novel, of course, and ever since the Greek *agora*, and increasingly so with the advent of modern public sphere in the 19th century, there has been a sustained interest in this dichotomy, and the sorts of semiotic labor necessary to mediate the relationship that lies therein (Gal 2002, 2005; Sennett 1977, Warner 2002). As Hannah Arendt observed some sixty years ago, a sustained consideration of human political worlds must involve some attention to the bifurcation of human activities into private and public realms (Arendt [1958] 1998). The demands of politics, in fact, are such that these two realms almost always must stand in conflict with each other. What concerns me today is not the genesis of this bifurcation, however, nor do I have the space to outline the scholarly debates around it. It is the way this bifurcation was recruited in Kurdistan for moral ends and ethical argumentations,

for the public/private divide accompanied all sorts of tricky questions about intentions and consequences, about true feelings and public performances, and about what was said and what was done: Did my friends take my conversation with the patrolling officer as a heartfelt greeting? Why does every shop in my street have a Turkish flag hanging on their windows? What were the entire board of management of my city's chamber of commerce doing at the inauguration ceremony of the new government compound? Why was my good friend's car parked outside of the governor's office this morning?

I heard people asking and debating such questions every day, which would bring them together in a conversation that would go on for several days if not weeks. These questions that in some sense invoked the entire history of Kurdish politics and Turkish rule would often erupt into breathless talk, whose appeal and excitement for people lied in the capacity of talk to take various forms from refined discussions held in private settings to social media fistfights. The challenge in these interactions was an ethical one that required people to bring their competing rationales on the table for whether to extend, or not, the bounds of moral responsibility and agency to acts of accommodation to power. The rationale *for* such extension might or might not be applied to individual cases in the end, but it was certainly an important regulative element of Kurds' everyday practices of assigning complicitous accountability to one another.

People's gesture to "complicity" in these cases was always more complicated than simply establishing someone's guilt. It was not necessarily about establishing someone's deliberate wrongdoing either. Except for acts grave enough that left little doubt about the actor's ill-intentions, such as walking into a police station and reporting a neighbor, people knew that individuals' accommodations to the state were never purely voluntary nor devilishly calculated. Yet many would still impute some shame on these individuals, whose practices would remain

under scrutiny for a while to see if they were willing to offer redress. As far as I could tell, some act of repair would follow shortly. The point was to promote a certain kind of reflexivity by distinguishing between real traitors and those who knew well enough that their behavior edged on treason albeit due to conditions not entirely in their control. The very moral ties that connected Kurds to one another meant that one person's act was the problem of the many.

Living A Morally Compromised Life

Almost five centuries after Machiavelli declared politics to be inherently amoral, it remains to be a question why political systems seem to be bringing out the worst in us. One does not need to live in a hyper-authoritarian state to see the increasingly morally demanding nature of politics; I believe people's cynicism about the political present is globally pretty much at the peak at the moment.

When I started my dissertation fieldwork in 2017, I observed that Kurds' cynicism with politics indeed seemed to have hit a historical high. The dangers that politics held for ordinary people were at the center of social life. There existed a great deal of uncertainties and risks that affected everyone. Many felt like Kurds were given no option other than keeping their heads down and swallowing their pride if they wanted to avoid becoming a target of the Turkish state. To properly understand the problems that this sort of life really entailed, as I was repeatedly told, one needed to cultivate a self-conscious orientation to certain aspects of the broader context that thrusted people into such relations of compromise. Only sensibilities trained this way could reveal the ethical conundrums that permeated the socio-political landscape of Kurdistan.

The important thing about "compromise," which makes it a viable and explicitly prized strategy in everyday life, is that an act of compromise, by design, should end the conditions of its

necessity. It is all about fixing a situation. When we compromise, we consider it to be a one-time act and a specific kind of arrangement wherein both sides make reasonable concessions. Certainly, nobody expects that they will need to make the same compromise every day, for the rest of their lives, and then still call it a compromise. In Kurdistan, however, this was exactly the case. People's compromises which should adequately bring a solution to their problems involved a major logical contradiction: They helped reproduce the conditions that compelled Kurdish individuals to compromise to begin with, making it impossible not only for these individuals but also for everyone to live a morally uncompromised life.

This was the reason why people's accommodations to the state, or their compromises, would often thrust them into relations of blameless antagonism. Try as they might to show that they intended well, Kurds often found that their accommodations made a causal contribution to abnormal political conditions that affected many other people. Remember the story of Ayhan and Selim with which I began this chapter. For Ayhan, his social media behavior was of course a matter of compromise. He knew what was being compromised was in fact his personal integrity and acknowledged the need to find ways to repair the damage. But it was also a kind of compromise between different positions about what really mattered the most: keeping his job or putting himself in danger for a cause he truly believed. In Selim's view, there was a logical inconsistency of some sort involved in Ayhan's thinking. For as long as Ayhan was not ready to make the same compromise for the rest of his life, or at least for a foreseeable future, losing his job would never cease to be a possibility. In this view, the situation called for a revision or re-qualification of the moral principles and terms of inquiry to do justice to the *facts* of the situation.

Indeed, throughout my time in Kurdistan, I found that people's reactions to even the subtlest demands of the regime, *i.e.,* using official Turkish place names instead of unofficial Kurdish place names, almost always came with an added emphasis on the complicitous nature of having to accommodate these demands. In all fairness to the situation, individuals' ability to refuse accommodation, and, by extension, their ability to argue for complicity were both tightly constrained by the intricacies and tangles of the socio-political context. Yet, as I have argued, it was these very tangles and intricacies that provided sufficient material to evaluate complicity less as an occasional error in judgment than an ever-present moral residue of Turkish rule in Kurdistan.

As key elements in the scaffolding of Kurdish everyday life, complicity accusations permeated social relations and processes of political engagement such that discussing complicity itself ineluctably became a training in the terms and tools of reflexivity. These debates allowed people to reflect on the sources, relations, practices, and outcomes that comprised what initially seemed like accommodation as the sources, relations, practices, and outcomes that actually comprised the domain of complicity. In other words, these debates were products of a vision trained to problematize acts of accommodation to the state in terms of their *likeness* to complicity. Most importantly, this vision, more than anything, was prompted by an anxiety over the inevitable excess and slippage that resulted from accommodation: its potential to reproduce "state control" within Kurdish life in ways that exceeded the limits of an actor's awareness.

Chapter 3 Kurdistan: A History of Circumstances

This chapter has three goals (two and a half, more precisely), each one of which I hope to achieve at its own pace. First I want to bring some ethnographic clarity to the geo-cultural and political category of "Kurdistan," the "here" of Roza's life. Second, I want to bring a similar kind of clarity to the idea of "circumstances," which I analyze genealogically. In pursuing these goals, the chapter explores the ways Kurds scale Kurdistan with reference to its unique circumstances, thus rendered salient. It argues, by way of exploring a list of representational forms and registers with which Kurds articulate their homeland, that a unique and defining aspect of Kurdistan for Kurds is that this place has been historically ruled differently. I believe this chapter will make it easier for the reader to see what kind of a theoretical value "circumstances" holds when the issue is connected to the specific project of place-making that it enables. Third, this chapter also has an individual goal of its own, one that does not strictly relate to a preceding or a following discussion. It is to demonstrate why *not* studying something can be a great way to learn important things about that same thing.

A Remote Place

In mid-September 2017, almost four weeks into my long-term fieldwork in Kurdistan, I was still living in the city of Van, the provincial center, slowly preparing to relocate to Bahçesaray district

– a remote corner that was pretty well adapted to its remoteness, and my first "official" field-site. The goal was always to start my fieldwork in a rural area, in a village, but Bahçesaray was not a place to which one could pack-and-move in 24 hours. Due to its mountainous topography and high-altitude, Bahcesaray was widely known as the hardest place to live in the province. It experienced heavy snowfall during the winter, which often resulted in the closure of the only road that connected the district to the center, and even on a sunny day in June, it would take almost three hours to make the tortuous 110-kilometer-long sketch barely wide enough for a standard minibus.

While for the outsider the district held this peculiar distinction of rising to national prominence only when an avalanche reminded to the rest of the country of its otherwise invisible existence (which most recently happened in 2020, when two avalanches occurred in two consecutive days and killed 41 people), for the insider, Bahçesaray was the center of its own universe. Locals would describe the district as a place that was always sunnier than the center of the province (though not necessarily warmer), always greener than most of Kurdistan, and an all-round magnificent place, with a visibly richer, beautiful flora. Bahçesaray was all these things, I was told, thanks to its topographic isolation from the outside world. Certain aspects of vegetation and climate variables presented the conditions under which Bahçesaray's remoteness was construed as a domain of esoteric knowledge, but the themes of distance and topography persisted in other spheres of social life as well. Young men, for instance, would measure the strength of their love by the number of steep hills that they had to climb to see their lovers. In semi-regular inter-village meetings designed for large-scale address of public issues, those who traveled from the farthest frontier of the district would get the most respect. Yet, as Edwin Ardener ([1987] 2012) proposed some time ago, remoteness should not be considered a property

of farawayness alone, nor this farawayness a quality that can only be registered in spatial terms. Remote areas are places seen by their inhabitants as distinct due to a much larger set of attributes that create a sense of historical, cultural, and political, as well as spatial *apartness*.



Figure 2: An inter-village meeting.

When I shared with my friends for the first time my intention to conduct research in Bahçesaray, most of them said that I must have lost my mind for being lured by such a crazy idea, and, at the same time, that the idea showed a peculiar genius, as I was told by many of the same friends, for Bahçesaray was probably one of the most interesting places in Kurdistan, where everything had a certain uniqueness to it. The district was a product of confluence where seven rivers and several zones of cultural influence met. It resembled somewhat of a *cul-de-sac* with the entire area being surrounded by mountains higher than three thousand meters. Its old-old name, which is Armenian and dates back to the 8th century, was *Moks*, meaning in classical

Armenian, the liturgical language of the Armenian Apostolic Church, "the place of magic," from which its Kurdish names *Miks*, *Miksî*, and *Müküs* were derived. Then in 1960, the Turks renamed it as Bahçesaray – ironically the two words, *bahçe* (garden) and *saray* (palace), that comprise the Turkish name are both of Persian origin. The inhabitants would use all these names, though not randomly but for particular purposes. The specific Kurdish dialect used in the area was called *Miksî* or *Müksüce*. When talking about administrative and public matters, such as electoral results, they would then choose the word Bahçesaray. In John Gumperz's terminology, *Miksî* was the "we-code" and Bahçesaray was the "they-code," hence the latter's ordinary acceptance due to its pragmatic and metapragmatic utility, and despite its problematic political history (Gumperz 1982).

There were a few typical things that people would tell me when I asked them about why Bahçesaray was so different. First, while social life was inextricably bound up with tribal politics across most of Kurdistan, in Bahçesaray, tribes (*eşîrên*) were not presently operating. Later in this chapter, I return and spend more time on the issue of Kurdish tribes, but for now let me emphasize a few things about this category and what it represents in Kurdistan: As *all* my interlocutors would accept, it is commonly said that Kurdish society is historically and culturally a tribal society, organized and divided along tribal groups that come together under the leadership of hereditary chiefs (*agha*s). These groups have been reproducing themselves for centuries, as it is generally believed, often living side by side in a balanced competition with one another. Drawing on a few key works on Kurdish tribes (Bruinessen 1991, Klein 2011, Özoglu 2004), I define Kurdish tribes as social identities that belong to Kurdish groups who cohere due to a need for cooperation over political and social issues, as well as protection from rival groups, and exhibit particular traits believed to have been stable over time (Özoglu 2004: 44). These

traits can include economic activity, such as a tribe having great control over husbandry in a particular area. The trait in question can also be linguistic, as intra-dialectical differences often mark in Kurdistan tribal identity – *eşîré Gewdan* of Van Province, for instance, speak quite a distinct Kurmanjî compared to the other tribes of Van, which is iconically indexical of the *Gewdan*s' tribal history. Because of their distinct register, it is believed that the Gewdan tribe did relocate from Hakkari Province to Van at one point in their group history, considering that the specific register Gewdans speak sounds similar to the Kurmanjî spoken in a certain area of Hakkari. The traits in question can also be personality or biological traits, with some tribes are said to have stronger men, and some other women with really big breasts, meaning that the women of the tribe must be fertile, hence the relatively bigger size of the tribe. In Kurdistan, based on ethnographic observation alone, I argue that these groups are bound together due to spatial connectedness, which however has also started to change due to outward migration and urbanization, shared activities and mutual need, and kinship through ancestry and continuing patterns of intermarriage, mostly patrilateral parallel-cousin marriage. But more specifically, the significance of tribal identity is tied to its power to create affective bonds, rendering members morally and in unique ways obligated towards one another, and towards a leadership that has influence over everyday practices and decisions of tribal members. This significance, moreover, is equally tied to the tribe's pragmatic purchase on social interactions, social relations, and how people tend to evaluate one another on the basis of their tribal identities, as well as how Kurds tend to make decisions about whom to do business with, trust, mistrust, show support, or easily become enemies based on the particular tribe to which the person in question belongs.

In Bahçesaray, as many interlocutors said, however, tribes were interestingly absent. The district comprised a small-town center and six neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were

composed entirely of villages and small hamlets situated in close proximity to one another. In the majority of Kurdistan, such archipelagos of villages were usually defined though political alliance as well as tribal identities, as villages or village areas of this tribe or that tribe. But in Bahcesaray, all seven neighborhoods were attributed identity markers other than a tribal affiliation, which thus turned those neighborhoods' political loyalties all the more salient. The village where I lived, for instance, was located in a neighborhood of six villages known as the pro-PKK area. There was another neighborhood close to ours known to be slowly switching its loyalty from the state to Kurdish political movement, where relations between older and younger generations were very tense as a function of this shift. Our neighborhood and this second one would give the most votes to the pro-Kurdish HDP in local and national elections. Still, the HDP only twice won the elections in Bahçesaray. Another neighborhood of eleven villages were known as the Sufi region, historically home to two big Kurdish *madrassas*. Religious schools run by local *sheikh*s or *mele*s (imams), madrassas teach an Islamic curriculum but some of them also teach Farsi, literature, poetry, and science. While some madrassas belong to Sufi orders that are also Kurdish nationalist, advocating for Kurdish self-determination and autonomy, the ones in Bahçesaray were not one of those. The ones in Bahçesaray were known on the contrary to be secretly supported by various Turkish governments for decades, despite the fact that *madrassas* were constitutionally banned in Turkey since the establishment of the republic, in order to promote religion and religious loyalties over nationalist discourses and movements.

A total of three neighborhoods of more than fifty villages, on the other hand, were known to be ruled by Orhan family, a Kurdish family with close ties to the Turkish state. The Orhan family did own large swathes of land in Bahçesaray and at least a few members of the family would always be politically involved in the ruling Turkish political party, and the district director

of the party's office in Bahçesaray would always be led by an Orhan. Indeed, the fact that Bahçesaray was historically and mostly, except for two of its seven neighborhoods, known to be pro-state was another reason that my friends supported my decision to conduct research there as an "interesting idea" – because, in general, Bahçesaray was a place researchers, journalists, or even activists would pass on for being politically on the wrong side.



Figure 3: A village in Bahçesaray

How come tribes did not exist in Bahçesaray? Here is the oral historical account that I collected: The district, having been entirely inaccessible to the Ottoman powers, had been comfortably ruled for centuries, until the mid-19th century, by *beg*s, known as the *beg*s of Müks, who were the hereditary heads of the Kurdish house that reigned in the area – these families can have names, but the one that reigned in Bahçesaray is remembered today as the "beg family," "*malbaté beg*." Unlike tribes, *beg* families that ruled over specific areas did not have kin ties

with the people they governed, rather basing their authority on the protection, aid, and access to land that they provided. In Bahçesaray, from the time of the *beg*s until recent history, *sheikh*s, religious leaders of various Sufi orders, or religious teachers taken under the protection of *beg*s, also had considerable power over internal affairs. The oral histories about these *sheikh*s, of which we might speak as arch-narratives or foundational narratives, describe a place where the most unconventional, rebellious Sufis came to take refuge and start garnering followers, and sometimes even soldiers, of their own. When in the mid 19th century the Ottoman empire demolished the *beg* family and sent its members to exile, which was also a particular historical moment in which the Ottomans waged a total war against Kurdish principalities, and I tell more about this history shortly, the political roles and leadership in the district redistributed in ways that allowed for certain *sheikhs* – and madrassas ruled by those *sheikhs* – and also families, in particular the Orhan family, to become powerful, all of whom gained prominence by willingly getting under the aegis of first the Ottomans and then the Turkish state.

Therefore, if Bahçesaray was interesting, and always different from everywhere else, that was most significantly for being too remote of an area, always secluded and hidden away, thus always ruled and populated differently, with a logic unique to its status as a non-center. The state needed the Orhan family and *sheikh*s, as much as the latter needed the state, because Bahçesaray's unruly geography and impossible landscape made it impossible for Turks to secure authority over and reach into the district without the help of *some* insiders. The PKK, too, found it for decades to infiltrate into and build a base in Bahçesaray, because the district was a *cul-de-sac* where once you got stuck in, you were, well, screwed. Though Bahçesaray was my most salient and rich ethnographic encounter with this kind of remoteness, I later and slowly learned that remoteness was a spectrum and a popular scalar metric to understand Kurdistan as a whole.

This was the case, because every place in Turkey's Kurdistan, even its would-be capital, was in certain respects remote with "that note of eccentricity and overdefinition of individuality" (Ardener [1987] 2012: 531). But none were more remote than Bahçesaray, a reason why Bahçesaray was an ideal teacher of remoteness. The reader will thus learn more about this place and hear about it repeatedly throughout the dissertation.

This chapter focuses precisely on the ways my interlocutors would refer to their homeland, Kurdistan, as a specific kind of place, unique to its own facts as a non-center, or non-state. Bahçesaray was a strong example of this uniqueness, but the tools and styles with which the residents of the town narrated and scaled their home were also readily available in other locations. Indeed, throughout my time in Kurdistan, scaling this place vis-à-vis other kinds of places and other ways of living was always a privileged activity. My interlocutors, as was said in the introduction, liked thinking about why things seemed to be working differently in Kurdistan, why the "here" of their lives seemed to have emerged out of circumstances that rendered it not-normal. In this sense, this chapter tries to unpack the "here" of Kurds lives, exploring how that "here" is registered in specific representational forms and articulations of history, landscape, and politics. On one hand, my purpose is to sketch how a relationship with Kurdistan encompasses one's affective and attentive orientedness to Kurdistan's specific politic status as a remote geography bordering various political centers, which nevertheless makes the center of its own universe. On the other hand, it is to look at Kurdistan as the "here" of a specific set of political and ethical experiences, taken by my interlocutors as proof to the status of this "here" as a place differently construed, ruled, and populated for a very long time, where this difference became a mirror to Kurds' own conceptions of Kurdistan.

Finding the Right Company

On a beautiful September day in 2017, I woke up to leave Van city center for Bahçesaray. After doing all the necessary preparation, including getting decorative gifts for my host-family, coloring books and pens for children, and ten boxes of kadaif for everyone else living in the village (which is a lip-smackingly sweet Middle Eastern dessert), in other words, all the wrong things and none of the right ones, like loose tobacco, cigarettes, knitting yarns, sanitary pads, medicine, or even alcohol, I was ready for my long-term research in Bahçesaray, the ultimate Kurdish heartland in my thinking. The day before my departure, I had even asked a close friend, a Kurdologist, if he could recommend to me a good Kurdish novel as a companion to my adventures. He showed up the same evening with not one but two books.

The first book was Heciyê Cindî's *Hewarî* (in English, *Cry [for Help]*), an early Kurdish novel published in the USSR (Cindî [1967] 1999). Cindî was a Yazidi Kurd born in 1908 in Kurdistan, who later fled to Armenia, settling in a village near the capital where he worked as a linguist of Kurdish language. In *Hewarî,* Cindî chronicled the lives and struggles of the Caucasian Kurds from 1915, the beginning of the Armenian Genocide, until the mid-50s. The second book was *Benim Adim Kirmizi (My Name is Red)*, written by a world-renowned Turkish novelist, Orhan Pamuk (1998), which I had earlier confessed to my friend that I actually never read. Perhaps already anticipating my reaction, my friend gave me *My Name is Red* with a slightly amused expression on his face and said, "I know, I know… I promised you a Kurdish novel, which I delivered, but no Kurdish novel will be as good as this one." I smiled faintly and put the book into my backpack as discreetly as possible, and just like that, we became united by a secret, the secret of liking Turkish literature (even more than Kurdish literature). What we experienced was a specific kind of sharing whose joyfully secretive quality was something only

we, me and my friend, and presumably other Kurds as well, could fully understand. In the next chapter, I will have a lot more to say about this sharing, this particular form of intimacy (*e.g.*, Herzfeld 1997, see also Shryock 2004).

In the end, I shall admit, *My Name is Red* proved to be a more convenient, low-maintenance companion than *Hewarî*, which I was advised by many in Bahçesaray to not carry around or let others see. Publications in Kurdish language were dangerous objects, variously banned or restricted by different laws throughout the history of the Republic of Turkey (Blum and Hassanpour 1996, McDowall 1988). A law that came into force in 1983, entitled "The Law Concerning Publications and Broadcasts in Languages other than Turkish," for instance, forbade "the declaration, circulation and publication of ideas in a language which is not the first official language of a State recognized by Turkey," effectively banning Kurdish language without even mentioning the word Kurdish (Uçarlar 2009). Although this law got repealed in 1991, the move was immediately counterpoised by a new anti-terrorism law (McDowall 1988: 431). This was and still is quite typical of the Turkish state, evident in its constitutional regime that is forever trapped in such self-reinforcing cycles of amendments and counter-amendments.

For my interlocutors, most important of all, if and how, with or without a law, and to what extent Kurdish language was restricted at any given time was a mere technicality. *Hewarî* was published in Ankara, the capital of Turkey, by a publication house legally operating in the country, and the book had a revenue stamp on it. But no amount of explaining convinced my interlocutors that *Hewarî* was *not* banned (*yasak*). These people were well aware that "official legal status" and "legality" were two separate things, never to be measured with the same metric, the law, which only and inconsistently applied to the former. Legality, on the other hand, was the standardized "style of reasoning" (*e.g.,* Rosen 2017: 133-138) by which the Turkish state

categorized persons and deeds as legitimate or illegitimate, and Kurdish things were always the latter. It was risky, so people said, to travel with Kurdish things, for which I first had to offer my interlocutors the convenience of knowing that I was not a risk-taker.

To make matters worse, *Hewarî* was written in old Kurdish, and I needed to carry a Kurdish dictionary as well as a grammar book to be able to crack its code. That was just way too many Kurdish words in one place, especially if that place was Bahçesaray to which publications in Kurdish language were, ironically, not a native. The older generation was mostly illiterate, and the youth did not have a habit or the ability of reading in Kurdish, considering that none had ever received formal education in their mother tongue, nor had I, hence the need for supplementary resources. All of this aside, my friend was right; Pamuk's novel was a delight to read. Unexpectedly, it also conveyed a patient, constructive "feeling for form and pattern" which Evans-Pritchard once argued that every anthropologist must have (1951: 82, cited in Scheele and Shryock 2019: 2). And this was exactly what made *My Name is Red* a great company to also study Kurdistan, because the non-center and non-state of Kurds, Kurdistan, came with a certain sense of uniqueness that directed attention to forms and patterns, which encompassed in the eyes of my interlocutors the very historical circumstances and power relations that reproduced them. In other words, one needed to have a feeling for this place, what made it different and unlike others, which motivated a sense among Kurds that being exposed to Kurdistan over a lifetime and on a daily basis was itself a training. This was why I would so often be reminded by my interlocutors of how I just needed to look around so as to see the injustices, histories, and patterns of historical wrongs that inflected their lives.

Perspective

My Name is Red is a detective story set in 16th century Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. It follows a group of painters of miniatures working at the palace trying to solve a murder case, but the central theme of the novel is the clash between Eastern and Western painting methods. Throughout the book, the one issue the miniaturists cannot stop debating is the question of "perspective," this odd invention of the Franks of Europe and a product of their obsession with the idea of reality – an obsession with painting things in their utmost detail and as properly proportioned vis-à-vis one another. Representation, on the other hand, belongs to the centuries-old wisdom of Islamic art that humbly mimics Allah's vision. The miniature masters consider "perspective" an expression of the arrogance of Frankish artists, who aspire for originality and creativity in their craft, and sign paintings to claim ownership, which are all preserves not of ordinary men (and women) but Allah.

Perspective is not only a matter of doctrinal debate, however, and its relation to *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) is outside of this chapter's purview (and the author's expertise). The miniature masters have all sorts of reasons for remaining skeptical of Frankish art, among which one directly pertains to one of the oldest, most revisited debates in anthropology: does an awareness of the miniscule details of life and form bear any real significance to a miniaturist's (an anthropologist's) ability to attain a unitary vision of phenomena? The miniature masters cannot decide whether it would make a real difference to ordinary people either, if these people were to be given the opportunity to see their most immediate experiences portrayed by an artist, such as the horror of an unknown silhouette, or the joy of eating a pinkish-red apple. Meanwhile, Pamuk the novelist regularly introduces nonhumans as narrators – a dog, a tree, a counterfeit gold coin, and the color red – bringing the reader to a realization how perspective entails

radically different scalar arrangements and ideologies, and there might really be no escape from it.

If the relationship between the immediacy of experience and the generality of representation poses a "scalar antinomy" (Carr and Lempert 2016: 6), Pamuk's characters are certainly not alone in noticing it. This is something we, the moderns, have long been grappling with in its many iterations: self/agency versus structure (or event versus structure – *e.g., Sahlins* 1981), microsocial attention versus macrosocial analysis, close-up images versus panoramic ones, particles versus the cosmos, or the personal (private) versus the political (public). Yet, I want to argue, this is an antinomy of sorts most felicitiously felt in semiotic forms that are qualitatively particular but quantitatively general. These forms include things that one sees a lot, and recognize in their abundance that they are important and definitive of their lives and experiences. Think, for instance, the widespread argument about the Middle East that this is a place where political conflicts never end, almost as if the same thing is continuing and repeating itself from the time of antiquity. Or think of religion, and the argument that in even the smallest, most isolated communities in the middle of Amazon there seems to be a system reminiscent of what in the Western or Abrahamic world people call religion. Forms, patterns, notions, and experiences that somehow always find their ways into people's lives, whether in a certain place or across a wider area, or even the globe, tend to create a scalar interpretation of themselves, such that their definitive of humanity, of the Middle East, and so on. A sensitivity to this, as Summerson Carr and Michael Lempert suggest (ibid: 7), "invite[s] us to recognize that there is much more drama to scale… than generic, analytical scalar distinctions suggest." An interesting side note: while adamant in their advocacy of ethnography, Carr and Lempert, too, commission

fiction – *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville – as their primary source of inspiration, which they describe as an "exercise in scale" and a "lesson in perspective" (ibid: 2).

Similar lessons can be extrapolated from *My Name is Red*. The first one is about the materiality of perspective. Across the spectrum from miniaturists, deities, dogs, and novelists to their 21st century readers, perspective conjures in the mind an image of physical orientation – of situatedness – so as to actually gain a view of an object. This, in turn, demonstrates how strongly perspective relates to, and takes shape in, a mediated socio-material environment in which people are called to take a *position*, what linguist John W. Du Bois (2017) studies as *stance*. Second, an awareness of this environment, as much as it is helpful to our interlocutors, can likewise be used for anthropological purposes, turning the very semiosis of objects itself into something investigable. In this relation, we should think of objects – the referents – as provisional accomplishments whose formation and presumed boundaries derive from social, discursive work.

The final lesson concerns ethics. One powerful, albeit unnerving, quality of perspective is that it comes with important ethical implications. Greater attention can be given to individual lives, for instance, if one stays close to her object. Taking the God's eye-view, on the other hand, risks the effacement of these particularities, yet it nevertheless remains an indispensable tool for reflecting on frames, patterns, continuities, and the overall "poetics" of life. Eloquently theorized by linguist Roman Jakobson (1960), poetics refers to the calibration of everyday experiences and representations to their own aesthetic, formal qualities (Lempert 2008, Nakassis 2017). It allows the foregrounding of the self-similarity of *parts* that constitute a certain experience or representation to one another as well as to the *whole*, such that one can formally order what is immediately perceived and present into a discreet sense of shared sociality – a specific kind of

semiotic endeavor that is in equal terms an ethical one. In *Ethical Life*, Webb Keane calls the God's eye-view the "third-person perspective" – the outsider's view – which is distinguishable from, but always in articulation with, the first-person (me/speaker) and the second-person (you/addressee) perspectives (2016: 63-67). The ordinary conditions of ethical practice, Keane argues, calls forth and often renders important the possibility of taking up a third-person perspective, which helps individuals grasp anew what is morally "near" by way of expressing it through explicit, somewhat externalized semiotic forms and frames of valuation. In other words, the propensity for ethics entails the "positioning" of actors vis-à-vis a "responsibility for [not only] stance… [but also] invoking sociocultural value" (Du Bois 2007: 143).

In what follows, I discuss the ways my interlocutors invest in "perspective" for its performative and ethical functions in order to properly animate Kurdistan – the object – as a certain kind of place, and how they do this by resorting to particular representational forms: maps, landscape, rhetoric, and tribes. These forms – though by no means a comprehensive inventory – are congealed expressions of the spatiality that they produce. This chapter thereby is an attempt to get the reader to better apprehend the "here" part of Roza's statement, "this is how life is here," which the reader shall remember from the introduction.

Kurdistan in Maps

Kurdistan – the "here" of Roza's life – is not and has never been an independent state with a unified political leadership. It has no intergovernmental representation, no voice in the United Nations, no recognition by the OECD, no interaction with the World Health Organization. It does not participate in the World Cup or the Olympics, nor does it have a Nobel laureate. All this deeply saddens Kurds. On the other hand, and despite the history of political violence, very deep

affective and cultural ties exist between Kurds and Turkey, such that they all speak Turkish language, consume Turkish novels, watch Turkish films or soap-operas, and have their favorite Turkish songs, many Kurds today regularly find themselves in the uncomfortable position of supporting the actors and institutions that represent their occupiers. While extending this support, moreover, they generally do not even have the ability, sometimes also nor the desire, to publicly register that support, as public recognition of Kurdish voices and Kurds's capacity to embrace a distinct group position on public matters are extremely limited. Though not an independent state, Kurdistan is still very much a thing for the supporter, the hater, and the observer. Kurdistan can be most "neutrally" defined as a geo-cultural territory located in the Middle East that spans across four nation-states – Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Within this territory, Kurds have a majority and speak a group of related languages that constitute a dialect continuum but are not necessarily mutually comprehensible (Paul 2008).

One may resort to maps to see what sort of a place this territory is, with the expectation of finding a "visual summary" that will help paint Kurdistan before the mind's eye. One will face it sooner or later, however, that one needs to begin with some distinctions, because Kurdistan comes in many modes and many shades. Iraqi Kurdistan, or *Başur* (in English, "south"), and Iranian Kurdistan, or *Rojhilat* (in English, "east"), have their official maps, as both possess administrative status. The former is an autonomous region, and the latter is a province, with each nevertheless falling short, in terms of scope and power, of what the Kurds of Iraq and that of Iran believe is legitimately theirs. Turkey's Kurdistan, or *Bakur* (in English, "north"), and Syrian Kurdistan, or *Rojava* (in English, "west"), on the other hand, have no official status within the respective nation-states of which they are a part. In fact, in both Turkey and Syria, Kurds cannot

even utter the word “Kurdistan” freely, and not without bearing the consequences, unless it serves a policy, or a campaign, temporarily adopted by their governments.



Figure 4: A map of great Kurdistan from the archive of the Kurdish Institute of Paris.

Once all these distinctions are established only, or ideally, to be rejected for being problematic anyway, it becomes possible to see the issue for what it is: a controversy. Whether one is talking about *a* Kurdistan, or many Kurdistans as regions within nation-states, one is always making an argument against the legitimacy of the established borders and the hegemonic histories that ensue. In this relation, maps of Kurdistan(s) are political statements with an unambiguous power for self-framing, and they are often highly sensational to the public (which is exactly what Kurds are after). These maps are intended to warp the spatial integrity of other

"known" maps, such that what has been forced to the background, existing borders, may now appear conspicuously partial and unabiding.



Figure 5: Another map from the Paris Institute. This map shows the designated territory where an independent Kurdistan shall be formed.

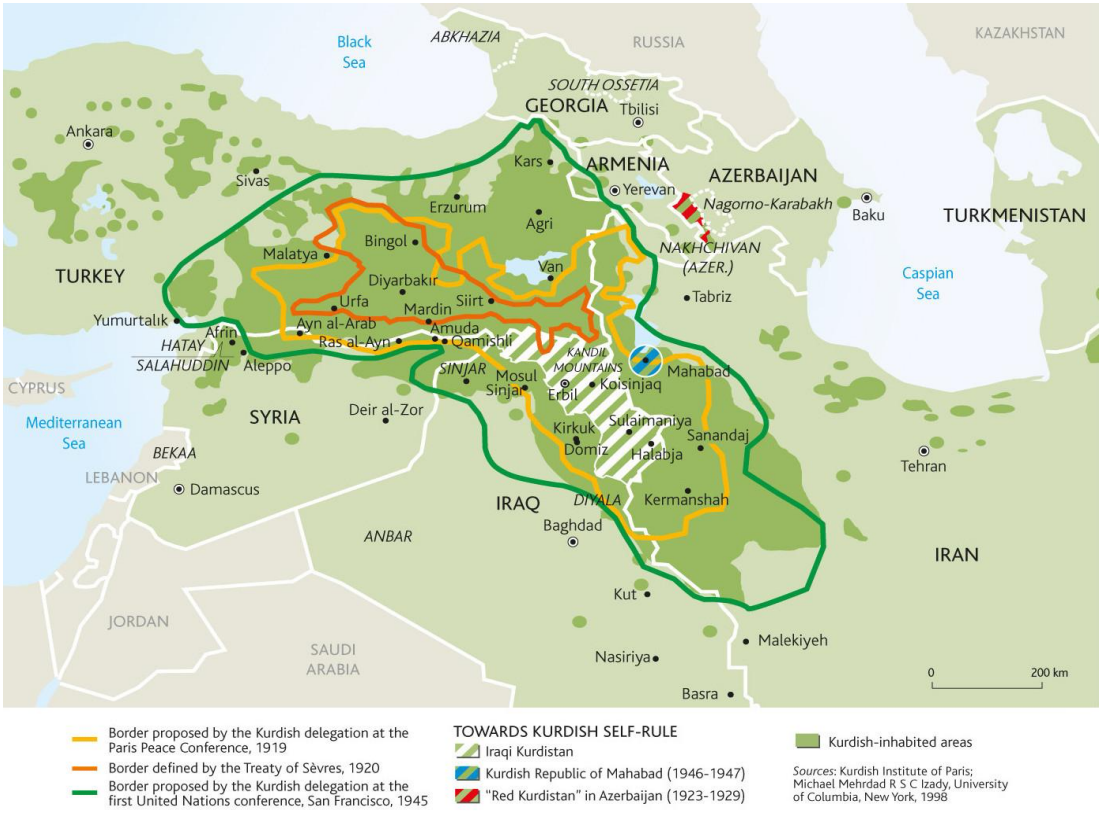


Figure 6: Another map from the Kurdish Institute of Paris. This map demonstrates the non-articulation with one another of different historical iterations of an independent Kurdistan.

Political scientist Zeynep Kaya presents us one of the few book-length studies on this topic, called *Mapping Kurdistan* (Kaya 2020). Kaya begins her discussion by stating how efforts to map Kurdistans necessarily rest on the creation of the idea of a "greater Kurdistan" as a ready-sign of a two-part story: the post-imperial fate of Kurds as a people absorbed into four-nation states; the fact that there is no place on earth where Kurds are not a persecuted minority. Another, related metapragmatic function of greater Kurdistan is that it allows Kurdistan to figure at once as a totality *and* a space of common sociality, instead of a bundle of peripheral nodes often characterized as historically and economically lagging behind a majority population (ibid:

2–12, 134–138). Another point Kaya convincingly argues for is the central role the Kurdish diaspora in Europe played in making greater Kurdistan go global, and thus even more controversial (ibid: 160–165). Note how the argument about the Kurds in Europe renders essential the existence of the diaspora to the possibility of *a* Kurdistan, whose coherence necessarily grows out of the mobility and spread-outness of its people. Engseng Ho (2004) calls this conception of diaspora the "British model." He argues that the emergence between the 17th and the 19th centuries of a British diaspora was what reshaped Britain into an empire to which English, Scottish, and Irish people were connected, creating a sense among those people that they were all part of a single imagined community. Likewise, but also in a different vein, the Hadrami diaspora from the Hadhramaut region of South Arabia, which Ho extensively researched, "took the form of a religious mission" (ibid: 215), again, creating a point of connectedness for people who were otherwise dispersed across globe. According to this line of reasoning, it can be said that the Kurdish diaspora, composed of individuals who began their journey as migrants from Turkey, Iraq, Syria, or Iran, and landed on the shores of Europe as Kurds, has taken the form of a distant homeland, shattered and as-yet-unrealized.

Maps, of course, are also semiotic constructs, representing the gradual, or sometimes sudden, congealment of socio-material circumstances and flows of people into solid forms. In social life, actors ongoingly make use of, study, and interpret these forms but not without pre-existing expectations, which the maps of Kurdistan may fail to meet. If we compare any two maps of greater Kurdistan, or any other Kurdistan such as Bakur, which is *the* Kurdistan of this dissertation, we will quite likely see that although they each signify the referent in suggestively similar ways, the maps are by no means identical. Within every possible framework, there exist a number of subtle and not-so-subtle variations, immediately visible to the modern gaze trained to

recognize boundaries as frozen lines (Perouse 1998, see also Pickles 2004). While the shifting, blurry contours that separate any particular Kurdistan from its surroundings are somewhat confusing, they also help register the points of collision wherein Kurdistan(s) resists shading into its/their hegemonic other(s), but not always successfully so.

If it is hard to provide a fixed image of Kurdistan, it is even harder to explain what kind of a cultural and political continuity the category evokes. I know quite well how challenging this could be. Every time I teach anthropology in America, I spend most of the first day of the classes talking about two very particular words. One of them is Kurdistan, and the other one is my name, Özge, with both presenting all sorts of challenges to my students. While students of Middle Eastern origin are considerably more familiar with Kurds and Kurdistan, which then smuggles the Middle East itself into the discussion, this sense of familiarity only rarely translates to confidence in their knowledge of these categories. Sensing the confusion, I find that I must rely on maps – often, a selected few with enough variation to encourage students to discuss what these maps might be accomplishing *together*. The class usually ends with the white board showing the word "Kurdistan," followed by its many derivatives such as "Bakur," "Turkish/Turkey's Kurdistan," or even "Western Armenia," considering that a good portion of what my interlocutors refer to as *their* Kurdistan is someone else's Armenia.[3] The discussion is

[3] In the Fall of 2017, I taught a linguistic anthropology course called "Language and Culture." As usual, I spent the first day talking at length about my research and field-site. By the end of the class, I took a picture of the white board and sent it to my father, who then sent it to some relatives who all received it with joy and pride – the joy and pride of seeing the word "Kurdistan" exhibited in an American classroom to American students, so the world could see that Kurdistan is real and it is not going anywhere. My mother differed from the rest of the family, worrying that such actions would put me in trouble. "Is it okay to say 'Kurdistan' in America?" she asked me: "What if there are Turkish students in the class, wouldn't they make a complaint to the university about that? I said, "no mother, I use the word Kurdistan in the title of my dissertation, I think the university is fine with that."

always interesting, for there remains all sorts of room to move within and between these categories. Most important of all, as my students variously express, the fact that there is enough room for conversation successfully prevents these categories, and the maps that correspond to them, from receding to the background to silently perform their work. Maps of Kurdistan, as it seems, do make a lot of noise, even in an American classroom.

No Map for a Non-State

Deprived of the convenience of a fixed image, it thus remains for Kurds to communicate to observers who cannot tell, or make sense of it for themselves, how all this noise amounts to a meaningful uniformity. Part of the difficulty of doing this lies in the difficulty of rendering legible the "regimes of historicity and region formation" that are different from the modern noton of nation-state (Scheele 2021: 909), because for many people today, "there is no spatial beyond of the state" (Li 2005: 384, cited in Scheele 2021: 913) – a primary reason why observers (like my students), haters, and occasionally supporters as well, all tend to think of maps of Kurdistan as representative of an underlying aspiration for political independence and state-building, which sure is true for *some* maps. Take *Figure 5*, for instance, which was widely shared on Twitter while I was conducting fieldwork.



Figure 7: A map of Northern Kurdistan. This is created by a social media user called "shilani."

This map unambiguously divides what is presently known as Turkey into two future states, one Turkish and the other Kurdish. Yet it also allocates a much larger territory to Kurdistan than what my interlocutors think is legitimately theirs, who nevertheless chose to retweet the map in order to create a scene, and "to piss Turks off." As the map provided major titillation, it felt worthy of everyone's time and attention, even though what it could possibly achieve was extremely limited. I should also note that this was the map my interlocutors almost invariably suggested that I must use in my dissertation, precisely in the spirit of trolling that it enabled, so here I am keeping that promise. In fact, most of what I was explicitly asked to include in my dissertation were either too great of an injustice for the world to ignore, or too great of an opportunity for me to miss for sending Turks into a spiral of nationalist panic (see also, Footnote-2). The reader can think of this example as part of a certain pattern of behavior that is quite widespread on the internet nowadays, which sees Turks and Kurds, Turks and Greeks,

Turks and Armenians, or, as an example that does not involve Turks, Indians and Pakistanis, rushing to every comment section on YouTube, Facebook, or news websites to turn every semi-relevant issue into an opportunity to deliberately provoke one another.

But, in general, maps of Kurdistan(s) served a different pragmatic purpose, that is, how these maps were privileged and imagined to matter. Bahçesaray was an ideal place to learn more about this pragmatics, though there certainly was a threshold of trust, below which my interlocutors would not respond to queries about dangerous objects. Bahçesaray was an ideal place again due to its isolation from the outside world, where the political cacophony around the issue often drowned out the voices of the very people that those maps concerned the most: Kurds. The remoteness of the district, in other words, had a special kind of advantage to it, enabling a temporary liberation from the confining gaze of the outsider, or the limiting space of constant virtual warfare between Kurds and Turks – meaning that Kurds were also a part of the outside cacophony. So, the sense of calm liberation that came from being in a place like Bahçesaray, sitting in a neighbor's living room, and freely chatting over a map of Kurdistan, was a sense that was made possible for the issue could once cease being a controversy. Whenever my friends, neighbors, and I engaged in a study of a particular map, the conversation would thus have little to do with the employability of the map in question for communicating the borders of a future state, and far more to do with the ontological givens and the overall constitution of Kurdistan as a fragmented, indistinctly contoured territory. To me, these conversations were also occasions to reflect on the competing scalar logics of the insider vis-à-vis the outsider, whomever that might be. For the former, maps of Kurdistan had a specific utility, a specific "use-value" (*sensu* Marx [1867] 1967), and negotiating statehood (which we can liken to Marx's

"exchange-value," that by which an object becomes tradable in the market) was certainly not the only acceptable reason for investing into topographic imageries.

My interlocutors would happily accept any map of Kurdistan, but they had a preference for the maps of greater Kurdistan as they were far greater in scope and far richer in detail, providing a rush of possibilities to take a position. Images of high resolution were in high demand because they expressed the multiplicity of the social and geo-material. What really appealed to my interlocutors was not the pieces and particles, however, but the possibility of discovering meaningful consistencies therein. To that end, they would curate (sometimes with my help) the most peculiar range of metrics – political marginalization, massacres, the flag of Kurdistan, the celebration of *Newroz* (the arriving of spring and new year), the symbolism of mountains, patrilateral parallel-cousin marriage, or other cross-border continuities such as dialects and tribal organization – which would help them measure what kind of a common sociality Kurdistan could be made to perform. The end-goal of this exercise was exposing the self-similarity of otherwise complex parts – four Kurdistans – to one another. And this self-similarity, in its manifold manifestations, had the cumulative effect of showing the strange fractal "orderliness" of greater Kurdistan. Often, furthermore, conversations would spill into "outside" locations, such as central Turkey, Armenia, and the south of the Caspian Sea, given the cartographic presences of Kurdish communities in these places (see above, *Figure 3* and *Figure 4*). What was iconically preserved in these presences was a much larger, recursive history in which the same people, Kurds, had been driven from their lands into exile, bringing back the memories of now-extinct Kurdish emirates, failed uprisings, counterinsurgency operations, and most saliently of the Turkish military's scorched-earth campaign in the 1990s and the corollary

forced displacement of millions of Kurdish villagers (Ateş 2021, Ayata and Yükseker 2005, Bozarslan 1988).

Yet, at other times, my friends and neighbors would choose to latch on a particular vantage point precisely to detect the inconsistencies that defied a localized narrative, problematizing, for instance, how Diyarbakır (in Kurdish, *Amed*), the would-be-capital of Turkey's Kurdistan, could not be marked as *the* capital of greater Kurdistan (which was not about administrative hierarchies but Diyarbakır's historical prominence). While Diyarbakır was the principal political seat of the Kurds of Turkey, it was *Hewlêr* for Iraqi Kurds, *Efrîn* for Syrian Kurds, and God knows what for Iranian Kurds who were purposely kept by their regime from the view of the outside world.[4] One could endlessly extend this framework to discover more inconsistencies. Take, for instance, the incongruent patterns of bilingualism across Kurdistan, or the asynchronous, at times even other-negating self-realization of various Kurdish insurgencies that were locally waged against different governments. Eventually, however, this train of inconsistencies would catch up with my interlocutors who could see it for themselves that these inconsistencies were nevertheless commensurate with one another. True that not all Kurds spoke Turkish as their second language, yet they all spoke a second language. Though asynchronous with one another, every Kurdish insurgency consisted of similar cause-effect sequences, in which hegemonic practice was met with counter-hegemonic response. In other words, "Turkish rule" was not a natural, fitting metric to scale the entirety of Kurdistan, but "rule" was.

All this suggests that maps were most productively used by my friends and neighbors to produce, organize, and experiment with perspective so as to gain what they could defend as an

[4] S*anandaj* is the provincial capital of Iranian Kurdistan, but a startling majority of the people I met in the field were not even able to name it. Even if they could, or when they were told, the value and political significance of *Sanandaj* to Iranian Kurds remained a cultural unknown.

adequate, just view of this "rule." In pursuing an ethnography of Kurdistan as the "here" of Kurdish lives, this research finds that each attempt to map this "rule" is inevitably an attempt to scale Kurdistan as a *non-state,* never to be severed from its form-ative particularities. With this comes a critical attention to non-statehood as a historically produced articulation of power relations and socio-cultural trajectories, which also informs the most immediate struggles of the day. The obvious problem with maps, on the other hand, and as appealing as they might be, was that maps were also always a little handicapped in their inadequacy to register the *fullness* of the category of non-state, because the default metapragmatic frame, by the end of the day, only permitted a "negative" recognition of non-state-like arrangements as "result[s] of state-failure" (Scheele 2021: 909). When maps disappointed, and they would inevitably disappoint the second one left the secure space of Bahçesaray, or imagined the gaze of an outsider, my interlocutors would then refocus their energies on configuring in and through interaction other, alternative representational forms: landscape, rhetoric, and most interesting of all, tribes. While maps were always fun and interesting objects, especially if one was in the presence of a reliable friend, my interlocutors taught me most I knew and exposed me to most I saw about Kurdistan while we were conversing about it. Now, I turn to how and in what kind of situations Kurds talk about and refer to what they consider to be their historic homeland, gleaning the ways and conditions in which Kurdistan presents itself in situated, everyday interactions as the "here" of my interlocutors lives.

Making Sense of the Geo-Material

To be sure, the epistemic anxieties that captivate Pamuk's miniaturists hardly exist in Kurdistan. As far as I was concerned, my interlocutors were very well adjusted to the complexities of the

world around them, because, and regardless of their outrage, those complexities were also their common ground. They had the keenest eye for curating this sense of commonality, which was a gift I gratefully studied, a gift that also reminded me of the formative significance of a certain articulatory labor to the phenomenology of space: talk. It was talk, more than anything, that allowed my interlocutors to parse out the geo-political grammar of Kurdistan. It was talk that helped them transmute into something legible what would otherwise appear to be an unfathomable spectacle. If maps of Kurdistan are loud, I shall argue, that is also because they are tasked to do the impossible: giving form to a shapeless totality of myriad interactions on events, movements, matter, artifacts, durabilities, recurrences, or meaningful anomalies.

To me, the real challenge was to glean the utility to my interlocutors of all this talk. Copious amounts of fieldnotes all converge on two, somewhat interrelated observations. First, and predictably so, the geo-textual landscape of Kurdistan showed little internal consistency of perspectives, and what was so huge and important to one, could easily feel like a faint humming sound to another. Second, and apart from any empirical lesson one might gain from this inconsistency, it was clear that the underdetermination of perspective was mostly to be settled on extra-empirical grounds. When my interlocutors talked about their views of Kurdistan, when they presented me with stories or anecdotes, or shared with me their knowledge of their homeland, they were, on one hand, displaying their affective gravitation to Kurdistan, stressing their deep care for this piece of land, and pointing out, on the other, the specific circumstantial exigencies that had historically shaped it. As I shall discuss, these conversations and the various ways in which my interlocutors had me exposed to Kurdistan helped emphasize the correspondences between what they considered to be the historically continuous aspects of Kurdistan and the structural conditions that reproduced them. Below, I take up this theme of

structures-as-circumstances. I want to argue that Kurds' gravitation and responsiveness to Kurdistan speaks of a certain intellectual orientedness, a certain desire for self-knowledge. This orientedness, in turn, necessitates the identification of the structures lying "beneath" the socio-material terrain that is Kurdistan and the forces floating "above" it so as to answer: "Who are we as per our circumstances?"

The Wise Wanderer

Be it as a researcher, an insider, or a traveler, I always loved spending time in Kurdistan and shared my interlocutors' gravitation to it. Ever since the end of my fieldwork, after which I entered into a world where dissertation-writing met Covid, I am greatly missing Kurdistan and find the exaggeratedly literal, somewhat priggish life in America unbearably humorless. Kurdistan, on its part, was the most thrilling performer to watch.

As an anthropologist of Kurdistan, I also learned a long time ago to accept that when I utter the word "anthropology," my interlocutors either hear something they have never heard before, or they hear "archeology." There is no sustained archeological work in Kurdistan, nor any discernible pattern of domestic or international heritage tourism, but Kurds have good confidence in its hidden treasures. Interestingly, and this happened twice, when I returned to Michigan from fieldwork, American airport security took me to be an archaeologist, too. Assuming my job must involve Indiana Jones-esque adventures, they searched my bags to see if I was smuggling in archaeological materials or ancient art with magical powers. These lay-people confusions are quite understandable, given that even the professionals themselves have not yet fully worked out the disciplinary boundaries between anthropology and archaeology. Yet I suspect the figure of Kurdistan, for being a part of the Middle East, also had something to do

with these category errors. Everybody knows that this is a world region privileged for the study of matter and the old.

In suggesting this, I get my inspiration from an edited volume by Judith Scheele and Andrew Shryock, aptly called *The Scandal of Continuity in Middle East Anthropology*, in which the authors "make the case for a particular way of constructing knowledge that derives its strengths from an old and ongoing encounter of scholars, a discrete set of ideas, and a region of the world" (2019: 1). If all this sounds too fancy, "more modestly," the case being made here is one for a "renewed attention to patterns of continuity" (ibid: 2) and to "collective representations of an enduring kind" (Jenkins n.d., cited in Scheele and Shryock 2019: 18).

The coupling of the Middle East with the word "continuity" is a risky move, to say the least, for "continuity" evokes a very particular (better, scandalous) narrative overlaid with a barrage of "orientalist" effects (*sensu* Said 1979, see also Said 2000). This narrative reifies the stereotypes of modernity, serving as a testament to the persistence of the old in the Middle East, a faraway land that reads like a passage from antiquity. Virtually every "anthropology of the Middle East" syllabus nowadays begins with defining the overall purpose as achieving an alternative narrative and thereby a countereffect (I dare the reader to find a syllabus that does not in some capacity do this). But truth be told, no anthropologist of the region can deny that there is something enduring, if not eternal, about its structures and events. If she denies, that is often a maneuver to dismiss "the general romanticism of anthropology" (Abu-Lughod 1989: 279, cited in Scheele and Shryock 2019: 18–19), which, the editors of *The Scandal of Continuity* argue, can nevertheless function as a productive "intellectual orientation," if understood rightly: "Romanticism implies a readiness to be overwhelmed… a skeptical stance toward the calculating rationality that dominated both the academic institutions in which anthropologists work and the

commonsense notions – of polity, self, and shared humanity – that metropolitan actors and institutions foist upon the world."

It is a personal choice on the part of the anthropologist not wanting to be overwhelmed, but I cannot overstate the intensity of the gravitation my interlocutors felt towards their homeland – to its riches, events, proud customs, embarrassments, mountains, and even prairies. In Bahçesaray, for instance, inhabitants had the deepest fascination with anything tall – hills, peaks, trees, minarets, crumbling steeples, and even men, all of which came with a wealth of longitudinal data. When I first moved to my village in Bahçesaray, for instance, I was taken by the imam of our village up to the top of the minaret, because, as the imam explained to me, that was the point where I could see both the beauty and the truth of the world the best. The top of the minaret, also, was the only point in our village where, on a lucky day, one could get a phone signal. In almost every village I lived in, had there been an extraordinarily long tree, my host-families or friends would show it to me, inviting me to join them in imagining all the history that the tree in question must have witnessed. But those trees were more significantly the symbols of the power of their owners if there was one. In Bahçesaray, the tallest and most majestic walnut trees were a source of pride for the owners, who took those trees as signs of their families long history and presence in the area.

In Silvan district of Diyarbakir, a small town I first visited in the summer of 2014, and despite that I had a mild fear of height, I remember being kind of forced by a friend to climb up a steep rocky hill on a day that was exactly forty-four degrees outside. Silvan is located in a relatively arid stretch of Kurdistan and the hill was void of any trees to make shade for resting, or hiding from the fiery summer heat of Diyarbakir. It took us more than two hours to reach the very top of the hill, where my friend showed me the small caves carved into the stone. The

scenery was magnificent. My friend, a former guerrilla fighter who was caught and jailed by the Turkish state for twelve years, five of which was spent in solitary confinement, said the hill was the only place he felt calm. After years of imprisonment, and possibly torture, he was socially awkward. He still had problems sleeping and he would not eat more than one humble meal a day. He was also drinking a lot. He said that he had spent months hiding as a guerrilla on that hill, that he and his friends would be running up and down in less than half an hour. He showed me some vague marks on the stone that they had left behind, yet had he not showed them to me, I would not have paid attention. The marks were obviously man made, but they were tiny and very thinly carved. He also showed me a few others that had not been left behind by him or his friends, signs, therefore, that other guerrilla fighters must have carved on the stone; signs, in other words, that indicated how there had been other guerrillas in that area too. He explained that those signs were part of the guerrilla's communication tactics, marking either where the guns had been buried, where the food had been buried, or where the medicine had been buried. The shape of the signs, as well as other verbal codes used by the guerrillas to communicate over the phone, he continued, would change monthly, so the Turkish security forces could not decode them.[5] To my friend, the hill was a symbol of Silvan's contributions to guerrilla warfare against the Turkish army. At one point in our conversation, he repeated one of the most popular proverbs in Kurdistan, "no friends but mountains," and told me that Kurds historically always found safety and autonomy on the mountains. He said leaving mountains had always been a form of betrayal

[5] I asked him whether I could write about these details, and he said that all those tactics were already old. The Turkish State, he explained, had switched to much advanced counterinsurgency technology bought from Israel in the early 2000s, which rendered obsolete the old-school guerrilla tactics and the basic solutions that had worked for them back in the day.

– *bêbextî* – or defeat, because Kurds leaving mountains were either forced or doing so to willfully surrender to Turks, getting into the service of the latter.

In Kurdistan, one common theme in such expeditions to tall places was that being so high above the ground provided a new perspective. How truly amazing it was, for instance, that all the worries and constant conflicts tormenting people's lives "down there" would vanish when one looked from above. A popular activity in Nusaybin, a Kurdish town on the Syrian border which I regularly visited and stayed in my second year of fieldwork, was climbing up to the Der Mor Evgin Monastery, which was an Assyrian Christian worship place, from which one could see both Nusaybin and the bordering Syrian town *Qamislo* lying side by side, with the barbed wire separating the two towns becoming completely invisible. Moreover, the Der Mor Evgin Monastery also offered a lesson similar to the hill in Silvan – that the monastery was built in such a high point was again as a sign of how groups and individuals repressed by and opposing dominant powers always found refuge in places higher from the ground. The Assyrian community sometimes also called Syriacs or Chaldeans, and *Suryanî* in Kurdish, which experienced a genocide under the Ottoman regime during the WWI, around the same period the Armenian Genocide happened, had for centuries lived under religious persecution in Kurdistan and thus mostly built their monasteries in high points and in a fortress style, from which they could see approaching Kurdish nomads or Ottoman soldiers. The lesson here, in other words, was also a lesson about the recursive, repeating episodes of violence and inter-communal enmities that shaped this part of the world for a long time, where a different "rule" existed. Today, many in Nusaybin commemorate their old Suryanî neighbors in a positive light, acknowledging the genocidal campaign that perished them.

In certain, interesting ways, as I observed during fieldwork, my interlocutors' fascination with things that were tall was also somewhat generative of a certain style of living with its own activities, rules, and celebrities. In my village in Bahçesaray where I lived during the first year of my research, Xalo Bewar, a village elder in his early seventies, was the unexpected star of this show, and a present sign-form of his own figuration in this milieu as the wise man.



Figure 8: Xalo Bewar (right) with two other village men.

Xalo Bewar's wisdom was a product of his studied nonchalance, but also of his daily free-soloing as a hill-climber. For it was not appropriate for men to spend more than a mere hour of the daylight at home, the men of our village, the old and the young, were in constant pursuit of a pastime at once fun and dirt-cheap. This pursuit would drive them out of the village, which did not have a communal space other than the mosque, either to a men's coffeehouse at the district

center or to the hills that surrounded Bahçesaray. The district center was highly militarized, however, with power being concentrated in the hands of the Turkish security forces and the village-guards (*korucu*), the state-sponsored local militia, rendering the hills the only option for some. Trying to remain "above" the dictates of the political context, looking for alliances with points of view instead of men whose elusiveness only ever angered him, Xalo Bewar's route was always to the top. He was almighty enough to arbitrate every village dispute, yet most days he wandered the land being chased by wild mountain goats. Or else, he would be chased out of home by his equally almighty wife.



Figure 9: Xalo Bewar's wife

I accompanied Xalo Bewar on his expeditions three times, twice to an abandoned village (*gundîye wêrane*, meaning the devastated village) near the peak of the mountain range that sprawled along the valley where our village and another five villages were located, and once to a ruined Armenian church, known by the locals as the White Church (*Dêre Spîye*). Both locations allowed a similar historical reckoning for the navigator, exhibiting the continuity over time of

formally self-similar episodes of external intervention. The church was left behind by the Armenians who perished during the Genocide perpetrated by the Ottomans, and it was not the only thing left behind. Villagers regularly explored ravaged cemeteries, curious letters carved on stones, fragments of artifacts surfacing from the soil, and time-worn canvases with faded drawings that presumably mapped where "Armenians buried the gold." All of these were treated as iconic encompassments of an otherwise disappearing truth – the fact that there had once been a sizable Armenian community in the area. In fact, it was commonly assumed that all the villages in the valley were originally Armenian but one, the Muslim village (*gundîye misilmane*), which everyone claimed was theirs.

The *gundîye wêrane*, on the other hand, represented the history of the Turkish state's use of fear and patronage to lure Kurds into a descent to lower lands, a history that was powerfully relayed to me by Xalo Bewar: "Kurds only ever lived in the mountains. Kurds were nomads (*koçer*). Kurds were wanderers (*rewend*). Lower areas were home to the *beg*s (the heads of the ruling Kurdish house of Müks, the Kurdish name of Bahçesaray). Then the state of Turks (*dewlete Tirk*) reached our land and killed our *beg*s. Turks said, 'mountains are for the rebels.' That was how our ancestors abandoned mountains, relocated [to the valley], and started working for Turks. Honestly, *beg*s were not all good people. But in the time of *beg*s, Kurds worked for Kurds. Now, Kurds work against Kurds." After pausing for a moment or two to allow his words to sink in, Xalo Bewar pointed his finger down towards the district center: "You saw it for yourself, didn't you? You saw the [high] number of the village-guards. They turn up on every corner of the bazaar (*sûq*). They are all Kurds, but they serve as the soldiers of the state (*leşkerên dewlete*)."

All these examples, I want to suggest, had the same metapragmatic effect of switching perspectives or taking a new perspective, which were acts of communication simultaneously displaying the speaker's intense personal gravitation to Kurdistan, and providing a rhetorical response to its circumstantial exigencies. While it was hard to find an official, standard narrative with which to scale or clarify what Kurdistan was as a place or a political category, it was always possible to learn more about Kurdistan and reflect on it as the "here" of some lives thanks to its overdetermination within a larger interpretive frame, wherein even the most outlandish details could not stop connoting the structures that produced them. In important ways, therefore, gravitation and rhetoric were sophisticated scalar tools in their own right, by which my interlocutors narrated these structures – structures in the sense of material circumstances that forge subjectivities.

A Strange Orderliness

As I already mentioned earlier, not only in our particular neighborhood, but in the entirety of Bahçesaray, and even Kurdistan, people, families, and villages were either pro-one side or the other: they either supported the PKK or were allied to the state. Yet some villages seemed to have evolved in time into hybrids, where families with generations of service to the Turkish state lived along families with generations of Kurdish guerrilla fighters. These villages were at once considered an anomaly, and said to have emerged over the normal course of the protracted war wherein some branching and defection inevitably occurred. This branching sometimes included families too, which was the case in another neighborhood of Bahçesaray, where younger generations were increasingly becoming supportive of the PKK, refusing to take up their father's job when the latter was ready to pass it onto his sons. In our valley, which was administratively a

neighborhood of six villages, the branching seemed to have occurred within villages, where some families chose to become village-guards. This was a function of the state's recognition of our valley as a pro-PKK area, putting pressure on more people over time to accept the role of a village-guard. One example was the village across the valley that neighbored ours, where four men, the breadwinners of their families, were village-guards – meaning four households out of twenty-seven. There were in fact quite a few villages like this one within close enough proximity, which was explained to me on economic grounds. Almost without exception, village-guards were the only people in rural Bahçesaray, where money was the scarcest of all commodities, with regular income and later pensions.

I wanted to know more about these hybrid villages, and about the everyday life of hybridity. I was also curious how many village-guards could a single village really contain. Yet the issue was politically sensitive and required a sensitive approach, at which point my imagination completely blanked out. Even the Ministry of the Interior kept classified the actual distribution of village-guards across cities and districts let alone villages. Thankfully, my friends rushed to my assistance and resourcefully turned my conundrum into a fun, clever game. Around that time, solar energy was increasingly becoming a thing in Bahçesaray, and an index of wealth. It was the most reliable way to have hot water from the sink, which was a luxury to many, although also initially the costliest. My friends hypothesized that only a village-guard could afford solar energy. All we needed to do was to climb high enough to gain a panoramic view of a hybrid village and count the houses with solar roof panels, thus our quest for statistical truth began. From mid-October until the early days of December, meaning until the arrival of the winter, my friends and I wandered around and obtained data from eight villages. Then we carefully approached one of the village-guards from the neighboring village, who was the kin of

someone from our village, and cross-checked the results with him. There were of course some deviations, but not enough to confute the initial hypothesis.

Not only in Bahçesaray, but in my other field-sites too, "looking from above" always came with the promise of a good lesson, because each such "here" had a similar, albeit strange, orderliness to it. Take Cizre, a town of 120,000 people and a Kurdish stronghold by Turkey's border with Syria. Cizre witnessed extreme violence and destruction in 2016, when the Turkish state launched a large-scale military campaign to clear the town from the PKK. By the end of the 78-day period during which Cizre remained under a blanket curfew, 266 civilians lost their lives and around 10,000 homes were fully destroyed.[6] The General Staff announced that almost 700 Kurdish fighters were "neutralized," meaning killed, during the clashes. I spent most of the second year of my fieldwork in Cizre, and while the ruins of the war were mostly cleared away, no amount of work, according to the locals, could bring the old Cizre back. It was obvious that the war, followed by a two-year-long state of emergency, had given the Turkish state an unprecedented ascendancy, and transformed Cizre, once a high-profile symbol of Kurdish autonomy in Turkey, into a restive town that screamed bitterness but yet to explode. The most bitter souls, the youth, would find refuge in what the locals called the Lovers' Hill, a sunset point where one could enjoy a panoramic view of the town and its surroundings. The youth would easily spend the entire day there, watching for hours the busy traffic of silhouettes and armored vehicles on the ground.

[6] These figures come from an extensive report published by the Turkish human rights organization Mazlum-Der. The report contains pictures that document the destruction and human rights abuses perpetrated by Turkish security forces. https://www.mazlumder.org/fotograf/yayinresimleri/dokuman/MAZLUMDER_CIZRE_REPORT_20162.pdf

These gatherings at the Lovers' Hill were occasions to produce personal reminiscences of the old Cizre, its lost faces, and lost patterns of sociality and reciprocity, all of which the war had destroyed. As Harvey Sacks formulates, "occasions of reminiscing are… occasions in which the general rule, 'don't tell what the others know' is lifted" (Sacks 1995: 443, see also Sidnell 2005). They are less about saying something that has never been said before and more about witnessing something that has already been witnessed, but this time with one's relational others. For the youth of Cizre, reminiscing was thus an expansive way of regrouping from defeat as witnesses, as well as deciding who could even make a claim to have been a witness. One time, my host-mother in Cizre had to arbitrate a dispute between our neighbor's boys and one of their peers deemed a misfit. The latter was disinvited from hanging out with the group for being "just pure annoying." Named by my host-mother a bully (*zorî*), Xemgîn, a sixteen-year-old youngster and the leader of the group, exploded: "But *xaltî* (aunty), he talks as if he had seen it all, as if he had been there. His father moved the whole family to Mersin (an important port city on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey with a substantial Kurdish population) at the beginning of the war. He is not like us; he doesn't understand anything." In this relation, reminiscing was also a duty of a political nature: the duty of putting the personal into its rightful context, discovering the circumstances of witnessing that shaped one's reality, and becoming aware of the divisions that at times estranged friends from friends.

Further, both the war and the return to normalcy came with different opportunities for witnessing which were materially anchored to the lived environment. During the war, the Turkish military concentrated its efforts on Cizre's four neighborhoods out of ten: Nur, Cudi, Sur, and Yafes. In the end, the first two were almost entirely leveled, all were littered with the debris and the consequences of the war, and thousands were homeless. From above, therefore,

the post-war Cizre presented an image of an internally divided place, where one group was made to pay the highest price so the others would be given the strongest warning possible. As Cizreans, slowly and with a lot of effort, reconstructed their lives and their city, shuffling things around, finding ways to reorganize the everyday, a new internal division emerged, however.

As part of the recovery efforts, hundreds of petitions were filed to the governorate of Cizre regarding the damaged or destroyed homes. As per the "Law 5233: Compensation for Losses resulting from Terrorism and the Fight against Terrorism," petitioners had the right to compensation for the loss in question, unless they themselves were connected to terrorism. Both the right to compensation and the amount of compensation were decided by the office of the Governor. The families of the "neutralized terrorists" got nothing, nor did the households with known connections to Kurdish political movement. Many who were granted compensation nonetheless complained that they were *not* compensated properly or fully, that compensation was not distributed fairly in proportion to losses, and that they had no course of action as agreeing to compensation was giving up the right to litigation.

In other cases, such as the Cudi neighborhood that had seen the deadliest of clashes and become somewhat of a pilgrimage site, the Turkish state opted for a completely different reconciliatory model. Citing security concerns, the government expropriated Cudi and handed the entire neighborhood over to its Housing Development Administration (*TOKI*), which oversaw the construction of new housing developments. Residents were offered new flats in lieu of their old stand-alone houses, but they had to pay additional fees. So, in certain ways, they were either priced out of living in their old neighborhood, or put in debt to the governor's office to be able to stay there. What my interlocutors found the most outrageous in all of this was the exploitation by the Turkish state of restorative laws to bargain Kurds out of the restorative

process, or to contractually oblige them to comply with the terms of the government. In this sense, as Zerrin Biner documents in her legal anthropological examination of the dispossession of Kurds, "reparative justice" was effectively transformed into a "debt-producing mechanism that created new compulsory bonds between the state and Kurdish citizens" (Biner 2016: 1, see also Biner 2013, 2019).

What does all this tell us about Kurdistan? While each one of these examples and observations from Bahçesaray and Cizre are all variously situated and variously anchored to specific communities and local histories, I believe they also point to a shared social milieu with its unique interpretive, orienting, and boundary-making tendencies, wherein one can start anywhere – maps, mountains, a deserted village, a ravaged cemetery, a mythical story, solar panels, a war-torn town, or a sunset point – to be able to arrive in Kurdistan. When Kurds try to connect these representational forms to one another, so as to make Kurdistan happen, I believe they are also making a case for a particular pattern: If, my interlocutors insist, power and wealth are distributed unevenly, cities and lives are destroyed unevenly, and then they also recover and re-emerge in suggestively uneven ways, there has to be an ordering principle, perhaps a genealogy to this self-imposing unevenness. This was the same unevenness, by the way, that outraged the colleagues of Ayhan, the Kurdish teacher that I mentioned in chapter two, who obeyed the demands of the governor of Van, and whose compliance took the form of a tactical tool for the governor to sort the teachers' in Ayhan's school into two camps: those who complied and those who rebelled the state. In this chapter, I am arguing that Kurds' sensibility to this unevenness is a product of their studied attunements to the common ground, which also requires them to connect this very work of attunement to the historical/political exigencies that co-indexically frame attunement as a practice relevant to group life.

The Tribe, A Peculiar Thing

In 2013, when I applied for a PhD at Michigan, I wrote a research proposal. When my PhD started, the proposal that got me there was already old-stuff, nor was it the only proposal that I found myself not liking. Part of the problem was circumstantial. In those years, the political situation in Kurdistan was changing in real time, and mostly for the worse, rendering every previous research idea unfeasible or even absurd (if the reader senses a pattern here, a pattern of blaming circumstances which is perhaps a habit of all Kurds, that is also a lesson about the tight coupling of circumstances and individuals who may at times have to carry the latter to another continent). The other part of the problem was personal, brought on by the onset of a certain hyper-reflexivity towards the conceptual inadequacy of a list of terms: rurality, peasant societies, tradition, custom, honor, lineage theory, segmentation, structures, functionalism, and so on. Some of these terms I could get away with if only ever written in quotation marks. Some, I later confessed to myself, were just plain innocent. But one term, tribe, was purposely absent from my thinking from the get-go. I chose to disinvent and sweep it under someone else's carpet, where "tribe" waited patiently until the day I finally sat and wrote a research proposal to find my footing, *not* in the disciplinary space/genealogy of anthropology, but in that of Kurdistan.

Now, what was the argument *against* tribes that made me maintain such a studied reticence? I would like to linger on this question as the question represents an ongoing and feisty debate in the field of Kurdish Studies, a slowly emerging research area where the term "tribe" and its applicability to Kurdish society has been problematized for some time now. Briefly put, "tribe" is subject to the same line of criticisms as "the anthropology of political systems" (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940), which admittedly stopped a long time ago being a legitimate object

but a bygone period of anthropological research that conveys little nostalgia, and almost no sense of reversibility. One reason for this turning away from political systems was the swing of the balance to the anthropology of the state (Das and Poole 2004, see also Scheele 2019, 2021). The other reason was the necessity, considered by many long overdue (Rosaldo 1986, Abu-Lughod 1989), to destabilize the dogmas that grouped the whole non-West, first, into "stateless societies" as if Evans-Pritchard had not been escorted into Nuerland by the officers of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (a fair point), and second, into a cultural milieu entirely driven by masculine energies for power and violence, of which tribes were an archetype (again, a fair point). Further, in a recent iteration of the same practice of pausing to think about tribes, two students of Kurdistan, Ahmad Mohammadpour and Kamal Soleimani (2019), argue that the whole literature is enshrouded in analytical confusion. "Tribe," as it seems, makes a claim for a so-called reality that is in equal amounts a political coalition, a kin-based identity, a pre-state formation, an anti-state formation, an "objective" stage in human development, and an "invented tradition" of our modern minds. All of this, plus the denunciation of "tribe" by post/anticolonial thinkers for being a category "born to serve Western colonialist enterprises" (Mohammadpour and Soleimani 2019: 6), we may well think that we have a great contender for the most problematic concept of the century.

Yet no anthropologist can be more aware than my interlocutors that this category is problematic, but nonetheless real, and never "so-called" and never less than compelling. The primary reason that it is compelling, as I discuss in more detail below, is the metapragmatic arguments regarding Kurdish history and political status that the category of tribe generates, in particular vis-à-vis the sense in which Kurds understand their homeland as differently ruled and located at the intersection of various power dynamics. Indeed, I find that my interlocutors' awareness of tribal organization as a reality is only occasionally to confirm or refute dominant

assessments about tribes, and it is *never* about whether approaching Kurdish society via the lens of the category of tribe creates unwarranted generalizations, or whether the label "tribalism" pushes Kurds together with a list of non-Western peoples into orientalist imageries. Their concerns with as well as fascinations about Kurdish tribes, considering that a very big majority of Kurds, though not all, come to this world with a tribal identity, are to identify in effect the category of *eşîr* as a social fact both constitutive of and circumstantial to their political history as a non-state, a social fact that has taken a historically persistent role in meditating Kurds' relations to neighboring state-powers – as well as, I would add, neighboring non-state societies such as Armenians and Assryians, but this aspect of Kurdish tribes does not, based on ethnography, get similar metapragmatic recognition from Kurds. The category of *eşîr*, in other words, is to my interlocutors almost the very opposite of what "tribe" is to many anthropologists and other scholars today. *Eşîr,* whether Kurds like what this category represents or not, whether they scandalize or embrace it, corresponds to an organizational attribute and somewhat of a historical and behavioral pattern definitive of Kurdish people, for *eşîr* is the primary thing that in contemporary politics and historical accounts which Kurds have and the various states and central powers that they have encountered or fought with did not and does not have.

All this, I argue, suggests that when Kurds pause to think about tribes, their pausing to think derives from a reflexivity different than that of the anthropologist. Taking my cue from Webb Keane (2003), I believe this difference stems from the fact that the question "what is a tribe?" motivates a different "problem" for Kurds vis-à-vis anthropologists, thus different possibilities for estrangement. There is a difference, in other words, because the disciplinary space/genealogy of anthropology and the geo-social space/genealogy of Kurdistan, and although they are both equally motivating in their own rights, do motivate differently. Mistaking these two

to be the same thing is a category error on the part of the anthropologist, who fails to see "the genealogical peculiarities that [she] brings into the mix" (Keane 2003: 224), such that "tribe" has come to acquire its present analytical shape[lessness], nor the fact that bringing genealogical peculiarities is a capacity not entirely of her own.

The Genealogical Impulse

To be perfectly precise, Turkey's Kurdistan is not conducive to producing old-school ethnographies of tribalism – except that tribes, *eşîrên,* are also almost everywhere. In fact, even if tribes are not present, like in Bahçesaray, the fact that they are not present functions as a key metapragmatic information, asking important questions about and somewhat defining the group or the place without tribal organization, precisely by way of its absence, almost as much as the attributes that are presently available. Still, I argue that Kurdistan is a great place *not* to study tribalism the typical-way, if such a way exists, for that kind of knowledge is hard to come by in Kurdistan. Kurds do not exhibit a "fascination with their genealogies for which Arab tribesmen are famous" (Bruinessen 2002: 167). Andrew Shryock, for instance, writes that his interlocutors in the Balga of central Jordan "must know the names of at least four patrilineal ancestors to participate in tribal law cases that involve homicide or personal injury" and that "his 'Adwani friends [from the Adwan tribe] could often name up to twelve" (2019: 29). A Kurd who could do this was an endangered species in my field-sites, such that the audience's fascination would fall on the bizarreness of the character and taste, not the information being offered. Another student of tribes, Paul Dresch (2000: 122), speaks of the "seeming fixity of… tribal boundaries" in Yemen, which is again not entirely true in Kurdistan. As Bruinessen (1991: 160 –168) notes in *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, one of the most detailed studies of Kurdish tribes, as well as Janet Klein

(2011, see "Introduction") in her research on Kurdish-Ottoman relations, due to its status as a frontier region perhaps since the Crusades and the Mongol Invasion of the Middle East, if not for longer than this, and the historically nomadic character of the society, Kurdish tribal histories in fact mark an opposite tendency, a tendency of leaving and relocating as a group elsewhere, depending on the demands and necessities of the political context. Hakan Özoglu (2004: 46 – 48 and 50), another student of Kurdish tribes, demonstrates the extent to which Kurdish tribes, being strategic political units with self-defense power and influence over a lot of people, for centuries until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire continuously moved along borderland as local auxiliaries of various states, some, such as the dynasty of Ayyubids that ruled the territories of Egypt and Syria as well as most contemporary Kurdistan between 12th and 13th century, being of Kurdish origin, but most being Turkish, Persian, and Russian.

It was my impression, therefore, that for my interlocutors, the social reality of the tribe (*eşîr*) did not necessarily and directly derive from tribes' corresponding morphologies as contiguous groups ruled by founding lineages, or from the fixity and fidelity of the existing knowledge about them. They *did* agree that tribes were social groups with a long history behind them, or as kin groups with shared descent and a legitimate leader coming from an important tribal family, but these were background assumptions that were mostly taken-for-granted, only ever invoked when a specific tribe's legitimacy was being questioned. Neither did my interlocutors ever de-emphasize tribes or dismiss the scholarly argument that Kurds are a tribal society, both historically and at the present moment (Barth 1953, Beşikçi [1988] 2015, Bruinessen 1991, 2002; Klein 2011, Leach [1940] 2004, McDowall 1988, Tapper 1983, Yalçin-Heckmann 1991). Tribes were considered a part of the "Kurdish reality" (*Kürt gerçekliği*), which warranted their recognition in discourse, but it was also near-impossible to perform an

unmediated investigation of the category. Some haste was needed as other matters were deemed far more urgent, such as the PKK, Kurdish political movement, Kurdish women's movement, Kurdish self-determination, political violence, displacement and dispossession, the authoritarianism of the AKP government, and a host of social problems in education, healthcare, youth unemployment, agriculture, access to land, cultural rights, and so on, all of which were driven to a great extent by broader structural faults of the political system. If I was there to understand how Kurdistan evolved and adapted as per its circumstances, these were its circumstances.

So, I thought, I must be on the right track. The issues to which I was told to pay attention were all reasons for the formation of Kurdish political ethics, which I had already committed myself to study. Yet tribes were hassling back, popping up in the background, the foreground, or between the lines. "Which tribe are you from?" was the most typical conversation starter, and there was little chance that a random interview with an interlocutor would not find us debating tribal politics, divisions, and conflicts. This was in part due to the extreme range and variety with which tribes were attributed certain characteristic traits, which would leak into every conversation, providing empirical weight to interactions about specific events, incidents, or issues. Weddings, for instance, which were, together with funerals, the most important social events in Kurdistan with extreme moral significance, such that nonattendance or not showing due regard and presenting a proper present to the newlywed were huge moral mistakes, could be most productively studied from a tribal perspective, given that from the design of women's dresses and the preferred style of traditional dance to the amount of gold being gifted to the newlywed, every detail would connote an underlying tribal identity. In Cizre, the women of the *eşîré Balîyan,* the *Balîyan* tribe, for instance, only wore fully white traditional dresses to

weddings and special occasions, such as protests and demonstrations, which would allow the observer to make empirical observations and claim that *Baliyan*s were well-represented in the event or not.



Figure 10: 2019, Newroz Celebrations. The women wearing all white are all from the Balîyan tribe.

Even for the most ardent opponent, who refuted tribes in the spirit of the PKK's rhetorical push against the excesses and depredations of feudalism, tribes were nowhere more polemically present than his own mind (the ardent opponent was often a man). Tribes were thus central to ethnographic endeavor but in a way that freed everyone, me and my interlocutors, from having to tackle what sort of a thing they really were. In the end, even more significantly, almost everything I learned about Kurdish tribes *(eşîrên Kurdan)*, about their pragmatic purchase on social interactions and the curious ways in which they guided everyday relations, rituals, events, and so on, I learned by way of studying something else – political ethics.

Bracketing the theoretical articulations between the two, here I want to suggest that political ethics – the seeking of political connections and group-specific circumstances to draw out the moral habitus and the practice of identifying the co-indexical relations between ethical problems and specific social groups – poses for Kurds a question that opens out into a genealogical impulse similarly embodied in tribes. Put in Peircean terms (1955), political ethics motivates people to ask the question of "circumstances" (sign), the use of which has the purpose of creating "[an image of] genealogical impulse" (interpretant), and this impulse can be externalized in material/representational forms – tribes, maps, landscape, and the rhetoric of witnessing. In other words, if political ethics is a reflexive project of describing, analyzing, becoming aware of, and properly problematizing one's group life and history, it necessarily turns on a genealogical impulse that begs attention to concrete forms, patterns, and structural as well as behavioral continuities. Tribes, I argue, are what Kurds turn to when they try to understand what they are to one another as a group, which makes them important ethical objects of concern. Dry as it might be, the Peircean language foregrounds the socio-material mediation of meaning-making processes regarding what tribes come to stand for in Kurdistan, and how they are made to exist in social life with significant metapragmatic weight. Particularly salient to the ongoing discussion, it demonstrates how the externalization of genealogic impulse culminates in the *mattering* of tribes to the actor's ability to reflect on the "moral habitus" (aka, object).

Governance via Other Means

Following a five-week long field survey in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1938, anthropologist Edmund Leach returned to London where he developed a fifty-something-page field report, in which he argued that the "external administration," which was developed out of the old Ottoman model,

was only marginally significant to the lives of Kurds ([1940] 2006: 9 – 12). Considering Kurdistan to be a periphery, Leach was determined to understand whether the periphery had adapted the forms of the center and concluded that it had not. Kurds had tribes, which were political groups that possessed an aggressive ideology yet lived in an environment of balanced rivalries. Due to their distinct survival value, these groups were enjoying an "ancient independence."[7] Almost three decades later, Turkish sociologist Ismail Beşikçi published his first book, "The Order of East Anatolia" (1969), in which he discussed the harsh reality of Turkish control over Kurdistan. The book was banned in 1971 by the junta, and Beşikçi sentenced to 13 years in prison, though he was released on amnesty in 1975. Beşikçi was not deterred from studying Kurds and finished in 1990 his most important book yet, "*International Colony: Kurdistan*" ([1990] 2015). In it, he declared Kurdistan an "inter-state colony," governed by not one but multiple external forces – Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran – with extremely conflicting interests (see also Vali 2003).

Rooted in their prevailing ethos of social anthropology, on one hand, and Marxist sociology, on the other, neither Leach's study nor Beşikçi's will strike the reader as avant-garde, though historical in the sense of being the first of their kind. The books work amazingly when read together, however, and it appears that there is an overarching framework: the significance of the tribal organization of Kurdish society to its political status, autonomy and indirect rule, respectively. Kurds were autonomous, Leach insists, because they had tribes, whose particularity lay in an ability to resist shading into the external power; and exactly because Kurds had these

[7] Exactly thirteen years after Leach, another social anthropologist, Fredrik Barth arrived in Iraqi Kurdistan to study "*The Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan*" (1953). In this equally short monograph, Barth, and almost word-by-word, repeated Leach's argument regarding the "external administration" which was virtually invisible and nowhere to be found.

self-interested tribes that survived at the *necessary* expense of other tribes, Beşikçi counters, Kurdistan remained vulnerable to indirect rule, hence colonialism.

As of today, both arguments have currency among Kurds in Turkey, reiterated frequently and often simultaneously in conversations, opinion articles, and political speeches. Like Leach and Beşikçi, Kurds, too, refer to "tribal politics" to better understand themselves as a people vis-à-vis the historically shaped idiosyncrasies of their social organization. The mutual propping of autonomy and indirect rule in genealogical practice, most important of all, reveals something very important about the semiosis of Kurdistan. When Kurds reflect on tribes, I shall argue, they engage in a process of semiosis with respect to a common object, Kurdistan, negotiating its status as a place that has been governed for far too long, well, via other means.

On a closer look, fieldwork in Kurdistan was an exercise in looking at the common world either from above the land, or from the inside of stories – personal, historical, mythical. The practice of oral history was something of a commonplace, and the tribe, a durable form, constituted one of the most crucial registers of genealogical self-narration. These stories, and despite the dizzying, cloudy rhetoric, held clues to a confluence of detours and exigencies that have shaped Kurdish political history. A key example to this is the Tanzimat Era, which was a reform movement in the Ottoman Empire that started in 1839 and ended in 1876, and an absolute embodiment of the Ottoman ambitions to extend central authority to the Kurdish periphery (Atmaca 2021). Tanzimat saw the fall of Kurdish Emirates, complex semi-independent entities led by a Kurdish *mîr* (prince), which brought the dissolution of Emirates into their constituent parts, tribal confederacies, confederacies into large tribes, large tribes into smaller tribes, and smaller tribes into nullity (Bruinessen 1991:169, Klein 2011: 60). From the void left after the fall of Emirates, therefore, emerged a completely new tribal dynamic: with *mîr*s and *beg*s out of the

picture, tribes turned into gregarious mini-beasts fighting for land and power, and whoever got the support of the central government got what everyone else wanted.

The very system of indirect-rule that Ismail Beşikçi studied in the 1960s inherited the legacy of the tribe-state relations that had started to shape up within the context of this power vacuum. Today, Kurds are keeping with Beşikçi's genealogical impulse, trying to grasp the possibility of Turkish indirect rule in historical ruptures, while also training their eyes to recognize the patterns of unevenness. In other words, they are trying to grasp how, in Kurdistan, solar panels, pensions, reparative justice, or jobs have become operational in everyday life as affordances for another Kurdish individual or group's necessary misfortune. This is a desire, in other words, that derives from the problematization of a certain kind of unevenness that pertains to Kurdistan, where socio-historical idiosyncrasies and institutions of Kurdish society that organize everyday sociality all come to reproduce themselves by way of necessarily reproducing group-internal inequalities. For a tribe to win, another has to lose. For a Kurdish family to have solar panels, he has to possess a certain power over other Kurds, thus in certain respects letting them pay the price of his solar panels.

I shall also note that, especially if the purpose is to understand the role tribes perform in reproducing and making this unevenness all the more legible, and very much prompted by certain societal and historical dynamics, the idiom of unevenness should be connected to a particular political ethical demand for greater reflexivity towards the Kurdish tribe's historical role in perpetuating a certain family of political realities. Especially since the early 1980s, with the rise of Kurdish political movement, there has been a flourishing of debates *among* Kurds *about* Kurds' historical struggles in and beyond Turkey, which centered on a problematization of tribes as feudal institutions that are by design open to be manipulated by the Turkish state

(Bozarslan 2012). From the perspective of Kurdish movement, that squarely of the PKK's, understanding Kurdish tribes was a genealogical project aiming at raising awareness among Kurds of their historical condition, and the necessity of such genealogical knowledge from the beginning sat well with the party's efforts to remold Kurdish masses into revolutionaries, which required an awareness of the material circumstances (Ünlü 2016, Yarkın 2015). Were it not for the demands of the PKK for greater historical reflexivity, I want to suggest, Kurds today would not have the inducement to voluntarily stray from the daylight into the same dark, dreary territory so repeatedly: an underworld of collaboration wherein *some* Kurds are partnering with their oppressors.[8] The PKK's continuous foray into this underworld, equally important, has led to greater public criticism of tribe-state relations than before, which then led a number of tribes to

[8] A growing body of research on Turkey's Kurdistan similarly focuses on "collaboration" to unpack the cross-institutional relations between the Turkish state and Kurdish tribes (Bozarslan 1999; Grabolle-Çeliker 2013; Tezcür 2009, Yadirgi 2017, Yüksel 2021). Students of the Turkish nation-state, too, have commonly found great use for the idea of collaboration, and without necessarily limiting or even connecting it to Kurdistan (Alexander 2002; Heper and Keyman 1998). What seems important to this literature are not the particularities of the Kurdish context but the possibility of thinking of collaboration as a modality of influence by which the Turkish state conducts itself in its peripheries. Often examined under the rubric of "patronage" (*himaye/hamilik*), this influence is actualized through all sorts of fickle transactions between Turkish bureaucrats and ordinary citizens in which the former trade economic favor in return of political loyalty. Patronage also finds us in classic ethnographies of "peasant" and Mediterranean societies, but a significant portion of these works push the state into the background, focusing instead on relations between local patrons and local clients (*e.g.,* Gellner and Waterbury 1977). In these accounts, what differentiates these two sides from one another is their respective class positions, with patrons – landlords and local entrepreneurs – having an upper-class status which they either socially inherit or later acquire during their lifetimes. The authors exhibit a particular perspective, in which they present patron-client relations as fully embedded in the economic structures of a localized context, next to which external actors (the state or the market) seem to have disembedded forms. Research on Turkey largely refutes this analytic. By all accounts, transactional give-and-takes most akin to those seen in the classical anthropological studies of patronage manifest in Turkey as typified interactions between the state and citizens, with the latter itself becoming the patron.

end their partnership with the Turkish state, while a considerable number of others became allied to the PKK.

When my interlocutors showed an interest in the contemporary life of tribes, perhaps even more importantly, their interest inevitably consisted of treating the actual – the immediate – as a document of what was already known about this underworld. This required the invocation of typified behavior and proverbial attributes that rhetorically aligned actual appearances to an ethics of representing the general. While the strongly religious image of any tribe-X indexed its potential for rapport with Islamist Turkish political parties, the unapologetically fierce and belligerent men of the tribe-Y were viewed as iconic renderings of the tribe's presumed proclivity for dissent and guerrilla warfare. Tribal leaders who were impetuously talented in making a scene, and known for their unquenchable appetite for fame, demanded serious caution, for these qualities were seen as vital assets for a paramilitary career. Lavish displays of gold gifted in a tribal wedding not only staged an exuberant performance of monetary strength, but also transmuted the host-tribe into an ideal candidate in the eyes of Turkish bureaucrats (who were present in these weddings as guests) for joining up powers across a range of areas. Just as gold flew through the wedding hall and accumulated on the bodies of the bridal couple, the entire event would become a carefully choreographed display of a certain kind of tribal personality that seemed immoderately desirous of becoming endlessly powerful.

One of the most memorable examples of this personality is the late Kinyas Kartal, the supreme leader of the *eşîré Brukî*, the Brukî tribe, based in Van Province. Kartal was a Caucasian-born Kurd who emigrated to Van in the 1920s. Kartal came to Turkey's Kurdistan while many other Caucasion Kurds, about which the reader will hear more in chapter six, also chose to come to Turkey's Kurdistan, fleeing the political chaos and violence in the Caucasian

region which erupted in the context of the October Revolution, or Great Society revolution, that happened in 1917. Most of these emigrees, as oral histories suggest, identified themselves as members of the Brukî tribe, yet the tribe did not have a unifying leadership at the moment. Kartal was a prominent figure in this community. Prior to his move with his family to Van, Kartal had received military training in the Military Academy of Tbilisi of Georgia and the Military Academy of Baku of Azerbaijan. He even fought in the Red Army under the command of Trochky, but only very briefly, before deciding to immigrate to Turkey's Kurdistan. Shortly after Kartal's arrival in Van, the new Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, and Kartal, as a well-educated and well-connected man, who was also a newcomer and thus in need of social support, developed good relations with Turkish bureaucrats. His quickly rising social prominence and wealth, together with the fact that he had already been a well-known and respected name among the Caucasian Kurds, helped Kartal establish himself as the leader of the Brukî tribe. In today's Van, Kartal is credited for uniting thousands of emigrees and giving them a tribal status. Kartal became active in Turkish politics in the 1950s and remained a popular figure until the 1980 military coup, after which he quit politics. Throughout his political career, Kartal was a member of center-right Turkish political parties, favored by Turkish politicians in large part due to his ability to generate votes for them, which is the typical model for how tribal leaders in Turkey have gained political roles in Ankara – other examples are *eşîré Metinan* of Mardin Province and *eşîré Seyhanîn* of Urfa Province, the leaders of both tribes are among the generations of Kurdish tribal parliamentarians who have bargained their way into Turkish politics in exchange of votes. A five-time parliamentarian, Kartal's primary bargaining power was also the number of votes that he could secure for the party that promised him a seat in the parliament. Indeed, Kartal once

said that a total of 258 villages were under his direct control, meaning that they were indirectly controlled by the Turkish state – at least in theory, which was more than enough for both sides.

What of Autonomy?

In 2015, a thrilling rumor spread among the Brukîs of Van that a film project about the life of Kinyas Kartal was in its first development stage. The revenue, as some "they" said, was expected to be as high as €20,000 – "an unheard-of amount" – and British actor Sean Connery was reportedly being considered to play Kinyas Kartal.



Figure 11: A portrait of Kinyal Kartal.

The project, the Brukîs claimed, was "almost a done-deal" unless the Turkish state would lobby against it. While the rumor was yet to reach Turks' side of Turkey, however, it caused a true storm among Kurds themselves. Non-Brukîs were up in arms over the film project, ridiculing the Brukî narrative about Turkey's alleged objection. "Turks will be happy, Kinyas Kartal was exactly their kind of Kurd," wrote an online commentator. According to non-Brukîs, Kartal's life was by no means a representation of Kurdish society or culture. If anything, his

entire life as a "self-invented leader turned enemy-spy" was a ready-sign that stood for the covert network of practices that had sustained Turkish rule in Kurdistan. Brukîs, on their part, believed that non-Brukî position was suffering from an indefensible bias: "Turks will *not* be happy, how will they be happy? A strong depiction of Kinyas Kartal means a weak depiction of their own state," a Brukî interlocutor told me.

Around the same time, a transcript of an old interview with Kinyas Kartal surfaced on the internet, in which Kartal allegedly discusses "Village Institutes" (*Köy Enstitüleri*), a network of rural schools that operated between 1940 and 1954. A cornerstone of the national rural development movement, village institutes were demonized as an imagined threat in the context of post-WWII anti-communist rhetoric. In the interview, date unknown, the interviewer asks whether village institutes were shut for raising communists and Kartal answers, "absolutely not." The interviewer asks whether the problem was coeducation and Kartal answers, "no, not that either, that we find everywhere in the world." "Why then?" the interviewer pushes, and Kartal gives the following response: "It was me, I had them closed down, because village institutes were a threat to [tribes'] power over the state. I have more than 200 villages under my control. Villagers make sure to consult with me on every aspect of their life. Marriage, divorce, conscription, legal cases, you name it. Some graduates of those institutes visited five Brukî villages, and suddenly the villagers outgrew their need for me, they stopped consulting with me. I couldn't accept that. I reached out to other *agha*s in the East (Kurdistan). I even found a landlord from the West. Then we entered into a bargain with Adnan Menderes (the prime minister) to make him close those schools." In Kartal's logic, rural development meant for villagers less deference to *agha*s, which meant for *agha*s less tribal influence in society, which

then meant for tribes less power over the Turkish state (*e.g.*, Mardin 1973, Yalçın-Heckmann 1991).

Kinyas Kartal's views on the issue were already readily known, somewhat waiting to be re-discovered at the right moment. Much like the first example, the rediscovery came in a rumor format. Catherine Bolten writes that rumors, "authorless" and "unsecured" information, generally have an "overt substance" that pales in significance compared to the "covert issue" that they nurture, opening up a discursive space for otherwise disallowed narratives (2014: 188–189, see also Fine 2015). This was exactly the case in Van. As actors of all positions met in a virtual debating courtyard, professing their admiration for Kartal or hatred for all forms of conformity with the Turkish state, the points of views were multiple, some tentative and others fixed. But the cumulative effect of these interactions was a kind of collective mediation on tribalism vis-à-vis the inconclusive antinomy between autonomy and indirect rule. In particular, the supporters of Kartal considered the controversy an opportunity to demonstrate the tribe's pragmatic maxim (*sensu* Peirce [1878] 2000) – its applicability as a concept for testing the practical implications of its own value to this antinomy.

These supporters, joined by a group of nonsupporters who nevertheless seized on the moment to show their otherwise covert regard for tribalism, called attention to a certain remark from the interview with Kinyas Kartal – "it was me, I had [the village institutes] closed down, because village institutes were a threat to our power over the state" – which they interpreted as an expression of the versatile force of *agha*s. A friend, a PKK supporter, confessed to me that there was something joyous about how one tactless, socially gauche Kurdish *agha* so resourcefully and for decades capitalized on the state's dependency on tribes. When I reminded him that Kartal equally capitalized on the villagers' dependency, my friend challenged me: "I

will personally agree, but Kartal would not. I don't think he truly cared if the villagers were dependent on him. He just wanted them to consult with him, respect his views, follow his ideas, become enemies with his enemies, friends with his friends, and vote for whomever he votes for" (confirming my suspicion that *agha*s were the original powerbrokers). Even more significantly, Kartal's remark demonstrated what achieving autonomy really looked like. Tribal autonomy, in this account, drew from an ability to claim: "the state doesn't make me say anything other than what I make the state say" (rephrased from the original in Latour 2003: 158). However, as Bruno Latour insists, the ability to make such claims, by design, is only possible in a certain context, such as Turkish indirect rule, wherein the voicing actor (tribes) "occupies two contradictory positions" at the same time: "the one who talks and the one who *is talked to*" (ibid: 156). In a broader light, this near-overlap of two positions is exactly what Kurds like to call the "Kurdish reality" (*Kürt gerçekliği*), another term that Abdullah Öcalan made popular.

Not all Kurds would concede this conception of autonomy, which has made multiple comebacks in Kurdish history with new, different pragmatic effects. But I want to argue that when autonomy is conceptualized this way, it allows Kurds to animate "tribe" as a key term of their engagements with their political context, both in its present and its past. This is why across the spectrum of *agha*s, villagers, urban-dwellers, land-owners, idealists, pragmatists, distant sympathizers, or active supporters, there exists a common awareness of tribes' metapragmatic entailments for the study of Turkish indirect rule. Though certainly not all but most of the time, a conversation on tribes is thus a conversation about what tribes reveal (the ambivalent position of Kurds in Turkey), and *how* they reveal it (by capitalizing on that position's pragmatic maxim), such that Kurds need the term "tribe" in their analysis of Kurdistan in relation to its

circumstantial exigencies. The truth is “the PKK” and “Kurdish political movement” won’t help them do this, because next to tribes, these two were born yesterday.

In plain language, the category of “tribe” is really about the actualized possibility of non-state beyond its negative identity in our contemporary moment. On one hand, tribes are the mediating ground wherein the state of Turks and the non-state of Kurds “are mutually constitutive to the point where it is the tension between them that seems to matter (and the possibilities this opens to people)” (Scheele 2021: 917). On the other hand, tribes give historical coherence to non-state, as well as the quality, for lack of a better term, of being a little bit full of itself. Without tribes, the non-state of Kurds loses not only its genealogy but also its theoretical protection from an increasingly intrusive commonsense, the normativity of the state, which would otherwise leave Kurdistan no rhetorical space but that of a state-failure.

Chapter 4 Politics: A Communicative Edifice

The previous chapter examined the "here" of Roza's life. It argued that this "here" is in large part a function of Kurds' attunements to the historical and socio-political exigencies of indirect-rule performatively materialized. The following chapter focuses on the "life" of Roza's Kurdistan, tracing the circumstances under which a certain kind of social world that is "not-normal" takes its contours, all the while slowly building a narrative of Kurdish family as a sophisticated institution that is in contextual relation to the political conditions in which it has transformed into what it is now. The chapter's empirical focus is the Kurds' recognition of *their* common situation as hard, unjust, difficult, dilemmatic, challenging, and not-normal. It seeks to understand the everyday articulations between the political apparatus and the ways this apparatus invites my interlocutors to adopt certain reflective, behavioral, and communicative habits to better cope with it. Lastly, the chapter turns on the notion of "luck," *bext* in Kurdish, seeking to glean the everyday pragmatics and ethics of unintended consequences enabled by this luck. Ultimately, my purpose is to understand why, and no matter how self-certain Roza was that she intended well, Roza's intending well did not bring her a viable moral certainty such that she eventually chose to quit her job. In other words, how can we unpack the "anomalies" of a moral habitus that is guided by luck rather than providence?

Authoritarianism

While I only realized the pragmatic distinctiveness of *learning* from *studying* somewhat ex-post facto, that delay was admittedly entirely on me. The last advice about long-term research that I received from my advisor, Webb Keane, was exactly that I needed to go to the field with a true openness to learning, an openness, more specifically, to the unique affordances of fieldwork for the kind of learning characteristic of ethnography, what he elsewhere calls the "ethnographic stance" (Keane 2014). Openness was necessary, as my other teacher Andrew Shryock did his best to make sure I knew, because the fieldworker was that person who is already and always late to the game, thus herself trapped in the necessity of catching up. Neither of them told me, however, that this sort of ethnography would leave me at the mercy of my interlocutors, nor that this mercy would ultimately save my fieldwork from a descent into total arbitrariness.

My interlocutors were the most helpful, willing partners, that I cannot deny, but also completely impervious to my unwitting attempts to reorder their common ground. They guided my fieldwork towards a million potential starting points, but I could not artificially start it anywhere. Let me explain what I mean by this. In Bahçesaray, where I lived as a part-time researcher and a full-time equerry to my host-mother, my daily routine involved cleaning, cooking, and other chores, punctuated by intermittent access to "real data." One morning, and I had no idea what kind of epiphany illuminated this decision, my host-mother said we were taking the full day off. I brewed a pot of tea, and we chatted as we smoked hand-rolled tobacco. The conversation was drifting leisurely before I brought up the topic of "religion." I asked a few questions about her faith and the role of Islam in village life, and she urged me to observe "*daîre*" (meaning "circle" or "frame", as in "the frame of reference"), a month in the local calendar during which the villagers, joined by the villagers from across the valley, were meeting

daily to recite the Quran. The women would usually gather in the evenings at a different house, the men in the mosque after the noon prayer, and each day a different person was to recite one *cûz* (part) from the Quran composed of thirty *cûz*es. *Daîre* started during the first *çelê* (the first 40 days of winter) and took most of the second *çelê* (the last 20 days of winter), which corresponded to the last two weeks of January and the first two weeks of February. My host mother assured me that *daîre* would be a great opportunity for me to learn about Islam.

Daîre sure sounded interesting, if not a bit too old-school of a ritual for my liking, but there was one tiny problem: we were not even halfway through October yet. In a cultural context where everyone was conveniently considered a Muslim, everyone prayed, and everyone took the Quran to be the most important of all sources, I needed to hold my patience for three months to observe religion. Then *daîre* arrived, and my host-mother informed me that my only duty was to help her practice the particular *cûz* with which she was assigned, and that she really wanted to shine that year.



Figure 12: My host-mother reciting the Quran

In all fairness, I probably never struck my host-family, friends, and neighbors as a religious person, who never knew if I really had something to offer in that area, or what that something would be. Due to my Alevi roots, it was also not entirely appropriate for me to attend *daîre* which was a Sunni practice. Alevism, a loose local interpretation of Islam and the largest minority religion of the country, shares some characteristics with Twelver Shi'ism, yet unlike Sunnis and Shias, Alevis have no binding relation with the Quran (Gültekin 2019, Tambar 2014, White and Jongerden 2003). My presence, therefore, might constitute a hazard to the integrity of *daîre*. I still managed to collect a fair amount of observation, owing largely to my-host mother who filled me in with daily and detailed reports on who recited well and who did not. It seemed none did a particularly impressive job but my host-mother.

Most of my attempts to conduct fieldwork on religion – "*dîn*" in Kurdish – stumbled into similar kinds of dead ends. The structure of our world, as it seemed, was not set up to explicitly display *Îslam*, which was the word Kurds tend to use instead of religion, *dîn*, but something else: politics. Or let me put it this way: *Îslam* and the God, "*xwedê*" in Kurdish, for my interlocutors, were undeniable, hard-to-question facts of life, yet not necessarily facts of *their* life, such that none would ever treat *Îslam* as continuous with the other, observable features of their social setting. They were not living and interacting with their surroundings, or consuming their everyday experiences, in a manner ready to encounter with, talk about, defend, or articulate Islam. While in cities and among younger generation, somewhat rival formulations such as atheism or politically grounded criticisms of religion, which were generally associated with the PKK movement and its Marxist-Leninist origins, could be observed, in Bahçesaray, as well as in my neighborhood in Cizre, the common assumption was that every person was Muslim – *misilman*. Sectarian divisions were likewise quite invisible. Throughout my entire stay in

Bahçesaray, I did not hear anyone asking another person something like “are you Sunni,” “are you a believer,” “are you Alevi,” and so on, and the fact that I was an Alevi was almost always discovered by friends and host-families accidentally. Not that I was hiding it, but I never had a reason or opportunity to randomly bring that up – it always felt like the wrong moment and quite unnecessary to do so, unless, for instance, it was Ramadan, a month of fasting for both Sunnis and Shias which Alevis do not observe. While *daîre*, furthermore, was one of the few occasions in which I saw my interlocutors engaging with the Quran closely, which otherwise was treated as a sacred object that stayed almost the whole year in a special, hand-made case, hanging on a wall, even in *daîre*, as my host-mother told me, the focus was on performing the most beautiful and flawless recitation of a given *cûz*, but not on debating its interpretation or meaning. Debates on Islamic teachings and textual sources, in fact, were a rarity, unless someone’s daughter or son declared her atheism, or decided to get divorce, or rebelled to the family by moving in with a man or a woman with whom they were not married. *Îslam*, even more importantly, was not a topic with which my interlocutors considered themselves in a position to help an anthropologist. Even though none ever truly understood what I was really doing there, seemingly wasting my time gossiping with women, cooking and cleaning, and occasionally walking around with Xalo Bewar, they could tell that my research concerned the everyday life, and *Îslam* was not something that they could frame that way.

Politics, on the other hand, had the property of being progressively realizable in almost every encounter and activity. For my interlocutors, politics was, on one hand, the state, *dewlet*, and even more generally, on the other hand, the situation, *rewş* or *dirim*. It was something afforded by and afforded as their common condition, shaped deeply by the practices and ideology of the state’s governance apparatus. When my interlocutors were talking about politics,

they were, in other words, talking about the situation, the overall state of things, and the very background context against which they lived their lives and made a living. And many of them also quite readily assumed that I was there to study "the situation", which was something I could grasp and consume in its immediacy: "You want to understand the situation? Look around, you will see it everywhere." Politics, in other words, was a certain totality of experiences that everyone in Kurdistan was ongoingly being a witness. This was the reason why my host-mother, when she first told me to wait for *daîre*, immediately assumed that I would be gone by then. She knew that I was in Kurdistan to learn about politics (Kurdish political reality, more to the point, and not that she ever felt the need to confirm this with me), which was accomplishable with a few months of good, attentive observation, because that knowledge was 24/7 on display.

This ever-presentness of politics can be restated as follows: politics, in Kurdistan, was always there to be experienced, observed, appraised, negotiated, and evaluated – next to politics, everything had a negative condition to it; this ever-presentness, in turn, would permit its own apprehension as a structural reality often thickly described. These were the conditions for my interlocutors of the traceability of politics, but what turned politics so vastly important was the ensuing discovery that they were all and potentially always in the midst of witnessing it – the discovery that politics possessed a "seen-from-within" quality and thus a quality of being intimately relevant.

The second important aspect of politics was that it described group history, but one that was tinged with a strong sense of luck and fate. This was why my interlocutors would refer to their political condition as "*bext,*" a word that I explained in chapter two, meaning "luck" but not a coincidental, fully accidental luck, like winning the lottery, but an inevitable outcome and a function of the particular circumstances in which it is produced. Kurds often refer to "*bext*" as

something that belong to them, like the "*bext* of Kurds", or "the *bext* of our people." In this sense, they articulate a vision of politics that translates itself in Kurdistan to a practical condition of being ill-fated, or being trapped in concrete, deeply entrenched circumstances that continuously produce unintended, undesired consequences, hence the necessity of constant caution – the necessity, for instance, of not carrying Kurdish language books arounds, not speaking freely in front of people whom one does not know very well, or not trusting friends, for they too are equally vulnerable to the same *bext*. What my interlocutors referred to as their *bext*, the fact that their life was ordinarily producing misfortunes that were unintended yet ever-present and always a possibility, was something experienced in the very nature of the political context and what it concretely entailed for Kurds, which this chapter explores.

Below, I unpack the problem of the ever-presentness of politics, its "within-ness" in the practical dynamics of everyday life, its concrete experience in everyday interactions, as well as the sense of caution and constant semiotic attunement that it produces, and I use this discussion to provide insights into the peculiar tensions of Turkish authoritarianism. These insights help me illuminate one important argument of this dissertation: while politics for Kurds derived from a confluence of governance practices, the mobilized significance of these practices to my interlocutors was the ensuing communicative edifice: a stockpile of dispositions, habits, and modes of apprehension instigated by the everyday dynamics of social life. But first, I want to describe and give some details about what my interlocutors called the situation.

Ever-Presentness

Put simply, ever-presentness is a measure of Turkish authoritarianism. It describes my interlocutors' experience of the latter as a system wherein everything seems to be finding its way

to the state's governmental ethos. Ever-presentness also refers to the observable dictatorial tendencies and omnipotence of the Erdogan regime, which a statement by a former Minister of the Interior, Idris Naim Şahin, so eerily captures: "The state is life itself. The state is life, life is the state. A minister is a minister of the state, [thus] a minister of our common life" (*Devlet hayatın ta kendisidir. Devlet hayattır, hayat devlettir. Bakan devletin bakanıdır, hayatımızın bakanıdır*). Most significantly, ever-presentness denotes the becoming of the police state a part and parcel of the Kurdish everyday.

But it really wasn't supposed to be like this. In hindsight, the 2000s and 2010s brought a series of modest to fairly significant political gains for the Kurdish political movement – some recognition and expansion of cultural rights, increased visibility in public life, electoral successes, and therefore better parliamentary representation. These gains were all very costly, none were ever taken off the bargaining table, but they were unprecedented, nonetheless. The triumphant moment came in 2013, when the Turkish government and the PKK announced the commencement of peace negotiations, also known as the solution or peace process (*çözüm/barış süreci*), to resolve the country's long-lasting "Kurdish problem" (*Kürt sorunu*). Kurds welcomed the negotiations with great joy, considering it a natural outcome of their unfaltering commitment to the political cause. As chapter seven will sketch a "during and after" ethnography of the peace process from the perspective of Cizre, I will get right to the beginning of the end: June 2015 Turkish general election. The election was a historical breakthrough on a par with the peace process. Not only did the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (*HDP*) surpass for the first time the 10% electoral threshold, but it also won 80 seats in the parliament, the same number as the Turkish far-right Nationalist Movement Party (*MHP*).

Only two days after the election, I was in Cizre for a three-month visit for preliminary fieldwork. The streets and roads were buzzing with people flocking to the town center to attend electoral celebrations. The atmosphere was triumphant, colorful, and exciting. Residents were out on the streets, marching in groups, singing Kurdish songs with revolutionary themes. On that night and every night for the remainder of the month, thousands crowded the city's beloved Birca Belek Park by Dîjle River (Tigris River, in English, also known in Kurdistan as "*Awa Mezin*," "The Great Water"), partaking in endless rituals of tea consumption with so much merriment and laughter in the air. Yet only a few weeks after the election, which had taken away the AKP's parliamentary majority, then-Prime Minister Erdogan began to veer away from the peace process, from the language of democratic solution, and eventually in August announced the end of the negotiations. In September, he called for a snap election citing "rising terrorism" and the country's need for a "strong state." Over the next few weeks until election day, around 400 HDP branch offices in western Turkey were vandalized by nationalist mobs. On November 1, the snap election was held and Erdogan's AKP regained the parliamentary majority. On November 2, Kurds woke up to one of the most violent, most militarized, most authoritarian chapters of their political history.

The fighting between the military and the PKK resumed with full force, and the Turkish state effectively adopted a "zero tolerance" policy against every perceived infraction of the country's status-quo – Turkish nationalism, central authority, territorial unity. The policy progressively spilled over into every corner and every nook of Kurdistan, picking up even more speed when the military staged a failed coup against the government in July 2016, about then months after the snap election. The parliament responded to the coup attempt by implementing a state of emergency (*OHAL*), effectively granting Erdogan the power to rule by decree. The state

of emergency was renewed seven times before it formally ended in July 2018. Over the course of the period between the collapse of the peace process in 2015 and the end of the state of emergency in 2018, Turkey purged 120,000 civil servants; unlawfully canceled 50,000 passports; revoked parliamentary immunity and consequently arrested 66 MPs of the HDP with 7 of them still in prison; detained and variously punished 10,000 Kurdish politicians, activists, and civil society workers; replaced 96 out of 102 elected Kurdish mayors with government-appointed trustees; implemented a total of 369 curfews in a long list of cities, towns, and rural areas across Kurdistan; conducted hundreds of small and large-scale military operations; and destroyed 25,000 structures, displaced 360,000 people, and killed 4,000 Kurdish fighters and more than a 1000 Kurdish civilians.[9] When I mentioned in the previous chapter of having to toss away one research proposal after another due to the political situation in Kurdistan, this was the political situation to which I was alluding.

In the midst of the state of emergency, as the statistics above were still adding up, I started my long-term fieldwork. I observed the state's efforts to re-invent and remake its own power over Kurdistan through the implementation of an ever-expanding police-state-authoritarianism that has survived to this very day. I documented the ways this authoritarianism shaped up into a bulky machinery of securitization, surveillance, and arbitrary punishment. It was a machinery, because it created an environment of extreme connectivity wherein no social actor could fully avoid, with or without a compromise, the purges, compulsions, and punishments of Turkish authoritarianism: community leaders, ordinary citizens, HDP voters,

[9] I compiled these figures from a list of reports and studies published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner, Amnesty International, Brussels based think-tank International Crisis Group, Washington-based organization Middle East Institute, the news agency Reuters, and two Turkey-based non-governmental NGOs, the Human Rights Association (*IHD*) and the Association for Human Rights and Solidarity for the Oppressed (*Mazlum-Der*).

government supporters, feminists, journalists, researchers, academics, students, musicians, poets, graffiti artists, media outlets, language schools, NGOs, publication houses, political groups, theaters, community centers, and so on. It was bulky, because it was overloaded with half-real, half-whatever granular details on people's political persuasions, associations, educational backgrounds, past activities, family connections, social media practices, habits of cultural consumption, or even fashion choices (like wearing an outfit with a "Kurdish theme"). It was not fully clear to anyone how the state was really managing the documentation and communication of all this information, and even if some data management existed, it existed in people's minds not as an overarching system, but as a "present event" from which they could draw inferences about how the state measured and scaled data. These events included police raids, surveillance by undercover agents, arbitrary interrogations, administrative and judicial investigations, punishment by demotion, dismissal, or by passport seizures, delays in processing appeals, and rejections on security grounds.

To fully see the centrality of information to Kurds' self-understandings of Turkish authoritarianism, however, it is important to focus on the vast network of ID-checkpoints and roadblocks that invaded Kurdistan. Desultory, offensive, intrusive, and oftentimes intimidating, ID-checks (*kimlik kontrolü*) were also inevitable and something of a commonplace. There was no going from any point A to any point B that did not include the standard protocol of ID-checks, and people in almost every part of Kurdistan, in particular young and middle-aged men, and travelers of any age and gender, were used to being questioned on a daily basis about the most miniscule details of their lives. The practice hinged on a combination of your typical car and pedestrian checkpoints and a more advanced information processing system called General Information Gathering (GBT), an ID scanning technology that the Turkish Ministry of Interior

adopted in 2002. GBT was vital to the operations of the police, giving officers instant access to a national database of arrest and detention warrants, draft-dodgers, and foreign travel restrictions. If one's name was not on the database, however, GBT was nothing more than an unnecessary performance of state power. GBT could even be a good thing for cutting down on the actual duration of face-to-face interaction necessary to complete an ID-check – the interrogation part.

My interlocutors considered this level of intrusion one of the most banal examples of the state's systematic discrimination against the Kurdish populace, which essentially re-organized their everyday into an interactive context with a simple yet effective participatory framework: state actors ask the questions and Kurds answer. The only problem with this otherwise elegant framework was that the former did not really know what to ask and the latter already knew not to answer. In a setting where everything needed to be controlled and everything needed to be made known to the state, there remained nothing specific or intelligible about the state's security apparatus. ID-checks, on their part, were the farthest thing from a judicious exercise of power, and not even remotely comparable in style and sophistication to cult dystopian novels that caution the world against Stalinism, Thatcherism, East German Stasi, and the likes – well, at least so I thought.

A Thick Encounter

Fast-forward four years and four months from the balmy evening of June where I spent the whole night in Birca Belek Park celebrating the HDP's electoral success, I moved to Cizre – post-war Cizre, more precisely – to conduct ten-months of fieldwork. Almost six weeks in fieldwork, however, I was yet to dare myself to enter the town center after nightfall. The government had deployed tens of thousands of special troops to Cizre during the military

operations in 2016, and most were now permanently stationed in the town. Seeing police everywhere was disheartening and quite intimidating, especially at nighttime, turning Cizreans away from leaving homes and residential neighborhoods. Though "freedom" had never been a prevailing condition in most Kurdistan let alone Cizre, except the two years of Turkish non-interference during the peace process, locals commonly believed that surveillance had never been this out-of-control, most obviously visible in pitch-dark.

Eventually, a close friend, a math teacher and the son of our next-door neighbor, convinced me that I needed to see it all with my own eyes. We met on a crisp November evening to take a stroll towards Birca Belek Park. There were four regular pedestrian checkpoints on the thirty-minute-route between my house and Birca Belek, which we both knew how to circumvent, but it was common for the police to randomly set up additional checkpoints at night. After fighting our way through a random checkpoint ("we are going to the greengrocer, officer"), and then through another one ("we are going to the sweet shop, officer"), we found ourselves sitting on a bench facing the *Medresa Sor* (the Red Madrasa), an educational and religious complex believed to be built in the 15th century and the burial place of poet Melayê Cizîrî, a national treasure of Kurds. Visiting the *Medresa Sor* to pray for Melayê Cizîrî was a common ritual in Cizre. But my friend was in the mood for a chat that day:

> "Dear Melayê Cizîrî, please accept my apologies for not visiting you last week. We had intense rainfall that flooded your eternal resting place, but you probably already know this. Things have not changed much since we last talked. Your home is still under the occupation of a *millet* (nation) incapable of building a simple drainage system because they are too busy fearing us. They destroyed our neighborhoods, imprisoned thousands, but they still fear. I hope this is giving you some peace."

Three of us chatted for a few more minutes, then my friend and I left the *Medresa Sor*. As we were nearing Birca Belek, he reminded me that we needed to stop by the liquor store. Here is why: Once a site of political expression and forever a symbol of Cizre's cultural history, Birca Belek was now one of the most controlled areas in the town. Both entrances of the park were guarded by scores of policemen and armored vehicles. My friend thought carrying alcohol would help us project an image of two lovers in need of sanctuary from the scrutinizing gaze of our society, arguably a reason why Cizrean youth were in the habit of frequenting Birca Belek, though the main reason was proving that they still could. When we arrived, a police officer told us to stand in line behind a few young men and two teenage boys, all waiting to play their part in a ridiculous theater of police state.

The queueing took a while, during which the police manhandled a youngster for mumbling his answers. Then it was our turn. An officer checked our citizenship ID-cards, body-searched my friend, told me to empty my pockets, and peaked into the fully opaque plastic bag known colloquially as alcohol bag (*alkol torbasi*). Another officer was video recording the scene from a few meters away, when a third one approached and asked what we were doing there. I let my friend do the talking. He explained that it was a simple night, nothing extraordinary: "we just thought it would be nice to sit in the fresh air by the water." The officer asked for information regarding our occupation and the nature of our relationship. Fortunately for us, we came prepared with a well-rehearsed story: my friend was a teacher, I was in between jobs, we met in college, and we were now engaged. The officer looked at me for a good ten seconds. He glanced at my ring finger (I was wearing my friend's wife's ring) before he asked, "do you live in Cizre?" I said I did not, I was just visiting. "Are you staying with your fiancé?" I said of course not, I was staying with his relatives. In his next turn-at-talk the officer didn't bother addressing

me directly: “where does she normally live?” My friend answered: “Izmir, she lives there with her family.” This part was mostly true. My parents did live in Izmir, a metropolitan city in western Turkey, where I was registered as a voter.

Though irritating, the fact that the officer chose to direct his last question to my friend was a good sign. It showed that he believed our story, that we were engaged, given that he switched back to the “proper” interactional etiquette. One of my first lessons in Kurdistan was the pragmatic value of interactional etiquettes, which was a lesson not so much about conformity with societal norms but the prevailing logic of the communicative economy of Kurdish public life. For women, an appearance of conformity had certain consequences. It could signal, depending on one’s addressee, virtuousness, docility, or subjugation to gendered hierarchies and thus being no trouble to anyone. An appearance of nonconformity had its own functions as well. And that nonconformity served these functions was linked to the way people perceived it as signaling a certain ethical history.

Living in Kurdistan, I could see that the Kurdish women’s movement (*KJK*, *Komalên Jinên*, in Turkish, *kadin hareketi*), a distinct organization within the PKK, had a clear, hard-to-question power in social life – even at a time its activities were virtually frozen. The KJK considers gender inequality to be a key ethical issue, considered an arena for ethical self-fashioning, for reflecting on how one should live and how one’s living concerns and affects others, thus challenging the routine everyday indexing of women’s subordination across all domains of common sociality (Cağlayan 2012). In terms of party politics, for instance, the KJK has lobbied for a quota principle (40% since 2015) and a co-chair system wherein all leadership positions are shared by a man and a woman. In its more everyday forms, the KJK movement politicizes the co-indexicality of gender and language (*e.g.*, Ochs 1992) and the social

"voicelessness" of women (Schäfers 2018). It considers "subordination" a gender role performed in interaction and "appropriateness" a device of patriarchal power, and argues that customary codes of behavior regarding women need to be challenged. As the impact of the KJK movement on Kurdish social organization has reached palpable levels, so has the group's metapragmatic salience within the state's security apparatus. For this reason, on the night when my friend and I went to Birce Belek, had my behavior seemed in nonconformity with what was deemed "appropriate" of women, it would have been readily available to the police as a sign of my commitment to a certain ideology, and thus to the PKK.

Put differently, making a choice between "conformity versus nonconformity," thus set within its political meta-frame, was a way to make sensible the very "face-work" that went into it (Goffman 1967: 5). With face-work, following Goffman, I mean the multifarious use of communicative signs by which the actor conducts herself and communicates her "line" (where she stands), as well as her commitment to that line. In this relation, the question of "conformity versus nonconformity" lent itself to the communicative economy of Kurdish public life, precisely for enabling the recognition by others of the intentions, values, and character of the nonconformist. If I had insisted on an appearance of nonconformity, the police officer might have taken my insistence as a hint as to its political roots and purpose. Such insistence, in other words, would have afforded a distinct kind of stance-taking which I was willing to let pass. At the same time, my explicit obscuring of a commitment that the police officer possibly presumed that I implicitly harbored within me was all that mattered to the state's security apparatus. One primary function of the ID-checks, for the Turkish state, was making Kurds trade an opportunity to take an active stance with an ability to go about their normal daily routine. For Kurds, it was

watching the state floundering at a corner of insecurity, having to content itself with but temporary wins.

Over time, experiencing and witnessing moments like this allowed me to gain a revealing insight into the state's security apparatus, that is, when the interactivity between everyday life and the security apparatus increases to such levels, so does the semiotic density and intertextuality of the latter. With density and intertextuality, I mean the thick textual groundedness of the Turkish security apparatus within the communicative economy of the Kurdish everyday. Similar though not entirely identical insights were also available to my interlocutors, who were ongoingly drawing valuable lessons from their encounters with the police, from having to stop at multiple checkpoints even on a short half an hour drive or walk. I argue that these encounters afforded my interlocutors endless possibilities to deal with the pragmatic life of "surveillance," with the rigorous indexicality of the forms and modes of signification that in turn made "surveillance" legible. Indeed, one important lesson drawn from these encounters was the distinct significance to the state's security apparatus of Kurds' movements within Kurdistan (I will come back to this point shortly). Another lesson was about the vital role "face-to-face interaction" played as a preeminent site of surveillance and control. Most of the time, the state did not look for any specific information. The state looked for opportunities to have a quick face-to face confrontation with Kurds. This latter lesson itself had two important implications.

First, it allowed my friends and neighbors to realize that information was practice before it was content. An ID-check was essentially a conversation between a state actor and a Kurdish actor, shaped by a "semiotic ideology" (Keane 2003: 419, 2018) that turned certain behavioral cues into signs that were *functionally* information. "Semiotic ideology" is a concept developed

by Webb Keane that turns on the actor's capacities for doing interpretative work. "Semiotic ideology" refers to readily-available "assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world" (Keane 2003: 419) as well as about "what consequences [signs] might or might not produce" (Keane 2018: 65).[10] In other words, it refers to the rigorous indexicality of an individual's interpretive work, both grounded in *and* oriented to its own metapragmatic setting: an awareness of the Turkish state's semiotic reflexes was necessary for a Kurdish woman to tell that the difference between "a backpack" and "a handbag" was essentially a difference of a semiotic nature, indexical of "being political" or "being no trouble," respectively. Put another way, sign-information might have intrinsic denotative properties, which nevertheless revealed so little to the actor about the semiotic challenges communicative moments posed to her capacities, as well as autonomy, as an information-bearing subject.

Second, the routine experience of ID-checks also prompted the recognition of behavioral cues as *devices* of the actor's face-autonomy, or interactional autonomy: "the state affirms the *face* and *line* that I make the state affirm." This recognition became possible, as Kurds were gleaning the ways their behavioral dispositions and choices were key to their capacities to apprehend and act in ways sensible to the demands of the communicative moment.

From-Within-Ness

The fact that broader ethical and political commitments were in constant conflict with the possibility of going about normal daily life was a source of major worry for my interlocutors. The conflict was so intrinsic to everyday life and the worry was so real that the cumulative effect

[10] "Semiotic ideology" in important respects follows from Michael Silverstein's "linguistic ideology" (Silverstein 1979), that is, "any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use."

was best explained as a life "not-normal" ("*ne birêzikiye"*), and no amount of going about normal could make that life, well, not not-normal. An attention to this "not-normal" certainly included a critical reassessment of the communicative context. This chapter aims to accomplish an ethnography of this reassessment, but let's begin with thinking about the from-within-ness of the clash.

There are many ways people can express a commitment or register a stance. At times, this stance-taking involves making moral-political statements that are anchored to a set of underlying principles such as equality, justice, or solidarity. For instance, one could say that they support abortion, or that they support the right of Kurdish citizens in Turkey to education in mother-tongue. At other times, it is done by taking action, such as joining an organization working to improve women's access to abortion, or organizing rallies to raise awaraness about Kurds' plight for education in mother-tongue.

But in a more general, everyday sense, and given the circumstances of the political context, my interlocutors would often register their stances *figuratively* as quick, routine, and somewhat understated achievements, such as compulsively white lying to the state, telling to a police officer at a checkpoint that you are going to dentist, while you are going to a friend's house, and thus undermining his authority, at least in your mind, and in front of your friends who are there with you to witness this moment of small rebellion. There were of course many points of articulation between different ways of taking a stance, and one particular instance of stance-taking might be active or figurative depending on its reception. Consider the following story of two school-age siblings, relayed to me by their father: Asmin, a ten-year old girl and a fourth grader, was given a school project. She was to pick a country that started with the letter "S," paint its flag on a paper, and prepare a short presentation on the country's geography and

climate. Having a hard time deciding, Asmin approached her brother for help. When the two siblings did some research on the internet, they made an interesting discovery: the Senegalese flag was conspicuously reminiscent of various different flags of Kurds, with which both were familiar from demonstrations, protests, and public celebrations.



Figure 13: The Senegalese flag (lower right) together with Kurdish flags.

With her brother's encouragement, the fourth grader decided to prepare a presentation on Senegal. Before starting her presentation, she showed her classmates the country's flag and then asked them to pass it around in the classroom. While the whole class minus the teacher were breaking into giggles, Asmin maintained a solemn expression, as if there was something really grave about Senegal's tropical climate. The adults learned all this later from the teacher, a young Turkish man from Ankara, who thankfully handled the situation confidentially, showing due regard for his student's safety and anonymity. The two siblings nevertheless insisted that they had no hidden agenda, explained how it was not their fault Senegalese had a flag like that, and accused the teacher of discriminating against the African country.

The fact that two children, one ten years old and the other only a few years older, had the knowledge and behavioral skills to effectively navigate the semiotic and practical intricacies of their situation was itself noteworthy, but also revealing of the dynamics of the common ground that socialized children into this kind of competence – a competence in maintaining one's interactive autonomy by way of drawing on semiotic resources and the broader context in which those resources gain their social meanings. Ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel gives us a helpful account of "autonomy," more precisely, an account of how autonomy looks like in the normative side of things:

> "[S]ociality consists of the person's assumption that some characteristic disparity exists between the "image" of himself that he attributes to the other person as that person's knowledge of him, and the knowledge that he has of himself in the "eyes" of the other person. He assumes too that alterations of this characteristic disparity remain within his autonomous control. The assumption serves as a rule whereby the everyday theorist groups his experiences with regard to what goes properly with whom… [T]he events of everyday situations are informed by this integral background of "meanings held in reserve," of matters known about self and others that are none of somebody else's business; in a word, the private life" (Garfinkel 1967: 275–276).

Of course, no social actor can fully know the others' "image" of the actor, she cannot really "see" herself in the "eyes" of the other person, and no matter how laboriously she tries to guard her autonomy, she cannot stop others from making undue claims on her meaning reserves. In their quest for the normative grounds of everyday sociality, ethnomethodologists' interest lies in the ways actors nonetheless believe in their capacities as autonomous subjects – that they can smooth over the impossibilities of intersubjectivity. This smoothing over is possible, because only the actor can truly know, by the end of the day, who she really is in "the private." In Kurdistan, on the other hand, the mere fact that Kurds might have some "meanings held in

reserve" itself was a problem, and never nobody else's business, which afforded further weight to the impossibilities of intersubjectivity.

Take the following example. Soon after I moved to Cizre in 2018, I met Recep, a nineteen-year-olds young man from Güçlükonak district of Sirnak, about one and a hour north of Cizre, which was known as the only predominantly pro-state area in Sirnak Province. Recep's entire family and kin was in Güçlükonak, while Recep was living in Cizre with a few highschool friends, all working as laborers in construction sites. Unlike his friends, who had been in Cizre for a few years, Recep was new in the town, but he was already missing his comfort back at home as well as his mother's cooking. And yet, Recep had no plans or hopes to return back home. As he explained to me, Recep had not chosen freely but felt forced to move to Cizre as "the situation back at home was not good," where Recep was not going to be able to have a normal, peaceful life. Why? Because Recep, a skinny and at first sight quite a shy boy from a poor family of nine, got himself in trouble with Bahattin Aktug, the head of the Güçlükonak Office of Erdogan's AKP, and the leader of *eşîré Haruna,* the *Haruna* tribe, which had a force of about six hundred village-guards. Okay, but how did that even happen? One day, about a month before the 24 June 2018 Parliamentary elections, Recep walked into a men's teahouse in the town center of Güçlükonak, looking for his father. As soon as he walked in, he noticed a group of men carrying Kalashnikovs, which led Recep to conclude that they must be village-guards from the *Haruna* tribe. He then saw Bahattin Aktug himself, surrounded by his tribesmen who were acting like Aktug's bodyguards. Recep was puzzled. What was a tribal leader of such high caliber doing in a random teahouse? But then he remembered that the general election was happening very soon. Bahattin Aktug, Recep thus concluded, must be there to campaign for the

approaching election, talking to citizens to make sure that they would all vote for Erdogan's AKP.

Recep, having no interest in getting involved in any of that, turned around to leave, but before he was able to reach to the door, one of Bahattin Aktug's tribesmen noticed him: "*Lo* (an exclamation to call men in Kurdish, "*le*" is used for women), boy, come here." Recep did as told. "We are from the Güçlükonak Office of the AKP, *Baho Agha* (*agha* means tribal leader and *Baho* is an abbreviation of Bahattin) is here to listen to the citizens." Recep nodded his head and slowly approached Baho Agha, who greeted Recep, told him to come and sit, and then asked Recep about his tribe. *Goyî*, Recep answered, which is a tribe with one half affiliated with the PKK and the other half with the Turkish state. Baho Agha nodded his head but did not make any comment on the topic. After a short pause, he then asked Recep which political party he was planning to vote for. Recep looked at Baho Agha, took a deep breath, and said that he did not want to answer. One of Baho Agha's men intervened and told Recep to tell Baho Agha which party he was planning to vote for. Recep, once again, refused to share the name of the party that he was supporting, which was the pro-Kurdish HDP, and went on to explain, with a confidence and courage that he had never felt before, that every decision about voting, including whether to share one's vote with other people or not, was to be left entirely to the individual discretion of the voter. "This is how things work in democracies," Recep said, "there is a reason why we are casting our votes secretly."

The rest was chaos. A few men roughly dragged Recep outside, yelled at him for a bit, while Baho Agha angrily left the scene. The same day, a group of men from the Haruna tribe came to Recep's house and talked to Recep's father, who tried to diplomatically solve the issue, promising the men that his entire family was supporting the AKP. But the men wanted Recep to

express his support too, and not only in private, but by becoming a party member. Recep refused to do that. That night, after the men left, his father beat Recep very badly for allowing those men to come to their house to begin with. After realizing that his son would not give up, or give in, he changed his tactic, trying to appeal to Recep's reason: "My son, don't turn this into a thing, you can always vote for the HDP, you just need to say you voted for the AKP, the whole family does the same thing." Recep refused again. Going through a phase of his life in which he was socializing into the principles and demands of Kurdish political movement, Recep was adamant about never hiding his true identity, feelings, and commitments. All this went on for another two weeks, with more men coming into their house, more and more serious threats, more beatings, and constant fights with kin members. Recep finally realized that he had to leave Güçlükonak. He packed a small bag of personal belongings and left his hometown before he got the chance to cast his vote. When I asked Recep whether he considered the whole ordeal as a victory on his part or a defeat, he said it was a defeat:

> "I could not vote for the Kurds in the end, yes, I stood up, but in the end my father voted, my mother voted, my siblings voted, and they all voted for the HDP, but I couldn't… I don't know, maybe I did the wrong thing… I guess what you do makes no difference, if luck (*bext*) is not on your side, you can try and try and it makes no difference."

I return to the theme of *bext* shortly, in the second half of this chapter, now I want to stress Recep's evaluation of his situation as defeat. Indeed, for many in Kurdistan, including Recep's entire family, the possibility of victory, the possibility, in other words, of finding a way to realize one's private wishes, especially if those wishes in some capacity concerned the Kurdish political reality, lied in caution and making the right use of interactional affordances. It was essential for Kurds, put another way, to realize themselves through guided, sensible displays

of "having no meaning held in reserve," "no hidden agenda," precisely to maintain a level of autonomy such that they still had some room left to avoid unintended consequences and maintain a degree of control over the situation. Yet why should this be so?

The day I *faked* being a "well-behaved fiancé," I later complained to my friend about how frustrating the experience was. When the two children of the "Senegalese flag" story finally felt safe enough, meaning once the adults were not angered but rather amused by their arguably innocent ploy, Asmin's brother told his father that one day, he would take a *real* Kurdish flag to the class. Never were my interlocutors in peace with having to pass on a possibility of taking up a genuine stance, nor with the fact that their passing on would not bring them any permanent resolution. But such ethical compromises were still commonplace. The fact that the pragmatic stakes for Kurds of not-compromising were very high surely helped compel their decisions to compromise, but what turned "compromising" into such a common thread was the Turkish state's relentless unraveling from-within.

ID-checks were one example of how this unraveling became for Kurds a practical reality. The formal schooling of Kurdish children in state-run educational institutions was another. Here is a third example: For 134 days between March 14 to July 26, 2016, Nusaybin, a Kurdish town 100 kilometers west of Cizre and another political stronghold, lived under round-the-clock curfew. Only lifted at brief intervals to let civilians escape, the curfew allowed Turkish special forces, supported by the military, to conduct hundreds of operations. At the end, six of its fifteen neighborhoods, which made nearly half of Nusaybin, were fully destroyed. The entire area was later expropriated by the government, on which the Housing Development Administration (*TOKI*) immediately started to erect about a hundred multi-story buildings, all exactly and hauntingly looking the same. In lieu of their destroyed homes, residents had the option to get a

new flat in these developments or stand-alone houses mirroring traditional structures in a "special area" (*özel bölge*) outside of Nusaybin. Nobody was happy with either choice. Reservations were many, and not just that residents were being made to pay additional fees for apartments too small to accommodate large Kurdish families anyway. Had these been the only concerns of my interlocutors, I suppose, the choice to move into the new apartments or not would have been a more straightforward, simple one, because the alternative was either continuing to live with relatives, which was not a sustainable choice, or paying rent for the rest of their lives, which, again, was not something that they could afford in the long term. But there were other worries, too. Many of my interlocutors were, of course, also ongoingly debating whether their official reconciliation with the state would be tantamount to betraying Kurdish fighters killed during the clashes. An equally pressing worry was that everyone knew leaving previous life patterns was going to have its consequences on local politics and social life.

Prior to the security operations, traditional neighborhoods located in big Kurdish towns and cities were instrumental to Kurdish mass organization. Especially with the emergence of self-governance (*öz yönetim*) in the early-2010s as a salient method of conducting Kurdish public, it became impossible to disconnect everyday politics from neighborhoods and traditional patterns of sociality. The neighborhoods where Kurdish political movement enjoyed a strong support base were mostly populated by working-class Kurds of the same or friendly tribes, located at the outskirts of urban centers. They were formed during the 1990s by internally displaced Kurds who were forced out of their villages by Turkish armed forces, like my neighborhood in Cizre. Houses were one-story or two-story small buildings, built by the house owners themselves over the course of the years, and lined up along narrow streets that connected to one another by tiny alleys. Indeed, walking through these neighborhoods felt like entering into

a labyrinth of alleys, where a swarm of children would run around from dusk to dawn. In the neighborhoods, crowded with large Kurdish families who were loyal to one another, the residents enjoyed a unique sense of community and privacy that was not possible in town or city centers, or even in villages which were scarcely populated by older folks. In certain respects, the residents were able to turn those neighborhoods into Turkish-state free zones, covering the walls of the houses and shops with graffitis and writings supportive of the PKK and the HDP, organizing weddings and gatherings where they shouted slogans and chanted guerrilla-themed songs that one could not imagine to possibly utter, or even mutter, in city centers, in fact even in villages, which would feel quite vulnerable and open to outside intervention for being scarcely populated and by mostly old people.

The neighborhoods were also critical to the activities of the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (the *YDG-H, ciwanen Kurdan*) – a militant youth group designated by the Turkish state as a subgroup of the PKK – that took the center stage in efforts to promote self-governance with a particular emphasis on self-defense. If anything, neighborhoods were the group's shelter, as residents would provide their houses to youth militants as tactical resources for protection and movement (Darıcı 2016). When, in 2016, the government began its operations against these militants, houses were again pivotal to the organization of Kurdish resistance. During fieldwork, I visited Nusaybin multiple times and conducted interviews with locals regarding their tactical support of the youth. A big majority told me it was voluntary. Some admitted that there was perhaps "a lack of choice," though the government's theory that the PKK was "punishing non-supporters" was not correct. Surely, the lived reality was way more complicated. A local man talked about his experience as follows:

> "At the beginning of the operations, I opened my house [to the youth] voluntarily, because I supported them. Then clashes turned really violent. I said [to

> the youth], 'I can't do this, it is too dangerous.' They said, 'we need your house.' They said, 'we are in a war now.' It did not feel like I had a choice, so I said, 'keep the house then.' I took my family with me and left Nusaybin. But if you are asking 'was it coercion?,' no, it wasn't coercion (*kotekî*). It was necessary (*mecbûrî*)."

I want to open a parenthesis here as this answer draws on an important aspect of ethical life, that it is deeply social and that it finds expression in specific social circumstances, thus giving expression to the very circumstances that also prompted it. Note, to begin with, that the Kurdish word this interlocutor used for "coercion," *kotekî,* indicates an external force, even more specifically, a physical force that puts pressure on the actor to make him act in certain ways. *Kotekî,* therefore, tells us almost nothing about the connections between what is done out of coercion and the worries, commitments, ideologies, and social relations that guide the actor in everyday life. Whereas the word that he used for "necessary," *mecbûrî,* indicates an obligation with a social character, which could be understood as an obligation of moral nature, such as taking care of elders, or of political nature, such as the obligation to vote, which is also an obligation in Turkey of a legal nature, where citizens who choose not to vote are fined. In this particular case, the word *mecbûrî* meant that my interlocutor felt a strong moral obligation, but one that left him almost with no other choice, to leave his house to the youth fighters who needed it. He formulated his answer in such ways that situated his predicament – to leave or not to leave his house to the youth fighters – in relation to the unique social and ethical circumstances in which it was produced. Put another way, my interlocutor's explanation that it was not physical force but a necessity of a moral kind, and although the outcome in either case was going to be the same anyway, was quite revealing, defining the social

situation and the pragmatic context indexically elaborative of what he considered a necessity, and why it was a necessity.

Many in Nusaybin that I interviewed about the near destruction of the neighborhoods, moreover, saw the destruction as a desired result for the state, not an unintended consequence. The goal of the state, in this account, was to dismantle the patterns of sociality that gave form to Kurdish political activism and to re-design the collective space so as to make population management easier. Many saw the government's branding of the new housing developments as a "better Nusaybin," a shameful rebranding of their *raison d'être*: the enhanced clustering of the local population into massive buildings managed by the Turkish state, which meant for Kurds even greater surveillance than before. Understandably so, there was a lot of talk about the potential consequences of being exposed to the Turkish state in such ways. This was apparent, for instance, when Delîl, an electrician and a father of three, argued that the whole project was intended to tame and discipline Kurds, who were now compelled to assume a more organic role in the state's security apparatus:

> "Before the war, the state needed real spies, 'subjective spies,' as *serok* calls them.[11] Our neighborhoods were crowded, families were big, houses were nested. Unlike the Turkish militant-left, we did not have 'cell houses,' we had ordinary houses. We did not have a few lefties hiding in a cell, you know, like sacrificial lambs. We had sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, uncles, uncle's sons who protected one another. Turks were in need of spies to make sense of *that* life (*o hayati anlamak için*). We have a different life now. We are after all becoming roommates with the state (*eee devletle ev arkadaşıyız artik*). Do you know what this means? We will be hereafter unknowingly, like idiots, spying *on* ourselves *for* ourselves (*bundan sonra bilmeden, aptal gibi, kendimiz kendimize ajan olacagiz*)"

[11] "S*erok"* means "leader," a word Kurds only ever use to refer to Abdullah Öcalan, or they do not use it.

The way Delîl viewed it, the new housing developments inevitably fed into the operational principles of the state's surveillance machinery, into a communicative context wherein everything was visibly-reportable to the Turkish state. Now compare this to the old neighborhoods, which provided Kurds with somewhat of a safe zone wherein they did not feel constantly being watched, thus having to adopt their behaviors, everyday interactions, decisions, and how they wanted to live to the gaze of an outsider. I emphasize visibility and gaze, because the state's surveillance machinery hinged heavily on surface appearances, such that the overseen would have to give herself a verbal or embodied "shape" that would go well with the overseer – remember Recep, the young Kurdish man who was put under intense pressure to publicly declare his support to the AKP, while it was of pretty much no importance whether Recep "really" supported the AKP. All this shows that one of the most demanding and everyday aspects of Turkish rule in Kurdistan was that it made Kurds to bear the burden of a *life* that was continuously other-directed, a type of request itself made by the other.

Note, lastly, how Delîl ended his analysis of the situation: "we will be hereafter unknowingly, like idiots, spying *on* ourselves *for* ourselves." Clearly well-versed in Kurdish political discourse, Delîl was hinting at Öcalan's idea of "objective spy," conventionally defined as a Kurdish actor who internalizes and thus reproduces her subordinate position in society. But Delîl's account also makes two other, important arguments. First, it suggests that there is a phenomenological dimension to the idea of "objective spy" – a social category indexical of its experiential conditions. The life of Kurds, the argument goes, was hanged together in such ways that the possibility of reproducing one's subordination inflected every act of communication. Second, it shows that the figure of "objective spy" occupies, just like Kurdish tribes, two contradictory positions at the same time: the one who spies *on* herself and the one who is being

spied on *by* herself. Perhaps this is the reason why Kurds tend to attribute higher moral weight to the idea/figure of "objective spy" than that of "subjective spy." Because the former arguably does a better job in captioning its own situated reality vis-à-vis the metapragmatics of Turkish rule wherein "objective spy" is pragmatically functional. Put another way, an objective spy is the explicit, next-at-turn realization of the ongoing semiosis of Turkish [authoritarianism and indirect] rule. Also note how this next-at-turn realization has a double interactional function, observing and being observed, which suggests that the treatment *of* oneself *by* oneself as *observable* is formative to the authoritarian edifice in which one lives.

And yet, my ethnography is slowly building a third argument, that this double-position provides Kurds an occasion to experiment with an "otherwise." If observability is composed of bits of behavior subsequently channeled to the state, its "otherwise" derives from the possibility to "demonstrate that [*this* channeling] is simply one arrangement of many possible arrangements" (Povinelli 2014). This is why interactive autonomy, which often comes in Kurdistan at the expense of all sorts of other autonomies (like the moral autonomy of a woman), still matters, for it nevertheless allows some space for the otherwise to speak. In the rest of this chapter, I take up this "otherwise" not as a problem with a solution in the abstract, but as a possibility made to exist in communicative situations wherein Kurds realize and act on their observability. The point is to show how "observability," once it turns into an object of self-awareness, materializes and becomes *iconized* in how Kurds conduct themselves. But for present purposes, I should first answer the following question: Why did the movements of Kurds within Kurdistan have a distinct significance to the state's security apparatus?

The Tale of Two Sons

When Roza told me, "this is how life is here," it was a response to my question whether she had any regrets for resigning from her position. Instead of saying she did or did not have regrets, she gave me a third response that at the very least implied regret was intrinsic to the situation – her life. Regret, unlike guilt, philosopher Bernard Williams notes (1981: 169 – 170), is born of situations wherein two commensurable desires find themselves in conflict. If there is no resolution, the unsatisfied, rejected desire then "reappears in the form of a regret for what was missed." Now, we may well ask, following Williams's definition of regret, why were such irresolvable conflicts of desire an intrinsic part of Roza's life?

In this case, the unsatisfied desire for Roza was the desire to provide for her family. Had Roza conformed to the PKK's ideal of "new personality," most strictly promoted in the 1990s, she could have perhaps solved the conflict by recasting her desire as false-belief, or more to the point, false consciousness. "New personality," theorized by Abdullah Öcalan (1983), laid out the necessity for Kurds to renounce feudal and family ties, and live outside of the taken-for-granted norms of their society (Grojean 2014). In lieu of "kinship," the PKK offered the organizational maxim of "friendship" (*hevaltî*) – the party's political language, for instance, contains no separate word for "comrade" which is simply "friend" (*heval*). When applied with doctrinal obsession, "new personality," aiming to drew *heval*s into a new intimacy antithetical to the old form, would often create suspicion towards the relational other: "Did she really leave the family behind?"[12] Yet overall, it can be said that "new personality" did not hold much in Kurdish society let alone for Roza. Because, as the editors of *The Intimate Life of Dissent* put it,

[12] This was apparent, for instance, when a former guerrilla fighter explained his insomnia to me as follows: "In the mountains, you live with a fear of Turkish soldiers but also of your *heval*s. You always think, 'is he really what he claims he is, is he really a *heval*?' So, you only ever sleep so lightly, always ready for a betrayal."

"intimacy is precisely the area where [people] seem to have least control over the *shape* [their] lives take" (emphasis mine, Amarasuriya et. al. 2020: 8). This reading directly follows from Laurent Berlant's eloquent formula: "'I didn't think it would turn out this way' is the secret epitaph of intimacy… [which] involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both one and others that will turn out in a particular way" (Berlant: 1998: 281). Though nobody did really anticipate this, the story of Kurdish political reality turned out to be a story about the Kurdish family.

I first recognized the key aspects of this story in the methodology of my ethnography. After conducting preliminary research in various locations across Kurdistan, I started my long-term fieldwork in Bahçesaray, lived there until the beginning of the second year of my fieldwork, and then moved to Cizre, from which I regularly traveled to Nusaybin. I also conducted fieldwork in the city of Van, the provincial capital, as well as in Özalp and Gürpinar, two other districts of Van Province. While at no point in the preliminary phase had I made the decision to pursue a multi-sited research, nor had I presumed it was going to be a "classic" single-sited one, anthropologists would most likely describe my research as one of these rather than the other. Not that I have an issue with the coinage "multi-sited ethnography" as a way to collapse distinctions altogether (Latour 1987), or as a new way to describe them (Marcus 1995, Pedersen 2013). I certainly had multiple field-sites, I lived in different places, and I moved around a lot. Indeed, being present in every out-of-town event – funerals, weddings, or court hearings – was an important part of my ethnographic personality: my "strategically deployed self" (Goodall 2000: 68). As a police commissioner who was terrifyingly well-informed about my travels once said, it looked like I was either up to something, or I was Erdoğan's campaign tour bus. For my

interlocutors, on the other hand, my mobility was only expected, as they themselves also lived the same way.

What guided me to frequently change my location was a combination of two things. First, it was a concern for the safety of my interlocutors; the longer I stayed in the same location, the more suspicious my presence looked to the Turkish state. Second, it was a certain concern of my interlocutors with "absences," more precisely, with the way an awareness of "absent others" would lead to concomitant reflexivities towards whereabouts, movements, and connections. If I wanted to understand the question of "absent others," and how these absences materialized as sedimentations of their own effects on social life, changing locations was the *only* way to do anthropology. In the end, therefore, not a particular methodological approach but a purpose gave my ethnography its unity, which was not the unity of a unit-based fieldwork, but the unity of a family unit. But why were these people absent to begin with?

In simplest terms, people were absent because they had chosen to live elsewhere, because where they used to live did not have a certain thing or it had a problem. Outward migration would commonly occur due to political violence, inter-group hostilities, economic hardships, or a general sense of hopelessness associated with the inside, or due to a perceived social reality that certain possibilities only ever existed outside: university education, political activism, seasonal or construction work, nicer homes, better infrastructure, modern hospitals, new reproductive technologies, or the promise of some independence. People would also leave their hometowns not necessarily to leave, but to make enough money elsewhere to come back and build a new house for the family, or to fight in the mountains with the Kurdish guerrilla to come back with a better political future for the community. Many were absent, moreover, due to circumstances entirely out of their control. My host-family in Cizre, for instance, had all its male

members in a particular European country and the house next door in prison. My host-mother's husband and three sons fled Turkey between 2011 and 2016, or else they would share the same fate with the men of the family next door.

In a broader sense, spatial mobility was a necessary consequence of a set of socio-economic and political pressures that compelled Kurds to leave their homes. It was in equal terms a consequence of the fact that families and communities were increasingly living apart, whose best option to maintain kinship and tribal ties was to adopt a more mobile lifestyle. Xaltî Bese had all her children living outside of Bahçesaray for instance. Her three sons had moved to Van years ago, believing that there would be more work and more opportunities there. Her four daughters were also not in Bahçesaray. Three daughters moved away when they got married, because their husbands, like Xaltî Bese's sons, chose to live in big cities where they worked in construction. One daughter was in Diyarbakir and the other two were in Istanbul. Her fourth and youngest daughter, Zehra, about whom the reader will learn more in chapter five, who was also the only child with a university degree, was active in Kurdish politics, spending most of the year traveling between Van, Diyarbakir, and Ankara. Xaltî Bese thus spent at least one third of the year moving between the houses of her children, and this was similarly the case for many parents in Bahçesaray, especially mothers.

The necessity to move around a lot, for my interlocutors, was also a function of political governance and transformations in cultural patterns of living. Due to historical cycles of violence, displacement, and dispossession, as well as increasing urbanization and the fact that younger generations wanted to live in cities, almost every rural community had a portion of itself elsewhere in Kurdistan or western Turkey. In the city of Van, for instance, a whole new neighborhood emerged in the 2000s that felt like a reorganized replica of the valley I stayed in

Bahçesaray, which was located in the outskirts of Van. The houses in the new neighborhood were very similar in style and size to the houses in Bahçesaray, but they were relatively new, and had more reliable access to electricity and water. Every summer, villagers would go on a mass exodus to live in the city, and after a few months they would head back to Bahçesaray. They would do so, because summer months were a time when family members, who spent the year apart and busy, would come together and live as a single, huge family of sometimes thirty people, thanks to the number of grandchildren, and the limited, isolated village life in Bahçesaray, where even getting a phone signal was a problem, and mobile internet almost never worked, was not how younger members wanted to spend their summers. The exodus to Van would also open families to different economic ventures and partnerships as spatial nearness/farness of communities were shifting, which made moving to Van an entrepreneurial project in and of itself. The families who did not do that, who chose to spend their summers in Bahçesaray, would thus feel like they were missing out on something.

Sharing the world of daily life with my interlocutors, I could therefore clearly see that a certain structure was always present in these multi-local arrangements, which also drew Kurd into new modes of solidarity. Take my host-families in Cizre and Nusaybin. Both families were from the same tribe. Both were originally from the same village, situated about halfway between the two locations. Their paths diverged in 1993, however, when their village was evacuated by the Turkish armed forces and all the houses were burned down. My host-family in Cizre consisted of only women, except for one grandson. It consisted of my host-mother, Xaltî Hediye, her three daughters, and two grandchildren whose father, the husband of the oldest daughter, was also in Europe as a political refugee. While Xaltî Hediye had her three daughters by her side, her five other children were not living with her anymore. As was said, her three sons were all in

Europe, together with their father. Two daughters were married to the sons of my host-family in Nusaybin, thus living there. The host-family in Nusaybin consisted of twenty-one people – a father, a mother, three sons, three daughters-in-law, two daughters, and eleven grandchildren – who lived in the same four-story apartment block, with a total of four apartments and a grocery store run by the family. Despite the distance, these two families remained kin to one another, and not only because they shared blood and were paternal-uncles' sons and paternal-uncles' daughters to one another, hence inter-marriage. It was because neither side was ever in demand of being reminded of the existence of these substances and codes as the basis of their recruitment as kin members. Their vulnerabilities, desires, commitments, and wishes were all shared, therefore their need for one another was ever present. During the military operations in Cizre, for instance, the two families stayed together in Nusaybin, and when it was Nusaybin's turn, they stayed together in Cizre, except for the sons of the family in Nusaybin and one daughter, who stayed with other relatives, because Xaltî Hediye's house in Cizre could not accommodate that many people.

In general, my host-family in Nusaybin was doing much better than the one in Cizre, with more economic power and better living standards. One obvious reason was that Xaltî Hediye's husband, sons, and son-in-law were all in Europe, which meant for Xaltî Hediye and her daughters that they did not have someone at home with regular income. While the men of the family were all sending money back home from Europe, the money would not arrive on an irregular basis. As political fugitives, the men could not send money via banks or in any other official way. Not only that the money would possibly be confiscated by the Turkish state, but it would be taken as evidence that the women in Cizre were in contact with and informed about the men. The only way to send the money, therefore, was sending it through the same human

traffickers who had smuggled the men into Europe. But this was not the most reliable solution and sometimes it took months for the money to arrive. The other reason that the family in Cizre was struggling financially was that the job market in Cizre did not have many options for women, who were also paid one third of what men would be paid for the same kind of job in return for almost 12-hours shifts in grocery stores or bakeries. Xaltî Hediye's daughters couldn't work most of the year, occasionally finding temporary employment for a month or two, which paid so little in the end that the money would be gone in less than a few days.[13]

Though I never openly asked this to Xaltî Hediye, for it would not be appropriate, I was aware that the family in Nusaybin was economically supporting the family in Cizre. Whenever the two families came together, Xaltî Hediye would receive food, goods, and perhaps also money. A few times, I saw Xaltî expressing how none of that was not needed, or making a shy comment about feeling uncomfortable, and she always got the same response, that Xaltî Hediye's family made all the sacrifices for "our people," with her sons and husband having fought for the political cause, so it was the least that the family in Nusaybin could do to show their gratitude.

A single home, a single source of income, a single form of labor, all seemingly operating on a single organizational principle was thus just not enough for a single family to survive. In this relation, movement was not an act ("we are moving to the city"), nor even a process ("we are slowly making a move to the city"), but an event that occurred under certain circumstances. It

[13] Despite all this, whenever I bought the simplest thing, like a toothpaste or eggs, Xaltî Hediye would become really angry. And I could only show in the town center anyway, in big grocery stores, as most of the shop owners in our neighborhood knew me as "the guest," *mevan* in Kurdish, refusing to sell anything to me, on the direct request, of course, of Xaltî Hediye. The only thing that Xaltî allowed me to spend my money on were her two grandchildren, one five and the other 3 years old.

was also a category which helped Kurds interpret *separation* and *absence* as functions of a robust division of familial labor. Someone, ideally a man, had to leave and send money back home. Someone, ideally a woman, had to get on a payroll so as to link the family to the formal world of banking.[14] Someone had to stay behind and work the land, or run the family business. And someone had to fight. Realizing all this was a definite contribution to my ethnography of Roza's life. Yet the real insight was not that families were now cross-spatially distributing labor. It was that members, while doing what was needed of them, had a shared sense of how these necessities, even the most personal kind, were in fact embedded in the circumstances affecting the whole. If Kurdish existence was built on existing resources, the Kurdish family was the resources. An interlocutor, in a rare moment I was asked to record the conversation, explained to me this particular kind of "economizing" as follows:

> "Let me tell you a story. Once upon a time, there was a man who had two sons. One son was a hero; he died. One son was a coward; he lived and produced two sons. The truth is, one [of these sons] can be a coward again as long as the other continues the fight."
>
> *"Ezê ji ter qala çîrokekê bikim. Wextekî berê mirovek hebû, du lawikên wî hebû. Yek jê lehengbû, çû rehmetê. Yek jê jî tirsonekbû, ew jî du lawikên wî hebû. Bixwedê, ji wan lawika yek jê tirsonekbi jî bes yê din bila şer bidomîne."*

How do I interpret these words together with Roza's story and all the other observations that I have just relayed? At first, I was content with an analysis that took the political economy of Kurdistan as an *explanan* (that which explains itself). This was not even the rich, empirical

[14] The reason women were given this responsibility itself had a social history. Had it not been for the Kurdish women's movement, changing structures of value, and the fact that other trajectories of leaving home, such as construction work, were only available to men, there would not have been so many young women with a university degree. As it was conveniently assumed that women were to ultimately marry and thus join the forces of another family, most young women would pay their debt to the people who raised them all in one lump sum by taking out a bank loan.

analysis of the political economy of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict that Veli Yadirgi (2017) chronicles in a recent book, but a two-dimensional view of "the Kurdish family" as a product of poverty and war. Then, when I was rereading Andrew Shryock's review of Marshall Sahlins's *What is Kinship– and is not* (2013), a certain passage that I had previously overlooked got my attention:

> "… Sahlins tells us that 'mutuality of being among kinfolk declines in proportion to spatially and/or genealogically reckoned distance' (53). Why should this be? No attempt is made to explain the pattern, but a similar effect can be seen in relation to temporal distance. It would seem that much of what conventional kinship studies have described as the extension of kinship ties and terms is in fact an attempt to offset these spatiotemporal declines, to manage, officialize, or reverse them. Kinship, in this sense, becomes a special mode of travel, a way to engineer secure landscapes and reliable histories" (Shryock: 2013: 278).

The connection between this passage and my ethnography was initially not the most obvious, but it still got me thinking: Had all that the Kurdish family been was but a necessary refuge from the dictates of poverty and war, it would have merely functioned in society as a traditional contract to which Kurds were obligated. But neither poverty nor war, nor the actual decisions, worries, regrets, strategies, and connectedness of people who lived with these realities, could adequately be represented in the idiom of "traditional contract."

As I kept reflecting on "the tale of two sons," Roza's regret, and the relationship between my host-families in Cizre and Nusaybin, three sign-using occasions in which "family" was evoked relative to its metapragmatic formulation, quite a different view of family that which is more akin to Shryock's definition emerged: a socio-biological affordance taken up by Kurds to "engineer secure landscapes and reliable histories." Moreover, it seems a particular ethical inconsistency finds its sensible form in "family" and thus become available to Kurds as an

intimately relevant semiotic feature of their social existence: for every guerrilla fighter, Kurds have to *procreate* a "coward," and every legitimate desire is conditioned by a compromise that falls upon one's relational others. For my interlocutors, these were costly yet nevertheless helpful lessons about life, allowing them to empirically philosophize "inconsistency" and thus regret as important semiotic features of their moral habitus.

Anxious Movements

No matter how distant, home is always home. Although, as was said, more than half the youth of Bahçesaray were living elsewhere either most or at least half the year, these people would never stop calling their village home. My host family in Bahçesaray was an old couple who lived alone in a two-story house, as their three sons and four daughters all had left the village some years ago. In many ways, the children were all very much present by their absence. My host-mother would spend a few hours of her day on the phone, calling each one of her children separately and daily to inform them on village affairs. Five out of seven lived within a few hours of drive, which meant they had to show up at funerals and weddings. All still voted in the village and most (if not all) regularly sent money back home which was kept by the father as "mattress savings" to continue purchasing land. In other words, they contributed substantially to the finances and operations of what I sometimes choose to call the *Firm* – like the royal family of Great Britain.

In Bahçesaray, the economies of these Firms were variously adapted to the remoteness of the town, and they operated with a very specific multi-location business model. The search for economic improvement would first start in the city of Van, where family members looked for a product that was either in short supply or more expensive in Bahçesaray. All three sons of my host-family were making money this way, by transporting something from outside to the inside.

Yusuf, the oldest son, had a career in cross-border cigarette commerce that spanned from Iran, where cigarettes were cheaper, to Bahçesaray, though he would complain how the market had become far more competitive. The middle son was in the trade of construction materials. The youngest son was helping his brothers, but other ideas would constantly catch his eyes.

A good friend from our village, Ahmet, was also working in my host-family's cigarette business – he was the one running the operations in Bahçesaray. Once a week, Ahmet would pick two massive boxes from the post-office filled with cartons of cigarettes and hand them out to the villagers across the valley. There was only one post-office in Bahçesaray, operated by the national post and telegraph directorate of Turkey (*PTT*). Ahmet was openly distrustful of the post-office staff, alleging the staff to be government spies. According to Ahmet, they were working as police informers. Ahmet would usually allow me to accompany him to the post-office, but each time I had to listen to him instructing me on interactional etiquette: "don't ever help me carry the boxes, they will think you are political." The hardest etiquette for me to master was silence, however:

> Ahmet: Don't talk until we leave the post-office, your Turkish is very good, they will know you are educated.
>
> Özge: Can I speak in Kurdish?
>
> Ahmet: God, no! Please no Kurdish. Your Kurdish is weird, they will know you are not from around here.
>
> Özge: Doesn't everybody already know I am not from around here?
>
> Ahmet: Just don't speak. Your Kurdish is not like you were raised in a village. It is as if you had been raised in the west [side of Turkey], not talked Kurdish much until you started college where you gained an awareness about the issue ("the issue" being linguistic rights).
>
> Özge: It is not *as if*. That is exactly what happened.
>
> Ahmet: Well, the police won't like that, they will think, "this girl is from the organization (*örgüt*, meaning the PKK) and she is in Bahçesaray to mobilize (*örgütlemek*) villagers." Then they will suspect we are transporting explosives or something.
>
> Özge: Okay, I won't speak a word.
>
> Ahmet: Good.

Many in Bahçesaray agreed with Ahmet. Although none ever showed me any solid evidence, my interlocutors would nonetheless liberally accuse the post-office staff of systematically collecting information on townspeople. That it just made a lot of sense to them was all the explanation I was given, and it really did make a lot of sense.

The post-office was the most critical node to other nodes of a vast network of rural connectedness. The staff*, if* they had actually been spying on locals, knew everything about who was bringing what through whom and in what quantities to Bahçesaray. They also had access to other valuable information. Women collected social welfare aid and child-support from the post-office. Parents sent allowance and clothes to their children schooling away from the post-office. Walnut farmers dispatched their produce to distributors again from the post-office. Gifts and purchases from outside of Bahçesaray were all delivered to the post-office. Since the only ATM of the town was attached to the post office, families financially supported by absent members would have to go there to withdraw money. Ultimately, the post-office was a key place that townspeople who were in the trade of goods and news, anyone with formal connections to the welfare system, and everyone with material connections to absent others would have to frequent to be able to continue their dealings.

The individual cases – the individual dealings of people in and through the post-office – were quite varied as they each were practically a personal story, but what matters for my present purposes is that all of these cases stress how information was not merely equal to its substance. Information was the Turkish state's way of taking stock of the Kurdish social world. Second, the state had a disposition to view Kurds' interpersonal undertakings as jointly-motivated and quite likely "malevolent." As must be clear, this disposition had the effect of identifying "family" and "familial ties" as security concerns, but other forms of intimacy, such as friendship, were also a

target. And third, the state's attention to intimate ties and relations, as if they all represented a concerted action, effectively transmuted information into an assemblage – a bunch of acts and peoples – and the security apparatus into a machine tasked to assemble suspicion. If the police were not meticulous about creating information with real substance, that was because they did not need real criminals, just suspicion.

Here is an example: Following the military operations, Cizre, Nusaybin, and many other Kurdish cities and neighborhoods experienced a "construction boom" with its exploitative conditions. Scores of young men from across Kurdistan labored in new housing projects, including the youth of Bahçesaray. This was seasonal work, carried out over a few months and then laborers would return back home. The problem was that young men traveling together were generally flagged by the police and subjected to extra security measures. The police had full discretion when it came to young men: they could search their bags and bodies and demand access to their phones, contacts, and social media accounts. The simplest things would arouse suspicion: carrying a piece of paper with a name and phone number, looking too frail or too educated to be a laborer, or *not* having a Facebook account as if to deliberately keep "the private," one's meaning reserves, from the Turkish state. Traveling together, each young man had to be socially trained and individually prepared to fudge the unknowables of such situations for everyone to be able to walk away.

Of course, a degree of unknowability is put in place already by the ordinary difficulties of life, difficulties that nonetheless feel sensible to actors. Despite these unknowables, as ethnomethodologists insist, every social situation is characterized by a search for its organization and meaning, and every social context is built up of procedures, insights, and practices that allow actors to presume that they can *correctly* interpret a given situation (Garfinkel 1967). Garfinkel

calls this presumption the “et cetera principle” (Garfinkel 1963, see also Sacks 1963), which refers to the actor’s confidence in her own preparedness to reason for a situation, that she has an “initial advantage” (Sacks 1963: 6), thus glossing over the unknowables – the et cetera part. In Kurdistan things were not quite the same, and this sort of confidence would often indicate that the actor was insufficiently cautious for two primary reasons: first, because the pragmatic stakes of “getting it wrong” were really high; second, because the whole project of “getting it right” was compromised by luck from almost the very start.

Consider the following example: In a village somewhere in Kurdistan, an old woman got critically ill yet refused medical intervention. The woman lived with her husband, and the couple’s four children and fifteen grandchildren in the city. Over the next few days after learning of the situation, the woman’s family traveled to the village as discreetly as possible. Four grandsons decided to travel together (strike one) and one insisted on borrowing a car from a friend (strike two). Yet the car broke down an hour from the village, and as the boys were pushing it off the road, a police vehicle passed by. The police officers noticed something completely missed out on by the officers at an earlier checkpoint, that the vehicle’s license had expired, of which the boys were completely unaware (strike three). This discovery lent the whole situation an air of suspicion and thus made the boys panic, who realized that they were a group of young men in rural Kurdistan with a vehicle that none possessed. It took the police threats and some bullying, but the boys eventually “confessed” the real purpose of their trip, and this was how the Turkish state found out about the big secret that had been right under its nose for almost a week. But why should this be a secret? Because the sick woman had one more child who was a guerrilla fighter. The Turkish state liked to be informed about the health and death of the parents of guerrillas, assuming their children would try to see or call their loved ones one last time.

When the woman passed away, her body was taken to a nearby mosque, surrounded by scores of policemen in protective tactical vests, and an armored vehicle remained on the country road for another month, monitoring every traffic flow in and out of her village.

As typical cautionary tales, this and the previous example also demonstrate that assembling suspicion was in essence a semiotic activity. At its very core, suspicion was an effect of the Turkish state's disposition to apprehend signs as surface appearances, which was the primary semiotic ideology of the security apparatus. Even more specifically, suspicion emerged at the confluence of particular ideas about Kurdish sociality, and an apprehension of "luck" as a mediating step between truth and its accidental revelation. The Turkish police commonly assumed that Kurds were always up to something and thus were always in the midst of covering up for themselves. This assumption played a key role in the semiotic mediation of suspicion, leading the police to a search of signs that were left behind by luck – or by mistake, negligence, laxity, and sometimes even stupidity. Conversely, what explicitly looked like a mistake, negligence, or carelessness – the unintended consequence – was implicitly performative of its specific "addressivity" (*sensu* Bakhtin 1986): its orientation to a particular recipient, in this case, the Turkish state. This addressivity of luck, that luck always found its way to the state, had important implications for social relations and communicative practices.

Mistrust

This chapter is slowly building a narrative of Turkish statecraft and its social and ethical challenges for Kurds. To summarize thus far: The state's governmental ethos treats Kurds as "observables," which means "having, and being aware of having, an appearance that permits warrantable inferences about one's moral character" (Sacks 1972: 281, 333 n. 1, cited in Keane

2016: 107). An awareness of this "observability" is materializing in the ways that Kurds self-censor and pass on opportunities for taking a stance, which has a lot to do with the fact that the Turkish state is always on their neck, making sure Kurds are keeping themselves in check. The state, on its part, feels like it has every reason to be on high alert, because Kurds are obviously just faking it – none of them are the "good fiancé" that they claim to be. Having neurotic suspicions of being cheated on, the state is thus acutely obsessed with the idea of catching the object of its jealousy in bed with its rival, the PKK, hence surveillance. All this generates an unusual apprehensiveness towards "luck," both for state actors and Kurdish actors, and *not* simply as a reference to the essential indeterminacy of life, but a key micro-feature of social action and communication. What this apprehensiveness was doing for my interlocutors was manifold, but I believe it fundamentally reshaped the ways they socialized, made friends, or avoided enemies as well as becoming enemies.

When I first moved to Bahçesaray, two teenage cousins of Ahmet were temporarily absent, working in another province as laborers. Once their contract ended, the boys decided to come back. The intercity bus the boys were traveling in was stopped at a checkpoint only half an hour after the departure. Ahmet's cousins and their three friends, also laborers, were told by a police officer to get out and line up against the bus – they were going to answer a few questions. But somehow things went wrong and all of them were detained by the police. According to one of Ahmet's cousins, this is what happened:

> "The police interrogated us separately. I was the first. I handled it well. I showed them my pay-slip to prove I was a laborer. I chatted about this and that. I told them it was my birthday. But I didn't respond to half their questions, didn't even give them my address. Then I went back to lining up and they took my brother. One of our friends, Mahmut, was a Brukî (Brukî tribe). Mahmut was fine. Like he was no traitor, but a little stupid… I saw Mahmut slowly taking his phone out of his pocket. We made eye contact. Mahmut whispered, 'my mother.' I nodded my head 'no.' He looked at the police and looked at me again. I nodded

> 'no,' but he slowly drew the phone up to his ear and quietly answered the call. A police officer saw it and dragged the boy away. Mahmut tried to explain, though to no avail. Then they took us all to the police station."

When I asked Ahmet's cousin whether the police had any real excuse to escort the boys out of the bus, he said: "That too was on Mahmut. The police asked for our ID-cards. We all had them ready, but Mahmut couldn't find his card for ten minutes… Mahmut just didn't know how things work. He lived in a Brukî village all his life and the state is nice to Brukîs, so he was lax, you know, as if politics is all a game. He felt really bad afterwards though." Upon learning about the details, Ahmet got really angry at his cousins. He told them that they should have known better; that they should not have traveled with Mahmut. The boys immediately went on the defensive, insisting how "Mahmut is not like other Brukîs, he supports the movement," but Ahmet interrupted: "I am not saying he is bad sort, but why did you trust him?" These words had a familiar ring to them, reminding me of a past conversation with one host-father wherein I was told that my trust for potential interlocutors was misguided, because Kurdistan was "not a normal place" (*Kurdistan ne cihé ji birézikî ye*). Now, I have a lot to unpack here.

First, note how Ahmet's two cousins defended themselves by alluding to Mahmut's trustability for being someone with a good character ("he was no traitor," "he supports the movement"). Matthew Carey, in his *Mistrust: An Ethnographic Theory,* talks about the pragmatic purchase of "character" on social construals of trust. Drawing from two influential authors of "trust," Georg Simmel (1950) and Niklas Luhmann (1979), Carey notes that trust, a sense of reliability of others, takes "familiarity as a basis of simplification" (Carey 2017: 6–8). Trust, in other words, is an ability to say, "I know him, he is good," which relies on an identification of attitudinal cues as to the true character of the trusted person. Starting from this

idea, Carey defines mistrust "as a general sense of unreliability of others," and argues that in his particular ethnographic context, the Moroccan High Atlas, mistrust is "rooted in the idea that familiarity is an insufficient ground for trust." Not that Moroccans cannot develop familiarity with one another, but they do not take this familiarity as a semiotic onramp into others' inner worlds – their character, more precisely, their intentions. Perhaps even more to the point, "intention" and "character" are conspicuously absent in everyday discourse. Carey argues the fact that people's inner worlds are not available for others to take up and evaluate speaks of an underlying ethical concern (Carey 2017: 29 – 35): Moroccans consider making claims to people's meaning reserves an attack on a key ethical principle of their social world: the right to autonomy.

There are certain parallels between Kurdistan and the Moroccan High Atlas, but they are not identical. In both cases, mistrust is not the lack nor "merely the photographic negative" of trust (Carey 2017: 3). Rather, mistrust is framed as a necessary attitude and a helpful social technology, which was evident in Ahmet's following remark: "I am not saying he is bad sort, but why did you trust him?" The two contexts differ in two fundamental ways, however: First, Kurds do not consider intentions to be unknowable, nor are people's characters, commitments, or true desires. But neither trust nor mistrust are predicated in Kurdistan entirely on disembodied attributes, knowable or not. Note that Ahmet did not get angry at his cousins for making wrong, unwarranted assumptions about Mahmut's character – their assumptions were probably right and very much warranted. What mattered in this case was that both trust and mistrust should point at embodied, observable features of material practice, grounded in their true empirical context, such that Mahmut, a well-meaning but loosely behaving friend, who did not know better because the tribe to which he belonged was treated leniently by the state, was still not trustable.

Second, mistrust has a somewhat distinct pragmatic function in Kurdistan. In Morocco, mistrust is a disposition pointing at the indeterminacy of character, but also a communicative device privileged to preserve the individual's autonomy to self-determine her own truth. Carey gleans this device in acts of lying and discursive obfuscation: "I suggest, the purpose of… lies is simply to prevent one's interlocutor from being sure of the truth, whatever that may be. In so doing, people preserve a space of psychic and moral autonomy by shrouding their actions in mystery" (Carey 2017: 35). We can find a similar argument in Rupert Stasch's work on Korowai of West Papua, where "sensitivity about not presuming to know others' minds is intertwined with sensitivity about not presuming to impinge on each other's self-determination" (Stasch 2008: 443). In both accounts, autonomy is the actor's ability to say, "only I can be discursively certain of who I am." In Kurdistan, on the other hand, the truth *of* the self was hardly as important as the truth *about* the self. More importantly, discursive certainties, known or unknown to others, were never enough to alter the uncertainties of communication.

Take my host-father, Xalo Salîm, whom I mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, the one who warned me against trusting my interlocutors for how Kurdistan was not a normal place. When the old man described my trust for other people as misguided, it was not that I was mistaken to believe that they all wished the best for me – they certainly did. He nevertheless advised me to develop a habit of mistrusting others, create for myself a fake biography, and deflect direct questions about my political views – because, he insisted, I could never know what would happen next: "the kids in our village are emulating guerrillas, they all have guerrilla names, today you interviewed them, tomorrow they will rush to the district center, they will find the most crowded teahouse, they will tell everyone 'she asked me this, I told her that,' and one of those people will be a police informer." In Kurdistan, mistrust was necessitated

by these kinds of situations. As a social technology, it helped sensitize my interlocutors to the excesses, slippages, and indeterminacies of communication. The main argument here was that every communicative revelation of the self would eventually meet with its contingencies, hence the precursory mistrust.

Non-Channeling

So, in a communicative context marked by a worried imagination of all semiosis accidentally finding its way to the state's security apparatus, where Kurds had the bad luck of not being able to control what their actions would create, how is an otherwise even possible? It is possible, I shall argue, because thankfully we live in a material world wherein indeterminacy is itself a practical question. Every time my interlocutors passed a judgment on the anxious circulation of communicative acts; those judgments would factor in the way they communicated. In this last section, I discuss that my interlocutors' awareness of circulation and indeterminacy was itself *iconized* in behavioral dispositions, habits, and choices that resisted being channeled back to the Turkish state.

I want to begin with the man who invented "non-channeling": Xalo Bewar, the hill-climber. For his neighbors and kin, Xalo Bewar was pretty much the antithesis of a hero. If *Gilgamesh*, the best-known figure of all ancient Mesopotamian heroes, sits at the high end of the spectrum, Xalo Bewar would certainly find us hiding at the opposite end. In a cultural world characterized by feuds, tribal rivalries, ambitions for local power, and competition for land, Xalo pursued an unremarkable life with no enemies and a few friends. The first-born son of a tragically poor family, Xalo Bewar was given his grandfather's name – a Kurdish name, so is the pseudonym "Bewar." His given name was later changed to a Turkish one by the registrar who

refused to grant him a Kurdish name. Xalo Bewar could not tell if it was sheer luck or fate that all his sons and daughters lived as well with two names: one official and one Kurdish.

Bewar married his paternal-uncle's daughter as a young handsome adolescent, yet his wife fell ill and died the following year, so did his first-born. He married again and had eleven children with his second wife; two of them died before they reached school age. His eldest daughter joined the PKK in the early 1990s, yet she was killed in a military operation the same year. Then his eldest son joined the PKK, too, and that was the last time Xalo Bewar saw him, though the family knew he was still alive. Now a grandfather to more than thirty grandchildren, the man's exact year of birth was unknown. I spent more time than I am willing to admit searching for clues on Xalo Bewar's exact age, hoping that unveiling a village mystery would prove me a good anthropologist to my interlocutors – or at least that it was handy to have one around. My efforts failed to deliver an answer, yet I managed to entertain villagers with the kinship charts and family trees that I produced in the process. None of that really mattered to Xalo Bewar, however. He did not like talking much and certainly did not like attention. He liked tending his garden and wandering on hills, and he would spend half the day at the cowshed away from humans. For as long as it was not a matter of life and death (read: weddings and funerals), Xalo did not care about events or crowds. He was a true introvert.

Still, Xalo Bewar was the most trusted person in his community. Important meetings took place in his house and conflicts were resolved in his presence. Every Friday following the sermon, the prominent figures of the village including the imam (*mele*) and the mukhtar would gather in his tiny living room to share bread. Outsiders had to obtain Xalo's approval, or else they would be approached with extreme caution. It took me a while to understand what illuminated others' trust in this laconic and irascible man. Xalo was perhaps bad at many things,

but he truly sucked at listening – he found it tasteless to fake an interest in others' lives, worries, and never-ending complaints. For someone whose children were known as the troublemakers of the village, due to their political activities, not because they were ill-mannered, Xalo Bewar was extraordinarily apolitical and unworldly. He had the image of a self-reliant man, dismissive of his fame and fans, who just wanted to be indulged in his love of nothing – and that was exactly his magic.

In his presence, it would feel like the open-network of Turkish surveillance met its own death drive, the dead-end of communication. In certain ways, Xalo Bewar's behavioral dispositions and habits created a sense of *non*-interdiscursivity, because he was not particularly well-versed in registers of circulation: he would not ask questions; he did not care about details; he had no memory of the near-past. Xalo would rarely use the stable communicative expressions indexical of [over]attentiveness, almost never demand repair, and he really did not like monitoring others during their talk-at-turn. His trustability was thus a function of his demeanor that eased the difficulties of intersubjectivity. His demeanor, in other words, was an affordance for others relative to some metapragmatic formulation of his personal habitus: that it was safe, and they were safe. For these reasons, the meetings at Xalo Bewar's house were quite interesting to observe, wherein talk would cease to feel like the minefield it was in every other situation, where interactants could finally have some certainty about what they wanted to say.

If not spilling the tea was one way of non-channeling, not putting all eggs in one basket was the other: In Bahçesaray, I would occasionally stay in a village located at the very end of the valley, where I was fairly friendly with residents. During one of those stays, a female journalist, covering the arts and culture section for a left-leaning news agency, visited the village which did not have a communal space other than the mosque. Xalo Servet, a village elder, was the only one

openly willing to host her. Though unannounced guests were nobody's favorite thing, the rule of hospitality entailed that somebody had to take the bullet.

Xalo Servet was living in a two-story house with his wife, two sons, daughters in law, and seven grandchildren. Two other village men, an elderly woman, and I followed them inside. Once we were all comfortably seated around a large tray of baked goods, sipping the strong, crimson colored Ceylon tea that Kurds prefer over the Turkish variety (of course!), the journalist, Zeynep, a young woman in her twenties, told us a little bit about herself. She was a Kurd, too, but from another province. She was traveling in the area to document seasonal changes and domestic patterns of production in the Kurdish countryside, but she had a deep curiosity for everything Kurdish. The conversation was lively and enjoyable, and Zeynep asked if she could visit again the next day. As I needed to accompany a few women to the district hospital, I was not going to be able to join Xalo Servet and Zeynep on that second day.

When we were back from the hospital, Zeynep was still in the village. I offered her a walk to the walnut gardens so she could see the painterly scenes of the colorful fall foliage that reminded me of Michigan. I asked her about how things went with Xalo Servet, and I was surprised to discover that almost everything the old man told her during the second interview was new to me. Xalo Servet, unlike Xalo Bewar, was a very chatty man. He would make me sit with him for hours on end and listen to his stories that generally spanned a few decades. Yet he seemed to have spoken to Zeynep about things of which I had never heard. Later, when the opportunity presented itself, I asked Xalo why he would not share with me the things that he shared with Zeynep, and I joked: "I thought we were friends." His answer was simple: "Honestly, my child, I am not keeping a track of what I say to whom. That is simply impossible… But I know that I told her the things that will keep her safe and I am telling you the

things that will keep you safe. This is what friends do." And just like that, with a single blow of rhetoric, Xalo Servet effectively dismissed the fairly incontrovertible necessity of consistency for friendship, in the name of friendship.

Underpinning this response were some important assumptions about how interdiscursivity worked: that interdiscursivity began with a repetition of forms; that it was embodied in individuals as the channels of circulation. The semiotic ideology of the security apparatus directed Kurds to recognize "repetition" and 'sameness" as playing a key mediating role between the *here* of Kurds and the *there* of the Turkish state. Yet the full completion of mediation, its consummation, if you will, relied on the transmutation of Kurds into channels of sorts. For we were friends, Xalo Servet was protecting Zeynep and me from "*becoming*-channels-in-the-channeling-of-discourse" (Constantine Nakassis, personal communication). All this shall become even more apparent in the second part of Xalo Servet's response: "Let's say I told you [two] the same thing, and then you go and write 'Xalo told me this,' that poor girl writes 'Xalo told me this,' wouldn't *they* think 'what is the matter with Servet, the same story again and again.'" In a helpful essay on the politics of interdiscursivity, Susan Gal makes an almost identical point: "Although uptakes are always positioned and therefore change the import of expressive forms, various instances can nevertheless be framed as iconically related, as "the same, again," thus as circulation" (Gal 2019: 2). Put another way, it was one thing to take the risk and spill the tea, and quite another to do it twice.

Not a Normal Place

Most of these excesses, slippages, accidents, channeling, spilling, and so on, one may think, belong to the ordinary conditions of everyday life, and *none* are unique to Kurdistan. The

grandsons of the sick old woman could not possibly know that the car would break down, which eventually led to their spilling the tea to the Turkish state. Mahmut could not predict that his mother would call him exactly at that second, and had he found his ID-card about two minutes earlier, perhaps the police officer would not have been angered enough to escort them all out of the bus – it was all a chain of accidents. Sure, providence is never a bad idea, but in the end, it is always luck that determines whether an overhearer is a police informer or not, whether a police officer considers "not having a Facebook account" personal choice or a sign of a hidden agenda. And luck exists everywhere – why are Kurds making such a big deal out of it?

There is more than one way to answer this question, but let me start with the most obvious: in Kurdistan, the main cast of these "luck stories" does include the Turkish state, the police, informers, village-guards, spies, and traitors, on one hand, and family, kin, friends, *heval*s, neighbors, and the broader category of "Kurdish people," on the other. Any person would find it hard to shrug off the note of guilt when mere recklessness turns a woman's funeral into a theater of police-state, especially if that woman is his grandmother, but even if she was not. Kurds are in fact willing to take responsibility for incomparably less significant injuries – like Roza's employment in the government causing an offense to her friends – because these injuries intimately matter to them. Here is my second answer: there is surprisingly little room within the communicative edifice of Turkish rule for a possibility to keep luck at bay. If the intention is *not* performing a service for the Turkish security apparatus when, for instance, attending a funeral, the person who attends the funeral will have to accept the paucity of his intentions from the get-go, and that there is only so much he can do. Luck not only means there is a risk of failure, but also captions something intrinsic to Turkish rule relative to its metapragmatic interpretation.

Lastly, this chapter is building a third possible answer: that luck nullifies the "et cetera principle," the glossing over of "essentially unstatable terms" (Garfinkel 1967: 173), which creates a crisis of confidence – hence mistrust. Why is this significant? Because it illuminates the ways Turkish rule interferes in the trusted, taken for granted normativity of ordinary action, such that a certain kind of "not normal" comes to take its contours. Of course, the et cetera is no mathematical solution to the inscrutability of social action – it is a "metapragmatic frame," that is, a certain way of "defining the situation" (Keane, forthcoming) as *this-is-how-most-people-will-see-it*. That a man's absence in social media being a sign of "personal choice" is a metapragmatic consequence of the et cetera: "and it is only through the mediation of signs [*absence in social media*] that anyone has access to the conceptions [*personal choice*] in play in any situation" (ibid). In Kurdistan, on the other hand, the political context dictates a different metapragmatic frame wherein prediction is out and luck reigns. In this chapter, I have sketched out the grounds and constitutive features of this frame – the communicative edifice – as well as the kinds of problems it creates for Kurds.

Now, I want to put emphasis on an important discovery that Kurds make about their life in the questions they ask about the metapragmatic arrangement of their moral habitus – that it is *ne birêzikiye*, meaning *not-normal*. Though my interlocutors agreed that "not normal" or "*normal degil*" (in Turkish) is a proper, everyday equivalent of *ne birêzikiye*, "not in the right order," "without an order," or even "without its customs" will be more transparent translations. This ethnography argues that *ne birêzikiye*, the "life" of Roza, takes its contours in a moral habitus that lacks the rightly ordered unity of intentions and consequences. A normal place, in this relation, is a place where one intends something but does not need to follow it all the way to the end to make sure her intentions will meet matching consequences there. A life that is *ne*

birêzikiye, on the other hand, is a life where one may intend "good" but cause "harm," where the actor cannot calculate beforehand the consequences of her actions, nor can she undo a harm already committed.

Of course, in principle, there are opacities of some sort in all events of communication vis-à-vis intentions and effects. Ethnographic studies are indeed full of data on various cultural articulations of "the opacity of mind" – the inscrutability of the inner worlds of others (*e.g.,* Robbins and Rumsey 2008). And even in socio-cultural and institutional settings – in particular, law and psychiatry – where it is available for reasoning and reflection, "intentionality" poses all kinds of challenges: how do we know intentions, how certain can we be about intentionality, does intentional mean freely conducted, and so on. What is interesting in Kurdistan is that the moral habitus is not organized around the [un]knowability of intentions – whether we know what others mean; it is, however, organized around another kind of non-knowledge: consequences.

Chapter 5 The *Leaf Problem* and Complicity

The arguments of the previous chapter can be summarized as follows: for my interlocutors, unintended consequences – or luck – were the *givens* of their social world. With this discovery, I now have the opportunity to ask what I consider to be the main question of this dissertation: What consequence does the *givenness* of unintended consequences have for morality, politics, and ethics? In other words, how do Kurds make unintended consequences count in the economy of everyday life? In this and the next two chapters, I will offer possible pathways for answering these questions. In the present chapter, I focus on the ways this givenness lends itself to an *implicit* pragmatic orientation, while being taken by Kurds to articulate and agonize over "complicity" as an *explicit* ethical problem. The primary purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the stitching together, step by miniscule step, of a political milieu that tugs Kurds right in, and often down the slippery slope of Kurds' complicity in their own political subjugation within Turkey.

Ethics, A Situation

Let me first provide a general analysis of the discussion thus far, before motioning to the specific issues that I hope to tackle in this chapter. The previous chapter ended with the stories of two men: Xalo Bewar and Xalo Servet. The stories were a prelude to the following discussion in that both captured how anxieties about luck, or unintended consequences, bleed into social interaction, contextualizing language use relative to its interdiscursivity and thus potential future

effects. Xalo Bewar's laconism and nonchalance conducted a personal habitus that others intuitively felt to be safe – in other words, what was said in Xalo Bewar's house stayed in Xalo Bewar's house. Xalo Servet's peculiar micro-interactional choices similarly entailed a promise of protection, and a nod to the macro-context of the police state. If Xalo Servet didn't like passing the same information twice, that was because he knew repetition had a certain "use" for the security paradigm, that the state viewed two Kurds saying or doing the same thing as an embodiment of a concerned scheme.

Turkish courts are full of examples of this semiotic ideology, labeling, for instance, two Kurdish activists making overlapping remarks in a chronological order as organized crime. A case in point was the indictment of the Academics for Peace, more than a thousand Kurdish and Turkish scholars who signed a petition asking Turkey to end violence in Kurdistan. The academics were accused of taking orders from Bese Hozat, a female guerrilla leader in the PKK. How so? Well, Bese Hozat made a statement in the media calling on "liberal and democratic" circles to support Kurdish resistance, dated 27 December 2015. The petition was shared with the press on 11 January 2016. The prosecution took this chronology as evidence, ignoring the fact of the petition being penned in November 2015. An academic, Prof. Tuna Altinel, a great mathematician, told me during a court-hearing that he was making a living on calculating risks, but one sometimes just had to accept the inevitable contribution of randomness.[15]

[15] The criminal case opened in late 2017 led to the trial of more than 700 academics and I was one of them. The process coincided with the second year of my fieldwork, during which I traveled to Istanbul four times as the hearings were scheduled two to three months apart. Though the indictments and eventually the verdicts – 15 months in prison, deferred for 5 years – were identical, academics were prosecuted individually rather than collectively. Eventually in July 2019, three months before my final hearing, the Constitutional Court, Turkey's version of the Supreme Court, ruled that the convictions of academics violated their right to freedom of speech.

Much of the discussion in chapter four traced the everyday ramifications of this randomness on social relations. It concluded that talk is not merely an exchange of information, nor is it limited to its "phatic" function (*sensu* Malinowski 1923: 306 – 309), *i.e.,* communicating social bonds by giving-and-receiving words. Talk is an act with results that fall on others. Thus, ethics and some notion of normativity are involved, rendering intended, and unintended effects people produce in communicative situations open to evaluations. Remember the story of two cousins and their friend Mahmut, the young Kurdish laborers from Van province, where Mahmut was labeled untrustworthy because he lacked the necessary self- and other-protective communicative capacities that he owed to his friends. Take Delîl, the electrician from Nusaybin, who spoke of his objection to the new state-run housing developments, which he linked to a particular political ethical argument – a Kurdish actor owed it to other Kurds to have the will to control the unintended addressivity of his words and deeds. Note that the art of addressivity, most importantly, consists in putting constraints on action as well as its channeling. "A Kurd needs no bicycle," hence the popular joke says, because "he'll go and hit the governor" (*Kürde ne gerek pıskılet, biner gider valiye çarpar*).

Yet there often isn't the time, so brief is experience, for pausing, pondering, anxieties, apologies, or explicit accounts of what the self does, what she owes to, and should expect from the other. And this is not the only challenge. Whether one takes the time to be explicit or "just knows and acts" can itself be an ethical situation that describes a dilemma between two choices. What dilemma? Well, many kinds. Observe that mistrust in Kurdistan often rests on the fact of the actor knowing that even well-intended actions can play out quite unexpectedly, and it is thus registered by implicit, somewhat understated adjustments through which the actor interacts with others in a manner appropriate to the socio-political context of luck. Overstating one's mistrust

of a terribly gregarious neighbor, on the other hand, is unnecessary, judgy, and rude. What if, say, the terribly gregarious neighbor changes his Facebook profile picture to a Turkish flag? That needs to be stated, right? But in what venue? Will an honest and blunt face-to-face conversation do it? Or will disliking the picture count as a more explicit stance? Say, we are talking about a kin not a neighbor. That surely calls for a much stronger reaction than a simple dislike, suddenly too simple.[16]

I had many friends in Nusaybin, Delîl being one of them, who tracked every online content on the new housing projects and commented aggressively. Many of these friends had a specialty in explicit language, tending to declare themselves on foundations of Kurdish political ethics. They considered the situation in Nusaybin quite baffling, but not necessarily because it was profound; because it was wrong – Kurds were being lulled by the government into complacence powered through an atmosphere of widespread complicity, Kurds were becoming objective spies. Whereas Xalo Bewar's propensity not to open himself to others came from innate feeling and historical experience, which pointed the way to a pragmatic grasp of the situation – mistrust and laconism were shorthands for what he chose to do and codified later.

Drawing on a host of anthropological and linguistic works (Carston 2009, Enfield and Sidnell 2017, Grice 1975, Fleming and Lempert 2014), I take up the analytics "explicit" and "implicit" (or, "indirect") in this chapter, which I view as dimensions of social life and social interaction. What matters in this framework is that actors generally accept that there is a

[16] As Ilana Gershon remarks (2010), the venue or the media of an interaction has the effect of committing interactants to its own persuasive perspectives on the ethical, pragmatic meanings of actions. Gershon defines these perspectives as media ideologies, inviting anthropologists to recognize the ways technology and material limitations make social actors complexly aware of the meanings, effects, anticipated uptakes, and future circulation of communicative choices and gestures.

distinction between the explicit form of an experience and its implicit import, with sign-vehicles alternating between being implicit or explicit relative to its pragmatic calibration. In Silverstein's terms (1993), sign-vehicles can either be "reportively" calibrated to its context of occurrence (with co-occurring verbal descriptions) or through the actor's "reflexively" regimented participation. In the flow of everyday life, Silverstein argues, features of experience acquire much of their social meaning from their implicit calibration to contexts of occurence, which, I'm tempted to add, demonstrates the semiotic – or phenomenological – density of experience, often fleetingly noticed. Over and over again, I observed my interlocutors' taking one or the other route – "make it explicit" or "just use the pointer" – itself a real-time event sometimes hard to verbalize. Whether the issue was state-run housing projects, or a noticeable but equally vague transgression, the context of social interaction was always one of many dilemmas.

But then some people, like Xalo Bewar, just do not like dilemmas. In Xalo's case, the man didn't like, more precisely, other people's need to talk about those dilemmas, the need, in other words, of making otherwise implicit predicaments of social life explicit. He liked minding his business, he liked counting on his own opinions of others, and his opinions always showed despite his proclivity for not sharing them. They showed in his attitudes, in whether he smiled at a joke or properly responded to a question, or in the way he positioned his body. One could tell if he didn't like a person, but when asked about it, Xalo Bewar's response would be "nothing" – *tişte k nabe*. If not these two words, which were his favorite two words, he would shrug his shoulders. He occasionally had a palpable reason – "the man is too cozy with the district governor (*kaymakam*)" – but mostly just an instinct drawn from little cues and life-long experience that often left evidence far behind, and others trusted Xalo Bewar's instincts in life. They trusted him, in other words, because the man understood a lot about everything, not

because he knew a specific something about a specific someone. This was why when Xalo did not give his implicit approval for a person, others would not ask for an explicit explanation.

A deeply pious man, Xalo Bewar had utmost respect for all *mele*s (imams) of Bahçesaray but one, the *mele* of the village located at the farthest frontier of our valley: Mele Mehmet.[17] What was wrong with Mele Mehmet? *Tiştek nabe* – he was kind, generous, and quite wary of hurting others' feelings. And yet, from the point of view of Xalo Bewar, Mele Mehmet was also a strange man, not living within the natural limits of human social life – people weren't meant to talk that much, become friends with everyone, or have twenty stories to tell in one conversation. A *mele* in particular needed to maintain familiarity with as many people as possible but not to the extent of indiscriminately accepting every lunch invitation. Mele Mehmet was a little, well, too much. Note that Xalo Bewar's was not an explicit criticism but an implicit attitude consistent with the habits of thought. Or let me say it this way: Xalo Bewar didn't have true respect for Mele Mehmet, but he never disrespected him. And this distinction mattered a great deal.

I have mentioned these examples for three reasons. First, they demonstrate how ethics puts constraints on people; even telling a story, traveling with friends, or smiling at people comes with its reasonable constraints. Both Delîl and Xalo Bewar embraced constraints as contrivances of ethical practice, as sources of their moral agency – or of self-fashioning – pragmatically and aesthetically compatible with the situation that summoned them, but this was only half the

[17] Mosques in Turkey, a constitutionally secular country, are built by pious foundations, charities, or the liquid capital of villages, neighbors, as well as, in the specific case of Kurdistan, tribes and large families. Once built, they are registered by the state's Religious Affairs Administration (*Diyanet*) and appointed an imam. Prior to the 2000s, the majority of imams in Kurdistan were of Turkish origin while local religious leaders (*mele*, *seyda*) ran their own religious schools (*medrese*), having been trained in the same or a similar school themselves. Nowadays, imams in Kurdistan are mostly local members of their communities with diplomas from Theology Departments.

problem. Rather more provocatively, ethics demanded these constraints to do their work quietly – unless one was a child, nobody got a medal for properly holding back during another person's turn-at-talk, but this made failure all the more salient. Second, ethics is not merely a domain of explicit norms. It consists of little incidents, anecdotes, fleeting judgments, instincts, senses, the grasping of the moment, or of one's limits, and using the pointer. It reaches across many levels of complexity and scales of agreement. Criticism too may come in many shades. It can be direct, in the form of harsh words, or implicitly signaled, and sometimes the latter kind bugs us more. Third, "using the pointer" is not the same as opting out of taking a stance; it is, in other words, not a softened, or more cowardly, version of what otherwise needs to be done. When using the pointer, when shrugging one's shoulders, when saying things like "this is just how life is here," my interlocutors did not consider themselves – at least most of the time – being insufficiently informative, inadequately clear in terms of what they thought or felt. They did, however, give [meta]pragmatic relevance to that which could only be grasped, said, and done – or better be grasped, said, and done – implicitly.

These three points are not directly about the luck of Kurds, or the state of Turks. They make a case about the peculiar ways in which social actors agonize over, ponder, scrutinize, weigh, and reason about the lived facts of ethical experience, and that ethical experience is finding oneself in *a* situation. One cannot study Kurds' fate or Turks' rule as characters in a Mesopotamian tragedy – they are parts of and stand in complex tension with the facts of lived practical reason, and they live side by side with other issues and concerns that comprise the domain of ethical life. Below, I first delve into an ethnographic exercise wherein I trace the practical contingencies of ethical experience, demonstrating how constraints and "using the pointer" come to saturate social interaction, all the while painting a picture of everyday sociality

from the perspective of moral questions and challenged that it summons, and acts on. This is a necessary detour, somewhat of a walk through a list of ethnographic stories that contextualize what I mean by ethical life in its empirical setting, which also shall set the stage for the following examination of the slippery slope of Kurdish complicity as a political ethical dilemma of sorts.

The Leaf Problem

Religious moral regimes and political movements focus great energy on "explicit" and "implicit" as analytics, or heuristics, of ethical life (Robbins 2004, Keane 2016). Chapter two likewise framed Kurdish political ethics as an ethical project quite deliberately publicly oriented, addressing itself to certain lived truths that Kurds encountered consistently enough throughout the modern history to be expressed in explicit codes – "betrayal," *bêbextî,* being one example. Yet chapter three and four took an opposite turn, stressing the ways my interlocutors traced "complicity" as capturing a moral pitfall of Turkish rule, implicit in the patterns, regularities, anxieties, and perceived inconsistencies of their political context wherein they found themselves, on a daily basis, either helping or witnessing others helping the Turkish state. Without trying to reconcile this split, the present chapter takes it at face value: people like to make things explicit – in the form of a word, a bold lyric, or a strong declarative statement – yet what is disavowed in theory – the implicit – often returns in full force in practice, thus re-emphasizing its [meta]pragmatic entailments. In the end, as I shall argue below, "making explicit" or "using the pointer" are both modalities of engagement generating different orders of worth and relevance, different questions and different answers about the arrangement of the immediate situation.

Our contemporary moment, democratic ideals of publicity, or global academic practice including politics of publication all mark a desire for explicit language. Yet in social life, as

anthropological works on secrecy and hospitality have shown (Dresch 2000, Herzfeld 2009, 2005; Jenkins 1999, Shryock 2012, Taussig 1999), identifying what is done, naming the norm, or the method, could be quite unsettling, even leading at times to catastrophic consequences.

Notions of secrecy, concealment, and disguise were likewise intrinsic aspects of everyday life in Kurdistan, particularly in and around hybrid villages where village-guards lived among ordinary villagers. I observed hybrid-villages most consistently in Bahçesaray. On one hand, there was nothing subtle about a hybrid-village. Solar panels owned by village-guards were too obvious not to notice, especially when one did not have hot water at home. The village-guards' houses were likewise always perceivably nicer from the outside, as well as the inside, and the fact that the job entailed carrying guns all the time was literally remark-able. On the other hand, one had to climb steep hills and find a secure distance to talk about such things openly and explicitly. *Within* the village, all were to be avoided, *as if* none were visible to the eye. Distinguished from deliberate, marked avoidance indicative of a rejection of village-guards' legitimacy – like how the Turkish state did for decades reject Kurdish language by avoiding it – the *as if* avoidance was to *force* a reform on the moral habitus of village-guards *as if* they were ordinary villagers – as if there was *no* ethical situation. Why should this be so? Well, as any student of Kurdistan knows in her heart, because it is exhausting to be in the midst of a situation all the time.

The "*as if* avoidance" can be illustrated through the story of the day that I stepped inside the house of a village-guard for the first time. The man's name was Ismail, he was from the neighboring village, and his father had just died of cancer. A funeral prayer was scheduled to be held at noon and the women of our village were to visit Ismail's house in the afternoon to offer condolences. One might think of our village and Ismail's village as archnemeses – in a vicious

cycle, every young man or woman who had joined the PKK from our side prompted the Turkish state to recruit a village-guard from the other side. This suggested, as similarly shown by research on the village-guard system (Acar 2019, Çelik 2016, Işık 2021, Özar et al. 2013), recruitment was a contextually sensitive act, not a standardized protocol, shaping and shaped by co-occurring local dynamics.

But the two villages were not enemies, they were not necessarily in a bad relationship with one another. One reason was that every village-guard in our valley was a close or distant kin, or kin of kin of other villagers. One of Ismail's sisters was the mother-in-law of my host-mother's nephew. Ismail's father's brother was the father-in-law of one of my best friends, whose husband, meaning Ismail's paternal uncle's son, had recently been given six years in prison for his political activities. Besides, hostilities and grievances needed be put aside when it came to death – it was a time to remember duties and the brute fact of mortal finitude – but also when it came to life – *i.e.,* weddings, the birth of a child, the recovery of a man from illness, and so on. Thus, a village-guard was a village-guard until he was kin, until he was so nakedly, defenselessly human, or until he found himself in the midst of a happy, celebratory occasion. He could only be a village-guard, even more significantly, when he was *not* a host or a guest. The ethical focus of secrecy, or *as if* avoidance, was to allow hospitality, *mêvanhezî* in Kurdish, to prevail such that the villagers could hold village-guards to the standards of a good guest or a good host.

In order to properly describe the day at Ismail's house, perhaps I need to briefly linger on the notion of *mêvanhezî.* As I just said, there are many standards to hospitality, which may well be called constraints. Yet *mêvanhezî* tends to deliver its promises in oddly contradictory ways. There are constraints, sure, in fact a lot of them, and then secrecy. Everything a guest is allowed

has its limits; every statement made by a host has an unstated part. Yet there is also care, affection, and attentiveness that at times borders on obsession. After all, *mêvanhezî* is literally "a love for guests," and when I say love, I mean it. Here is an example: In mid-December 2019, a guest from the Iraqi Kurdish city Zaxo arrived in my house in Cizre. The woman, let's call her Kewe, was a distant relative of my host mother, Xaltî Hediye. After her husband died, Kewe had left Zexo en route to Europe, waiting for the next caravan of immigrants to depart Cizre, a strategic hub of emigration. Kewe's three sons in Finland had already paid the smugglers seven thousand euros for her transfer, the standard fare at the time. Delicate in stature, Kewe seemed quiet but with a mischievous air. She was in her fifties, and she had beautiful, wide dark eyes filled with such curiosity that nobody could tell the woman was blind. Her hands were adorned with *deq* (tattoo) drawn with ink made of Kewe's own breast milk – each *deq* was a diary entry marking the birth of one of her eight children. Guests in Kurdistan always attracted attention. I heard no apologies, no explanation, no excuses from any neighbor or villager showing up uninvited to meet with a guest, *mêvan*, and no complaints from a guest about the incessant questioning. Still, Kewe was a special case – the woman was pure charisma, and it didn't take long for her to make a name among the widowers of our area. Kewe had no interest, yet when men appeared at our door, offering Kewe gold and many fine things, she would graciously smile though never give an answer. She would instead point them to Xaltî Hediye. "Oh God, what do I even say," was her typical response, "Hediye knows [the best]" (*Xwedê, ez çi dijim*? *Hediye zani*).

Why such deference? Because what else was Kewe going to really do? A blind woman with no familiarity with Cizre, stuck in a distant relative's house with nowhere else to go, Kewe's best option was being a good guest. It was letting it be the Queendom of Hediye – the

same Hediye who did all the dishes, laundry, cleaning, and some. If Kewe needed protection, she owed it to Hediye, the woman Kewe enthrusted everything, the pleasurable sensation of discriminating between potential suitors. *Mêvanhezî*, in other words, dictated the host's discretion to run the show and call the tunes. The guest, for her part, had all the freedom to eat, drink, laugh, observe, and enjoy herself while comfortably seated on the finest cushion, from which she could not, however, move an inch.

Kewe's story was not your typical political drama, but it was a close, therefore telling look at contemporary political society replete with similar motifs of deference, vulnerability, care, and protection. Take the military operations between 2015 and 2016 that displaced 360,000 Kurds, who lived for months on end, if not years, as guests in the houses of kin and in the cities of other Kurds. Or take seasonal employment, which is commonplace in Kurdistan, contributing directly to Kurdish hospitality complex. With the turn of each new agricultural or construction season, thousands of young Kurdish men and women transform into first-time laborers in need of protection from those who know better. In construction sites, for instance, laborers group among themselves as metaphorical hosts and metaphorical guests. A typical guest is a young, naive village kid, considered by the hosts unprepared for the rough realities of the labor market. A typical host is an older, though still young, laborer who protects the kid, teaches him the job, and lets him eat his rations of meat and honey. In return, the kid acts, talks, sleeps as he is told by the host, knowing quite well that in the alternative scenario, the host is his bully. Hospitality, as Andrew Shryock (2012) suggests, is a great albeit complex ethical remedy for strikes and inequalities between social actors insofar as all accept the morally binding terms of the contract.

Now, back to Ismail, the village-guard who just lost his father. In certain ways, accepting hospitality from a village-guard, visiting his house, taking the role of a guest were all remedies of

the same sort that Shryock's work emphasizes. But, of course, not everyone had to seek a remedy, not everyone wanted to avoid or act *as if* there was nothing to avoid when the topic was the village-guards. Take Zehra, the youngest daughter of my host-parents in Bahçesaray, who worked in the women's branch of the provincial organization of the pro-Kurdish party HDP and spent most of the year traveling between Van, Diyarbakir, and Ankara. Coincidentally, Zehra was in Bahçesaray for a short stay when Ismail's father died and upon learning that our village's women were planning to pay a visit to Ismail's house, she very clearly refused to join us. At a time when the Turkish state was punishing Kurds indefinitely, Zehra insisted, in which village-guards were complicit with the Turkish state, she had better things to do than extending sympathy to a village-guard.

Zehra's attitude was, well, so Zehra, thus it did not really surprise anyone and just angered her mother. A dedicated activist who was present in every demonstration, every protest, every court-hearing, Zehra was openly supportive of the PKK. For someone who aspired to ideals associated with the Kurdish women's movement, Zehra's personal habitus bore the marks of political directness and disobedience, which was all the more visible around people Zehra deemed a sell-out or a middle-of-the-roader (*ortayolcu*) – like her brothers. And these qualities gained Zehra many fans as well as critics.

My host-father, Xalo Kendal, was on team-Zehra. Xalo Kendal took Zehra as his favorite, appreciating her knowledge, intelligence, and hard-work. Next to Zehra's self-confident eloquence, his three sons' constant empty chatter had the sophistication of a caveman's illustration of his prey – "primitive man" (*mirové hov*) being his exact words. More to the point, Zehra was achieving great things in the city, she was fighting for her people. What excuse did the sons, especially Yusuf, the eldest, have for leaving their parents alone in the village? If Zehra

was around, the sons therefore would avoid visiting the village, because they would know that their father could not not get into the same conversation again. But the main reason was different. “It is not only my father’s attitude; I can deal with that,” Yusuf explained, “it is more so because Zehra is on bad terms with half the valley, she keeps getting in fights with people” – the very people, more importantly, that Yusuf and his brothers were selling cigarettes and construction material. My host-mother, Xaltî Bese, was on team-Yusuf. She considered his eldest son a genius and a bit of a stand-up comedian, whereas Zehra had a huge defect: when it came to village politics, she trusted her own hard facts more than her mother. Did Zehra *not* know she could not accuse a neighbor of being a spy? Did she really think it was okay to tell a man in front of other guests that *he* needed to serve the tea? Did she have to treat everyone as if she was offering them a chance to correct the record? And why did she have to turn everything into a big deal? Zehra, on her part, thought certain things *were* a big deal, village-guards being one of them.

Ismail’s house was a short thirty-minute walk away from ours and Xaltî Bese complained about her daughter every minute of it.[18] “True, Ismail is a bad man,” Xaltî Bese explained, “but what can Zehra do about it?” For her mother, Zehra had her facts but no understanding of the basics of the social world: “I just don’t understand. Now, Zehra refused to come, she acted

[18] If the reader is confused as to why Zehra had to come, that was because being seen in public life, albeit fraught with risks, was also something *owed* to relational others. Without an exception, my host-parents were all enormously upset whenever their children had to miss an important social event, especially if that event was a funeral or a wedding. It did not matter if the latter had a serious excuse, because no ephemeral detail of one’s non-attendance could excuse the permanent damage incurred on family reputation. It was frivolous behavior, if not worse, in that the son or the daughter in question acted without due regard to the well-established expectations of the social universe. My-host parents had a point. Funerals and weddings were on average three-day-long events followed by weeks of drama about non-attendances, which affected, more than anyone, the present family members of the absentees.

inappropriately. But what does Zehra think will happen? Let me tell you what'll happen, people won't say 'Ismail is bad,' they'll say, 'why is Bese's daughter acting like this?' Then she paused for a second, taking deep breaths, and then turned to me and said: "God knows people are strange, they don't ask 'who did this' they ask 'who told you this' (*Xwedé mirovan ecêb bûn, ew nabêjin kê kir; ew dibêji kê got*). Xaltî Bese's remarks pointed to two crucial and interrelated features of ethics, that a social action creates its own moral scene, standards of evaluation, and public of judges, and that these actions draw their ethical value from how others assess them. In plain language, Zehra had to think about the consequences of her actions.

I told Xaltî Bese that I agreed with her, and this inspired Xaltî to elaborate. She leaned forward, picked a leaf from the ground, and asked: "What do you see here?" I said a leaf. "Yes, a leaf," replied Xaltî, "I know this is a leaf, you know this is a leaf," hence the futility of naming it between us as a leaf. I later discovered that "leaf" for Xaltî Bese was somewhat of a metaphorical placeholder for the pervasive obviousness of things. Another, vivid example occurred the day Zehra and Xaltî were fighting over Zehra's avowed atheism. Xaltî Bese again picked a leaf – and it must be Xaltî's magic that the woman had a leaf at her disposal whenever she needed to make a point – and showed it to Zehra: "What do you see here?" *A leaf, mother.* "Yes, a leaf. Saying God doesn't exist is no different than saying this leaf doesn't exist." The crux of Xaltî's "*leaf problem*" was its emphasis on the quiet implications of *moral givens* that came with their own, common-sense protocols. Xaltî knew Ismail did bad things, but so did everyone. She knew God existed and so did everyone. When it came to the painfully or the plainly obvious, voicing or denying what everyone knew held more ethical weight than that which everyone knew.

So, what happened at Ismail's house in the end? *Tiştek nabe* – nothing! The house was packed with villagers from across the valley. We sat in the room reserved for women and exchanged greetings with every other guest – this part alone took about an hour. Then one of Ismail's two wives (another evidence of how Ismail, a village-guard, had an "abundance of everything") approached my host-mother and whispered: "Ismail wants to meet the guest." We were all guests there, but *the* guest, for as long as I stayed in Bahçesaray, was always me. With Xaltî's permission, I left the room and found Ismail outside in front of a small tray of tea, bread, and cheese. I sat next to him and we chatted and smoked tobacco. Having heard a lot about Kendal's *mêvan* – guest – Ismail said that he was hoping to meet with me in person: "you know how Kurds are, we love a good *mêvan*." He asked my hometown ("I can tell you're a Kurd too, you have the look, but why is your Kurdish so weird?"). He asked about my parents ("Is their Kurdish weird too?"). And he asked if I had traveled to other parts of Kurdistan as well ("I haven't seen Diyarbakır myself, but I heard the Kurdish there is different, like it is a little funny"). Then he made a request: "I would like you to visit again and spend some time with my daughter-in-law. She is like you, she is from the city, and she has no friends here." I promised him that I would come back (which I did) and he nodded his appreciation. He then said that he'd never seen a woman rolling her own cigarettes before and joked: "But don't teach that to my daughter-in-law." I smiled, he smiled, and that was it.

My host-mother was glad to hear about my conversation with Ismail: "He called you a *mêvan*, huh?" I said yes, quite a few times. "Good. Did he ask anything about what you do?" I said, no, he had not. "Did you say anything inappropriate (*eyb*)?" I assured her that I acted wisely, making no comment whatsoever on his job, house, wives, or solar-panels. "Very good." Why very good? Because Ismail and I had finally met in the right moral context – as a host and a

guest. If not as a *mêvan*, Ismail would have had to recognize me as a researcher, but then he would also need to report me to the police – which was his job. Didn't he know that I was a researcher? Sure, he did. Didn't I know that he was a village-guard? Sure, I did. We just treated those as background details noticeable but *not* note-worthy. Village politics dictated hospitality, hospitality dictated an exercise of secrecy, and secrecy favored implicit orientation over explicit rendering.

If it wasn't preferable to call a village-guard a village-guard, for this or that reason, directly or by way of insinuation, Zehra found it equally impossible not to, however. When I asked Zehra why she hadn't come to Ismail's house, she gave me the following response:

> "How can I explain? I wouldn't be able to do it (*yapamazdım*). I couldn't visit that man's house, greet him, smile, sit there and drink tea. As if he was just a villager, as if he is not an *ajan* (spy). No, just no. I can't even imagine myself in that situation (*kendimi o durumda hayal bile edemiyorum*). That would be betraying myself, betraying my ideals. But I also don't blame my mum. She lived in this village her entire life, she thinks 'it is village-guards today, it was land disputes yesterday, and it was blood feuds before that.' I grew up listening to these stories. In Bahçesaray, there are two sides to every issue and the state backs one of them. My mum takes this as the rule of the game *(anneme göre oyunun kurali bu*). Okay, but why? What kind of an idiotic rule is that? Say two neighbors in the west [of Turkey] are fighting over noise, or because this one's great-great grandpa didn't like the other one's great-great grandpa. Will the state go and say, 'I am taking your side?' See? You're laughing, but this is the historical reality of Kurdistan."

Zehra, in other words, was protesting the game, all the while pointing us to her incapacity of playing that game to begin with – that she didn't visit Ismail's house, because she couldn't bring herself to do it. Bernard Williams defines incapacities like Zehra's as moral incapacities, deliberatively concluded by the actor as *not* an option (1993). He gives the example of a man who could not gossip to a reporter about his wife's problems, because that would be disloyal, or despicable (ibid: 64 – 65). Williams insists that moral incapacities are analytically distinct from

constraints, limits, fears, and so on, but I am not sure if this insistence would play well with ethnography. In social life, these notions seem to be operating along one another, all being pragmatic actualities and sources of ethical practice. I view incapacities, put another way, or constraints, limits, and so on, as ethically insightful conclusions that people make about their first-personal conundrums.

While Zehra explained her moral incapacity in one simple word "*yapamazdım*" (seven in English, "I wouldn't be able to do it"), this one word was a perfectly sufficient onramp for Zehra to glance over her own grasp of the situation. Note that Zehra's incapacity was hardly the defining threat or the end-point of her story, but a maximally rewarding lesson, elaborative of the hidden, or *given,* dynamics of Kurdish political history. Note, moreover, that we also know Xaltî Bese's side of the story. We know that Xaltî's reasoning was not as centered as Zehra assumed in an idiom of political strife but, much like Zehra, in the ethics and pragmatics of moral givens. So, in certain ways, both women were talking about something that was "out there," something that presented itself as a self-evident feature of their social universe, but they differed on how one needed to deal with it.

Let me draw out two important points from this rather long ethnographic exercise, which spanned from hybrid-villages and hospitality to secrecy and political history. The first point concerns the "leaf problem." You know the drill by now: I see a leaf on the ground, I know others see it too, and we all think the leaf is remark-able, why not remark on it? Or why bother remarking on it at all? If we all think the leaf is remark-able, why do *I* feel the need to remark on it? And why is *this* leaf so remark-able *for* us? The problem is not an exercise for philosophers, nor do I wish to turn the leaf into a standard metaphor for asking a specific moral question about humanity. Somewhat a tribute to Xaltî Bese, the leaf problem makes a very practical observation

about its political and cultural context, and when analyzed together with what it is *not*. Why did Ismail's case constitute a leaf problem, but not a village-guard problem? I argue that when Xaltî Bese referred to the leaf as a metaphor, she referred the issue of village-guards back to the contingencies and exigencies of a social world known in common. She invoked a narrative of luck – a narrative of ethical life where many problems were happening out of luck, circumstances, and not necessarily or exclusively because someone intended them to happen. Ismail was a bad sort, Xaltî agreed, but a bad sort that derived its ethical and pragmatic purchase partly from its external, circumstantial origins. Note, moreover, that Zehra too used the word "game" as a metaphor, which similarly described a circumstantial given, a given that came about by luck, though not any random luck but the luck of Kurds. And this was precisely why Kurds, as Zehra insisted, had to find an explicit vantage from which to problematize this idiotic game with an idiotic rule, because the damn game was made to exist for them, *and* it was idiotic.

Now, here is the second point that I want to emphasize: each one of the examples above stress the tight connection between ethics and conventions of say-ability/do-ability. Each stresses the ways social interaction is conventionally ordered by ideas about what is say-able or do-able, and what is not, which is also a question of ethics – a question that ethically commits the actor to what is said and what is done. And these commitments run both ways. For Zehra, conventions were burdensome expectations that she tended to reject on ethical grounds. Xaltî Zehra, on the other hand, couldn't even begin to imagine ethics outside the limits set by social conventions. For Xaltî, and even for Zehra, constraints – or incapacities – were all contrivances of lived practical reason, without which one could not make the right kind of sense even of a political sin as clear-cut and obvious as serving under the Turkish state as a village-guard.

I have no conceptual ambition here. What a constraint is, how it differs from incapacities, and how these two relate to conventions are questions that I cannot answer for myself, nor would it be possible to give an answer that won't fall apart two pages from now. My argument is different: when someone – such as Zehra – braces herself for what she considers a big ethical challenge, when she tries to make things explicit, others will take a position to assess how she does that. Because in everyday life, ethics is not merely saying, "this is a leaf," if it is not anticipating a response at the same time. It is thus essential that we approach "big ethical challenges" armed with the point of view of micro-constraints. Zehra didn't have the capacity to sit face-to-face with Ismail, for instance, but another interlocutor, Araz, Zehra's father's brother's son, explained that he was struggling with an opposite sort of incapacity:

> "I am against the village-guard system, I think that system shouldn't exist. But I don't feel bad when I visit Ismail's house. If I tried being rude to him, I'd find that hard. Ismail didn't ask for the job; the state offered the job. The state doesn't say 'if you don't want the job that's fine.' And this was fifteen years ago, what do I say to Ismail now? Don't get me wrong, some village-guards asked for the job, but it's too complicated overall. It's hard to tell what happened, who did what, who said what, if it was voluntary, necessary, forced… I am not saying Ismail is innocent, but he didn't want any of this, nobody did. A [Turkish] commander back in the day viewed our village as pro-PKK, so he said, 'the other village will be pro-state then.' There was only one difference between the two villages, one of our youth was a guerrilla."

I suspect if I had hit a child right at that moment, Araz would have interfered. I'm pretty sure he would be infuriated. He might even call me names. Yet all this had to be done right away, not a day after, let alone thirty years. Village-guards were not an event transpiring in the here-and-now of Araz's life, but an ethical problem "too complicated overall," a problem materialized by and materialized *in* the very contingencies that made it possible. Surely, contingencies are not an exit from morality – Ismail was *not* innocent – but they come with their

unique challenges, leading the actor to theorize what she can't do, can't know, can't answer for herself as incapacities that are internal to the very ethical problem of which she seeks to make sense. In other words, the actor knows that there is a problem, and she knows that it is a problem almost impossible to fully explain or pin down. This is the closest the leaf problem gets to canonical philosophical thought experiments – the infamous trolley problem, for instance: A runaway trolley is careening down the tracks towards five people; you can switch the trolley to a neighboring track, but there is a person there too. Will you let the first five die or switch the trolley and kill one? (Keane 2016: 4; see also Edmonds 2013). I will not attempt to solve this dilemma, which is designed to make its case as a tough situation anyway. And tough situations are interesting to think about, precisely because they don't neatly fit to any one mode of reasoning. Consider the following tough situations from the discussion thus far: Kurdish political ethics rules against state-run housing projects, which it sees as a system of control no different than Bentham's *panopticon*, but people need housing. Village-guards take up Kalashnikovs against their own people, and this is bad, yet they didn't call the rules, they did not choose that life. Recep wanted to stand against the biggest bully of his town, but his doing so cost the pro-Kurdish HDP a vote. I didn't like playing the "good fiancé" in front of the Turkish police, but it was necessary to protect myself and the people who so generously hosted me. Perhaps then, and even more important of a lesson, it is essential to examine ethical problems vis-à-vis the incapacities in which they present themselves to the actor, incapacities that reflexively pick, and destabilize, the notions of agency, ethics, and politics with which they coexist.

Truth and Confession

When I first began thinking about the structure of this dissertation, I decided to focus on "Kurdish complicity in Turkish rule" as *the* leaf problem of Kurdistan – a problem tinged with guilt, concern, and discomfort. If anything, it encouraged a critical reconsideration of history, compelling Kurds to look back in time and reconstruct their political condition, their *bext*, from the point of view of the leaf problem. It was also ethnographically relevant – the effect was disquieting, but my interlocutors understood and mostly agreed with me when I explained my desire to examine the slippery slope of Kurds' collaborations with and accommodations to the regime. They said, yes, Kurds did that: Kurds did collaborate, accommodate, assent, abandon, keep quiet, and thus *aided and abetted* the Turkish state. Many advised me to be an objective observer – "don't judge Kurds, but don't lie." Zehra, for instance, urged me to frame the issue as a two-sided coin – "there is complicity but there is also resistance." A few outlined the whole dissertation for me. Had I followed their advice, the present work would have read something like "Confessions from the House of Kurds," presented in a tapas-style format with bite-sized titles: *bêbextî* or *îxanet* (betrayal), *bêbext* or *xayîn* (traitor), *ajan* or *casus* (spies), *hevkar* (collaborator), and accomplice (*hevparê sûcî*). What do these words tell? A lot. They tell us a great deal especially if imagined as chapters of the same dissertation, or as facets of the same ethical question, thereby achieving a complex description of the latter: an accomplice is a Kurd whose gaze aids the enemy, whose acts betray from within, hence confession – note that next chapter will focus specifically on the idea and social life of the notion of "betrayal" in Kurdistan.

If the topic deserved a dissertation-length treatment – not a single chapter – that had more to do with another, somewhat different ethical argument, however. I remember the first time I shared with an interlocutor my interest in the public circulation of categories like betrayal, complicity, collaboration, and so on. It was right after this interlocutor, Benazir, named by her

father after the late Pakistani politician Benazir Bhutto, showed me an anonymous Twitter account dedicated to exposing local women dating Turkish policemen.[19] Benazir was visibly torn between whether the women's behavior or exposing them was more outrageous. I didn't hide my disapproval of the Twitter account, especially that it put the women in danger. Benazir agreed, but I could see that she was looking for an alternative angle: "I understand what you're saying, but isn't this a kind of public court?" (*dediğini anliyorum ama bu da bir çeşit halk mahkemesi degil mi?*). Courts were for criminals, I countered her, but what was the crime? Benazir paused, reflected on my question for a moment, and then answered: "complicity" *(suç ortaklığı*).

That was, of course, an exaggeration – as Benazir quickly corrected herself. But it was an exaggeration with a point with which I was pretty familiar. I knew that Kurds liked to use the word "complicity," or descriptions and evaluations that corresponded to "complicity," in order to signify what they viewed as morally compromised associations between Kurds and state actors as associations that stood for their unique pragmatic effects – that they were helping the Turks, making their job easy, allowing them a sense of superiority. In important respects, "complicity" was the day's Kurdish semiotics lesson that applied where the results of a morally flawed association took the form of the hegemony, rule, power, control, or superiority of the Turkish state in Kurdistan and over Kurdish lives. Benazir considered the behavior of the women attacked by the Twitter account "like complicity," somewhat of a borderline case that produced

[19] Benazir explicitly consented to let me use her real name, when she discovered that it was common practice for anthropologists to use pseudonyms. I told her that this was the case during a conversation where Benazir, I, and a few other friends were talking about the stories behind our names. These stories qualified something important about the individual name-holders and the families that they described, filled with anxieties, practical calculations, political sentiments, moral compromises, creativity, and a sense of taking a stance, or putting a mark on the world. Benazir asked whether I must use pseudonyms, and I explained that it was not compulsory. She then told me she'd prefer to be referred to by her own name.

similar results, and definitely "a form of betrayal" (*bir çeşit ihanet*). "But you didn't need to come all the way to Kurdistan to study this," she added, "it is all over the internet now, I would just send you the links and you could write your dissertation." I replied that I had no complaints being there and that I really liked Kurdistan, and she replied back:

> Benazir: That's because you have somewhere else to go. Imagine this is your only option and every damn day you wake up, you look around, and everything is wrong. What was that English word you taught me the other day?
> Özge: "*Shitshow.*"
> Benazir: Yes, "s*hitshow*." It's a great word, like it is made for Kurdistan. But don't say this in America, say this: "*Kurdistan heaven in Middle East shitshow*." Did I say it correctly?
> Özge: Almost. So, you're saying I shouldn't study betrayal, I shouldn't study collaboration; I should study better, nicer things about Kurds.
> Benazir: No, that's not what I am saying… It is just a very difficult issue. Kurds have no power in this system. You can't write it like you're blaming Kurds. But when I look at history, and not only history, the same goes for the present situation, I see a lot of betrayal, and we have to start talking about this.

So Benazir too, much like Zehra, pointed out a moral taint of a historical kind, and that it was something Kurds were yet to properly talk about. When I went on to discuss all this with other interlocutors, I found that Benazir was not alone in her views. Many interlocutors expressed that "stuff like betrayal" deserved attention and that it was time to critically reflect on the issue. I argue that this line of thinking has the effect of turning the question whether Kurds' accommodations to the state amount to complicity in their ensuing political subordination into a leaf-like problem: "We all see the effects of our own complicity in this rule, most of us think this is shockingly remark-able, then why do we remark on it so little?" The challenge that this question presents to the ethnographer is the absurdity of the claim – Kurds are *not* not talking about it. In fact, as noted in chapter two, the argument that Kurds bear a historical responsibility for their own subordination is well grounded in Kurdish political ethics, and it articulates a

powerful vision of Turkish rule: one that finds Turkish rule *theoretically* inseparable from "Kurdish complicity" and "Kurdish complicity" practically inseparable from its concrete, omnipresent medium: accommodation.

And yet, whenever the issue presented itself, the conversation either started with, or at one point got interrupted by, the same argument: "we are not talking about this enough." Here is another example, which is the second part of a story that I sketched in chapter two. Let me quickly summarize the first part. Our main characters were two cousins from Van, Ayhan the compliant and Selim the dissident. Ayhan was the school-teacher-turned-traitor shunned for his eagerness to accommodate the governor of Van, the supervillain of Van universe, Selim was the doctor-turned-municipal-contractor whom the same governor unfairly dismissed from his job. Initially, the story was one of a life-long friendship torn asunder by a series of ethical conflicts, as well as of a man (from the perspective of Selim) listening to his moral compass, which Ayhan mislaid and thus became complicit in Turkish rule. But this was just the beginning. It became all the more complicated when Selim took his personal case to Twitter, where he staged an attack on "optimists among us who believe bending to the whims of this incompetent governor will solve their problems" (tweet #1), "bringing decay into our society with their cowardice" (#2), "playing stupid about their responsibilities for the worsening situation of Kurds in Van" (#3). In this second part, I want to focus on how people engaged with Selim's case on Twitter.

Twitter users were presented with a choice. At a time when public dissent yielded no profit, and in the face of a mounting surplus of complicity accusations, why bother with this one? Yet something in Selim's rhetoric provided the riveting sound bites that people needed, leading a number of known and unknown others to take a stance on the issue. Most were sympathetic and even those who took a slightly dismissive tone found enough motivation to stay in the

conversation. A few posts under the thread that Selim started began with "I wasn't going to say anything but…" and a few with "reading about this made me so angry." It seemed that the majority of the commentators were not directly affected by but intimately concerned with the issue. When the conversation died down after about 48-hrs, I called Selim and we met for a drink:

> Özge: Now, I'm so curious, were the tweets about a particular someone? Like Ayhan?
>
> Selim: No, not at all. I didn't give names for a reason. This isn't about names. This is about the general situation. And enough with Ayhan. I'm still upset with him, but we have real traitors in Van.
>
> Özge: Such as…?
>
> Selim: I said I am not giving names.
>
> Özge: Fine. Can you tell me if you received criticism in private? I mean about the tweets.
>
> Selim: My mum yelled at me for an hour yesterday. She thinks I got myself into a public fight with Ayhan. I told her it wasn't about Ayhan, but she said everyone thinks it was. She said my aunt called her, then uncles, kin, kin of kin, someone called Şakir. I don't even know who Şakir is. She said, "I don't have to deal with this," she said, "since you know everything, you can explain yourself to the family." She doesn't understand Twitter, but someone told her "your son wrote bad things about Ayhan," and now she is convinced that I passed out leaflets on the street. She said, "don't you know that's illegal?" I was like "mum, this is not the 2000s, we don't do leaflets anymore."
>
> Özge: The woman is right; you should clean your own mess. I have another question: Were there any twitter replies that stood out to you?
>
> Selim: I can't think of any one reply, but I noticed something else. I originally posted three tweets and the third one got the most response. The tweet that says, "some Kurds are playing stupid" (*salaga yatmak*). It was essentially about *our* responsibilities. It was about Kurds who are in denial, who try to save the day without thinking "will this harm my people, will this hurt anyone, is this even right?"
>
> Özge: What kind of reactions did you get for that tweet?
>
> Selim: Positive. Many people were like "we can't avoid this issue anymore." It was a badly written tweet, but people got it. I think Kurds are fed up. There is something wrong with the situation and we all know there is something wrong.

It really was a badly written tweet, and I was glad that Selim admitted this much. It did not specify what "playing stupid" looked like and there was so little room for a nuanced discussion about the agentive grounds of Kurds' complicitous accountability vis-à-vis "the worsening situation." Yet it achieved its purpose; people got it. Okay, but how?

For far too long, I examined the social categorization by Kurds of certain acts and relations as complicity in the state's crimes like a logician trying to break the code of a paradox. I treated "complicity" as representing an ethical problem that received ample attention from across many sectors of Kurdish society, Kurds disagreed. I considered it an argument about a specific accomplice culpably involved in a serious offense carried out by a principal, a Turk, but "it wasn't about names." My efforts got me nowhere and my mistake was not considering the issue in its proper context.

First of all, themes like "playing stupid," "cowardice," "betrayal," "collaboration," and "complicity" played themselves out pretty well in Kurdistan and they did not need any further analytical grounding. If naming an accomplice struck too false a note, that was not because of an underlying analytical or causal confusion, it was because naming persons was at odds with the privileged status of these themes as heuristics for delivering the worst truths of the moral community – like Selim noted, it wasn't about names, it was about the general situation. More broadly, decoding what was said *in* the code, parsing the grammar of betrayal, collaboration, or complicity, was hardly the point. Selim made a case for a public inquiry in the context of a truth that he believed was being avoided; the case being made, in other words, was about the privileged connection between truth and semiotic practice, notably the practice of assertion. Selim wanted greater reflexivity and more debate.

The fact that the demand for ethical reckoning was tied so straightforwardly to the practice of assertion is one reason why I find pragmatic theories of truth quite useful. Peirce describes truth as the opinion "fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate" ([1878] 1986: 273), and Dewey as knowledge that meets the local standards of "warranted assertability" (1941: 169). Either way, truth is a function of the semiotic practices people engage in and the commitments they make. Treating an opinion as truth thus boils down to its [meta]pragmatic bearings on semiotic practice, opening up for evaluation the performativity of inquiry itself. Selim's tweets, for instance, performed social criticism from within, asking his audience to prefer bitter truths to comforting illusions. Unlike the truths discovered by Enlightenment thinkers, this was a kind of truth swept under the carpet for being discomforting, hence the prevailing metapragmatic argument, "we need to start talking about it." Note the doubly-reflexive and doubly-confessional performativity of this argument: "I'm aware that you're aware that we *both* are not talking about this."

So, did I prove myself a bad anthropologist by asking names, by treating complicity accusations, or insinuations about complicitous behavior, as accounts about a third-person who aided and abetted? Was it a terrible mistake on my part that I assumed Selim must have had a specific someone or a specific something in mind? What about Xaltî Bese and Selim's mother? Why couldn't these women appreciate the broad ethical purpose of their children's actions? Did they lack the insights that the latter had about politics or possess a set of different motivations that did not serve them well? Well, none of these really. Sure, Selim was talking about the general situation, but something other than the general situation prompted Selim to make his case that day, not another. The immediate context of Zehra's history lesson was Ismail's funeral and not, well, a history lesson. Zehra's entire village and Selim's inner circle all interpreted, and

understandably so, the actions of the two within, and as contingent on, their respective communicative contexts. Why? Because, as Xaltî Bese put it so wisely, people don't ask "who did this," they ask, "who told u this." In other words, people tend to grasp a matter of concern as someone's matter of concern, which is only meaningful, and available to be taken up for evaluation, insofar as it is an example of actual language use responsive to and instigated by a specific situation that summoned it. Or let me put it this way: If I called Zehra right at this moment to tell her that "village-guards are a problem," I suspect she would want to know where that really came from.

What does the discussion thus far tell us about ethical problems? Many things. Both remark-able and unremarked, unique and abundant at every turn, an ethical problem is a function of its contradictions. Try as we might to add things up to a totalizing ethics, to norms, or moral codes, picking up a leaf from the ground is a communicative gesture, and picking up a leaf on a specific day though it has been there all along is a semiotic event wherein the leaf is made to exist through a pointing of a distinct manner. Here is another angle to the story: Any metaphorical leaf designating something "out there," a given, or a matter of concern linked to luck, or God, asks a question about the notions of morality and politics with which it coexists. Say, I take Kurdish complicity to be a theoretical given of Turkish rule, existing even when I don't see it happening – an argument, by the way, already variously made by Zehra, Xaltî Bese, Araz, Benazir, Selim, and a bunch of Twitter users. This argument alone is quite strong, but there is another question to be asked: to what is this givenness opposed that Kurds need it in their political ethical considerations of Turkish rule?

Now consider this: I don't live in Kurdistan anymore; I live in the States and my current neighbor is a Korean PhD candidate at the department of physics. But I know very well that

village-guards didn't disappear, just because they fell out of my sight. I do know, however, that I am possibly missing something and knowing that I'm missing something helps me distinguish *my* vantage on the issue from the overall code of the issue itself. An ethical problem thus becomes a pragmatic exercise. Or take my interlocutor from Bahçesaray who maintained that Ismail, a village-guard, was not innocent, though the same Ismail hadn't freely chosen the life he lived, and it was also impossible overall to tell how and under what exact conditions Ismail had become a village-guard. Why do these ambiguities matter? Because they show that there exist very practical, concrete limits – or constraints – to moral imagination, which are internal to the very nature of what one is perceiving.

In the rest of this chapter, I show how these questions and ambiguities help Kurds communicate the very circumstances and experiences that summon them. I begin by asking: what does it mean to say that a problem is not problematized enough? I ask this, because I heard this claim a lot, but also because I think I have an answer, which is also an answer for an anthropology of politics. I argue that notions of complicity, betrayal, and the likes are actualized in Kurdistan as a unique sort of ethical problem that persists in its fundamental contradiction, that it always transpires in the midst of its recognition, already a missed opportunity, but also known in its truth to be so, a missed yet *not* an unproductive opportunity.

Luck, A Problem

A problem not being problematized enough is one that hasn't spoken its truth yet, one that hasn't been made to perform its responsibility for the world out there – well, at least for Selim and Zehra. For the anthropologist, that a problem is not being problematized enough is a description of the very context in which the problem is evaluated as one not being problematized enough. It

tells us that Selim and Zehra consider the issue being problematized as most occurring in the background, without being taken up properly, perhaps silently avoided. It also, therefore, suggests that the fact people not problematize this problem may depend on contextual factors, such as whether people have enough resources and freedom to problematize it, or how their doing so would be regarded by the others around them, or how witnessing a problem a lot affects or diminishes their ability to even want to talk about it. Saying that a problem is not being problematized enough is also criticism intended for a certain audience, in this case, Kurds. As description, or criticism, it therefore simultaneously registers a stance that metapragmatically evaluates the circumstantial limits, contradictions, and reflexive habits that won't allow the problem to be taken up the right way. In a broader sense, the argument being made here is that in Kurdistan, for different reasons and in different ways, people tend to use the pointer, or feel obliged to use the pointer, instead of making it explicit. In a context so defined, where people either choose or criticize others for choosing to use the pointer, what can we say about politics, ethics, or agency?

But for Selim and Zehra, again, the purpose of their respective interventions was also to show that the truth was quite otherwise. In chapter four, I briefly alluded to the idea of "an otherwise" in my discussion of "interactive autonomy," which I theorized both as an affordance of communication and the otherwise of state-surveillance. The point was to stress, as Constantine Nakassis (2014) notes in his distinctive take on the term *otherwise*, that surveillance and its strategic misuse by Kurds, who sometimes lie to the Turkish state, and sometimes fake it, stand in a relation of "semiotic simultaneity." Like Nakassis's semiotic simultaneity, my interactive autonomy too somewhat loosely draws from Elizabeth Povinelli's call for "an anthropology of the otherwise… that locates itself within forms of life that are at odds with dominant, and

dominating, modes of being" (Povinelli 2011 n.p). Povinelli sees this anthropology as essentially studying ethics, which corresponds in her jargon to a *practice of effort*, a practice of inspecting the current arrangement of things so as to imagine a different arrangement. Take Selim's criticism of *some* Kurds, who lived in denial, not even asking "will this harm my people, will this hurt anyone, is this even right." These questions, I believe, exemplify the kind of effort that Povinelli's ethics entails. A second example can be given from Keane's discussion of feminist consciousness-raising groups: "The feminists' political goals depended, in part, on the ethical work of redescribing everyday interactions so that other people could see the harm they entailed and the ways of flourishing they forestalled" (2016: 314).

Drawing on my selective reading of Povinelli, I want to stress two important aspects of the practice of effort. First, it is an art of a very practical description, of describing, taking stock of, and always through sustained and critical inquiry, the way things are currently arranged and known as such-and-such. Second, the privileged mode of this ethics is a certain kind of estrangement necessary to see that the truth was quite the otherwise. This is not the sort of truth to which one swears her allegiance (Povinelli 2012: 459). This is the sort of truth that one speaks to herself upon the completion of an inquiry. "If," Povinelli adds, "the conditions of the otherwise lie in the radically potential spaces of a kind of truth speaking… what political and theoretical weight will be given to the exhausting conditions of these spaces?" (ibid: 454). Both of these points neatly relate to my interest in the idea of "complicity," which is a kind of truth Kurds find in the questions that they ask about their moral and political habitus. This truth is not too far from the truth that Peirce theorized – belief destined to be agreed upon by the end of inquiry – but a tinsy bit closer to philosopher Cherly Misak's definition of truth as belief that fulfills *and* disciplines the aspirations of inquiry (1999).

My use of Povinelli's framework is limited to these two points, however, as I realized the rest is not the right fit for Kurdistan. Given that this realization alone was helpful, I want to explain why. First, let's look at Povinelli's definition of power: that which enables *one* arrangement of many to become dominant, steering people away from actually caring for an otherwise. Yet dominance is a partial achievement, Povinelli argues (2011: *n.p.*) and it always "creates simultaneous surplus, excess, deficits, and abscesses in material and memory." As an example, Povinelli looks at *Kula* (Malinowski 1984), "an inter-tribal exchange of ceremonial objects… that traveled in opposite directions in a closed circuit along established routes." She remarks, citing Malinowski, that although this ceremonial exchange "publicly defined Kula," there were "a greater number of secondary activities and features that took place under [the Kula's] cover." Kula was thus *one* arrangement forged out of a dynamic "social whole… of disparate social parts." Most important of all, precisely by keeping Kula running, the Trobrianders were continually, simultaneously creating Kula's extra stuff subsumed under the hegemony of Kula. Povinelli concludes that when people notice this extra stuff, they realize there is more to Kula than publicly avowed and eventually ask: if the otherwise is built into every dominant arrangement, why is *difference* not allowed a legitimate existence?

In a list of writings on the topic, Povinelli favorably cites the anthropology of globalization, actor-network theory, indigeneous studies, feminist research. She points to various continuities in style and effort between her work and works on productive misunderstandings, partial connections, and assembled worlds (Latour 2005, 2014, Strathern 1991, 2004, Tsing 2011). Bracketing out the immensely complex ways in which these approaches upset a list of modernist and social constructivist settlements, I want to point out a certain argument that they all implicitly make – and this is obviously a simplification: if power is unexpectedly productive,

then the prospect of an otherwise is partly enabled by unintended consequences, which turns "luck" into somewhat of a good thing. I think my interlocutors would bitterly disagree.

But let's unpack the argument in favor of luck. Take "morality," an oft-repeated example of domination. In modern Western philosophy, morality is a set of universal principles that individuals shall practice on their own, an approach that Bernard Williams criticizes for its overemphasis on rules. For Williams, everyday social relations and interactions carry a much heavier ethical load than principles (Williams 1973, 1985). The emphasis on principles, as Webb Keane reminds us (2016: 32), is of course not unique to modern Western philosophy: "ethnographic and historical records are indeed full of rules and obligations, put in very general terms, which are meant to be internally consistent, like the morality system Williams criticizes." Yet for present purposes, I find William's notion of morality as *one* distinct kind of ethics to be quite helpful.

Now, in the spirit of the otherwise, how can social actors realize that morality is but one arrangement of many arrangements? And how does morality steer actors away from caring for an otherwise? Williams argues that the answer lies in Kant's practical reason: the capacity of individuals to rationally guide their actions by way of following their principles. In a world of infinitely unknown futures, Kant insists, actors have to rely on universal principles as the basis of conduct, and that bad things enabled by principled actions must be a non-factor in morality. When strictly applied, practical reason frees a hypothetical employee, who did *not* lie about the queerness of a colleague, from the guilt of the latter's dismissal – the former's morality is immune to the fact that the latter has the bad luck of being a gay man in a conservative society. Williams comments that Kant's doctrinal "attempt to escape luck" might seem "an obsessional

exaggeration," but the attempt is quite "intimate to our notion of morality [offering us] solace to the sense of the world's unfairness" (Williams 1981: 36 – 37).

It may well be that, however, the otherwise of morality results precisely from upholding morality as the only way, reproducing in effect the morality's surplus. Naisargi Dave's ethnography of queer activism in India is a great example. Take the following quote from an activist: "Just because they say sex work is morally wrong doesn't mean that we have to say that it's morally 'right.' The point – our point – is to create a *new* morality." Dave explains that "this radical imaginary" (2010: 371) is partly enabled by unintended consequences of the hegemonic morality that turns queers into "accidental activists" (ibid: 370):

> "... the enforced remove from the morally disciplining centers of family, law, and nation serve as the necessitating factor, as well as the *condition of possibility*, for the creative practice of new forms of affiliation and relationship. These are not modes of simple 'resistance' but of radical invention" (ibid 373).

In her focus on "moral discourses and their normalizing, and *productive*, relationship to ethical possibilities" (ibid: 374), Dave presents a powerful case study of a widespread experience: the social flagging of individuals or groups for having amoral desires. And it's not any less widespread of an experience that these individuals and groups often, and despite the odds, choose to pursue the life they want. While such courage may well be a corollary, but not necessarily always, of having no other choice, what matters here is that one is now betting on a life that has not yet declared itself. Thus, one may fail, and one may also find success, happiness, and a better life. Bernard Williams notes that the latter sort of situations serve to remind us that we all have deep, real reasons to be grateful for living in a world where morality does not always prevail. In other words, we realize that morality is but *one* arrangement, itself occasioned by

luck, though not the "luck" of moral luck (in Williams's terms). This is not the luck that wins us the lottery either. But I believe this *is* the luck for which anthropology has developed a fondness. Morality's attempt to escape luck, in Povinelli's terms, is an attempt to conceal that its unity has been but an illusion.

Why does this luck not cut it for Bernard Williams and not for Kurds? The way I interpret Williams, he has no interest in situations wherein the actor *exits*, for whatever reason, a moral conflict or pressure. He wants to understand instead the repercussions for the actor of unintended consequences that *ought not* happen and *might not have* happened had she acted differently. Viewed this way, moral luck captions an intrinsic aspect of the ethical situation relative to corollary meta-semiotic dilemmas: Should the actor feel *guilty*? Should she *regret* what happened? Where does her *responsibility* lie? Is she to *compensate* for injury? I believe my interlocutors were grappling with a sort of luck akin to that of Williams: a luck intrinsic to their accommodating, keeping quiet, or abandoning in ways, had it not been for the dictates of politics, would have appeared completely unacceptable. More broadly, however, I argue that Kurds' distaste for luck turns on a rather distinct notion of *difference* that derives from a notion of power differently construed.

Politics

Because the story Kurds privilege to speak about "power" – that which closes the arrangement – is a political story, a story in which they do not only talk about politics, but also about history, morality, community, or family, and in such ways that imply all these are refractions of the same "politics," I too will continue with this terminology. Considering how intensely power and

politics orient towards one another, any choice between the two is technically a choice about where to begin anyway: is it a chicken or an egg?[20]

I have to admit though that there is a vexed feeling of nostalgia to talking about politics or the political domain nowadays. The social anthropology of political systems is a child of by-gone days, and contemporary anthropology warns us against treating the political as a separate domain strictly tied to its own structures. In an impressive review, Christian Krohn-Hansen (2005: 11628) summarizes the current disciplinary stance as follows: "A typical anthropological point of departure today states that politics, or the political… must be investigated as articulation between power relations, cultural processes, and historical trajectories." Compare this formula with the following excerpt from *African Political Systems* edited by Meyer Fortes and Edward Evans-Pritchard (1940: xiv) that defines the book's object of study – political systems – as the maintenance of "social order within a territorial framework, by the organized exercise of coercive authority through the use, or the possibility of use, of physical force." Had I asked my interlocutors to pen for me a dictionary definition of politics, I am certain that most would have offered a formula akin to that of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard.

There is still something to be grateful about the new version of politics, however, though not exactly for what it says but what it does for our ethnographies. When politics is defined in such broad terms, it quite conveniently disappears, which compels us as fieldworkers to beg our interlocutors to please point us towards what is political in their world such that we can actually

[20] Steven Gregory (1999: 13), for instance, formulates the relationship between power and politics this way: "For my purposes, politics refers to a diverse range of social practices through which people negotiate power
relations. The practice of politics involves both the production and exercise of social relationships and the cultural construction of social meanings that support or undermine those relationships." The sentence would of course lose some meaning, but it would not become incomprehensible, if we were to swap the word "politics" with power and vice versa. This is not a comment about the quality of phrasing, but metasemantics.

study it. The result is a certain notion of politics conceived as a network of encounters wherein people confront the political and say, "wait a minute, this is not a solar panel, this is politics," "not a school project, but politics," "not a simple job, but politics," and so on.[21] In other words, the political – as it is not about systems, structures, or even institutions anymore – remains *implicit* in explicit descriptions of other phenomena. The idea of articulating the implicit in the explicitness of relations and conduct was for Evans-Pritchard (1973, see also Scheele & Shryock 2019: 3) a property of good anthropology, but it is also anthropology in its most challenging form.

It is challenging for two primary reasons, and both have something to do with the established disciplinary conventions. First, this sort of anthropology requires a deep training in the self-reflexive and sequentially realizable character of local knowledge, and the way in which this knowledge becomes available in situated practices of "looking-and-telling" (Garfinkel 1967). Yet this training cannot be fully completed at the preliminary stages of project development, though the expectation is quite the opposite. Indeed, as a soon-to-be recent graduate, I know most of us do not even start this training until a few months into long-term fieldwork, at which point comes despair: "I don't even know what I am doing here." Second, contemporary anthropology, having to survive in an increasingly competitive academic environment, has its interests in explicit discourse, in being a sort of discipline that produces an anthropology of education, or of job market, with one chapter on socio-political inequalities. In certain other ways, however, and although it is hard to get over the loss of focus in political anthropology, the loss itself forces a new frame – unless one is content with an anthropology of

[21] This is in fact quite a common plot twist in Turkey and people see it everywhere: as soon as one dares to claim, "this is Islam," almost immediately appears a gigantic speech-bubble out of nowhere that says "nope, you are being deceived you fool, this is politics."

solar panels. It may be that political anthropology cannot be confined within an explicit area of knowledge as some contemporary alternatives because the unifying thread running through its material – what political anthropology studies – is precisely the actor's implicit pragmatic orientation.

This was at least the case in Kurdistan. From my interlocutors' point of view, Turkish governance was something to be discovered at each turn of events. It could easily be described the way Andrew Shryock (2013: 271) describes *What kinship is– and is not* (Sahlins 2013): "so dense, so [annoyingly] perfect in its construction, that it leaves [them] almost no room to turn around in, but infinite space in which to ponder and re-imagine the topic at hand." More importantly, I was repeatedly told to think of politics as an aspect of everyday life bound to strike one instantly – "look around, you will see it everywhere." Politics was carrying a Kurdish language book and not feeling good about it. It was solar-panels. It was paying a price for stupidly going on a journey with a friend who did not know how to act, or watching others pay a price, and knowing that these two were the only options. It was the idiotic game, the leaf, the exceptional wrongness of everything to which one waked up every morning.

Therein in this wrongness, my interlocutors insisted, lay a consistent, tantalizing hint of rational doubt, mistrust, a crisis of confidence, and a pragmatic impulse to mitigate at all costs the uncertainties yet to realize themselves, providing another hint, perhaps, of how everything in Kurdistan existed in *potentia* to become relatively political. *Potentia* here is not a clever idiom painting a nightmarish authoritarian dystopia. It characterizes a way of reasoning about the lived facts of the political domain. It paints politics as the unifying thread that runs through events of semiosis, itself externalized in those events wherein the actor turns around and says, "this is politics." But the actor doesn't always choose to say that, and at other times, like Benazir, she

takes it back, considering it a bit of an exaggeration. Or like Xaltî Bese, she may even ask others to not say it either. And all these latter kinds of choices derive from the same infinite space in which one ponders and re-imagines the topic at hand.

Equally important, *potentia* implies an anticipation of the next turn – the next *bad* turn, more precisely. Or let me say it this way. *Potentia* offers a rhetorical shift from "this is politics" to "this is politics, *again.*" Indeed, I see this *again* as alluding to a key, if subtle, aspect of politics relative to its prevailing metapragmatic framing in Kurdistan, where political things are interpreted as self-similar sequences of an ongoing semiosis, *i.e.,* Zehra's historical tracing of blood feuds to land disputes to village-guards. When Zehra, Selim, and Benazir took issue with certain self-similar sequences, they were in fact referring to their recognition of each such sequence as *politics, again*, remark-able but unremarked, scandalizing but not necessarily the first of its kind.

Here are a few other examples: Suppose you are a road worker in the city, visiting your village for a wedding. Just as the wedding band plays your most favorite Kurdish song, a patriotic ballad about guerrilla fighters, the father of the groom runs to the stage and cuts the song in half, shooing the band members away. You turn around and see a group of village-guards entering the wedding hall, acting *as if* nothing strange really has happened, which you unthinkingly absorb as "just politics." Or suppose you are at your local teahouse, sitting next to a childhood friend who recaps his entire week. You listen and keep an eye on the Kurdish language news program on the TV, though you truly hate watching news, because nothing good ever happens in Kurdistan. Suddenly, a complete stranger walks in the teahouse. Imagine the effect. Imagine your friend's face, instantly tensed. Imagine him straightening up his posture, looking at the ceiling as if it is the most interesting thing in the world, and imagine the chatter

trailing off into an enigmatic pause, with the only noise being that of the TV, miraculously playing a Turkish soap-opera. All of this, in their appearance, guides you to reason that "this is how life is here."

Moments like these all characteristically imply in Kurdistan an inconsistency of sorts: those who work against their people are the ones being shown respect and deference; having a conversation or watching news are acts that one needs to hide from unknown others. These inconsistencies hardly beg for a verification. They are bothersome, everyday, and almost always grasped immediately as they occur, leaving a taste of regret and a sense of an opportunity already missed. If we give all our attention to that which seems scandalous without taking into account that there is nothing ingenious about it – just a bad taste – we can't fully appreciate the genuine affordances of being in-the-midst of anticipating, reasoning about, and witnessing an unintended effect of which the actor is already too conscious. Even worse, we would be forcing an unwarranted hierarchy on equally complex semiotic operations that mutually clarify one another.

More broadly, all this points the way to a question that feels open and interesting to me – how can we think about politics and communication together? What I'm trying to get at is not that talk, or semiotic practice is "political" due to the fact of belonging to some register, genre, or any other socially marked mode of interaction that is of political nature. Nor do I imagine politics as content, communication as institution, or political communication as the yielding of information. Rather, I want to theorize politics as created by virtue of having been probed pragmatically, at times delivered in as an implicated answer.

In Kurdistan, people consume politics as something they have learned about in life, something that piques their interest, saddens, horrifies, bugs, or scandalizes them, something they experience, encounter, see, ignore, and indexically tie to its ensuing consequences known as

such-and-such. In doing all this, they engage in pragmatic and ethical work. To say or indicate, for instance, that Kurds' complicity in systemic wrongdoings in which they take the role of an enabler, or aider and abettor, is scandalizing or not surprising, remark-able but not needed to be remarked, is to present oneself as a certain kind of person vis-à-vis her stance on the topic, thus also defined and evaluated through the contradictory choices that it produces. This stance can be put in quite explicit terms, but it can also be signaled implicitly, through a simple shrug of weary acceptance. And just as legal verdicts demand justification by reference to internal standards – unless one is in a Turkish courtroom – this stance too, in fact any semiotic practice, must include an interpretation of its own ethical standards. One needs to do it right. Because life is funny like that; the authority of a cardinal political ethical idea is not necessarily greater than the pragmatic authority of conventions of say-ability, respect, or reciprocity.

It is true that there is a lot to be said about politics in explicit, denotational terms, but the present discussion insists on treating the political as taking place in a larger context of communicative experience, contingent on the actors' minding something together. As I shall suggest below, when people invoke and problematize politics as a domain of injustices, inequalities, and so on, they essentially tell us important things about the communicative context in which politics appears to them as such-and-such. In this dissertation, I am making a case for a political anthropology that studies the many varied ways in which actors learn these important things, or find themselves in their presence.

Difference

Where the actor locates and how she evaluates politics also has the effect of committing her to particular ethical questions, such as: if the otherwise is built into every possible arrangement,

why is *difference* not allowed a safe existence? I argue that the conditions of the communicative context in which Kurds study politics commit them to the following question: Why is *this* arrangement working differently *for* us? or "What kind of an idiotic rule is that?" This question is not obligatory, and it certainly does not cover all situations and viewpoints, but it still holds important lessons.

First, something different about "difference" is said when the question is asked the latter way – why is *this* arrangement working differently *for* us? In this account, *difference* does not strictly lie in, or emerge from, the individual. It is not a property of groups, invariably experienced as a function of their discursive, material, or metaphysical othering in society. Not that there is anything wrong with this approach. My point here is simply that it is essential to probe the specific conditions in which difference is produced and realized as a certain type of value. When Kurds say, "this is how *life* is *here*," when they claim "Kurdistan is not a normal place," and that "everything here is wrong," or when they ask "what kind of an idiotic rule is that," *difference* indeed constitutes an important link between these claims, but the underlying ethical problem is not merely that "we are not allowed to be different," but more specifically that "we are disproportionately vulnerable to luck," hence exhaustion.

Second, "why is *this* arrangement working differently *for* us?" speaks of a desire for normativity. The daily struggle of my interlocutors was not a struggle against "the comfort of normative adjudication" (Povinelli 2014 n.p.). It was a struggle *for* that comfort. Take the local conception "*ne birêzikiye"* (not-normal), which also registers a desire for "a normal life," the essence of which, for Kurds, lies in the normative unity of moral agency, such that one can reasonably predict the warranted range of directions in which an intention gives way to a range

of future effects. A normal-life, Kurds insist, is a life where unintended consequences can be treated as a non-factor.[22]

But, of course, the interesting thing is that they are *not* a non-factor. Luck exists; in fact, its existence, as Ian Hacking puts it (1990), was one of the greatest "conceptual events" of the twentieth century such that "the main task of theoretical sciences," according to Karl Popper ([1963] 2014: 460), became no other than "identifying the non-intentional social repercussions of intentional human actions."[23] Similarly, Bernard Williams (1981), Thomas Nagel (1979), and Martha Nussbaum (2001) variously have shown that the idea of luck plays centrally on ethics, law, and morality. And year, as I already noted, Kurds articulate luck – *bext* – as something circumstantial to, and arising from *their* political condition. In doing so, they not only distinguish between what is up to them and what is up to the world, they also say that unfortunately, a lot of things in their world are not really up to them. Do Kurds mean that luck is nonexistent elsewhere? Of course not. The argument that "we are disproportionately vulnerable to luck" doesn't suggest that luck is unique to Kurds; it suggests, however, that even luck needs to occur within its acceptable, normative limits. I want to turn on Williams's moral luck as an example to how luck can be made to exist in social life as something acceptable, or at least workable.

Moral luck, for Williams, occurs when we feel that it is right to morally assess and judge an actor for something that occurs outside of her control. Take his oft-cited example where a

[22] It might also be helpful here to note how this metapragmatic argument is a primary mode of reasoning that deeply shapes democratic sociality, as Robert D. Putnam notes (1993), as well as the practice of modern law wherein guilt is interiorized as a mental state and malicious intent (Laidlaw 2010, Parrish 2007).

[23] I also want to add here that if the conceptual event was one of the greatest, that also had something to do with the ethical complications to which it gave rise, turning science into a frenzied attempt to crack the morphology of consequences, and luck into an irregularity of a probabilistic sort (Hacking 1990, Stone 2020).

hypothetical lorry driver accidentally runs over and kills a child (1981: 43 – 44). Surely the lorry driver could not know this would happen, but moral luck flows from exactly that which cannot be readily known. From another perspective, I want to argue that this very unknowability – that the lorry driver could not have known this would happen – makes all the difference in the way whether an actor, like our lorry driver, can restate his moral unity retrospectively or not.

Not that our driver is now off the hook. Not at all. As Michael Lambek (2010) helpfully remarks, social actions are irreversible, and this irreversibility entails an ethics of acknowledgement and avowal. The lorry driver may have no legal liability, but he cannot escape, not in ethics, from committing himself to the truth that a child died and he was involved. Similarly, he shall know that "there is something *special* about his relation to this happening, something which cannot be eliminated by the consideration that it was not his fault" (Williams 1981: 43). Note that this avowal is meaningful precisely for being a reparative act owed to the child's parents. This way of framing avowal as responsibility emphasizes how the lorry driver is ethically differently positioned vis-à-vis the child's death than, say, a spectator or his wife, of which he needs to be conscious and reflective. Judith Butler remarks of this responsibility (2005: 10), that it positions the lorry driver to give a sensible account of his *causal relation* to the suffering in question, the very terms of which should be self-reflexive and first-personal. What is at stake here, more importantly, is a responsibility to conduct the self with appropriate regard for the other, not merely to run a mechanical rehearsal of past events in light of a negative outcome.

Yet giving an account of oneself is also an occasion for the driver to re-situate himself in the prevailing circumstantial matrix of moral luck. Put differently, accounting for one's causal-agentive relation to another's suffering, expressing regret, and showing willingness to take a reparative role are all ways of restoring the facts and influence on the situation of moral luck. It

is by way of self-accounting one can argue that what happened was an aberration from his normal-self, the self who would have never, not in a million years, intended this bad thing to happen, thereby re-stating the normative unity of his intentions (what he intended to cause) and effects in the world (what others take him to have intended to cause).

I will return to the idea of giving an account of oneself in the next two chapters, in particular in chapter seven, but there is a case to be made here about the normativity of moral luck which, and although it may initially look counterintuitive to the unity of moral agency, turns on a mode of accounting wherein unintended consequences can be effectively framed as *ought not to* happen. And it is often not by reading ethical theory that actors come to realize the significance of this normative frame, but by encountering an actual "breach of an everyday expectancy" *(sensu* Garfinkel 1967). Even a simple neglect of the demands of intersubjectivity – such as emailing a friend about a change of plans instead of calling – demands a relatively abstract normative analysis in case of a failure – "I ought to be more considerate than that." In that sort of case, the "et cetera" principle, which awards the actor ethical permission to live as though the future is predictable, shall make no pretense that the actor is immune to luck. The principle, in other words, does not describe a world wherein the actor is *guaranteed* that her well-intended deeds shall never bring ill consequences. The normative ground of moral unity derives instead from a different kind of guarantee: that there is always more to the empirical conditions of a breach than what a victim, or a spectator, can possibly know for herself, such that the actor can say, "I am sorry, but my phone broke."

Let me quickly stress the key role that *there-may-be-more-to-a-situation* plays in the possibility of giving an account of oneself, and also that the same *there-may-be-more-to-a-situation* loses most of its power, if applied merely as a counter-argument. Whatever it is that the

actor knows, and the others don't may well be the most mundane or unforeseeable of all excuses, but it still needs to be something for which the actor considers himself accountable to adequately serve as redress. It is one thing to explain how one's phone broke, and email was the second-best option; it is quite another to accept the truth of neglecting taking the phone to a repair shop when it first started acting weirdly. Even in situations similar to that of the lorry driver, where nothing the self does but someone else's actions determine the outcome, there still is a world of difference between the following two statements: "I wish the child had not been there" versus "I wish I had taken a different route." Both refer to the facts and influence of moral luck, yet only the latter stands as an avowed awareness of situated indeterminacies, now rendered the contrivances ethical practice.

Williams's moral luck, Butler's accountability, and Lambek's point on irreversibility are hardly the same thing, but there is something to be learned from them when read together: if every action is somewhat necessarily and metapragmatically anchored to its own cross-temporal unfolding, then people are better of imagining their moral agency retrospectively. Much the same way, however, as Webb Keane reminds us (2016: 93), "people do (sometimes) become ethically self-aware and verbal and do (sometimes) project themselves forward in time as ethical persons." And this was strikingly the case in Kurdistan, where waiting for the next thing to happen to see what was really meant before was something of a great luxury. Indeed, as I shall argue below, at stake in complicity accusations, as well as in self- or other-induced fears about becoming complicit with the Turkish state, was a political ethics that invite Kurds to reflect on the forceful bearing of prospective possibilities on present conduct, and with an anticipation that a failure to do so might cost them in the future the right to give an account of themselves.

Note, lastly, how a certain view of morality takes its contours here, one in which a degree of guilt lies in an agent who knows certain aspects of her actions can potentially produce negative effects, and is worthy of reconsideration on moral grounds, but still does not do anything differently. This was why Roza quit her job and why *some* Kurds, according to Selim, were guilty of a crime that none had ever intended to commit. And this was also why it appeared to my interlocutors that *this* arrangement was working differently *for* Kurds, keeping them from the assurances of morality – yes, even moral luck – normatively accorded people elsewhere as a solace to the impossible tensions and vagaries of temporality.

In other words, while Williams's lorry driver, in Williams's account, of course, because that lorry driver is not a real person but a philosophical example, copes with meta-semiotic questions about "why guilt," "why regret," "what responsibility," "what mode and means of accountability," and so on, the meta-semiotic problem in Kurdistan is itself the luck. The problem is itself that the existing arrangement, in Povinelli's terms, is reproducing slippages, excesses, and surplus that seem to overburden Kurds' lives, rendering it near-impossible to excuse oneself, account for one's intentions, and overall holding onto the very grounds of one's self-understanding.

Agency

I have been thinking about agency for a while now, trying to formulate an analytically rigorous notion of agency that may help me better depict the lives of my interlocutors. My reasoning for this thinking and trying is two-fold. First, the ethnographic story that I focus on calls for an attention to agency, for at the very least being a story that touches upon the classic question of structure versus agency, the question whether and how the anthropologist should understand the

articulations of structural relations that are "bigger" than individual lives and the fact that those individuals nevertheless able to pursue their desires, aspirations, and commitments. Second, and in line with a list of anthropological studies (Hirschkind 2006, Keane 2003a, Kockelman 2007, Laidlaw 2010), I too see the framework of "structures versus agency" somewhat problematic, prioritizing the anthropologist's expectations of what agentive action should look like, taking "structures," or master narratives, as the sole determinants of what agency responds to, where it should be searched for, and how it functions in social life. As James Laidlaw notes (2010: 144), this framework smuggles into social analysis an assumption that agency is composed entirely of efficacious and powerful action taken against some structures, and guided by certain values such as empowerment, liberation, equality, and so on. Laidlaw remarks that the main pitfall of this framework is that it limits, rather than clarifies, agency, recognizing it in actions conducive towards certain ends and outcomes which are often valued as important, valuable, good, and right by the anthropologist herself – in this sense, we are unable to understand, or even talk about, the agency of a village-guard, for instance.

Laidlaw's solution is simple. He proposes a view of agency that is put in its right intersubjective context, in which a person's agency derives from how others evaluate and assess certain actions as actions coming through that person, thus communicating her agentive capacities. Agency thus is enacted in social relations whereby people not only act in an efficacious manner, but also assume responsibility for what they have done and how their actions are assessed. Agentive efficacy, Laidlaw maintains, is in fact a product of the particular relational frames in which agents are assigned a role in social situations.

Paul Kockelman (2007) follows a somewhat similar thinking, whose formulation of "semiotic agency" takes the actor's awareness of the meaning of her actions and her

accountability to others as a condition of human agency (see also, Enfield and Sidnell 2017). What this means for ethnographic analysis is that in everyday life, production of agency derives from culturally specific modalities of assessment and evaluation, which in fact allow the actor to actually practice, enact, and act on what she intended to do, how she views herself, what kind of person she is, and how she want to be seen by others. The fact that the actor can only realize herself through an awareness of her accountability to others, and the fact that her actions should show and represent that awareness, is a very important component of social interaction, itself allowed by interaction. This has very concrete implications. When people form relationships or undertake a project together, they often treat their own actions and that of the others as delivering a particular message about their intentions, personality, and awareness of their accountability towards one another. Of specific concern to Kockelman's work are the communicative sources and strategies used by people to render their agency palpable and representable.

In both accounts, agency has a situated, contextual, and temporal dimension to it. Admittedly, Laidlaw's responsibility and Kockelman's accountability are not too far off from one another (and the authors use both terms), yet the latter comes with an added emphasis on what it is that mediates agency intersubjectively: accounts. It suggests that the actor's self-conscious capacity to realize herself as such-and-such a person is mediated semiotically when she variously accounts for – reasons about, explains, assesses, excuses – her actions and standpoint to the others. I think the emphasis on accounts is important and brings agency in a more direct relation to its articulations with social life, which is constituted, on one hand, by actions and sensibilities of actors, and, on the other, by the manner in which these people exist for one another. Accountability – more precisely, the act of giving an account of oneself – is a

means by which actors position themselves socially vis-à-vis the others, and thus become, willingly and with some effort, available to one another.

My ethnography supports this argument. In this chapter, I have variously shown the ways my interlocutors treated their social universe, and the very public that they form, as a space in which Kurds are available to one another as moral agents, evaluable on the basis of their actions, choices, silences, and so on. The next two chapters continue building on the notion of accountability. The chapters both approach the question of Kurds' morally flawed associations with the political regime, which *may* render them accomplices of the latter, for those associations are usually fated, in fact designed, to create that result, as a matter of accountability.

But I also want to make an intervention here. The contemporary critics of "structure versus agency" framework, while being quite right in their criticism, seem to have moved the issue, I believe, a little too far from the question of values, and more importantly, of normativity. In Kurdistan, what anthropologists study as agency, the sense in which actors own their words and deeds, with an ability to direct their lives and give it meaning, draws on the idea of the unity of agency. And this unity is often depicted as the unity of one's intentions and one's effects in the world. More centrally, it is described by my interlocutors as their preferred form of being in the world, as the "normal" way of living that grants a comfort, as well as something Kurdish communities across Kurdistan have been struggling both historically and daily to achieve and maintain – something, due to the conditions and demands of the political context, that they are constantly asked and forced to compromise. This is why in the introduction, I referred to anthropologists as a rather negative and overly critical folk, failing pretty badly in thinking normatively and with attention to how agency is reproduced and qualified as a value just as actors negotiate its means and limits. In this sense, this dissertation examines moral unity as a

useful and positive measure of value, by which Kurds continue to judge aspects of their socio-political circumstances – the structures, if you will – as disproportionately conducive to reproducing misfortunes, or moral luck, in ways that metapragmatically evaluate agency as a good, desirable, albeit hard to maintain unity of some sorts.

Chapter 6 The Traitor at the Court

The previous chapter examined "complicity" as an implicit ethical problem as well as a technique of meta-theory, by which Kurds evaluate *why* their life work the way it does, reflexively picking and elaborating on the notions of politics, ethics, and agency with which "complicity" as such coexists. Sometimes implying a problem is not enough, however. For Zehra, for instance, eliciting a conception of givenness, itself given in the problem, was too conservative for a political ethical project with revisionary ambitions. She was not in the trade of a truth already known in common, already ordinarily viewed as such-and-such; she wanted others to see that they got it all wrong. The present chapter looks at the ways Kurds take up the category of "betrayal" to overcome the limitations of the *leaf problem* discussed in chapter five, disentangling the complexities of the problem from the value of the moral work that problematizing it can do. It aims to show how the notion of betrayal as a specific type of group-internal crime is tied to distinct figures, actions, and possibilities for interaction, thus transforming what is otherwise known implicitly into something concrete.

"This is a *cehş*"

Consider for a second how generic the word "leaf" is, how elusive it sounds for a metaphor tasked to caption a certain human behavior that has played in Kurdistan a nefarious political function, that is, bolstering Turkish indirect rule. Is the phrase "an idiotic game" much better than "the leaf?" Perhaps not, but at least it qualifies the speaker's feelings about the topic at

hand. Now listen to my interlocutor – also my kin – explaining the word "kew" (partridge), which he glossed as "traitor;"

> "In Dersim (a Kurdish province), we say *kew* instead of traitor. I also heard people saying *kew* instead of *ajan* (spy). My grandpa told me that Kurds consider *kew*s as treacherous in nature, that *kew*s tend to harm their species. In the wider area where I live, there are eleven villages of the same tribe. If you visit these villages, you will see that most men own a few *kew*s that they feed and train, so they do know the nature of this animal very well. When men go on a hunting trip, they take a well-trained *kew* along with them and leave it next to the trap. *Kew*s are so treacherous to their own kind that they keep singing until other *kew*s come and get caught… Dersimians refer to Rayber who betrayed Seyîd Riza (the leader of the 1937 Dersim Rebellion) as the first *kew*, but the word still has currency. There is a man in the neighboring village, for instance, everyone thinks he is collaborating with Turkish armed forces. Once my grandma saw him sitting at the back of a military vehicle. She said, 'soldiers are going to hunt, they have their *kew* with them.'"

How elaborate, isn't it? Now take the word "*cehş*," sometimes written as "*cahş*," meaning "donkey-foal," which corresponds in Kurdish again to a traitor. I heard the word *cehş* most frequently in the southern provinces of Turkey's Kurdistan as well as in Iraqi Kurdistan. What is wrong with donkey-foals? Well, a whole lot actually. Donkey-foals, as soon as they start walking, leave their clan and somehow turn away from their own species, getting cozy with horses instead, as if they are the latter's offspring, thus becoming mere, pathehic lackeys – a primary quality looked for in a traitor. Or think of "*qantir*," meaning "mule," an offspring of a male donkey and a female horse. Mules are essential assets in Kurdish rural life, especially in mountainous areas and areas where they are used for border trade between Turkey's Kurdistan and neighboring countries. Metaphorically, *qantir* is a person who can easily be lured by Turks into betraying Kurds. Why? Because *qantir*s tend to deny who they are, considering their distinctness a source of embarrassment, hence the saying, "*ji qantir re gotin 'bavête kîye?' got*

'xalêmi hespe'" – "they asked a mule 'who is your father?' [the mule] said 'my uncle is a horse.'" A Kurd is referred to as a *qantir,* if she is ashamed of her own culture, language, people, or customs, trying too hard, for instance, to perfect her Turkish.

For Xaltî Hediye, my host-mother in Cizre, locals who criticized the pro-Kurdish political party *HDP* were all *qantir*s. Local youth disrespectful of or indifferent to Kurdish customs, such as marriage patterns, likewise, were again *qantir*s. And each day, she would name a different person a *cehş* – a traitor. Her favorite pastime activity was to drink tea on our balcony with the neighbor women, during which she would wag her finger at some buildings in our area, claiming the owners were all traitors:

> Xaltî Hediye: This is a *cehş*, this is a *cehş*, this is a *cehş*, and this is a *cehş*.
> Özge: What about this one Xaltî?
> Xaltî Hediye: I just showed it, didn't I?
> Özge: No, you didn't, you said this one, this one, this one, and this one.
> Xaltî Hediye: Oh, then yes, that one is a *cehş*, too.

Let me explain why those people were all *cehş*s. As was mentioned in chapter two, Cizre experienced months-long military operations and heavy fighting between Turkish armed forces and Kurdish militants in 2016. Four neighborhoods of Cizre, including ours, were surrounded and besieged for three months by Turkish armed forces, while the whole city lived under round-the-clock curfew. Daily artillery fire continued the whole time, leaving a badly damaged, haunted Cizre behind. The buildings to which Xaltî Hediye pointed all shared an interesting feature. Tall and readily visible from afar, none were much damaged by shelling, bearing only a few marks of the fight such as bullet holes. Xaltî Hediye's argument was pretty straightforward: the owners must have served the Turkish military in some capacity to have their properties spared. It was a shame, both Xaltî and our neighbors agreed, that those *cehş*s all got away with

their treachery – a common sentiment and criticism in post-peace process Cizre to which I return in the next and final chapter.

Here is another word: *birakujî*. *Bira* means "brother," *kujî* "murder," together making "fratricide." *Birakujî* is not any word, however. It crystallizes a specific episode of the Kurdish history, the Kurdish version of the *Habil and Qabil,* if you will. *Birakujî* is the title of a poem by Abdulla Peşêw, one of the most famous Kurdish poets from Iraqi Kurdistan, who also coined the word. The poem was about the Iraqi Kurdish Civil War that took place between two rival factions during the mid 1990s.[24] Peşêw refers to the civil war as "three long years of *birakujî*" and ends his poem, dated 1998, with the following verse: "*Ev ne helbest e, helwest e*" – "this is not a poem, [but] an attitude." In 2017, Selim Temo, an independent researcher and a columnist of Kurdish origin from Turkey, wrote an opinion article titled "What is *birakujî?*" It is quite interesting, Temo writes, that *birakujî* is so widely characterized by Kurds – here Temo names a few organizations, a tribal confederate, for instance – as a well-learned lesson. "But when," Temo rhetorically asks, "when exactly did we learn that lesson?" *Birakujî* to Temo is nothing but the recursive history behind it, not a well-learned lesson, but a long overdue tool for social awareness and a tool for reflecting on what Kurds were historically creating for one another.

Lastly, take *bêbextî*, which is the word for "betrayal," with traitor being *bêbext.* I already have talked about *bêbextî*, which comes from the word *bext* that connotes Kurds' overall misfortune, and some kind of luck fated to happen. So *bêbext*, traitor, is a person who is bringing *bedbext* – misfortune, a person whose betrayal turns the luck around, or creates a situation in

[24] Kurdish actors and historical, social narratives generally refer *birakujî*, the Iraqi Kurdish civil war, back to Saddam era policies, in particular to Saddam's economic blockade over the Kurdish region. It is said that the blockade was so severe, forcing Kurds to look for new alliances. In the end, one faction of Iraqi Kurds had to turn to Turks for support and the other faction to Iranians, which culminated in *birakujî* as a proxy war between these two regional powers.

which nothing good can really happen. *Bêbext*, remember, is also a partridge, a donkey-foal, and a mule who *undermines* normalcy and the normal, ordinary way of life, turning away and betraying their own species – "imagine," as my interlocutor told me, "a partridge doesn't even know that he needs to protect its own kind, isn't that crazy?" So *bêbextî* – betrayal – is the undoing of the normal order of things; it is also not allowing the normal to take place to begin with. It can also be thought of as a pathology, or the flip-side of the ordinary condition of human sociality. And *bêbextî*, Kurds often say, is commonplace in Kurdistan, much like berets in Paris. That it is commonplace represents a critical argument and metapragmatic description of the broader circumstances in which betrayal appears to be occurring a lot, framing and justifying the specific mode of reflexivity that betrayal demands, rather than a stable belief. What is at issue is coming to terms, at least for the sake of the moment, with how betrayal is never an impossible hypothesis, because in Kurdistan life is already not-normal – it is, more precisely, not in its rightful order, unfolding in ways that violate the normative, customary ways of life, which people in other places do have.

But why is there such an intense interest in betrayal? And why does betrayal articulate itself in such richly allegorical and ethically nuanced terms while complicity is just a leaf? I think the reason why there is such stark contrast between these two typifications, I shall argue, is that the category of complicity in Kurdistan denotes a joint undertaking between two social actors, a Kurd and a Turk, who also don't give a damn about each other. More specifically, it connotes an undertaking between two actors who do not owe much to one another, who are not within each other's moral circle. If the undertaking fails, nobody is shuttered, which does not render it ethically unimportant. On the contrary, it is ethically important precisely for being a problem not given enough attention, ordinarily undertaken by actors who seem too uninterested in even

pausing to think about what they are creating for others. It is important, equally so, for being a very important problem that is yet crystalized in the simplest image of a leaf or a game, in accusations first made and then withdrawn, in conversations carefully void of any reference to the accused parties, and in incapacities that turn the category of complicity in Turkish rule into an issue almost impossible to settle.

In thinking about betrayal, on the other hand, Kurds *qualify* complicity as a moral threat to their own group solidarity and society, for it signifies a sort of crime wherein actors who necessarily have to give a damn about each other, whose obligations to one another are more clearly defined, do let each other down. Therefore, betrayal institutes itself as a shuttering, destructive, and cunning act that necessarily turns on a victim, who is pushed under a bus by her own kind, by someone whom she should be able to trust. Because without a victim, there is no crime and thus no reason to investigate. From another, related point of view, the category of betrayal also connects to the argument about Kurdish being not-a-normal place, for it derives its ethical meaning from essentially being violative of the normal order of things – that a partridge, normally, should have not betrayed its own kind, and, similarly, a Kurd, normally, should not have aided, helped, supported, or quietly encouraged the Turkish state, thus reproducing the state's power and control over Kurdistan. Lastly, the emphasis on betrayal is an argument about the ethical necessity of re-thinking the relations between Kurds – what Kurds create for one another – as one productive way to gain deeper purchase on broader political and historical realities of Turkish indirect rule. While betrayal almost always addresses itself to the slippery slope of Kurdish complicity with systemic wrongdoings, its [meta]pragmatic force emerges from Kurds' purposeful use of this category as a technique and idiom for commenting on the thick grounds of human sociality – of living amongst one's own kind.

The Strange Case of the Brukîs

I would like to begin with everyone's least favorite traitors: the Brukî tribe. In chapter three and four, I already mentioned the Brukîs, a large Kurdish tribe from Van Province, which was known in Van as a tribe "invented" in the early 1920s by Kinyas Kartal. How does one invent a tribe? And what is the opposite of being invented? Based on what I gleaned from my interlocutors' criticisms of the Brukîs, a tribe should ideally be formed over the course of a reasonable amount of time and somewhat naturally. There was something not quite right about the way the Brukîs emerged, my non-Brukî friends insisted. This was in and of itself a surprising discovery, for my interlocutors also only rarely commented on the origins and emergence of tribes. Why should the legitimacy of the Brukîs need to be questioned? What was so specific about the tribe that it was treated by my interlocutors as "invented," as a social group that did not feel right?

Of course, ethnographic and historical research conducted by students of Kurdish tribes refute the claim that tribes need to be formed slowly or in specific, set terms (Bruinessen 1991, 2002, Klein 2006, 2011, Yalçin-Heckman 1991). Kurdish tribes have historically emerged and disappeared differently, with different degrees of internal complexity and stratification, and it is impossible to calculate the optimal phase in which these processes should take place. Much is contingent on geopolitics, existing rivalries, and the very concrete demands for resources and power on the ground. Listen to how Hamit Bozarslan and Cengiz Günes, two scholars who have extensively studied Kurdish tribes describe this process:

> "[Kurdish] tribes came into existence because of alliances formed among several clans and lineages in a certain region, or in some cases, by two distinct tribes uniting. This was a process shaped by many local factors, such as the need to share access to land and pastures, and the threat caused by rival

> groups and other tribes. The membership of tribes was subject to fluctuation and change depending on factors such as tribes' ability to provide security and prosperity for their members (Bruinessen, 1992: 58) ... Notwithstanding their discourses on 'common ancestors' and their genealogies attached to the Prophet, here as elsewhere, [Kurdish] tribes have continuously re-emerged or re-consolidated themselves as narrowly defined solidarity structures… based on the developments in the Kurdish geographic space." (Bozarslan and Gunes 2020: 581 & 588 –589).

Tracing the names of tribes in sources from the last few centuries, moreover, shows both continuity and transformation. *Sharafnâma*, literally *The Book of Honor*, compiled in the late 16th century by Şerefxanê Bedlîsî (written as Serefhan Bitlisi in Turkish) ([1597] 2018), the famous Mîr of Bitlis Province, is an early source on the history of Kurdish dynasties. In *Sharafnâma*, Bedlîsî mentions the Principality of Zirqan led by the Zirkî family. Dating back to the 14th century, the region under the rule of the Zirkî family was first recognized as an autonomous Kurdish principality in 1515 by the Ottoman Sultan and first Caliph Selim I. A patron of regional *beg*s (heads of ruling Kurdish houses) and *agha*s (heads of tribes), according to Bedlîsî, the Zirkîs ruled over large swathes of land that spanned across present time Mardin, Bitlis, and Diyarbakir provinces. Turkish historian Cevdet Türkay's research on Kurdish tribes, which Türkay conducted in Ottoman archives, shows that the principality came to an end when its army was defeated by the Ottomans in 1835, five years after the Zirkîs declared independence (1979: 112 –115). Members of the Zirkî dynasty were then exiled to Edirne, the westernmost point of the empire bordering Greece. In *Asiretler Raporu*, "A Report on Tribes" (2014), which is a study of Kurdish tribes of Turkey said to be prepared by Turkish intelligence in the 1970s, the word Zirkî is mentioned as a tribe living on the border of Bitlis and Diyarbakir provinces.[25]

[25] *Asiretler Raporu* was first published in 1987 by a socialist weekly magazine called *2000'e Dogru* (Towards the 2000s). The publishing of the report turned into a high-profile espionage case, but the editors were all acquitted in the end.

According to *Asiretler Raporu*, Zirkî tribe was "invented" by local bandits who capitalized on the legacy of the then extinct principality, yet the same report says that the Zîrki *agha*s were all exiled in 1925 to Burdur, a province in central Anatolia, due to their support of the *Serhildana Şêx Seîd* (Sheik Said Rebellion), a Kurdish nationalist uprising. So, this was the story of how the *Zirkî*s shifted from being a principality that ruled other tribes and provided them protection to a single tribe, thanks to the historical continuity and strategic re-appropriation of its name.

Under the right circumstances, in other words, as Kurdish intellectual Abdurrahman Bedir Khan wrote in 1990 in a magazine called *Kurdistan*, even "a shepherd fifteen or twenty years ago… called *Misto Keçelo* (Mustafa the Bald)," could turn himself into *Mustafa Agha* of the Mîran tribe of Urfa Province (quoted in Klein 2011: 59). What were the right circumstances in this case? It was the formation of the Hamidiye Light Cavalry, a Kurdish tribal militia, at the turn of the 20th century by the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II. As Klein writes (2011: 54 – 60), the primary idea behind the Hamidiye Cavalry, named after no other than Abdulhamid II himself, was to form a Sunni Muslim force acting as a check on the Armenian-Russian alliance and against Armenian revolutionary activities. Hamidiye played a major role in the Armenian massacres of 1894 –96, a period of violence that paved the way to the 1915 Genocide (Akçam and Kurt 2005, Üngör and Polatel 2013). *Misto Keçelo* – Mustafa the Bald – was a notorious bandit who volunteered to become a Hamidiye commander, which proved to be a turning point for *Misto* as well as his tribe, the Mîrans, both of whom were now important regional powers. Because *Misto Keçelo,* a shepherd-turned-bandit-turned-tribal-leader, Klein remarks, showed such great success as a Hamidiye commander, leading countless attacks on Armenian villages and cleaning an entire area from the Armenians, he gained significant privileges from the Ottomans, which turned him into an agha, precisely because an agha was exactly that – it was

having enough power and political influence to get the best deal for his tribe, to make the right alliances, and to secure the most resources.

In both cases, the histories of the tribes in question, the Zirkîs and the Mîrans, lie at the confluence of a number of different streams of political and regional events, with both tribes seem to have transformed into what they are now rather than formed. In both cases, there are different time-frames at issue and different temporal modalities. While names emerge slowly and possess very long lifetimes, tribes, as they are known and function and understood to exist as such-and-such, may sometimes emerge overnight, and thanks to oddities and contingencies that are sometimes too absurd. Still, I believe that there is an argument to be made *for* the idea of the optimal phase, the idea of things happening in the right time-frame, which, I want to suggest, accounts for different, not necessarily taxonomic, but deeply ethical considerations – not because there is a set time at which a tribe needs to appear on the stage of history, but precisely because there is no such set time, which opens the issue to more fluid considerations of manner, style, attitude, and so on. The history of the Zirkî tribe of the day, for instance, is considered legitimate, for the tribe did it right, emerging out of a power vacuum created by the events of the 19th century, providing a refuge to the rural population who needed to become unified. The Mîrans, on the other hand, are subject to criticism and suspicion, much like the Brukîs, for they did it wrong, following an immoral bandit who unleashed terror in order to gain power. There is, therefore, an optimal way of doing things.

Let me draw an analogy to house parties. Even in the case of a house party, there is an optimal arrival time accounting for several considerations tinged with ethical import. If one arrives at the party too early, that will be awkward (trust me, I know) and possibly a breach of the original commitment, thus an act of disregard for the host. If one arrives long after other

guests, that too will look rude and inconsiderate. As everyone who has ever hosted a party knows, it is an unspoken rule that a guest should show up in a timely manner to help kickstart the event. While it is a desired thing to be fashionably late, in other words, the refined art of being just late enough is a minefield, contingent on the host's expectations, one's social status among the group, as well as existing rules of etiquette.

Now, what does all this have to do with the Brukîs. To explain that I shall take the reader back to the day I visited Xaltî Saliha's house in Van. Xaltî Saliha was Xaltî Bese's youngest aunt, more or less the same age as Xaltî Bese. Unlike my host-parents, Xaltî Saliha would stay most of the year in Van, looking after her grandchildren. On a beautiful spring day in early May 2018, I visited Xaltî Saliha's house to meet her new-born granddaughter, Nûdem. Being around Xaltî Saliha was such a pleasure thanks to her inventive and convivial company. What was going to be a short visit thus turned into a full-blown day of festivities that ended with a long, animated conversation. I can't remember who brought it up the first, but a part of our exchange was on the Armenian Genocide, a strikingly unconventional topic for a celebratory occasion. To be more precise, the occasion was odd; the topic, however, was not so much.



Figure 15: Xaltî Saliha (right) and her daughter-in-law.

Van used to be a major population-center for the Ottoman Armenians and hidden in the surface of things was a record of time that implied the violent loss of these people.[26] This loss appeared in revelatory remarks such as "our village's old name is Armenian," in confessional

[26] The issue of the Genocide is significantly more visible in Van, but not only in Van. Prior to my field-work in Van Province, I conducted preliminary research in many other areas of Turkey's Kurdistan. I spent three consecutive summers in Diyarbakir, Mardin and Şırnak between 2014 and 2016. A significant majority of the people I spoke to on the issue recognized the mass-killings of the Ottoman Armenians, as opposed to the official narrative of the Turkish state. Not all Kurds would define the massacres as genocide, however, but mostly because of a lack of knowledge of the term, or lack of awareness about the controversy around the term. Some interlocutors familiar with the word "genocide" (*soykirim*) explained that they understood it as a broad category, corresponding to pretty much every instance of state violence that targeted civilians *en masse*. When prompted, however, many Kurds that I spoke to expressed that they had no problem with using the word – well, perhaps because they knew it very well that the mere utterance of "genocide" was enough to provoke nationalist panic among Turks, certainly a desired effect. I would also like to add that several Kurdish organizations, such as the PKK, Kurdish Institute of Paris, the HDP, as well as prominent Kurdish political actors including Abdullah Öcalan, made statements about their recognition of the Genocide. The HDP, for instance, since forming a group in the Turkish parliament in 2015, has each year penned a resolution for the official recognition of the Genocide, thus far rejected by the MPs of the other parties. And yet, I don't wish to idealize "Kurdish recognition," which speaks of an ethical aspiration rather than statistical designation. What matters is that the manner in which social actors talk about the issue delineates distinct social and political boundaries and affiliations.

anecdotes about how a present day structure, a house for instance, was built with gravestones stolen from an Armenian burial site, or vague evaluations accusing Kurds of bystander incrimination, or of acting as the "tools" of the Ottomans. These tiny moments of commemoration were high on feelings but short on precision, void of reference to timeline, perpetrators, and the very concepts of genocide and mass-murder that gave meaning to this history elsewhere. Even the most theatrical performances, excruciatingly detailing the sufferings of the Armenians, were to portray the Genocide as an outrageous catastrophe, recognizing the humanity of the victims without putting any blame on particular individuals and groups. This was why my conversation with Xaltî Saliha was a surprise. When I asked her whether she knew of any local group that participated in the Genocide, she told me in a whispered tone that it was the Brukîs: "Everyone in Van knows this, that Brukîs worked with Turks… Gosh! Where do I even begin? Those Brukîs, they are real trouble (*belayî*)."

A typical way for my interlocutors to gauge and assess historical or present-day wrongs in Van was to blame them on the Brukîs, a tribal people whose nature was specified as being essentially bad rather than good. Brukî individuals and families were *bebextan* (traitors); they were all kinds of free-riders, getting rich at the expense of other tribes, considering themselves impervious to moral principles of the society. I heard many stories about how the Brukîs always got away with their crimes. Kinyas Kartal, the late Brukî leader that I talked about in chapter two, was known to have done everything within his power to always protect his tribesmen, even when, in fact especially when, the latter committed a wrong, such as confiscating another person's land, kidnapping a woman, or playing dirty in business, because for Kartal, his power and thus his tribe's power derived precisely from that they were infinitely privileged. For these reasons, I was hardly surprised that Xaltî Saliha characterized the Brukîs in an unfavorable light.

But I was surprised that she named a specific tribe, even if that tribe was the Brukîs, as the perpetrators of the Genocide, as I had never heard a name being uttered before. I was even more surprised when I discovered that many others agreed with Xaltî Saliha – it was the Brukîs, they insisted, the Brukîs did it.

Why wouldn't my interlocutors give me names or dates? Well, the most obvious answer was that because they really had none to give me – Kurds don't make great book-keepers of their own history, let alone the history that more squarely concerns some others. They are, if anything, allegorical thinkers at all levels; they like reflecting on the broader moral and political frames and impacts of historical episodes. Having said this, the present ethnography observes that there are two respects in which the Genocide institutes itself as a specific public issue in Kurdistan, rather than merely being an allegorical reference point. First, many people I spoke to about the topic expressed that they reflected on and prioritized the Genoicide as an important problem out of a commitment to creating sensibility about the shared ill-luck – *bext* – of the Armenians and the Kurds (Akçam 2004, Göçek 2011, 2015, Tambar 2013, 2017). Indeed, Xaltî Saliha expressed her sympathy towards Armenians in precisely these terms: "we understand their *bext*, they understand ours." This commitment registered the Genocide as a spectacular opening to a much longer history of sufferings, rendering the individual plights of the two peoples inseparably linked to one another. Second, the Genocide was something in which the Ottoman Kurds were directly, undeniable complicit. Although specific information about perpetrators were almost absent, the facts that Kurdish tribal militias were involved in the mass-killings of the Armenians, and that overall, Kurds of the era supported or at least turned their back to and remained quiet about – as bystanders – the Ottoman policy of extermination were common knowledge in Van. "What a joke," a young documentarian friend once told me, "that our ancestors so

enthusiastically (*hevesle*) worked in the service of the same ideology that later turned against them." As anthropologist Ali Sipahi (2020) argues in his historical study of the 1895 massacres against the Armenians, my ethnographic observations in Van similar suggest that historical episodes like genocides and massacres gain their purchase on social memory as the grounds in which social actors learn to reflect on and theorize what they did collectively.[27]

If all this was the case, the reader may well ask, then why blame the Brukîs for a crime in which everyone had been complicit? This is an important question, but covers only half the anomaly. The even bigger oddity was that the Brukîs were not even in Van when the city was plunged into months of violent turmoil. One can even say that there was no Brukî tribe at that point, as it is known today by non-Brukîs as such-and-such sort of a tribe, for the Brukîs of Van appeared on the stage of contemporary history only in the early 1920s. Before then, the Brukîs were the Kurds of Caucasia.

[27] What remains untold in everyday narratives can be found in works of scholars, who have produced a list of interrelated factors as to why Kurds readily joined the genocidal campaign against the Armenians (Bozarslan 2003; Kevorkian 2011; Klein 2011, 2006; Sipahi 2020; Suny 2017). We know, for instance, that early Kurdish nationalism efforts in the 19th and 20th century were centered on the assignment of the Armenians to the status of an ultimate other. The Tanzimat Laws, which was a reform movement that started in 1839 and lasted almost forty years, decisively exabargated and put in a whole new context the social tensions therein. Tanzimat was the absolute embodiment of the Ottoman ambitions of the era to extend central authority to Kurdish-Armenian borderlands. It created a power vacuum, however, for it displaced the traditional Kurdish emirates, the last of which had been destroyed by government forces in the early 19th century. It is not possible to overstate the extent to which the Tanzimat, in particular the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, produced fierce and bloody competition for goods and lands. Then came the "rise of tribes," a period in which different Kurdish tribes fought somewhat of a civil war to take advantage of the moment. It was in the midst of these transformations; the historical homeland of the Armenians became a battlefield. These transformations in tribal relations played out significantly in the period that led to and during the Genocide, turning the Kurdish population into "willing executioners" (Klein 2006). An overall consensus among historians today is that Kurdish complicity was infrastructural to the success of the Genocide.

To understand these oddities, I turn to oral narratives collected from Brukî interlocutors, which detail with curiosity the ways, trivial and tremendous, the tribe's status as the new-comers of Van turned it into an object of intense moral and political concern. Here is a summary of what I learned about the Brukîs from Brukî friends: First, for Brukîs themselves, of course, their tribe was not "invented" in the 20th century and its history dated all the way back to the 16th century. It was reported that the Brukîs were originally from the present-day Diyarbakir, but they had to emigrate to Caucasia in the mid 16th century due to inter-tribal wars. Yet, my interlocutors were quick to admit, the Brukîs had failed to live as a unified political group in Caucasia, letting their tribe to dissolve into hundreds of smaller communities. For several centuries prior to returning back to Turkey's Kurdistan, those communities lived as nomads in the pastures of Erivan in modern day Armenia, while some found refuge in mountains that are now within the borders of Azerbaijan, without having much connection to one another. In some respects, therefore, those Caucasian Kurds were all Brukîs, but the Brukî tribe ceased to exist.

From the early 1990s, however, and increasingly so after the end of the WWI in 1918, Caucasian Kurds started moving southwest towards areas that are now Turkey. There were multiple factors that triggered this move. Transcaucasia was quickly becoming a place of deeply entrenched inter-ethnic rivalries, especially with the onset of the nationalistic upheavals against the Russian Empire in mid-19th century. Things only got more complicated in 1917, when the October revolution in Russia broke out, followed by popular movements among the diverse polity of Transcaucasia for independence and sovereignty. Caucasian Kurds, lacking leadership and political unity, found themselves caught unguarded against these regional forces, which propelled a permanent exodus that would take months and years to complete. According to oral narratives, most of these people reached their final destination, Van, between 1919 and 1924,

taking over the then-abandoned Armenian villages. This was the extent to which the Brukî tribe, having missed all the action by the time they arrived in Van, took a somewhat secondary role in the Genocide, by indirectly benefiting from it.

Having escaped from a conflict zone only to arrive in another highly conflicted place encouraged these emigrees first to re-group among themselves and then to seek external support. That support happened to be no other than Turks, which seemed profitable for both sides. From the point of view of the newly-established Turkish state, some cooperation with local tribes was necessary due to the thorny challenges of the Russo-Turkish frontier, a problem inherited from the Ottomans (Leupold 2020; Reynolds 2011). And the Brukîs was the most obvious choice – the Brukîs were a sizable group, and they were all alone. As Brukî interlocutors relayed to me with great pride, the Turkish government immediately began the negotiations with Brukî notables, sending its bureaucrats to the latter with expensive gifts and attractive promises, effectively allowing the Brukîs a conspicuously privileged channel of engagement with Ankara. Many Brukî individuals were recruited as public officers. In the process of the redistribution of the properties and agricultural land that once belonged to Armenians, Brukîs were favored. And the Turkish military, on its part, developed a habit of showing favor to Brukî villages while villages that belonged to other tribes were being assaulted almost daily. Today, Brukîs have an unambiguous political and economic power in Van, owning countless businesses in the most prosperous parts of the city, sending representatives to the parliament as MPs of Turkish center-right parties.

Surely, then, it can be said that the fact Brukîs monopolized the social landscape of dirty opportunities in the aftermath of the Genocide turned back to the tribe as somewhat of a moral taint. Much the same way, it can be argued that there is a causal story to be told regarding the links between the Genocide and the Brukîs' transformation into a powerful, deeply self-

protective political actor in Van. The case of the Brukîs, therefore, and although initially quite strange in its oddities and inconsistencies, breaks for us the complex ethical framework in which tribal or otherwise complicity in Turkish rule is conceived as mutually clarifying of the broader moral habitus in which such complicity is made to exist. The Brukî tribe might not have truly participated in the killings of and attacks against the Armenians, but it was still possible to morally implicate the tribe in this history as an immoral actor that made a difference. Most important of all, I interpret that the Brukîs were invoked as "traitors" in my interlocutors' retellings of the Genocide as a specific semiotic act, attributing the tribe a sense of *standing* in a space shared by relational others, by others of one's own kind. So, the Brukîs monopolized what was not of theirs, they collaborated with the Turkish state, *and* they betrayed Kurds – all at the same time.

But why insist that the Brukîs were not even a real tribe? And why insist on this in the context of accusations of betrayal, or of complicity with Turks? How do these two arguments relate? In my opinion, this strong emphasis on the tribe's questionable historical and social status shows how moral issues – betrayal, for instance – are always read against the background of material processes and concrete actions. In terms of the house party analogy that I offered earlier, the Brukîs were the guests who completely forgot the fact that they were indeed just that, simple guests, who needed to play by the rules of the host, guests who needed to know their place. They were the guests that the host invited out of kindness, just to be nice, or for being guilted into letting them in, and yet they failed their host greatly. Being the ungrateful guests they were, the Brukîs arrived at the party late, they did not even help with the set-up, they were rude to everyone else, and then they ate all the shrimp. I would push this analogy even further, for a bad-guest is usually a guest who betrays the trust of a host. Betrayal, then, is in some respects a

powerful ethical register that invokes a sense of crossing the line, or transgressing one's limits, which is materialized as and materialized in gestures, or cues, of indifference, disregard, neglect, mistreatment, abuse, and so on. This is where betrayal connects to the idea of Kurdish complicity in Turkish crimes, given that the latter is known in Kurdistan as a political and moral sin not properly problematized, thus scandalous precisely for how it happens every day without receiving the right sort of reaction, criticism, or intervention. There is, in other words, an attitudinal overlap between the figure of an accomplice and the figure of a traitor, both of which characterize a wrongdoer as a person who injures and harms, who shows disregard and exploits a situation for her interests, yet does not care.

Below, I continue tracing betrayal as an idiom of transgression, and somewhat of a public art of description and debate. The discussion throughout the chapter follows different cases of betrayal, examining the context, figures, acts, and reactions that comprised them. By the end of the chapter, I would like for the reader to take the point that complicity in the crimes of a sovereign presupposes but cannot be entirely reduced to accommodation; it is accommodation that meets intimacy.

The *Dischargeds*

Yakup was a hardworking anesthesiologist in Diyarbakır, the would-be capital of Turkey's Kurdistan. In November 2016, he was dismissed from the profession by a statutory decree. His license was revoked. His passport was canceled. And he had no legal recourse, as the emergency-era decrees were closed to appeal by individuals. Yakup was not surprised, however. The young doctor was anxiously waiting for this day to come, as he had been targeted only a few weeks earlier by Turkish media for secretly providing treatment to Kurdish militants. When I

questioned how Turkish media could even know about that, Yakup looked at me and then mumbled something about "treacherous schemes" (*fesat oyunlar*) before going entirely quiet.

Another friend, Ekrem, was more vocal about his accusations. Only two weeks after his house had been raided by Turkish police, Ekrem was dismissed from his position at the Van Municipality. A police officer, a Kurdish man himself, tipped him off about a "secret complaint" regarding an old tweet from 2010. The alleged tweet, in which Ekrem comments on the ongoing power struggle between the Turkish government and the Turkish military, was taken to prove his knowledge of the coup that the latter attempted in 2016. Although he was not given any specific name, Ekrem maintained that he knew the identity of the complaint-maker, who was a colleague: "There are rumors, you know, about this person. I did not want to believe the rumors at first, but now I am thinking. The governor found an excuse to dismiss everyone in my office except for her. How do you think that happened?" Shaking his head with disbelief, Ekrem insisted that he was not reacting out of personal spite: "This is not about me. There is an army of discharged men and women out there, what was their fault? To have dignity?"

Throughout my time in Kurdistan, the "dischargeds" (*ihraçlar*) was a common social designation for people who had lost their jobs as a result of the governmental purges that followed the coup attempt.[28] The post-coup state of emergency, which lasted two years, not only allowed the government to take a firmer turn against Kurdish institutions and individuals but also many other left-wing groups, unions, and opposition media outlets. In this light, the story of the dischargeds is a story about what political theorist Partha Chatterjee calls the new techniques of governmentality – a story about how the job market becomes an "ambit of governmentality"

[28] The number of the "dischargeds" reached 140.000 by the end of the two-year long emergency. The situation constituted one of the most pressing social issues of the time, whose effects have extended in different directions, shaping the livelihood of Turkish citizens to this very day.

wherein the Turkish state creates "a necessarily heterogeneous society" through shifting policies, bureaucratic modalities, and legal interventions (Chatterjee 2004: 39).

Turkey's Kurdistan has long been the economic periphery of the country, with little to no private sector investment, turning public sector jobs into vexed objects of public desire. But this iceberg of desire became more of a surface reality only in the late 2000s, a period in which the Turkish government ambitiously expanded patronage through neoliberal policy shifts and social welfare (Bozkurt 2013, Buğra and Candaş 2011). The result was increased public spending and thus a significant increase in public jobs, which created for Kurds a key moment to take over public institutions as doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, architects, workers, and administrators. The trajectory of public employment ran into a stone wall in 2016, however, with the implementation of the state of emergency, exposing the very logics of the mercurial and continuously self-negating landscape in which it was embedded. For two years until the end of the emergency, purging incrementally worked its way through Kurdistan, eventually touching every part of the society.

The story of Sami, an elementary school teacher from Van, is a powerful illustration of this costly political landscape of mercurial policies and arbitrary punishment: In September 2016, the Turkish government temporarily barred 11.000 teachers across the country from their profession by a statutory decree, Sami being one of them. It seemed the decree targeted almost entirely the members of a left-wing trade union, the Education and Science Workers' Union (*Eğitim-Sen*), a fierce opponent of the government. Understandably so, many concluded that the suspensions were due to the teachers' union activities and political opinions. Eğitim-Sen immediately declared that it was taking the Ministry of Education to court, and started mobilizing as much publicity and support as possible as a pressure tactic. Before the courts could

reach a verdict however, the ministry reversed the decree and the teachers returned to their jobs. For Eğitim-Sen, all this was a potent, timely reminder of an age-old ethical lesson, demonstrating the power of organized dissent. Yet the matter was far from over.

Fast-forward a year, on the first day of the *Cejna Qurbanê* (Eid Qurban) of 2017, the Muslim festival of the sacrifice, more than thirty teachers met at the Van branch of Eğitim-Sen to discuss the government's most recent wave of job replacements, unofficially called "the exile orders." Perhaps the most memorable detail of the meeting was its fashion; and as anyone familiar with left-wing politics knows, leftists normally tend to be underachievers in this area, except for a few socialist leaders who were the self-made fashion icons of their times, such as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's Tito, or Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. For this reason, just as the members, both men and women, showed up in carefully picked, colorful, brand new Eid outfits, significantly "styled up" compared to their everyday modest look, it was hard to imagine that they were there to hold a union meeting. The teachers didn't seem aware how awkward they looked, however, which was a minor inconvenience next to the mess created by the exile orders. Many teachers were sent to small towns in central Turkey, of which they had no knowledge. Sami was appointed to a small town in Uşak, a province 1.600 km west of Van.

The union could take the ministry to the court (again). The teachers had a strong case as the replacements were going to heavily disrupt public education. Yet the Turkish courts were chronically slow, with hearings in a case usually being scheduled months apart. The law might be on the teachers' side, but the judges were not. The union could also pressure the ministry to renegotiate the situation (again). Yet this strategy, too, carried contradictions, given that the exiles were not issued through a single decree this time, meaning there was technically nothing to reverse. Either way, the teachers would have to relocate to their new places of duty, at least for

the time being, if they wanted to keep their jobs. The teachers grudgingly admitted that they didn't have any other option: "I will not give up my job, my career, everything I worked for… I will fight, I will pay the price," Sami told his union friends, who all nodded their agreements.

Traitors and Solidarity

It was against this background, the dischargeds quickly became an integral aspect of the everyday ethical universe of Van. During fieldwork, I conducted semi-formal interviews with a dozen people who were dismissed or temporarily barred from their positions – a fraction of the total number of dischargeds that I met. These interviews – conversations, more precisely – were long and rich with evidence, testimony, and nuance, but I will limit myself to a necessarily concise summary: The interviewees mostly described purges as the government's attack on Kurdish society as a whole, indiscriminately targeting everyone who dared to stand with the "wrong" side – the PKK and the pro-Kurdish *HDP*. Like Sami, they characterized their ordeal as a "price" (*bedel*) which they were willing to pay. The argument about the necessity of paying a price was not accidental; it helped my interlocutors frame the present as a significant moment to promote solidarity. Doing otherwise, choosing not to pay the price, would be tantamount to treachery, which was unfortunately everywhere, as they *all* insisted.

Here is an example: One day, I received a phone call from Ekrem who asked me to meet with him in a teahouse near my apartment. As soon as I arrived, he told me about "some serious allegations" regarding a municipal employee, an accountant, who was said to be a government spy. Since we were dealing with a vexed, discomforting situation, I should confess, I wanted to retain a cautious skepticism: Wasn't the very same employee campaigning only a week earlier for a pro-Kurdish party candidate? That was right, Ekrem replied to my question, but wasn't it

curious that the alleged spy had managed to escape purging despite his rather conspicuous affinity with the Kurdish political movement? Even more curious, he was enjoying significant privileges under the new administration, practically leading a team of new hires. The rumor was that the accountant was tipping off the governor, Ibrahim Taşyapan, about the internal workings of the old administration led by Bekir Kaya, who was at the time unjustly imprisoned in a Turkish jail.

I was familiar with the accused person, the accountant, who was a known figure in Van. Mixing his stylistically vintage embrace of socialism with a romantic version of Kurdish nationalism, he would give extremely long speeches in public meetings, pretty much beating his audience to death every time. Watching his rapid rise to fame ending with accusations of treachery was a political twist to which I was very accustomed by then, as I had witnessed many other anxiety-producing episodes of spy-catching like this one. These accusations would usually make a fascinating start but almost never really go anywhere, however. When I asked Ekrem what he was planning to do about the situation, likewise, and although he was visibly outraged and very much scandalized, Ekrem expressed no interest in bringing the accountant to some form of public court. “What can he possibly have to say for himself,” he asked me. These words had a familiar ring to them, reminding me of an earlier conversation that I had had with Roza, in which she summed up her decision to resign from her post in quite similar terms. Not doing so, according to Roza, would be immanently unjustifiable: “How was I going to explain it to myself, let alone other people?”

In retrospect, I actually do understand where Ekrem was coming from. While it is true that my field-notes are full of accounts of vivid conversations and rumors about traitors, it is also true that I only rarely witnessed a real confrontation between an accuser and an accused. In such

situations, both sides would have their own reasons to avoid confrontation. For the latter, the best way to deal with allegations of this kind was not to make much of a deal out of them. For the former, confrontations were void of purpose, unless taken as an opportunity by the accused to offer redress and perform some repair. Nobody believed the likelihood of an alleged traitor to reliably, and in a meaningful way, be able to do that, because nobody had ever seen anything of the sort really had happened before. Betrayal was this very special kind of crime which could not be undone once committed, hence the question, "what can he possibly have to say for himself?" The logic behind such questions was that betrayal, by design, indexed such a radical disregard for other people's feelings and judgements, for how one appeared to them, that it was inherently in contradiction with the norm of accountability. Individuals with this attitude could not in any case be held to account for themselves, and there was little to nothing an ordinary person could do to elicit redress.

All this was ethnographically revealing, however, pointing at an intriguing breakpoint in Kurds' own thinking about "solidarity." I believe that various pronouncements of betrayal that I collected in Kurdistan not only framed betrayal as destructive of Kurdish solidarity, but also understood solidarity in a manner that ensured the near impossibility of redress. Real-life solidarity, grounded in one's readiness to compromise for relational others, was also about creating a space for account-giving privileged by Kurds as an everyday and conversational model for unity (*e.g.,* Butler 2005). In a society so assembled, solidarity was to be held by the affective and communicative responsiveness of members towards one another, their readiness for giving an account of themselves, as well as awareness that they owed doing so to their relational others. The most erosive effect of betrayal, what made betrayal such an explicit moral and political problem, was precisely that it mercilessly pointed out the very limits of the interpersonal

ties that were to sustain and reproduce solidarity among Kurds. When Ekrem grudgingly allowed the accused accountant to get away with his treason, when a woman chose to remain silent about a neighbor presumed to be an informant, or when a young man told me about his sense of helplessness in face of a childhood friend joining Turkish police, these people alerted us to recognize that betrayal corrupted Kurdish solidarity, and it did so exactly by diminishing Kurds' ability to demand accountability from each other. All this allows us a glimpse into how what is defined as solidarity is something that really only exists in a radius of accountability. In the final and seventh chapter, I will return to the relationship between solidarity and accountability.

If not confrontation, one might ask, what was the point of making these accusations? If not confrontation, in other words, what kinds of reflexivity did these interactions really promote? I believe what they promoted most saliently was an ethical conversation about *what would make this betrayal and what betrayal makes.* Because betrayal, in fact moral categories *en masse*, are not pre-handed labels; they are never static, purified tags of value. Quite the contrary, the metapragmatic effect of betrayal in Kurdistan was that it held up a mirror to the little twists, incapacities, and oddities of the lived topography of human relations in which an actor did not act the way she was supposed to act, going against the normative expectations and grounds of group-life. Moreover, moral categories derive from serious communication and reflexive ethical problematizations on the part of real actors, possessed by real interests, who would often make use of these categories as registers of engagement and stance-taking with much wider ranges of reference than assumed. In the remaining part of this chapter, I examine the actual discursive processes through which Kurds provide themselves the category of "betrayal," effectively turning something implicitly known to be true, and a category of value with which they judge their lives, into something concrete.

Betrayal: It is All-Too-Familiar

On September 25, 2017, the regional government of Iraqi Kurdistan held a historical independence referendum with 92 per cent supporting secession. In response to this, the federal government of Iraq launched a military operation against the Kurds, retaking the oil-rich city Kirkuk.[29] The Turkish and Iranian governments, long term regional foes with substantial Kurdish populations of their own, deployed armed forces to their borders with Iraq in keeping with their hardline posture towards Kurdish independence. Eventually, the regional government had to abandon its project of state-building, and its president, Mesûd Barzanî, said he would resign. Closely monitoring the situation, Kurds in the north (those living in Turkey) spent the following month speculating over why Kurdish forces had withdrawn from Kirkuk without much resistance. The defeat was largely blamed on disunity among Kurds. Rumor had it that the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Party led by the Talebanîs, one of the two tribal families exercising a kind of "monarchic" rule in Iraqi Kurdistan, had betrayed the Barzanîs and left them alone in the battlefield. The Talebanîs was said to have made a secret pact with Qasem Suleimani, the famed Iranian general, who was at the time a major power broker in Iraq.

Sometime in mid-March 2018, in the city of Van, a handful of shop owners came together to discuss the governor's proposal to demolish the old bazaar to replace it with a town square. The shop owners were to evacuate their properties as soon as possible. Each would be

[29] In 2014, as ISIS secured the control of Mosul and Tikrit, the Iraqi army evacuated Kirkuk to relocate its forces in these areas, and the Kurdish *pêşmerge*, the military force of the autonomous region, undertook the control of Kirkuk. The city had long been a disputed territory prior to these developments, with various groups claiming control over it, as it is composed of multiple ethnic groups, including Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens. Perhaps more significantly, it is also home to one of the biggest and oldest oil-fields in the Middle East, as well as an airport and a military base.

paid by the governor's office an amount the latter deemed appropriate, and the former regarded as repulsive. The shop owners considered the entire undertaking an unjustifiable project, showing complete disregard for the city's economy. Some suggested filing a petition against the governor, and others proposed holding a press conference to draw attention to their pledge. Both plans required the maximum participation of the city's tradespeople. The problem was that some of these people, including the board members of the chamber of merchants and craftsmen, had already openly expressed unwillingness to join any concerted campaign against the governor. It was clear to everyone that speaking in a unified voice was not a possibility.

Nazım, an antique carpet-shop owner in his forties, and impatient with what he described as "Kurds' chronic ineptitude for unity," asked for permission to speak. He then related the stories of "Adule and Derwes" and the "Bedirxan Uprising," well-known Kurdish epics, in which historic rebellions are suppressed by the opposing forces of Arabs and the Ottomans, respectively. In both of these epics, the decisive moment comes when an insider, a traitor at the court, betrays the house of the protagonist by turning it over to the enemies, wreaking devastation and carnage on his own people. As poignant tales and compelling allegories, both epitomize the moral problems internal to the hero's own society. For Nazım, these epics were demonstrative of how certain patterns of action had in fact a "scandalous continuity" in Kurdish history (*e.g.*, Scheele and Shryock 2019). As a closing gesture, the carpet-master reminded his audience of the recent events in Iraqi Kurdistan that ended with the loss of Kirkuk. Treachery, according to Nazım, was a common feature of Kurdish life. One saw it in heroic stories inherited from a time beyond living memory, and one could see it in contemporary politics.

About a month after the Iraqi Kurds' bid for independence had spectacularly failed (again), causing a storm across the wider region, I went to Diyarbakır where residents were still

chewing over the narrative folds of this all-too-familiar saga. There I met with *Xalo* (Uncle) Abdullah, a close confidant and a true extrovert, to hear about his views on the topic. He began by telling me with a knowing air that "it was Iran," whose involvement had been key to hindering Kurdish independence. This was not mere speculation. It was known that the Shia groups under Suleimani's command had been fighting along the Iraqis. Surprisingly, according to Xalo Abdullah, the Americans chose to stay out of the conflict, allowing Iran to consolidate its upper hand in Iraqi politics. No other international actor expressed support for the referendum either, despite the near-universal moral argument in favor of Kurdish self-determination. The biggest blow, however, came when the forces loyal to the Talebanîs had fled the battlefield. "It was an unforgettable betrayal," said the old man. In a later statement, the former president of the autonomous region Mesûd Barzanî would similarly express that his administration had been ready for everything but a "historical backstab." He described the day the "enemy" forces entered Kirkuk, as a "dark day" in Kurdish history. When I read this statement to my host mother, she said that "it was indeed a dark day, [but] the world was as shitty as ever" (*rast e, rojeke tarî ye... heyat wek berê gû ye*). The betrayal was exceptional, yet "as shitty as ever" at the same time.

To make better sense of these convoluted themes of extraordinariness and commonality, I turn to Evans-Pritchard's seminal ethnography of witchcraft among the Zande people of central Africa (Evans-Pritchard [1937]1976). As Evans-Pritchard quite skillfully demonstrates, Azande accuse one another of witchcraft when an exceptional chain of causation turns an individual to a victim. While it is nearly impossible to control events that unfold under such bizarre conditions, Azande believe that there still must be decipherable reasons for *why* they happen. As tricky as it

might be to assess the causes and forces behind these events, they cannot be dismissed as coincidences or wild misadventures.

What might seem even trickier for an anthropologist, as James Siegel argues (2006: 9-11), is to explain why, in accounting for such singular events, Azande refer to a general category of action – witchcraft – which ostensibly cancels out the significance of the extraordinary circumstances that grant these events a quality of singularity. Yet a closer inspection should reveal to us that Azande's recourse to the idea of witchcraft is not necessarily to eliminate the perceived extraordinariness of an event, nor to undermine the victim's claim to injury. It is to rule out the possibility of the said incident to be an accident, an unfortunate mishap that is of no real significance. In a parallel re-reading of Evans-Pritchard's work, James Laidlaw argues that "what witchcraft explained for Azande was not the occurrence of events or circumstances as such but specifically their moral quality; if an event or circumstance were caused by witchcraft, what this meant was that it was an act of human malevolence and therefore that someone, and someone other than the sufferer, was to be blamed for it" (2010: 155). The question "what makes this witchcraft" is a question about moral meaning. The way Kurds answer the question "what makes this betrayal," I think, bears some resemblance to the way Azande deals with witchcraft cases, while also differing from it in some important respects. Let me start with the similarities.

Kurdish construals of betrayal excite a hermeneutic approach analogous to that of witchcraft, wherein political misfortunes are linked to a specific pattern of action, betrayal, due to their shared moral character. Nazım's speech at the shop owners' meeting was aimed precisely to exhibit and act upon this idea. Before going forward with his criticisms of the board members of the chamber of merchants and craftsmen who had allegedly asked to start "amicable consultations" with the governor, Nazım first acknowledged the increasingly precarious political

atmosphere forcing many to refrain from angering those in power. One man contributed by recalling the detainment of a group of Kurdish activists (in another city) for asking local businesses to stay close in protest of governmental purges – the activists had been prosecuted under anti-terrorism laws. There was no point in denying something so evident, that in the context of the emergency rule, public dissent was fraught with peril. Perhaps, then, another shop owner suggested, individuals could be excused for cooperating with Turks or choosing to remain silent to shield themselves and their loved ones from arbitrary punishment. True, Nazım followed, yet treachery was not the same thing with humans' natural disposition to self-protection. It could not be defined as an accidental and unintended outcome of unreflected habits and practices. Betrayal was a certain kind of undertaking that *began* by producing a victim.

The difference between the Azande and the Kurds, on the other hand, comes from a difference in how much ethical weight they attribute to the concrete ways in which misfortunes unfold. My work observes that in order to speak of any act or event as an instance of betrayal, Kurds have to account for questions of meaning and material significance, so it becomes possible to show why, say, working for the government eventually materializes something like betrayal. By this I mean that betrayal exists within a web of social relations, practical decisions, and personal attitudes, and by virtue of some person or people actually making meaningful empirical connections between those relations, decisions, and attitudes. An ethnographic examination of this category, therefore, cannot be complete without an understanding of how, and with what kinds of tools and techniques, betrayal is made concrete in and through interaction.

Whirlpools of Debate

Make no mistake. The referendum was not the first time the Barzanîs accused the Talebanîs of perfidy, or vice versa. On the contrary, these accusations were such a common plot twist that it always seemed like a matter of time before one side, or the other, would do something like that again. Still, the Talebanîs could not sit idly by as their rivals accused them of scheming with Iran. Almost immediately, they started a counter-offensive and issued multiple statements, strongly denying that there had been a secret agreement. Bafel Talebanî, the oldest son of the late Kurdish politician Celal Talebanî who is known to Kurds as *Mam* (Uncle) Celal, explained that there had indeed been a formal meeting with a group of Iraqi officials (read: no Iranians), but it would be a complete fallacy to call it a secret. The Barzanîs knew about the meeting; they could have joined the conversation, but they had chosen not to. The decision to withdraw the military forces from Kirkuk, another point of criticism against the Talebanîs, was by no means an easy one, and it only came after the field commanders had reported the death of more than one hundred Kurdish fighters. It was "an honorable compromise."

Some people found this explanation implausible, dismissing it as Bafel Talebanî's clumsy attempt to cover his family's love-affair with Iran. Some admitted that the Barzanî-led referendum was perhaps a mistake that appeared to be executed rather hastily and prematurely. And a few were left to puzzle over why so many were willing to jump on the let's-cancel-the-Talebanîs train. The head of the Barzanî family, Mesûd Barzanî, himself was enjoying great personal rapport with the Turkish president Erdoğan, so the Talebanîs were obviously not the only Kurdish group "getting cozy with the enemy." The remarkable thing in all of this was that lack of agreement was not necessarily a problem, for reaching an agreement was not the point anyway. The point was to find the best possible explanation for why what the Talebanîs framed as an excusable act of political craftsmanship was in fact treason, or (and equally so) why what

had initially looked like treason might have been a necessary compromise. This meant having to give some serious thought to the attitudes and choices of both the accused and the accuser, which involved an empirical study of what they each did and how.

Most I have to say about the "Barzanîs versus Talebanîs" debate is actually quite typical of how scandals of betrayal generally unfold in Kurdistan. Betrayal hardly ever appears in everyday life as crystal clear as it does in epics, thus debates around it rarely produce harmony but a forum for case-building wherein different perspectives interact. Also important, the debate is surely a great method but not without its caveats – things can easily get to a point where even the moral duties most highly regarded are being dismissed in favor of capricious bias or other irrelevancies. Take Seher, a young woman in her thirties, who told me that she was not really giving much credit to "all that talk about betrayal" with respect to the failed referendum. She related the positive memory of Mam Celal, a longtime Kurdish guerrilla leader and the first Kurd who served as the president of Iraq, whose quirky demeanor, charismatic mustache, and smile of a storybook grandpa made it hard to believe that anybody from the Talebanî family could actually be "treacherous people" (*mirovên xayîn*).

For my purposes here, I find it helpful to borrow from Webb Keane (2010: 69 – 72) who argues that ethical arguments and evaluations are usually grounded in an attention to the "surface of things." Here, "surface of things" refers to the material, discursive, and procedural properties that comprise an act (or event), which serve as communicative resources by which actors negotiate their judgments about particular acts (working for the governor) as an instance of a specific moral category (intra-communal betrayal). The example that Keane gives us is two people exchanging gifts. The fact that a particular object passes hands, he says, is a necessary but insufficient condition for gift-giving to happen – for that exchange to acquire a moral value.

Because the exchange alone will not transform that object into a gift, nor does it tell us much about the object's moral value for the exchanging parties. Rather, "it is the formal properties of the action that frame it as a gift." An object becomes a gift, in other words, when it is offered generously, with the right amount of respect to the norms of etiquette, and as a token of a certain kind of social relationship between the giver and the receiver.

When Nazım the carpet-master claimed that the acts of the board members of the chamber of merchants and craftsmen were tantamount to treachery, likewise, it was not because the latter sought a meeting with the governor, but for *how* they did it. In evaluating the actions of the rival group, Nazım took the laborious route to unpack the step-by-step unfolding of the event, insisting for attentiveness to the rhetorical and symbolic resources that governed the allegedly treacherous meeting between the board members and the governor: A gift had been presented to the governor as a token of good faith; the meeting had ended with the participants taking a "souvenir photo" later printed in a number of local newspapers; the whole interaction, these newspapers reported, had been replete with reciprocal exchanges of deference ("with all due respect to the governor") and benevolence ("our state will protect the interests of its citizens"). Although all this "evidence" did not necessarily prove anything, they were enough to propel Nazım's audience to engage in a rigorous ethical study of the meeting in question. Some agreed that there was a malicious tinge to how it happened, and some questioned whether the media representations were accurate. One shop owner went as far as suggesting that the board members did in fact do the right thing. He criticized his friends for looking for a solution that would exclude the governor, but how likely was that? And while the shop owners and the board members were wallowing deeper and deeper in endless whirlpools of debate, life in Van was continuing unaffected. Many in the city would indeed brush off the issue as a non-issue in favor

of a rationalistic logic computing a scale of urgency. The fate of the bazaar, in this account, was hardly the most important problem confronting the residents.

There was also, of course, no easy way to tell whether a particular case of treachery would remain consistent with its own facts. Only a few weeks after Nazım and his friends had staged an attack against the board members, for instance, they too met the governor to talk about their objections, hoping the latter would agree to their demands. When asked about this second meeting, Nazım said it was not the same thing with the first one. His explanation was again grounded in an attention to the surface of things, citing as evidence the material composition of the second meeting (that it happened in a conference room and not in the governor's office, putting the parties on neutral ground), and the way the event was described in the media (that the media hailed the shop owners for running a successful campaign and forcing the governor to hold another meeting). I did not push against these points, as I was fairly convinced by them. Instead, I took a note of how Nazım's explanation was itself an argument about ethics, underscoring the need to set out a list of formal, surface-level realities that have to be taken into account before one can even begin talking about a particular moral category such as betrayal.

So, says Nazim, betrayal has a form to it. One major advantage of this argument is that it perfectly captures the material grounds of ethics, a domain that is otherwise populated by all sorts of conspicuously immaterial things such as intentions, commitments, or ideas about right and wrong. Not only is it about materiality. Ultimately, it is about the possibility of humans creating equivalences between moral categories and patterns of action by way of ethically inquiring into the formal properties of the latter as criteria by which to judge the moral grounds of the former – this is also where the Kurds and the Azande differ most significantly. Now, this is a crucial consideration, one that tells us a great deal about the role ethical practice plays in the

organization of human experience. But this argument alone will not explain why conducting such inquiries are important to people, nor about the peculiar public force that these inquiries do possess. It is one thing bearing in mind, when one looks at a particular case of treachery, that it must possess certain formal qualities to pass for treachery, and quite another to take that task seriously and know that others do too. It is one thing, in other words, to decide whether an act constitutes betrayal or not, and quite another to try to meet the obligation of inquiry. What both seem to have in common, on the other hand, is the fact that they are both ways of response-ability – our ways of connecting the problems around us to an ability as well as demand to respond to them.

Perhaps, I am now in a position where I can stress the key points of this chapter. I have already said that an important function of betrayal accusations is that they re-situate the question of complicity in a more complex and intimate, and thus somehow more outrageous context of thicker social relations in which the accusation takes place between people who, under normal circumstances, owe each other an explanation. Accusations of betrayal, therefore, are more penetrating, they ring truer, they do a better job in showing what is so wrong about them. They allow Kurds a stronger orientation in a space thus made to exist as a space shared, and thus created together. The category of betrayal, in other words, turns acts of complicity in Turkish rule as acts by which Kurds do something to one another, creating a certain social world in which a Kurd injures another Kurd. What Kurds call betrayal – what betrayal communicates to them – thus strongly connects to their evaluations of this category as an impediment to communal solidarity. I believe that each case examined above shows the ways betrayal operates as a local formulation by which Kurds trace "complicity" through the kinds of tangible, intimate connections in which it is made to exist.

Chapter 7 Self-Governance: An Ideal of Sociability

One unacceptable consequence of Turkish rule that almost all my interlocutors agreed on was its negative impacts on the moral community, in particular the way it created an atmosphere in which Kurds could not hold one another accountable for their accommodating behavior. In this final chapter, I briefly move away from the story of the ethical crisis that I have been sketching thus far and describe its exact opposite: Kurdish self-governance (*öz-yönetim)*. For Kurds, Kurdish self-governance, a period of localized projects of self-management and self-defense across Turkey's Kurdistan that lasted two years between 2013 to 2015, was the opposite of the crisis of confidence, trust, and solidarity that this dissertation studies. This was especially the case in Cizre, the epicenter of self-governance, where my interlocutors most explicitly argued that Kurdish self-governance was a period free of everything that they deemed morally bad – there was no betrayal, no reason to accommodate the Turkish state, no moral clash – and Kurds, perhaps most important of all, were truly accountable to their own people. Kurdish self-governance was narrated to me as a context of solidarity, wherein Kurds were showing solidarity with one another precisely by living with the right kind of awareness about what they were to each other *politically*, by resisting to, moreover, creating and normalizing Turkish rule and dominance in their lives. This chapter sketches a during-and-after analysis of self-governance, focusing in particular on its moral element – the goods associated with it – to unpack the cultural and political ethical logic behind Kurds' problematizations of complicity. It argues that Kurds problematize complicity, which, on one hand, is an implicitly gleaned sense of wrongness, also,

on the other, a mode and product of *de-politicization,* of not caring about one's accommodations to Turkish rule in the right political terms.

Self-Governance

The first thing that I need to say about Kurdish self-governance was that it was, for many reasons, a mass-scale undertaking which my interlocutors, and not only in Cizre but across Kurdistan, including all my Kurdish friends and family in west Turkey, considered to be the second boldest and most daring episode of contemporary Kurdish history – the first one being the establishment of the PKK. Why did self-governance appear this way? To explain this, I need to explain the politics of publicity and public representation in Turkey.

Turkey's rigid economy of public representation revolves around a series of taboo-objects most of which are denied existence. These taboos are contained by an ideological edifice safeguarding Turkish nationalism, central authority, and territorial unity as the ontological givens of the country. Regional and subaltern histories are off topic. No word of the Armenian Genocide. No criticism of Atatürk, the founder of the republic. The constituency consists entirely of Turks. Kurds, therefore, do not exist. Even if they exist, they are not treated badly. Perhaps they were once treated badly, but not anymore. And so on. Despite bans, punishments, and all sorts of coercive tactics, such state-sanctioned taboos, like any taboo, have nevertheless inspired so much talk and action. They have been variously challenged by a variety of social actors including the state itself, continuously reshaping the structures of tolerance and denial, permissibility and unmentionability. If there was one thing that had remained virtually inconceivable, however, it would be the idea of a group of Kurdish militants conducting ID checks, organizing public courts, and giving judicial orders. Until, of course, it happened.

And that it happened was not a simple feat. It took large-scale mobilization and real human power, culminating in a key moment of Kurdish political history that has profoundly shaped the contemporary political landscape. While the present chapter complements and provides a new perspective on the discussion thus far, it also has its own ethnographic story to tell: the story of Kurdish self-governance, a political model theorized and promoted by the PKK. Kurdish self-governance also corresponds to a specific period of self-rule that took momentum in 2014, in the midst of the peace process, and ended in the fall of 2015, when the peace process ended. The discussion below reflects on Kurdish self-governance in two-ways, as a revolutionary social project indexically articulative of its own counter-hegemonic status and discourse *and* as a mode of social organization with a distinct ethical promise of solidarity and accountability. The chapter is planned as a during-and-after ethnography of self-governance. The empirical focus spans from the summers of 2014 and 2015, during which I was in Kurdistan for preliminary research, to 2018 and 2019, during which I lived in Cizre as part of my long-term dissertation research. For the case of Kurdish self-governance makes a unique ethnographic object with its own specific circumstances, I also provide a necessarily concise background to self-governance so as to clarify for the reader the chronology, key actors, and key ideological premises of this particular chapter of recent Kurdish history.

On one hand, my purpose here is to glean the possibility for a grassroot Kurdish youth organization (*YDG-H*) to conduct ID-checks, organize public courts, and give judicial orders without any institutional backing. Put another way, it is to account for the semiotic performativity – the capacity to materialize itself – of Kurdish self-governance (*öz-yönetim*). On the other hand, I treat Kurdish self-governance as an ideal of sociability wherein precisely the moral goods that Kurds consider to be threatened by a culture of complicity were promoted. In

this account, Kurdish self-governance is approached as a social movement which was imagined and conducted as a counterpublic, occupying an alternative discursive space that challenged the dominant modes of publicity (Cody 2011, Warner 2002). But my main motive for interrogating this case is a genuine sense of wonder at the way self-governance seemed to work, albeit provisionally. If not institutional power, what was it that motivated its pragmatic potential? Why were Kurds so persuasively invested in it? In other words: What does Kurdish self-governance tell us about the actors who produced it, about their aspirations and relations, and about the overall human capacity to conjure up a sense of reality through social interaction?

A Short History of Peace and War

Kurdish self-governance and its social life and memory in Kurdistan are never separate from and should be understood against the background of the PKK movement. While I already sketched the emergence and political ethics of the PKK in chapter two, I thus want to point out a few additional and important aspects of its political organization and moral status within Kurdish society.

Self-governance – or *öz-yönetim* – another Turkish word that is key to Kurdish political discourse refers to a delimited time-period during which several Kurdish communities in Turkey declared self-rule, which I will explain shortly. But it also refers to a class of ideas and historical objects that are related to one another, in terms of their pragmatic and ethical weight, as belonging to the same family. Self-governance, in other words, is a statement about a historical desire that Kurds long have for self-determination. Studies show that since the beginning of the 19th century, Kurdish communities across the Middle East have been in search of a political identity that is unique to its own facts (Bruinessen 2016, Bozarslan at al 2020, Vali 2002). While

Kurds' plight for self-determination has a long history, however, it took on an enhanced significance in the 1970s when it was designated as a primary goal by the PKK. In contemporary Turkey, the idea of Kurdish self-actualization and the desire to create a spatially designated autonomy for Kurds are widely recognized as belonging to the PKK. It is also true, I believe, that the PKK's various contributions over a period of almost half a century have certainly changed the political publicity of the idea of Kurdish self-determination. Kurdish political movement, in other words, instituted a public space wherein the language, methods, and imaginations with which a majority of Kurds today choose to narrate and publicly represent their own historical journey, as well as desires and aspirations for the futures of their communities.

As was mentioned in chapter one, moreover, an important aspect of the PKK was that its political persona strongly hinged on a moral critique of what it perceived to be the immoral consequences of Turkish rule. The organization challenged the silent submission of Kurdish masses to the state discourse; it targeted, in particular, state-tribe relations, considering Kurdish tribes as its own local competitors and the state's accessories in Kurdistan; it promoted for an ethics of solidarity that patterned with a broader insistence on penalizing wrongdoers and those the party deemed to be politically degenerate. One can say that these strategies paid well, and the PKK successfully established itself, not for everyone of course, but for a good majority of Kurds, as the good one among its alternatives and a force that could finally bring the atomized segments of the population into some unity. What ethnographically matters, moreover, is not whether a majority now support the PKK or not. It is that the popular discourse in Kurdistan and even elsewhere in Turkey is that most Kurds do support and feel sympathetic towards the PKK, which they believe have changed the course of Kurdish history, giving life to a people who once lost its soul and true character. Even more significantly, as many interlocutors noted, it is commonly

believed in Kurdistan that the political movement which the PKK started and the overall public status of Kurds as the main opposition to Turkish authoritarianism are what best represent Kurds in Turkey as well as in the world. This is why, for instance, an interlocutor once asked me whether my American friends were feeling surprised when I shared with them that there were indeed village-guards in Kurdistan, and pro-state areas, traitor *agha*s, and millions of Kurds who voted for the AKP. I explained to my interlocutors that while not everyone felt the same surprise, I witnessed many people looking puzzled hearing that Erdogan in fact got votes from Kurds. "Aha," my interlocutor responded, "they think all Kurds do support their own movement, right? They must all assume that we all support our *serok* ("leader," referring to Öcalan) and the party (the PKK)."

Another factor that played into the PKK's popularity was its metabolic versatility. When its de-facto leader Abdullah Öcalan was captured in 1999, for instance, the group fell into a crisis deepened by a conspicuous despair among its many supporters. Yet the organization proved remarkable resilience and came through this difficult moment, which many considered unlikely, by re-articulating its methods and objectives, effectively creating a new public grammar for Kurdish politics that retained its left-wing substance yet abandoned separatism as the primary goal. The new political ideal was a bifurcated opening to democratization and regional autonomy, dividing Kurdish political labor between the promotion of citizenship rights and the creation of autonomous zones for the polity. While the PKK was the primary actor who was tasked to pursue these goals, it practically passed a large portion of its responsibilities back to Kurdish people, basing much of its legitimacy on the latter's willingness. Throughout the 2000s, the party regularly issued public calls for demonstrations, protests, civil disobedience, and mass mobilization against the government. It arduously campaigned for linguistic rights, such as the

right to make legal statements in Kurdish or the right to education in Kurdish, which heavily relied on Kurds' everyday activism to use and promote their mother-tongue. In certain respects, then, the PKK created a context in which Kurds socialized into a set of everyday duties that were essential to the success and the future of their political movement, thus marking their failure in positively responding to those duties as failures of moral, political, and also, I would like to insist, pragmatically consequential nature. Indeed, complicity accusations generally derive from the presumed pragmatic consequentiality of not acting the right way, accommodating instead the demands and convulsions of the political rule. [30]

The significance of the peace process can also be better understood against the background of this politico-moral story. It was clear to me, for instance, when the Turkish government announced the commencement of peace negotiations in 2013, many in Kurdistan interpreted and celebrated that development as a natural outcome of their unfaltering commitment to the political cause. But what made the peace process all the more interesting was that Kurds were not the only ones celebrating this time. The peace, as soon as it was announced by the government, which was followed by an announcement by Öcalan himself who wrote a letter from the prison, which was addressed to Kurdish public, was welcomed enthusiastically by the press of virtually all political fractions except for the Turkish nationalists, with headlines marking the retreat of Turkish security forces to stations and withdrawal of about 3,500 Kurdish guerrillas from Turkey to the camps in Iraqi Kurdistan. Political analysts hailed the reassuring effects of the process on citizens, economy, and democracy. In an effort to chastise their rivals, government officials took the moment to emphasize their role in ending the decades long

[30] This distributive model is hardly unique to the PKK. In fact, the re-allocation of corporate responsibilities to individuals is a common characteristic of many membership-based structures such as states and businesses (Pasternak 2013).

conflict. Flattering photos of Abdullah Öcalan showing him sitting in front of a small library of books in his prison cell were published in Turkish newspapers, and the then-Prime Minister Erdoğan announced the ban on the Kurdish letters "q, w, x" were to be lifted.[31] Overnight, the sphere of taboos was reformatted in effect to transmute things like the Kurdish alphabet and political leaders into [semi]legitimate objects (I use the prefix "semi" because taboos retain their social histories even after they are exonerated through some rite of passage).

The process was not free of contradictions, however. The government was unwilling to bring the negotiations into a legally binding framework, all the while continuing the construction of heavily guarded military posts (*kalekol*) in the Kurdish countryside (Hakyemez 2017). Despite the peace efforts at home, Turkey was increasingly more aggressive towards the Kurds of Syria. In contradiction with earlier media reports, first-hand testimonies from Kurdistan suggested that a certain number of guerrillas remained within Turkey, and many others were flowing in and out

[31] Kurds today use two alphabets. One of them is known as the Hawar alphabet, or Bedirxan alphabet, as it was first introduced in 1932 by Celaded Alî Bedirxan, a Kurdish linguist and poet. Bedirxan, born in Constantinople, Ottoman Empire, lived most of his life between Iran, Iraq and Syria as a political exile after he and his brother were sentenced by Turkey to death in absentia. He developed a Latin alphabet for Kurdish in Syria and published it in 1932 in a cultural magazine called Hawar, hence the name Hawar alphabet, which is now used by Kurds of Syria, Turkey, and Armenia. The Hawar Alphabet contains three consonants that are not present in the modern Turkish alphabet – q, w, x – and these letters are banned in Turkey via various laws and governance practices. Take the 1934 Surname Law, which also stipulated that all citizens had to choose Turkish names written in Turkish alphabet, with no reference to tribal or ethnic backgrounds and foreign cultures. While the fact that the designation "Turkish names" is quite indeterminate, with many Turks today using names from the Quran and the history of Islam, leaves it to local civil registrars' discretion to decide whether a name is allowed or not, the ban on Kurdish consonants is consistently the case across the country. For instance, the Kurdish male name Welat is written in birth certificates, if the birth registration office allows the name to be given to a newborn to begin with, as Velat. Ciwan is registered as Civan. Similarly, "q" becomes "k," and "x" becomes "h." The second alphabet Kurds use is a Perso-Arabic script called the Central Kurdish Alphabet, and it is used by Kurds in Iran and Iraq. The regional government of Iraqi Kurdistan voted in 2016 to officially list the Central Kurdish alphabet as the region's official script.

through the Iraqi border to conduct daily operations. For Kurds, the continuing presence of these fighters was a necessary precaution and a direct corollary of the government's failure to command an assuring tone. These anxieties were later justified when Erdoğan announced in 2015 that the peace was now off the table, which led the fighting to resume with full force. Thousands were killed and hundreds of thousands of Kurds were displaced (Ercan 2019).

Still, the two-year long peace process, particularly the policy of noninterference temporarily adapted by the Turkish state, presented Kurdish communities an auspicious opening to a vast range of experiments in autonomy and political expression. It was at this most critical juncture that self-governance turned into a full-fledged social movement. The pro-Kurdish HDP took the helm of the local municipalities, the YDG-H turned itself into neighborhood self-defense units, and local political elites formed people's assemblies (*halk meclisi*) in many Kurdish towns and cities. These structures, guided by and in close dialogue with the PKK, constituted the main pillars of this movement, creating an ever-expanding horizon of daily and symbolic political conduct. The YDG-H, consisting of young men and young women in their teens and early twenties, was admittedly considerably more visible. All it took for these militants to accomplish a presence was to take a step out of the house onto the street. The YDG-H, commonly referred to as "the youth" or "Kurdish youth" ("*gençlik*" or "*ciwanên Kurd*"), showed incredible resourcefulness and creativity in taking over public spaces as its arena of action, and thus quickly became synonymous with Kurdish self-governance of which it was a part.

A New Political Model

To be clear, Kurdish youth activism did *not* start as a result of the peace process. It goes all the way back to the 1990s, during which a Turkish military-led scorched earth campaign displaced

about 400.000 (according to the military) to 3 million Kurds (according to the Human Rights Association of Turkey) (Ayata & Yükseker 2005). These people later formed the poorest, most marginalized sectors of the towns and cities where they had taken shelter. The children of these immigrants, in part to react to the passive victimization of their parents, became increasingly invested in the business of disrupting the routine flow of everyday life. They would never shy away from getting into conflict with the police, never walk away from an opportunity to provoke their opponents (Darıcı 2011). Consequently, stone-throwing Kurdish children quickly became a familiar and overused trope in mainstream media, regularly making the headlines (Darıcı 2013). It was the extent to which the practices of these young individuals accrued a perceptual and discursive salience, which is to say that the youth was meta-pragmatically framed as a public thing, the topic began to enjoy a degree of reality. The YDG-H, on the other hand, was reportedly officially found only in the mid to late 2000s. Yet it was not until the year 2014 when the group started to unilaterally declare self-rule across a list of towns and neighborhoods in Kurdistan, did the YDG-H's existence come to be seen as a real threat to the Turkish state.

Although, as was previously mentioned, the peace process ushered in a new context of state tolerance, Kurdish autonomy and youth activism retained their taboo-like quality for Turkish public as objects of aversion, as well as of patterned avoidance (note that people's response to taboos are generally twofold: explicit rejection and tacit evasion). The government was highly conscious the whole time of possible public reaction and insisted that the essential features of the Turkish constitution, namely the central authority and the territorial unity, were non-negotiable. Kurdish self-governance, in other words, would never bring Kurds territorial or any kind of special autonomy, including, and most importantly, self-defense. While the government-led peace process was celebrated, Kurdish self-governance was not televised.

Mainstream media chose to largely treat it as a public secret to diplomatically evade the issue. In stark contrast to this surface silence, there was panic behind-the-scenes, particularly on social media, whereby Kurds' pursuits of autonomy elicited a variety of reactions that ranged from strong nationalist backlash to condescending riffs, dismissive of Kurds' actions as mindless drama void of any binding force. In theory *and* practice, Turks assured one another, governance required all sorts of techniques and institutions, and it could not be enacted within a vacuum outside of the necessary political infrastructure.

From the perspective of Kurds, however, the Turkish denial of self-governance looked rather naive, marked by an unaffected simplicity. In many towns and neighborhoods, people's assemblies together with local YDG-H units were effectively running public life. Beyond their daily insurrectionary practices aimed to keep the Turkish police entirely out of areas under their control, youth members were responsible with the social order at large and the handling of crime. They conducted ID-checks, patrolled the streets, questioned visitors, implemented new rules, organized public courts, and punished wrongdoers.

When the peace process was announced in May 2013, I was in London for my master's degree. Though I closely followed the process from its very early days, it took me almost a year to find an opportunity to visit Kurdistan to see the effects of the process on everyday life. When I finally went to Diyarbakir in April 2014, the peace process was going in full momentum. It really was a different Diyarbakir and a different Kurdistan. Why was it so different? Well, it is actually not so hard to answer this. The peace process was a historic gesture, or a series of historic gestures, which made the strongest signal to date for the possibility of a real solution to the country's long-lasting "Kurdish problem" (Kürt sorunu). Having lived under some form of military occupation for decades, it was such a breeze for Kurds not to see soldiers and police

officers everywhere. Even more significantly, I believe the main factor that almost transformed Kurdistan into another planet was that nothing was banned, and Kurds took full advantage of this. They were allowed to speak in Kurdish, listen Kurdish music, wear Kurdish colors, show political support to Kurdish actors and institutions as they wished, protest whatever they want, organize conferences and invite former guerrilla commanders to give the keynote address, change all the road signs and signs on municipal buildings to Kurdish or Kurdish and Turkish bilingual signs, or give a newborn the most "hardcore" Kurdish names that they were able to imagine, such as Kurdistan, and without the fear of getting punished for these acts.

Equally important, the peace process was a decisive win, and a turning-point for Kurdish society in Turkey, which saw the replacement of familiar platitudes with a thriving scene of diplomacy and open-talk. Kurds were not even given the usual condition of distancing themselves from the PKK in return for improvements in their everyday condition. It was quite the contrary. Abdullah Öcalan was the primary Kurdish actor on the negotiation table with a delegation of MPs from the pro-Kurdish HDP regularly meeting with Öcalan in Imrali Island Prison, where Öcalan has been serving a life sentence since 1999. It thus appeared to many that Kurdish political movement, after years of hard-work, finally did break the historical cycle of try-again-fail-again-fail-better. Sociologist Bülent Küçük (2019), in a review of the Kurdish political movement, compares this temporal loop to the story of Sisyphus, who rejects the gods' power and finds himself eternally punished to roll up a stone to a mountain summit only to watch it fall back again. Refusing to give in to a sense of hopelessness, Sisyphus perseveres with no apparent reward. While his resilience certainly burdens the gods, it would not be enough to free Sisyphus from the burden of an endless labor. According to Küçük, this state of "mutual failures and temporary successes… depicts the delicate conditions of struggle between the Kurdish

movement and the sovereign power in Turkey" (2019: 753). For the first time in the lives of millions of Kurds, many in Diyarbakir told me, it looked like the stone was not rolling back and the history was not moving backwards. What Kurds celebrated as the peace process was metapragmatically framed as a new opening into a new chapter and this feeling was what made the peace process so important and so different than any other political achievement that preceded it.

While this was the atmosphere in Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish-majority city in Turkey with a population of 1,800,000, the peace process also saw the unilateral declaration by people's assemblies and the YDG-H of "democratic autonomy" (*demokratik otonomi*), or self-governance (*öz-yönetim*), in a list of hardliner Kurdish towns and neighborhoods across Kurdistan. Democratic autonomy, or Kurdish self-governance as it is more commonly known, refers to a political model developed in the early 2000s by Abdullah Öcalan (Akkaya 2020, Akkaya and Jongerden 2013). It promotes a system of plural political communities that co-exist as horizontally scattered and self-ruling local governments. The model, inspired by Murray Bookchin (2015) and developed by Öcalan (2015), also explicitly rejects establishing a Kurdish nation-state, instead envisioning a regional network of fully autonomous communities of residence such as villages, towns, cities, and neighborhoods. These communities, by nature, also possess the right to self-defense and institute their own armed forces. In this light, as underscored repeatedly by Öcalan in his book *Democratic Confederalism* (2015; see, for instance, pages 45 – 47 and 78 – 79), the most important aspect of Kurdish self-governance is said to be its deliberate rejection of national territorial sovereignty and statism. Listen to Kurdish local politicians quoted below who explain the primary goal of democratic autonomy, which demonstrates well the anti-statist position of Kurdish self-governance:

> '"Our aim", the chair of the council explained, "is to face the problems in our lives, in our neighborhood, and solve them by ourselves without being dependent on or needing the state." Others add that "the state is a hump on the back of the people," and "we try to live without the state"' (members of the city council of Diyarbakir, quoted in Akkaya and Jongerden 2013: 196).

This Kurdish model of self-governance was developed by Öcalan in the 2000s, but Turkey's Kurds had to wait more than ten years to take it to a test drive. If the peace process, especially the temporary context of Turkish non-interference, was a historic opportunity, part of the reason was the grassroot experimentation with self-governance that spread across Kurdistan during this time. Throughout the peace process, especially in the second half of it, a total of sixteen local assemblies across Kurdistan, such as the assemblies formed in the towns of Cizre, Nusaybin, Silvan, and in the Sur neighborhood of Diyarbakir, declared that they were implementing Öcalan's self-governance in their respective communities. Considering that the political model allows for a high degree of flexibility, with local governments themselves deciding on their own functions vis-à-vis the needs and the nature of the political community – such as its size, the languages spoken, economic activities, housing patterns, the distribution of the population between villages and town and city centers, and so on – the individual self-governance movements in these locales were not identical but in dialogue with one another. Every new declaration was being made with reference to the previous ones, for instance, and many in Kurdistan were aiming to eventually transform the movement into a more connected network of autonomous communities grouped together as regions that would then be connected to one another as regions of an autonomous *Bakur* – Turkey's Kurdistan.

Cizre: First impressions

An otherwise unexceptional Kurdish town along the Iraqi border, Cizre has been since the beginning of the 1990s one of the centers of the Kurdish insurgency in Turkey, and it was the epicenter of the recent experimentation with self-governance. Both the people's assembly of Cizre and the YDG-H were already well organized when the peace process was announced. It took the YDG-H a few months of training and preparation to turn itself into neighborhood-based self-defense units, immediately barricading the areas under their control from the police entrance with make-shift check-points and trenches. By early 2014, Cizre was already entirely under the reign of the youth, and remained so until the 2015 - 2016 military operations that aimed to clear the area from these Kurdish fighters.

I visited Cizre in May 2015 to conduct summer research. I did not know this back then, but it was the final phase of the peace process which came to an end in August 2015. And I had my first encounter with the youth on the very day that I arrived at Xaltî Hediye's house – which was also the day I met Xaltî Hediye for the first time.

Xaltî Hediye was living in the Cudi neighborhood of Cizre, formed in the 1990s by the internally displaced Kurds who lost their villages and homes during the Turkish army's scorched-earth campaign. I arrived at Xaltî Hediye's house at around 2 p.m. and was welcomed by a big group, including Xaltî Hediye, her three daughters, mother-in-law, younger brother and his wife, and three women from the neighborhood.

Despite that it was Ramadan and Xaltî Hediye herself was fasting, a huge tray of food with soup, chicken, rice, and salad was set in the middle of the living room. During Ramadan, Kurds generally expect the non-fasting folk to go with the fasting ones, living on quick snacks all day until the whole household sits around the dinner tray to break their fasts. So, the fact that Xaltî Hediye had such a nice and big lunch ready for me was a huge gesture. I later discovered

that Xaltî Hediye's nephew, who introduced me to the family and also himself drove me to Cizre that day from Nusaybin, had called Xaltî Hediye early in the morning to tell her that I was an Alevi and that I was not fasting.[32] Even though I told Xaltî Hediye that I found it awkward to eat while everyone else was fasting, she insisted that I should feel free to eat and said that her two daughters were not fasting either and that they would give me company. She also added that if anyone in the neighborhood made a snarky or judgmental comment about the fact that I was not observing Ramadan, I should immediately let her know. "We [in this] household follow the words of our *serok* (Abdullah Öcalan)," she added, "I am an old woman, I fast, I perform prayers, but my two daughters, except my youngest, are revolutionaries like *Apo;* they don't fast, they don't perform prayers, they know in their heart Allah is the greatest, but they live like our guerrillas, and I won't let the neighbors and kin to say a word to them. Now, you are my daughter, too, so I will protect you the same way I protect my daughters."[33] Which she did for as long as I lived with them, during that summer and later during the second year of my fieldwork.

But before we got the chance to sit around the lunch tray, the door was knocked. The youngest daughter of the family went to answer it and a few seconds after she left the room, I heard her calling my name: "Sister Özge, come here." Right outside the house, two youngsters – both YDG-H members – with their faces half covered were waiting for me. The boys, both

[32] Alevis don't observe Ramadan and instead fast during the first twelve days of the Islamic month Muharrem. Alevi fasting is also treated as a mourning period, memorializing the agony of Imam Huseyin at Karbala. During this period, Alevis are not allowed to have sexual intercourse during or after the break the fast, shave, look at their own reflection, listen to music, and eat meat or any other red colored food. They don't use knives as Imam Huseyin was killed with a sword or drink water as it is believed that Imam Huseyin was deprived of water in Karbala before being martyred.

[33] Apo is a hypocorism for Abdullah and a word of endearment that Kurds use to show their affection and closeness for Abdullah Öcalan, suggesting that he is kin to everyone in Kurdistan. The preference for Apo reflects cultural habits of Kurds who generally use diminutive forms of personal names, such as Îso, instead of Ismail, or Ûso, instead of Yusuf. They do this even for names already short. My father's name is Veli, for instance, but he is called Velo by his kin and tribespeople.

seemingly in their late teens, told me to step outside and follow them to the empty lot near Xaltî Hediye's house. I obeyed. There, they explained to me that they had been informed about the arrival of a guest to Xaltî Hediye's house. They asked about the car that drove me there, and I told them that the car belonged to Xaltî Hediye's nephew. They looked suspicious and I could understand why. Xaltî Hediye lived in a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of the town. Non-locals would typically avoid the neighborhood, nor would they have any reason to be there. So, the fact that I was there itself demanded an explanation.

Then began a twenty-minute-long Q & A, which, for lack of a better term, can be described as an interrogation. I was asked about my intentions for visiting the town (Cizre was hardly a tourist attraction), how I had come to know the family (I was referred to Xaltî Hediye by her relatives in Nusaybin), my occupation (working at a university), and my hometown (in other words, whether I was a Kurd too or not). They wanted to know how long I would stay there (three months) and what my stay would look like (just like any guest, eating and chatting all day, or going on walks with women, or making house visits to meet other neighbors). It was only after Xaltî Hediye interfered, reassuring the youth members that I was an ally and that my father was a Kurdish patriot, known as a true *heval* in his own community (she pretty much improvised this part), the boys seemed to have relaxed a bit. As a final gesture of precaution, they wanted to see my citizenship ID-card, which listed my name, surname, father's name, mother's name, date of birth, marital status, and most important of all, the province, town, and village of registry as this information confirmed that my patriarchal lineage was of Kurdish origin. Before letting me go, they asked if everyone from Dersim had the same weird Kurdish. I said, "yes, our Kurdish is different."

When I went back inside, I was confused about what had just happened. “I am happy to answer any question, but why is this even necessary,” I asked Xaltî Hediye and others. Everyone in the room, and although they all expressed that they felt bad for, and that it was inappropriate, letting a guest go through such questioning, also told me that all that was necessary (*mecburî*). “The Turkish state is trying really hard to infiltrate Cizre,” Xaltî Hediye explained to me, “the youth has no other choice but to be very careful and very alert.” I later heard this from other people in our neighborhood, too, that the youth was guarding our area from spies and infiltrators.

Indeed, for everyone I spoke to in Cizre, the work of the youth began with countering anti-revolutionary forces (police, traitors, degenerates) and detecting the government spies along the way. The group was in a total war not only against these people, but also against drugs and prostitution, which were believed to be conveniently tolerated and even promoted in Kurdistan by the Turkish state in the hope of depoliticizing Kurds and turning them away from the political cause.

The youth’s reign in Cizre was an eventful period, to put it mildly. One could describe it as two-years of near daily escalations punctuated by major escalations. In October 2014, for instance, massive anti-government protests broke out which were met by violent police intervention. In December 2014, Cizre saw deadly clashes between the Kurdish youth and the Turkish state backed Sunni-Islamist Kurdish group called Hîzbullah (which does not have anything to do with the Lebanese Shia Islamist party Hezbollah). In January 2015, 14-year-old Ümit Kurt was shot dead by Turkish special forces in a targeted attack that wounded three other Kurdish boys, which prompted another round of heavy fighting between youth members and the police. ISIS was the other chief source of worry. Syrian Kurds and the Syria-Iraq based radical group had been in a well televised war by then. Countless Kurdish men and women from Turkey

crossed the border into northern Syria ("Rojava" in Kurdish) to join up forces with local Kurds and many were killed there. On occasion, families were able to bring the remains back for a funeral to Cizre, in which case the youth would issue public calls for massive funeral corteges and attendance was not optional. At these events, the frustration was loud and the fear palpable; Kurds were alert and highly wary of the prospect of the conflict spilling over into Turkey's Kurdish region. For all these reasons, and despite the growing discontent with the youth's proclivity to carry things to an excess, the group's efforts to control the daily flow of people, vehicles, activities, and news were seen as necessary.

The YDG-H was not only monitoring but also in charge of the daily flow of things. A few times in the week, youth members would drive in the neighborhood, making announcements with loudspeakers about demonstrations, funerals, or public-courts, or that they were going to block the main road the next day to stage a street protest. ID-checks, round-the-clock patrol, or at any rate, the youth's sphere of activities at large, were not purely ceremonial, most important of all, as everyone in Cizre insisted. These practices were not only necessary, in other words, but they also had real consequences for everyone involved, and everyone had to do their part. Consider the following story of a criminal prosecution which concerns a drug-smuggling case handled by the YDG-H:

> "One day, the youth search a car and see the truck is full of drugs. The car belongs to a man from our neighborhood. But he just rented it to someone, he was not involved in the drug business… The youth punish the dealer and they decide to take the man (the owner of the car) to the people. One morning, it was early, the youth drove around in the neighborhood with loudspeakers. They said there will be a trial. We all went... The youth asked us [if they should] confiscate the car or fine the man. The people in our neighborhood voted. We said a fine is enough."

Admittedly, not every crime called for an official proceeding as such, and often youth members considered it sufficient to beat or intimidate a wrongdoer during rough interrogation. And although such practices did not always sit right with the locals, provoking debate about their appropriateness or fairness, it was obvious that the youth did contain the punitive authority necessary to implement prosecutorial strategies and decisions. Against this backdrop, it was not surprising to see the youth and self-governance becoming one and the same. The YDG-H not only gave Kurdish self-governance a distinct direction, one that was centered upon specific techniques of defense, discipline, and community-building, but also instituted these techniques as the rationalizing and systematizing principles of its own existence.

Return to Cizre

That summer in Cizre was a summer of mixed feelings. It was the summer of the HDP's historic electoral success that I mentioned in chapter four, but also a summer of increasing violence between the PKK and the Turkish military. On one hand, the grassroot movement of self-governance was spreading even faster than the summer of 2014, with communities usually politically more cautiously acting, forming assemblies and declaring self-rule. On the other hand, as anyone familiar with the theater of Turkish politics could tell, there was a strong sense that a bad thing was about to happen. Why? Because the broader public conversation around the peace process was rapidly shifting from being supportive to more and more loudly critical of the process. Erdogan was getting rid of all the cabinet members supportive of the peace process, for he blamed the election defeat on those people. Erdogan's AKP was still the first party, having won more than 40% of the vote, but it lost the parliamentary majority. The most immediate consequence was that Erdogan now needed allies outside of his own party, and Erdogan's choice

was the Turkish far-right Nationalist Movement Party (*MHP*). The nationalists were ready to support Erdogan, yet they had one condition: the peace process had to end.

Still, when I look at my field-notes and emails sent to interlocutors during the summer of 2015, it is obvious that I was completely unaware, and so were my interlocutors, that we were witnessing a defeat in the making. Rather, my field-notes mark observations and questions about the self-governance movement, which was still continuing in full force but in an increasingly more threatening environment. They mark many conversations with interlocutors about the future of the movement and the power of youth. The notes show that many in Cizre were confident that the youth could defend the town and self-governance, had they become under attack. There are also questions and comments in these notes about the overall possibility of self-governance in the absence of the necessary institutional infrastructure. For the presumption that sovereignty needed to be institutionally and in some ways officially recognized and supported was so deeply crystallized in the popular, predominant argument *against* Kurdish self-governance, it was inevitable that I picked on that question. How was self-governance possible? I could not help but wonder: what were the sources and methods that helped Kurds imagine and enact Kurdish self-governance? What kind of an explanation could be provided for the performativity of self-governance, that it mattered to Kurds, and that it was [meta]pragmatically consequential, creating its own context of uptake?

These were the questions with which I left Cizre in August 2015. I did not have answers yet, as it was a preliminary visit not aimed to generate answers but only good questions. I also thought I would be back in about a year for another round of summer research. I remember feeling confident, despite rising tensions and the fact that the Turkish army and the PKK were already engaging in small fights in the countryside, that Kurdish self-governance, with its

structures, methods, and actors, would not go anywhere. So, I thought to myself, I could come back in a year and continue my research. With these thoughts in mind, I said goodbye to my friends and my host-family. I wished them good luck, and I promised that I would see them all in 2016. That, however, never happened. Only three days after my departure, while I was still in Turkey getting ready to return to Michigan, the Turkish government announced the end of the peace process. Between 4 and 11 September 2015, Cizre was sealed off from the outside world by Turkish armed forces that launched a security operation against the youth. Leyla Imret, the locally elected young female mayor of Cizre, was forcefully removed from her position and indicted for being a member of a terrorist organization. As evidence, prosecutors cited an interview she had given early that year to Vice News based in New York, the details of which the Vice News later refuted.

When the curfew was lifted on 11th of September 2015, on its eighth day, Turkish media reported that the military operation was a success and more than forty "terrorists" were "neutralized" (*etkisiz hale getirilmek*), a word typically used by Turkish media in lieu of the word "killed," with zero mention of the civillian deaths that occurred, which were mostly reported by citizen journalists and only on social media. According to the pro-Kurdish HDP and the locals, the number of civilians who lost their lives during operations was twenty or twenty-two. Because of the restrictions on movement and the round-the-clock curfew, eye-witness accounts and resorts by Kurdish activists and politicians indicated, locals had to keep the bodies of their loved ones killed in the violence in refrigerators until the end of the curfew. On 12 September, the day after the operations were over, thousands of Cizreans marched to the town's main graveyard to attend the funeral ceremony of the civilians that lost their lives.

This was, unfortunately, only the beginning. As was mentioned earlier in chapter two and three, a much bigger devastation and death toll happened during the second curfew that began on 14 December 2015 and ended on 11 February 2016. And then, in the summer of 2016, after a failed coup attempt against the government that took place on July 15, the parliament declared a nation-wide state of emergency that lasted two years. Until the end of the state of emergency, and although I remained in touch the whole time with Xaltî Hediye and many interlocutors from the neighborhood, I thus could not visit Cizre again. I contemplated going there many times, for at least a week or two and just to see friends and express my sadness face-to-face for all that had happened, but I was strictly told by Xaltî Hediye not to visit Cizre for my own as well as others' safety. Most importantly, my visit was not a matter that Xaltî Hediye and I could decide for ourselves, given that it could, directly or indirectly, affect a whole neighborhood of people who had already been through enough. For all these reasons, I only returned to Cizre in September 2018, a little over three years after the day I had left the town in 2015, and this time to conduct long-term research.

Accountability

"*Wan deman her tist pir bas bû*" – "it was a time when everything was good." In Cizre, I heard this statement a lot. It describes "the time of the youth" – *demané ciwanen* – which many interlocutors in Cizre considered to be a period of great political as well as ethical achievements. Whenever I asked why they considered the time of the youth so distinctively good, I would be given an explanation along this line: "*Ciwanan hesabê her tistîyé nebas dipirsî"* – "the youth would make everyone to account for bad things." What bad things? If a man had not attended a political demonstration, the youth would make him account for that. If he had spent his days

playing cards, the youth would make him account for that. During the era of the youth, politically degenerate practices, such as alcohol consumption, drug use, and prostitution, were all virtually erased. Or take the complaints of Xaltî Hediye, my host-mother, which I mentioned in the previous chapter about the owners' of certain houses in our neighborhood that Xaltî believed were traitors. If the youth had still been around, Xaltî Hediye repeated to me a few times quite confidently, those people would be made to pay for their betrayal. But the youth was gone, almost all killed during the military operations between 2015 and 2016.

The movement of self-governance and in particular the YDG-H did not only mark a turning point in the history of Cizre such that the whole town was portrayed by a "before the youth & after the youth" narrative, but also in people's personal stories and intimate relationships. Take Bengo, an unapologetically extroverted man in his early forties, and a good friend of mine.

I met with Bengo for the first time in a dark alley in our neighborhood, where we both found ourselves due to an outrageous concurrence of things including a power outage, a lost key, a cockfighter husband, and a frustrated wife. Bengo was dawdling around to avoid his wife's ire – the cock he had recently bought with all his savings was severely injured in its first fight. I was locked out and unable to reach Xaltî Hediye, whose antediluvian cell phone would only work when plugged into a power outlet. Perhaps due to the circumstances under which we met, Bengo quickly became a close friend whose primary role in my life was being a trouble-maker of the best kind. He had an entrepreneurial spirit (his own words), yet his endeavors had been forever dodged by bad luck – *bedbext*. He would often relate his lack of fortune to that of his homeland: "Poor me, poor Kurdistan" (*bila gunehê, Kurdistanê gunahê*). On a few occasions, Dûnya, Bengo's wife, explicitly asked me to write *about* Bengo's gambling addiction as a threat *to*

Bengo: “All peoples (*hemû millet*) will see Kurds are gamblers, they will say Kurds are bad to their families” (and I found it incredibly sweet that she believed all peoples would eventually read my work). Off chance, Dûnya hoped, the possibility of misrepresenting Kurds might perhaps prevent Bengo from pursuing such bad habits.

For Dûnya and the other wives of cockfighters whom I met along the way (and I met quite a few), had the YDG-H still been around, their husbands could not even dare to imagine venturing in such worthless undertakings. The husbands agreed. Bengo, for instance, once told me that he was a better man when the youth was active and ruling everyday life in Cizre:

> “When the youth were ruling Cizre, they were really harsh, they punished many people. I used to complain about this. I would feel offended, angry even, that a bunch of kids were telling me what to do, how to spend my time… I would think to myself ‘I am an adult, why do I even ask for permission from these boys?’ I will be honest to you; I obeyed the youth just because other people obeyed them. I could not risk being the only one not doing that. Now, I think differently. I understand things better. I can see that the time of the youth was a great time for Cizre. For all of us. I was a better man. Ask my mother, she will tell you that I was a better son. Dûnya will tell you that I was a better husband. But I am not a good man now. I became selfish. I am harmful to my family. When the youth were here, they said, ‘nobody can harm others.’ They wanted Kurds to be good people. But look at the situation now. I lost all my savings in gambling and my friends did not even shame me for that. They didn’t say a thing. They just laughed.”

I could not tell if Bengo was a better man or not, but I knew that he would have been a wealthier man, had the youth been still around. Fiercely campaigning against any form of silly entertainment and gambling, the youth put cockfighting under a ban – it was virtually nonexistent for a while. In tea houses, only the tables farthest from the windows were available to card players, while the older and more reserved folks would be seated visibly from the outside. The allowed to air TV channels in shops and other businesses were limited to Kurdish language news and music broadcasters, with Turkish channels being off limits. My interlocutors, including

present-day gamblers, would describe these proscriptive policies as good and favorable, driven by an effort to portray the post-youth era as something of an age of moral decay. These descriptions were to index the appreciation and longing these people had developed for the youth, all the while exposing their grievances over its loss. What I witnessed, in other words, was a trend among Kurds in thinking about self-governance through morally weighted examples selected as its model achievements which were fitted against all the bad things that followed it.

Indeed, the Cizre of 2018 was starkly different from the youth-governed town that I had left in 2015. Youth militants were nowhere to be seen, almost all had been killed in security operations that left behind an enormous material destruction. Walking past these ruins was an occasion to produce personal reminiscences about the bygone days of self-governance. The people's assembly was disassembled following the killing of its key members, and the town was governed by a government appointed trustee, a Turkish man, who shared the fate of all the other trustees appointed by Ankara, the fate of not being liked by locals even a bit. The state of emergency was over, meaning that the size of the police force and the number of resources allocated to the surveillance system were half of what they had been during the emergency, but that did not seem to help much with anything. Cizre was still a place under occupation, a textbook example of what a colonial state looked and felt like. Even more significantly, Turkish armed forces and government employees were now the main group of consumers, with the whole aesthetic and style of the marketplace being adapted to their needs and desires. In shops, teahouses, and cafes, only Turkish TV was playing, or no TV was playing, and if there was music in the background, it was always a Turkish popular song. When people walked into a shop, the owners would greet them in Turkish, unless the people walking in were known to them already.

Once I was at a small bakery with a good friend of mine. There were two other men inside, who were behaving very aggressively. I did not see how it all started, but the men got into a fight with the shopkeeper over the price of an item. The men were speaking in Turkish, but I could tell from their accent that they were Kurdish, though not from Cizre. I could also tell that the shopkeeper was doing his best to remain calm, nodding his head to everything the two men were saying. "It is the same price everywhere," the shopkeeper told the men, "but give me whatever you have, that is fine." In the end, the two men decided not to buy anything and left the shop still cursing. My friend and I, feeling bad for the shopkeeper, bought enough bread and biscuits for the next two weeks and left. As we were walking back to our neighborhood, my friend told me that that shopkeeper himself was a very serious man, who would normally never allow customers to behave like that. "Not only that shopkeeper, nobody in Cizre would have allowed that to happen," she added: "Those men were not from here, so it is even worse that they are coming to our town from outside, daring to talk to a local like that. If the youth was still here, those men could not act like that, or they would pay the price. But it is not like the time of the youth anymore, it is worse than ever, nowadays you don't know who is anymore, people from outside generally come because they work for the state, there are more state people than Cizreans around, so even a proud man like that shopkeeper has to swallow."

I heard many similar complaints from friends and neighbors about the dramatic changes in the town. Sometimes for hours on end, I would listen to my interlocutors complaining about the explosive growth of Western-style cafes (meaning the west of the country, aka the "Turkish Turkey"), the rise of alcohol consumption, illegitimate affairs between Kurdish actors and state actors, and purportedly dubious enrichment of some locals claimed to have happened overnight. I got a phone call from Bengo one day, for instance, who warned me to never travel with Cizre

Nuh again (Cizre Nuh was a locally owned intercity bus company). When I asked why, he gave me the following explanation: “Have you not heard of it? Everyone talks about this. Last night, the police stopped a bus owned by Cizre Nuh and arrested five people from the same family, all relatives of a guerrilla fighter on the run. People say that the owners of Cizre Nuh are now openly collaborating with the state. The bus drivers are all informants now, watching passengers, calling the police if they see anything suspicious. But they will all get away with this, there is nobody to make them pay for their betrayal.” I told Bengo how I had wished that the youth was still around, knowing very well where the conversation was going, and Bengo immediately agreed: “See? You are not a Cizrean but even you know that the time of the youth was so different.”

Rumors about romantic relationships between Kurdish women and Turkish civil servants working for the government were an everyday issue, interpreted as signs of the moral decay in Cizrean society that followed the demise of the youth. One day, Xaltî hediye’s oldest daughter, Solîn, told me that she had to end her friendship with Asya, a young woman from our neighborhood, due to the latter’s “unconstrained” (*serbest*) behavior (and she urged me to do the same). Asya was already a target of criticism in the neighborhood. The problem, according to her friends, was that Asya stopped living like a revolutionary after the military operations that ended self-governance in Cizre. She was spending too much time in the town center, shopping and hanging out with friends in cafes. She was wearing different, more colorful clothes and makeup, posting on Instagram selfies instead of political content, and listening to Turkish popular music. To make matters worse, word had it that Asya was also text-messaging with a Turkish teacher. For Solîn, this was not acceptable: Asya’s uncle’s son was from the youth, the boy was

seventeen years old when he was killed by Turks fighting for our future, and now Asya is talking to a Turkish man, she is betraying her people, can even you believe this?"

Solîn's other friends, all young women from our neighborhood, agreed that Asya's actions constituted betrayal. But Asya was not the only person in her family: "Asya's brother has a phone repair shop, and his shop is making great money now, you know how?" Helîn, Solîn's best friend asked me. "Because he is serving Turkish civil servants and police all day every day." When I asked Helîn why she considered this a problem, especially thinking that Asya's brother had no other choice but to serve those people, Helîn said the problem was not that he served them, it was that he had good relations with many of them: "He is only playing Turkish music and Turkish TV in the shop, he warns his kin visiting his shop not to speak Kurdish inside… in my opinion, he is technically surrendering to Turks, he is handing our city to them like 'here, Cizre is yours now, do whatever you want with it, we won't say a word'... I think this is the biggest form of treason." Had the youth still been in Cizre, both Solîn and Helîn agreed, Asya and his brother would never find the courage to act the way they did: "They are so shameless, they do whatever they want, they don't care what others think of them, this would never happen at the time of the youth."

At first glance, my interlocutors seemed to be complaining about an array of different things which, while part of the same family of moral errors, were all also indexical of the personal views, priorities, and social experiences of particular complaint makers. Yet, one could also see something of a commonality among these accounts, the essence of which consisted not exclusively in the wrongs that were being identified, but in a shared perception of a lack of social and moral control that played into their proliferation. Nobody seemed to be following the political ethical ideals promoted by the youth, such as non-compliance and group solidarity, that

had been just a few years back taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life. While the wrongs were many, varied, and every day, to put it differently, my interlocutors' primary issue with them was the perceived attitude of the wrongdoers of invincibility, attributed to a sense of immunity to punishment and disciplinary action. The argument being made was thus aimed to demonstrate that in the absence of the YDG-H, there remained no authority to ensure "political accountability" as a coordinated way of organizing social life. The social significance of the youth and Kurdish self-governance thus went far beyond that they broke a taboo, challenging the dominant state discourse and governance model to enable self-rule and self-expression for Kurds. Their appeal and utility, instead, came from how these objects were imagined to have created an ideal of sociability for Kurds, and a model for solidarity, indexing very unique ethical ends.

The Work of Accounting

To be perfectly precise, in Cizre, hardly anyone would refrain from questioning an acquaintance for getting cozy with government employees, consuming alcohol, or gambling, but only a few could pull that off with the conspicuously theatrical force unique to the youth. Without a doubt, this force tended toward a proliferation of the performative efficacy of the YDG-H. Yet the most important distinction was the degree to which youth members turned "answering back" to a moral duty. The principal function of this duty was to render Kurds answerable to relational others vis-à-vis their alleged violations of community ethics. All this strongly shaped the organization of public life, for such "answering back" could not be done in private. It was not that people, when they were targeted by the youth for this or that reason, would not look for confidential arrangements, mostly to avoid the shame of being put in a public trial – be it a real

or imaginary one. Obvious to everyone, however, was that an arrangement as such did not have the benefit of constructing moral selves or creating good. Private arrangements were merely a letting of some wrong pass as if it had never happened, and the very ethical goals of the whole movement was to build a culture of accountability in which wrongs such as immoral habits, compliance with the Turkish state, accommodation, or open collaboration were never turned a blind eye. This was why, many interlocutors insisted, the youth did not like solving things behind the scenes. For "answering back" to constitute a political act, for it to meet the distinct ethical ends that it was imagined achieving, that "answering back" had to be performed in front of the others.

Why bother following this duty, which often overwhelmed individuals and casted them into the wrong role? One popular explanation was that it worked to uphold the principles of political autonomy and self-actualization. If the Turkish state had secured a way into Kurdish life for decades, comfortably controlling Kurdish people, turning them into spies, traitors, or cowards, that was because Kurds had never problematized those things, or expected accountability from one another. According to this account, if the Turkish state successfully ruled Kurds, it did so by depoliticizing many everyday acts and objects that were deeply political and politically consequential in nature. What were those acts and objects? Well, many things, such as having a government job, speaking Turkish every day, indulging oneself in frivolous habits, gambling or cockfighting for instance, prioritizing romantic relationships, consumerism, apolitical attitudes like not attending protests, and so on. The youth's primary function, which the group inherited from the PKK, and the primary thing that it had achieved, was to reclaim the Kurdish everyday, precisely by re-politicizing certain mundane habits and behaviors, and making Kurds duty-bound to account for them. For many, the youth's magic was unveiling the invisible

hand behind the power fields that governed the cultural, economic, and political subsumption of Kurds under a superimposed state control. The group showed Kurds that watching Turkish TV was not only watching Turkish TV; it was surrendering one's city and people to the quiet, unreflected, everyday control of the state. When my interlocutors described "answering back" as a valued practice, a relic of a collapsed world they longed for, they were in fact reframing Kurdish self-governance as an ideal and ethical form of everyday sociability.

This duty was also clearly structured around the PKK's principal ethics, wherein Kurdish lives were seen as thoroughly bound in mutual obligations as well as shared responsibilities towards the political cause. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the PKK's ethic saw it as imperative for Kurds to "answer back" whenever a call was issued by an actor or organization allied with the PKK leadership. It was the same political ethic that allowed the youth to elicit responsiveness from Kurds, which functioned as one of the primary means by which the business of self-governance was publicly transacted. When the youth called Kurds to attend a funeral, Kurds did so. When they organized a public court, Kurds took it seriously, and if they did not take it seriously, like Bengo, for instance, they acted as if they were taking it seriously, and played their part. While it emerged in a range of contexts, the duty to answer back was thus most transparently visible in Kurds' responsiveness to publicly issued invitations by the youth.

As sociologists of conversation have long argued, an analysis of social structures should be an inside out analysis of their semiotic production through reciprocal actions (Goodwin and Heritage 1988: 287, Heritage 1984, Sacks and Schegloff 1974). John Heritage identifies accountability as the functioning of social relations through exchanges of *accounts*, arguing that these exchanges are the elementary building bricks with which these structures – institutions, ideas, social movements – are made to exist, relevant to their metapragmatic construals as good,

necessary, obligatory, and so on. In my analysis of the movement of Kurdish self-governance, I take "answering back" as a mode of action imagined building from inside out the very social ideal and political imagination that it exemplified. According to my interlocutors, "answering back" did its pragmatic and ethical work on two levels. First, it was a way to provide explicit explanations about alleged wrongdoings, which were usually offered in the context of a demand or accusation. In this sense, the ethical context of accountability as it was promoted by the YDG-H was an example of the modality of "giving an account for oneself" developed by Judith Butler (2005). According to Butler, "giving an account for oneself" is always instigated by an accusation and in social life where the actor's behaviors, choices, mistakes, and so on create suffering for some others (see also, Keane 2016: 91 – 93). For Kurds in Cizre, the necessity to account for perceived misbehaviors or infractions was a significant part of what was entailed in self-governance, which, as a social movement, directed Kurds to self-consciously monitor and govern their everyday behavior in a context where they were duty-bound to answer for their violations of community ethics.

Second, if "answering back" as explicit accounting was possible, that was because of the broader pragmatic context out of which it was assumed to have emerged. As Heritage argues, accounts index people's "continuously updated implicit understandings of what is happening in social contexts" and ability to tailor their behavior accordingly (Heritage 1988: 128). Much of everyday life, in fact, owes to this implicit kind of accounting saturated by the actor's sensitivities to her surroundings, recognition of her co-presence with others in shared spaces, and her own capacities for pragmatic contribution. Here is an example of what I mean by "pragmatic context" from the summer of 2015, from the summer that I first went to Cizre in order to observe the movement of self-governance underway: In our neighborhood, there was a one-story house

allocated to a group of PKK guerrillas. The neighbor women were taking turns cooking for them, and the mother of the family next door would take the task from there and smuggle the food inside through a shared wall. Similarly, boys as young as eight years old had an alternating division of labor to observe witnesses, assessing among themselves their credibility. Note as well how two very distinct properties of face-to-face communication, turn-taking and sequencing, become constitutive of a much wider swathe of social activities, allowing people to account for their place in them. The fact that the youth was so forcefully able to demand accountability from locals, making them stand in public-trials, and making others attend the same public-trials as judges, should be understood against the background of this broader ethical context of accounting, in which locals lived in a manner indexically elaborative of their awareness of the political moment, making their actions to iconically register and communicate an account of that very awareness.

So, what does all this tell us about Kurdish self-governance? And what does Kurdish self-governance tell us about the ethical crisis that followed it? At its essence, my discussion of accountability/answerability addresses the articulation of self-governance as a good thing collectively achieved, a good thing that brought true political autonomy and moral improvement. Accountability, or answerability, constitutes the moral element that metapragmatically articulated self-governance as a counter-hegemonic way of living, or way of reflecting on the common ground. The whole movement prized itself, and later was remembered by many Cizreans, for working against the dominant, habitual, taken-for-granted discursive hegemony of Turkish rule over Kurdish public life. From the perspective of this framing, one can see that there was much more at stake in self-governance than the possibility of making one's own rules or building one's own institutions. At stake in self-governance, in other words, was greater and

better reflexivity. Throughout my time in Kurdistan, during or after the peace process, whether it was a time in which Kurds seemed to be winning or struggling with defeat, I witnessed variations of this ethical reflexivity. Copious amounts of field-notes show how my interlocutors reflected on the conditions of Turkish rule or the necessity of self-rule by trying to elicit their recognition of the corollary ethical effects, good or bad.

In important respects, then, Kurdish self-governance was about the possibility of imagining a more ethical life and living differently. It was an ethical project that drew from a certain notion of sociality, of the true entailments and necessities of living with one's own kind. Put another way, living with one's own kind necessitated a specific ethical lens towards what one's actions created for the others, part of which involved accounting for what one did and living in a manner itself accounting for one's awareness of what one did. The culture of complicity that my interlocutors problematized, as the absolute opposite of the sociality that the Kurdish self-governance was built on and imagined, on the other hand, was a context in which wrongdoers did not even need to account for their actions, tacitly or implicitly.

The empirical focus in the second half of this chapter was thus on the ways that the YDG-H translated self-governance into a participatory space for coordinated action that aimed to create a moral circle of accountability. Because if self-governance was valued by Kurds as a politically provocative, participatory project, that was linked to its specific ethical ends and possibilities, and not simply because it made Turks angry. What I learned from my interlocutors, especially during my long-term ethnographic research in Cizre between 2018 and 2019, was that it is essential to ask what else, other than transgression, self-governance promised and to a certain degree enabled Kurds to achieve. This was necessary, moreover, to imagine Kurdish self-governance as a social movement resting upon specific virtues, goals, and techniques of

reflexivity and sociability privileged by its agents. Kurdish youth were not merely in the business of changing the political conditions of governance. The group had a second and equally important goal that pointed to a moral covenant: setting up a space in which Kurdish political movement and the very ethical project that this movement undertook elicited sensibility and responsiveness from Kurds. Therefore, by way of connecting the project of self-governance to the necessity of responsiveness and awareness, the youth turned the very common ground, the shared everyday, into a school of reflexivity where Cizreans daily performed a certain way of looking at their lives, and lived in a manner that showed that they were good students.

No doubt that the political history of the idea of Kurdish self-determination is far too complex and multi-dimensional than what a rather unique and short-lived experiment of youth-led activism can possibly tell us. Yet the case of the YDG-H is still one of the most forceful examples of what self-rule looks like to Kurds as a social organization and a way to rearrange the common ground. Indeed, I consider Kurdish self-governance a dense semiotic figuration, indexically grounded in its own social history, as well as the social histories of the ideals, worries, fears, aspirations, beliefs, problematizations, and political criticisms that comprised its pragmatic context.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

Recently in 2022, I called Benazir, the friend who showed me the Twitter account which revealed information about Kurdish women who allegedly had romantic relationships with Turkish policemen. I wanted to check with her whether Benazir was still okay with me using her name in this dissertation. She said she would be happy if I did that: "I still love my name Özge, nothing has changed about that. But you should only use *my* real name, I want to feel special, otherwise I will not allow it." I promised her that would be the case. Then we chatted a bit, she told me about "the situation" in Kurdistan, where things were, Benazir insisted, still all very wrong. She said that there were improvements in surveillance and the constant monitoring of the citizens' every movement, but, she added, that was because the Turkish state was comfortable now that it had won – that Kurdistan was perfectly tamed: "It is like a lawless land; every institution, every decision, even the decision of hiring a cleaner to a small government office, is relegated to the AKP's provincial organizations. The arbitrariness is now the rule. Nothing works as it should; it is really a sad place; you are lucky that you have not been a witness all this." I countered Benazir by suggesting that things had always been that way, but she said "no, this is worse." When I asked her to explain, she said that the pandemic and the economic crisis since 2018 surely and certainly did not help, but even more specifically, there was a causal, annoying sense of lack of concern on every side: "I don't remember seeing Kurdistan this way, ever, it is not the same place. Kurds live like they don't care; it is all about empty, daily things nowadays.

Then she asked me about how things were going in my life, and I said I was fully immersed in dissertation writing, pretty much killing myself over it. On Benazir's request, I explained my arguments and gave her a general summary of the work. She laughed, and said, "oh, so you are really writing about that, complicity and stuff." I said, yes. Then I reminded her the day she characterized the women who allegedly were dating with, or perhaps just talking to, Turkish policemen as the accomplices of the Turkish state: "Oh, really? Did I say that? Well, that is a little bit of an exaggeration," Benazir responded. I reminded her that "exaggeration" (*abartma*) was the exact word that she had used the first time we talked about that issue. Benazir laughed and said, "yeah that sounds like me," and then added: "But can you even write about these kind of things in a PhD dissertation, I thought PhDs were serious business." I asked whether she could elaborate on that statement and why she considered "complicity and stuff" as *not* serious enough issues for a dissertation. Benazir took a moment and then explained: "I mean… Can you write about things that are not real? We all know about village-guards and the tribes who collaborate with the state; these are surely real, but these [categories] do not cover every Kurd, and I do not think you can prove that ordinary Kurds are really helping the state, that is just something we like to talk about a lot, because we don't like the state so deeply inside our lives. That is our big issue, every Kurd feels that is wrong and wants that to change."

Back in the day, when Benazir and I had talked about all this for the first time, she said that "complicity and stuff" were not being talked about enough. In this last conversation, she said that there was not much to the issue other than the fact Kurds liked to talk, debate, and problematize it among themselves, for it allowed them to capture a certain sense of wrongness. And yet, Benazir also told me at the beginning of the same conversation that things were really

bad in Kurdistan, in fact much worse than they had ever been, due to a perceivable lack of concern among people for the absurdly arbitrary political realities.

In Kurdistan, complicity accusations, or conversational gestures to the idea of complicity in Turkish rule, were not merely resources to label a certain kind of joint-undertaking as the shared crime of a principal and an accomplice, or to label a Kurdish actor as the accomplice. They were, rather, tools for asking important questions about the general state of affairs, for acting on a sense of wrongness noticed but not properly remarked, and pointing out a set of contradictions that defined the Kurdish lifeworlds. When my interlocutors talked about, or around, the category of complicity, they were addressing what they considered to be a given and also deeply troubling aspect of their lives, the fact that the Turkish state was too much and too shamelessly involved in the Kurdish everyday. They were also acting on the very incapacities that rendered making accusations of or even properly reflecting on complicity, turning on those incapacities as metapragmatic tools to describe the circumstances and the very relations that summoned those circumstances into existence. More specifically, they were framing all these as problems that required a different and a much greater reflexivity, inviting one another to think about their lives and what they were creating for one another through a new lens. In this relation, they were narrating and scaling Kurdistan as a specific kind of place, differently construed; Kurdistan was a kind of place, in this formulation, which was made to exist as unlike any other. All this thus required a massive change in Kurds' reflexive habits, tools, and terms necessary to understand this place and the sort of life that it entails.

Over the course of this dissertation, I have outlined several dimensions of this reflexive work. Here I want to draw on some of the central arguments that I developed earlier and reflect on how those arguments contribute to the theoretical and methodological study of ethical life.

First, the most compelling dimension of the category of complicity in Turkish rule for Kurds is its dilemmatic, contradictory nature – that it is hard to make conclusive accusations of complicity, that it is even harder to notice it as it is happening, but one is also almost always witnessing it happening, that it is everywhere, bothering everyone, who also seem to be really not talking about it enough. In chapter three and four, I sketched the ways in which my interlocutors witness "Kurdish complicity" in historical recurrences, certain patterns of behavior, the everyday realities of the security-paradigm, the fears, anxieties, and never-ending unintended consequences that turn it into Kurds' misfortune that they constantly catching themselves doing some kind of help to the Turkish state, without ever intending to do that. In this sense, this dissertation has used the category of complicity as an onramp to ask why people problematize unintended consequences, and why unintended consequences are a question of ethics.

In doing so, my purpose was to trace the ways Kurds describe a certain family of problems unintentionally brought about as ethically troubling, precisely because those problems render their lives not-normal. In chapter six, for instance, I showed the ways my interlocutors depict traitors as people who act outside of the normative limits and conditions of human life – as people who do not protect their own kind. But normativity also brings a much longer list of ethical considerations into the picture. In the case of the Brukî tribe, for instance, not abiding by the rules of optimal behavior and being a good guest are the very "stuff" with which moral evaluations are both prompted and justified. In chapter three, I talked about mistrust as a social technology, which my interlocutors connect to the not-normal conditions of their political universe, in which even the most well intended acts can produce harm. In all these discussions, I tried to show how paying attention to what Kurds mean when they say not-normal makes it possible for the anthropologist to glean the structures, histories, patterns, forms, and broader

circumstances that are semiotically summoned into the problematization of not-normal, thus rendered salient.

Yet I also always tried to show how the specific ethical crisis of complicity that this dissertation studies, and the specific ethical situations in which my interlocutors encountered with that crisis, are matters of communication, learned in and through the very communicative context that they summon into existence. To say that there is a "complicity problem" in Kurdistan is a communicative gesture, semiotically articulating the circumstances, actors, and public of that problem. In other words, ethical problems, evaluations, and justifications are produced in and through communicative practice, sometimes tacitly noticed, sometimes explicitly problematized, but they are always consumed in a shared world, where the actor understands the components of ethical life vis-à-vis what those components mean to others. Even the most implicit experience invites reflection on whether other people noticed it, or not, and whether talking about it would make any difference to their lives. Likewise, naming an issue as most explicitly everywhere is asking in effect how others did not notice it, or if they noticed it, why they did not say a thing about it. In other words, ethical problems are ways to account for the social relations and interactions in which they are made to exist as problems, supposedly important for a certain group of people, thus relevant to them because of the shared and unique conditions of their group-life.

Note that there is always a scalar movement in ethics, from face-to-face encounters in which the actor is expected to follow the ordinary rules of talk, and show due regard to the others, to the broader pragmatic contexts out of which what is intersubjectively shared as an ethical situation is said to have emerged, such that the ethical situation also belongs to a place and a life, and thus characterizes a general problem with its own conditions of possibility. Why

are these scalar movements important? Because they show that it is in situated, concrete interactions that people learn to reflect on and also make communicative choices vis-à-vis the broader conditions within which those problems come to matter. And yet, all these also happen while people are continuously presented with oddities, irrelevancies, and everyday obligations owed to relational others, next to which, sometimes, "big" problems pale. Remember Zehra whose attempts to problematize what the young woman considered to be a very crucial issue always stumbled on considerations that also equally belonged to ethical life: Whether saying or doing something is appropriate to the context? What would others think? And why does it seem like the nicer choice sometimes to just leave the leaf back on the ground and walk away?

Ultimately, this dissertation has argued that ethics is to inhabit a world where people build and imagine relationships, feeling themselves compelled to act on what they owe to others, what others owe to them, and how their actions are consequential of a world in which living together becomes possible. For Xaltî Bese, picking the leaf and remarking on it was not necessary, for instance, because it was *not* going to make living together any easier. Put this way, both Xaltî Bese and Kurdish political ethics are concerned with the same thing: the very grounds of people's living together, in groups, and as actors who connect to one another in semiotically unique ways. What Kurdish political ethics is aspiring for Kurds, therefore, and the very ideals of solidarity, accountability, and self-rule that this ethics draws on and from, are not any different from Xaltî Bese's position. Kurdish political ethics put a similar demand on Kurds, inviting them to ask a similar question and become more reflexive of this question's broader entailments: How do human actions essentially create a life in which living together becomes harder, better, or possible?

Appendix

In Kurdistan, as a researcher, I use both the Kurmanjî dialect of Kurdish, which is the most widely spoken dialect in Turkey's Kurdistan, as well as Turkish. Bilingualism is the general condition in Kurdistan. Thus, my interlocutors were all bilingual, except for some elders in villages, most of whom were women. The difference between older women and men commonly stems from the fact that men used to learn Turkish during compulsory military service, whereas women had no real reason to leave villages. In everyday life, bilingual Kurds tend to either strategically and based on where they are and whom they speak to, or spontaneously and not always consciously, shift between Kurdish and Turkish. In public spaces, the preference is given to Turkish especially in big cities including Van, whereas in small districts and big towns like Cizre known for their support of Kurdish political movement, the everyday "bazaar language" (*zimane suqé*) is Kurdish. But even in Cizre, or small villages, there are moments where people feel watched and not in safe company, and then they may choose to speak or unconsciously switch to Turkish.

Because the Kurdish language does not have a history of institutional standardization, such as the Turkish language, there is intense variation across Kurdistan among different Kurmanjîs. The variations between Kurmanjîs spoken across Kurdistan, such as the Kurmanjî of Cizre, the Kurmanjî of Diyarbakir, or even the Kurmanjîs of different tribes, such as the Kurmanjî of the Brukî tribe of Van, are mostly lexical, but there is also variation in grammatical rules and sometimes in syntactic order. The interesting thing is that Kurds tend not to rank these differences as the right version or the wrong version, often humorously commenting on different

variations of Kurmanjî as weird, interesting, funny, and so on. Only recently, perhaps in the last ten years or so, Kurds who adopt the discourse of Kurdish political movement have been pushing for more public conversation around standardization and the need to decide on a national, unified Kurdish, but these views hardly reach to rural areas, at least not to the ones where I conducted research. In Bahçesaray, for instance, nobody thinks people in Mardin need to change their way of speaking, or that they need to change their own way of speaking. These variations are not overlooked, of course. They often create a context for metapragmatic commentary, wherein interactants reflect on how others speak, which words they use, how they express a certain thought, and so on. This sometimes becomes tiring, however, at which point Kurds turn to Turkish. Another reason to switch to Turkish is that it allows younger people more freedom to speak between one another while there are elders around. In Bahçesaray, for instance, as well as in Cizre, young women would gossip or talk about love affairs in Turkish, hoping that doing so would protect them from being overheard by parents and other, older relatives, whose Turkish were never as good as their children.

There are also many "hybrid" words and discursive forms in Kurdistan used randomly and daily by Kurds, which are mixed words made up in general, but not always, of a Kurdish root and Turkish particle. Take *Müksüce*, which is the name of the Kurmanji spoken in Bahçesaray. It is a "hybrid" word formed by the Kurdish word *Müküs,* which is the Kurdish name of the district, and the Turkish suffix "*-ce*" that is added to geographical or group names to turn them into language names, such as *Ingiliz-ce* (English), or *Flemenk-çe* (Flemish/Belgium Dutch). "*-Ce*" is not the only Turkish suffix appropriated by Kurds. Another example is "*-miş*," the suffix of the "heard-past-tense" (*mişli geçmiş zaman*) which is a grammatical marker that indexes how the evidence for a given source of information about a past event is coming from

indirect sources – Turkish language also has a "seen-past-tense" (*dili geçmiş zaman*). Kurdish-Turkish bilingual Kurds in Turkey often smuggle the Turkish suffix "*-miş*" into their everyday discourse. The use of "*-miş*" by Kurds is often interpreted as a [bad] habit, or a "montage," more than a loan-fragment, providing manifold opportunities for metadiscursive and metapragmatic commentary.[34]

During interviews and everyday conversations with my interlocutors, I never showed any personal preference about which language to use, leaving it to my interlocutors' discretion to decide in which language they wanted to talk. While for reasons of safety and my interlocutors' preference, I only rarely audio recorded these conversations, I took extensive notes and then reached out whenever necessary to check with my interlocutors if they were happy with my reconstruction of the interaction. In this dissertation, I include a note about which language was spoken at an interview, if there was a switch and if the switch was made with metapragmatic commentary. The entire interview with Roza, for instance, whose story I relayed at the beginning of the introduction, was conducted in Turkish, as it was the language Roza used most of the time. With host-families, I mostly communicated in Kurdish, on the other hand.

The only personal preference between these two languages that I make in this dissertation is that when I speak about specific concepts, such as betrayal, I use Kurdish words, unless the political discourse that I am referring to is itself Turkish. The term "Kurdish reality," used by Kurds to refer to Kurdish political history and condition in Turkey, for instance, was developed by Abdullah Öcalan in the 1990s and it has always been used in Turkish, as *Kürt Gerçekliği*. Later, the phrase entered into Kurdish language, while also known to be Turkish. As an English

[34] "*-Miş*" has been a "point of contact" in many other historical encounters between Turkish, the source language, and a target language, wherein the suffix was appropriated by the speakers' of the latter, such as Tajiki, the official language of Tajikistan (Güven *et.al.* 2016).

example, the readers can think of "*coup d'état*," which is a French phrase commonly used in English, while it is still known and pronounced as French. Today, many words that are popular in Kurdish political discourse are Turkish in origin, also known to be Turkish by Kurds. Here are a few examples: "*ortayolcu*," meaning "middle-of-the-roader," which indicates that a person is a political opportunist and thus prone to betray his or her people; "*objektif ajan,*" which I already explained above; "*demokratik modernite*," meaning "democratic modernity," which is a "*paradigma,"* or "paradigm," developed by Abdullah Öcalan, describing a radical democratic political model of plural political communities organized locally to form regional confederates; "*halklarin diyalektigi,*" meaning "people's dialectic," which Kurds make use to describe a particular way of reasoning about Kurdish political history, which is the way of reasoning that the PKK developed – I talk about the PKK's approach to Kurdish political reality in chapter two. Thus, even in interviews conducted entirely in Kurdish, if the interviewee was fluent in Kurdish political discourse, some phrases and concepts were expressed in Turkish. Yet, because this was common practice, my interlocutors would not make metapragmatic commentary on these momentary shifts, and thus neither do I.

I want to very briefly linger on the reason that Abdullah Öcalan chose to write his theoretical pieces in Turkish, which is twofold, because I think Öcalan's position is a good representation of the bilingual landscape of Turkey and its consequences for Kurds. First, Öcalan himself never received formal education in Kurdish language, whereas he studied in the 1970s at the political science department of Ankara University – though he never graduated and instead started an insurgency – and writes perfectly in Turkish. He also prefers reading in Turkish. Second, much like Öcalan, most Kurds, especially back in the 1970s and the 1980s, did not have a habit of writing and reading in their mother tongue. If Öcalan wanted his books to be read and

reach the masses, he needed to write them in Turkish. Having said these, however, it is no other than the PKK movement that turned language rights and especially the right to education in mother-tongue into urgent public issues in Turkey (Opergin 2021). Many interlocutors noted that, for instance, they saw significant differences between the past and the present in how Kurds perceived their language, especially in terms of how language loss and linguistic assimilation turned into issues widely accepted by Kurds as one of the most urgent problems of their society. Take Nazim, a carpet-shop owner and a close friend from Van that the reader will learn more about later in this dissertation. Nazim once told me that he himself had witnessed a great transformation in Van in terms of everyday patterns of language use since the PKK became a major political actor. Nazim argued that almost nobody would speak Kurdish in public spaces back in the 1980s, and that Kurds were also quite unreflective of the decline of Kurdish language overall. Things were quite different now, Nazim added, giving me a list of names from his social circle of people who took private language classes to improve their writing skills in Kurdish, or who made it a rule not to speak Turkish in public unless it was necessary.

In this dissertation, I write local languages in italics, and I provide commentary about whether the local language used by an interlocutor is Turkish or Kurdish when necessary, mostly if commentary was likewise given by my interlocutor on why she or he chose to switch languages, or if there is something specific about the linguistic switch that supports or adds extra information to my discussion. If this is not the case, then linguistic shifts are not marked. Both Turkish and Kurmanjî are written with Latin alphabets, and the alphabets are mostly overlapping, with some variation. All the original texts below are written in the respective alphabets of the languages. Kurdish language does not have the following consonant, ⟨ğ⟩ which is ⟨g⟩ with breve, and Turkish language does not have the following Kurdish consonants: ⟨q⟩,

⟨w⟩, ⟨x⟩. The vowels in Turkish alphabet are as follows: ⟨a⟩, ⟨e⟩, ⟨ı⟩, ⟨i⟩, ⟨o⟩, ⟨ö⟩, ⟨u⟩, ⟨ü⟩. The vowels in Kurdish alphabet are as follows: ⟨a⟩, ⟨e⟩, ⟨ê⟩, ⟨i⟩, ⟨î⟩, ⟨o⟩, ⟨u⟩, ⟨û⟩.

Bibliography

Abu-Lughod, Lila
1989 "Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18: 267–306.

Acar, Yasemin
2019 "Village Guards as 'In Between' in the Turkish-Kurdish Conflict: Re-Examining Identity and Position in Intergroup Conflict." *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 7 (December): 925–40.

Ahearn, Laura M
2001 "Language and Agency." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (1): 109–37.

Akçam, Taner
2007 *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*. 1st Holt pbk. ed. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books/Holt.

Akçam, Taner, and Ümit Kurt
2015 *The Spirit of the Laws: The Plunder of Wealth in the Armenian Genocide*. War and Genocide; Volume 21. New York: Berghahn Books.

Akkaya, Ahmet Hamdi
2020 "The PKK's Ideological Odyssey." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 22 (6): 730–45.

Akkaya, Ahmet Hamdi, and Joost Jongerden
2012 "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy." *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, no. 14 (June).

Amarasuriya, Harini, Tobias Kelly, Sidharthan Maunaguru, Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic, and Jonathan Spencer, eds.
2020 *The Intimate Life of Dissent: Anthropological Perspectives*. UCL Press.

Appiah, Anthony
1987 "Racism and Moral Pollution." *The Philosophical Forum* 18 (2): 185–202.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony
2011 *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*. Reprint edition. New York London: W. W. Norton & Company

Ardener, Edwin
2012 "'Remote Areas': Some Theoretical Considerations." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2 (1): 519–33.

Arendt, Hannah
1987 "Collective Responsibility," in James Bernhauer (ed.), *Amor Mundi*, Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff.
1998 *The Human Condition*. 2nd ed. /. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2003 *Responsibility and Judgment*. 1st ed. New York: Schocken Books.

Atmaca, Metin
2021 "Negotiating Political Power in the Early Modern Middle East: Kurdish Emirates between the Ottoman Empire and Iranian Dynasties (Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)." In *The Cambridge History of the Kurds*, edited by Cengiz Gunes, Hamit Bozarslan, and Veli Yadirgi, 45–72. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Austin, J. L.
1962 *How to Do Things with Words*. William James Lectures 1955. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Barth, F
1953 *Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan*, Oslo: Brødrene Jørgensen boktr.

Bauman, Richard, and Charles L. Briggs
1990 "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19a: 59–88.

Berlant, Lauren
1998 "Intimacy: A Special Issue." *Critical Inquiry* 24 (2): 281–88.

Beşikçi, İsmail
1969 *Doğuda Değişim ve Yapısal Sorunlar: Göçebe Alikan Aşireti*. Armenian Research Center Collection. [Ankara]: Doğan Yayınevi.
2015 *International Colony Kurdistan*. London: Gomidas Institute.

Biehl, Janet
2012 "Bookchin, Öcalan, and the Dialectics of Democracy." In *Enlightenment and Ecology: The Legacy of Murray Bookchin in the 21st Century*, edited by Tarinski Yavor Tarinski, 10. Toronto; Canada: Black Rose Books.

Biner, Zerrin Özlem
2010 "Acts of Defacement, Memories of Loss: Ghostly Effects of the 'Armenian Crisis' in Mardin, Southeastern Turkey." *History and Memory* 22 (2): 68–94.
2013 "The Logic of Reconciliation: Between the Right to Compensation and the Right to Justice in Turkey." *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 4 (1): 73–91.

2016 "Haunted by Debt: Calculating the Cost of Loss and Violence in Turkey." *Theory & Event* 19 (1).
2019. *States of Dispossession: Violence and Precarious Coexistence in Southeast Turkey*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bitlisi, Serefhan
2018 *Serefname Cilt 1 - Kürt Tarihi*. Nubihar Yayinlari.

Blum, Stephen, and Amir Hassanpour
1996 "'The Morning of Freedom Rose up': Kurdish Popular Song and the Exigencies of Cultural Survival." *Popular Music* 15 (3): 325–43.

Bolten, Catherine E
2014 "Sobel Rumors and Tribal Truths: Narrative and Politics in Sierra Leone, 1994." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56 (1): 187–214.

Bookchin, Murray
2015 *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy*. Verso Books.

Bozarslan, Hamit
1999 "Network-Building, Ethnicity and Violence in Turkey." *Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Reserch: Emirates Occasional Papers*, 33.
2012 "Between Integration, Autonomization and Radicalization. Hamit Bozarslan on the Kurdish Movement and the Turkish Left. Interview by Marlies Casier and Olivier Grojean." *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*,14 (June).

Bozarslan, Hamit, and Cengiz Gunes
2021 "Tribes and Their Changing Role in Kurdish Politics and Society." In *The Cambridge History of the Kurds*, edited by Cengiz Gunes, Hamit Bozarslan, and Veli Yadirgi, 581–600. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bozarslan, Hamit, Cengiz Gunes, and Veli Yadirgi, eds.
2021 *The Cambridge History of the Kurds*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bozkurt, Umut
2013 "Neoliberalism with a Human Face: Making Sense of the Justice and Development Party's Neoliberal Populism in Turkey." *Science & Society* 77 (3): 372–96.

Brady, Michael, and Miranda Fricker, eds.
2016 *The Epistemic Life of Groups: Essays in the Epistemology of Collectives*. Oxford University Press

Bruinessen, Martin
1991 *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*. London; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books.

2002 "Kurds, States and Tribes." In *Faleh A. Jabar and Hosham Dawod (Eds), Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, edited by Hosham Dawod and Faleh A. Jabar, London: Saqi. 165–83.
2016 "The Kurds in Search of Modes of Governance." Presented at the *Lêgerîna Kurdan ya Rêveberiyê* / Kürtlerin Yönetim Arayışları, Bogazici University.

Bugra, Ayşe, and Aysen Candas
2011 "Change and Continuity under an Eclectic Social Security Regime: The Case of Turkey." *Middle Eastern Studies* 47 (3): 515–28.

Buss, Sarah.
2020 "Some Musings About the Limits of an Ethics That Can Be Applied – A Response to a Question About Courage and Convictions That Confronted the Author When She Woke Up on November 9, 2016" *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 37 (1): 1–33

Butler, Judith
1993 *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge
2005 *Giving an Account of Oneself*. 1st ed. New York: Fordham University Press.

Çağlayan, Handan
2012 "From Kawa the Blacksmith to Ishtar the Goddess: Gender Constructions in Ideological-Political Discourses of the Kurdish Movement in Post-1980 Turkey." Translated by Can Evren. *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, no. 14 (June).

Carey, Matthew
2017 *Mistrust: An Ethnographic Theory*. Hau Books.

Carr, E. Summerson, and Michael Lempert
2016 *Scale: Discourse and Dimensions of Social Life*. Univ of California Press.

Carston, Robyn
2009 "The Explicit/Implicit Distinction in Pragmatics and the Limits of Explicit Communication." *International Review of Pragmatics* 1 (1): 35–62.

Çelik, Adnan
2016 "Kürdistan Yerellerinde 90'ların Savaş Konfigürasyonu: Baskı, Şiddet ve Direniş." *İsyan, Şiddet, Yas: 90'lar Türkiye'sine Bakmak*, 71–113.

Çelik, Ayşe Betül
2005 "'I Miss My Village!': Forced Kurdish Migrants in İstanbul and Their Representation in Associations." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 32: 137–63.

Chatterjee, Partha
2004 *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. University Seminars/Leonard Hastings Schoff Memorial Lectures. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cody, Francis
2011. “Publics and Politics.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (October): 37–52.

Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff
1991 *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Darıcı, Haydar
2011 “Politics of Privacy: Forced Migration and the Spatial Struggle of the Kurdish Youth.” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 13 (4): 457–74.
2013 “‘Adults See Politics as a Game’: Politics of Kurdish Children in Urban Turkey.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (4): 775–90.
2016 “Of Kurdish Youth and Ditches.” *Theory & Event* 19 (1).

Darley, John M., and Bibb Latane.
1968 “Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 8 (4, Pt.1): 377–83.

Das, Veena, and Deborah Poole
2004 *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*. School of American Research Press.

Dave, Naisargi N.
2010 “Between Queer Ethics and Sexual Morality,” *Ordinary Ethics*, edited by Michael Lambek, Fordham University Press, pp. 368 – 375.

Dresch, Paul
2000 “Wilderness of Mirrors: Truth and Vulnerability in Middle Eastern Fieldwork.” In *Anthropologists in a Wider World: Essays in Field Research*, edited by Paul Dresch and W. R. James. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Edmonds, David
2013 *Would You Kill the Fat Man?: The Trolley Problem and What Your Answer Tells Us about Right and Wrong*. Princeton University Press.

Enfield, N. J
2011 “Sources of Asymmetry in Human Interaction: Enchrony, Status, Knowledge and Agency.” In *The Morality of Knowledge in Conversation*, edited by Jakob Steensig, Lorenza Mondada, and Tanya Stivers, 285–312. Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Enfield, N. J., and Paul Kockelman
2017 *Distributed Agency*. Oxford University Press.

Enfield, N. J., and Jack Sidnell
2017 *The Concept of Action*. Cambridge University Press.

Ercan, Harun. 2019. “Is Hope More Precious than Victory?” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 118 (1): 111–27.

Evans, Grant. 1995. *Lao Peasants Under Socialism and Post-Socialism*. Silkworm Books.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E.
1951 *Social Anthropology*. London: Cohen & West.
1976 *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*. Abridged with an introd. by Eva Gillies. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Fine, G
2005 “Introduction: Rumor Matters” *Rumor Mills: The Social Impact of Rumor and Legend*, In G. Fine et al., eds., New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction

Fischer, Peter, Joachim I. Krueger, Tobias Greitemeyer, Claudia Vogrincic, Andreas Kastenmüller, Dieter Frey, Moritz Heene, Magdalena Wicher, and Martina Kainbacher, eds.
2011 “The Bystander-Effect: A Meta-Analytic Review on Bystander Intervention in Dangerous and Non-Dangerous Emergencies.” *Psychological Bulletin* 137 (4): 517–37.

Fleming, Luke, and Michael Lempert
2014 “Poetics and Performativity.” In *The Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by Jack Sidnell, N. J. Enfield, and Paul Kockelman, 485–515. Cambridge Handbooks in Language and Linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fortes, Meyer, E. E. Evans-Pritchard
1940 *African Political Systems*. London: Pub. for the International institute of African languages & cultures by the Oxford university press, H. Milford.

Gal, Susan
2002 “A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction.” *Differences (Bloomington, Ind.)* 13 (1): 77–95.
2005 “Language Ideologies Compared: Metaphors of Public/Private.” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15 (1): 23–37.
2019 “Making Registers in Politics: Circulation and Ideologies of Linguistic Authority.” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 23 (5): 450–66.

Gardner, John
2007 “Complicity and Causality.” *Criminal Law and Philosophy* 1 (2): 127–41.

Garfinkel, Harold
1963 “Common Sense Knowledge of Social Structures: The Documentary Method of Interpretation in Lay and Professional Fact Finding.” In *Theories of the Mind*, edited by Jordan M. Scher. Free Press.
1967 *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Wiley.

Gellner, Ernest, and John Waterbury
1977 *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies*. London: Hanover, N.H.: Duckworth; Center for Mediterranean Studies of the American Universities Field Staff.

Giddens, Anthony
1984 *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. University of California Press.

Göçek, Fatma Müge
2011 *The Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era*. London; New York. I. B. Tauris.
2015 *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present and Collective Violence against the Armenians, 1789-2009*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Goffman, Erving
1967 *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face to Face Behavior*. Aldine Transaction.

Goodall, H. Lloyd
2000 *Writing the New Ethnography*. Rowman & Littlefield.
Goodwin, Charles, and John Heritage
1990 "Conversation Analysis." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1): 283–307.

Grabolle-Çeliker, Anna
2013 *Kurdish Life in Contemporary Turkey: Migration, Gender and Ethnic Identity*. Library of Modern Turkey; 2. London; New York: I.B. Tauris.

Gregory, Steven
1999 *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community*. Princeton University Press.

Grice, H. P
1975 "Logic and conversation." *Syntax and semantics*, Vol. 3: Speech Acts, ed. P. Cole and N. L. Morgan, 41–58. New York: Academic Press.

Grojean, Olivier
2014 "The Production of the New Man Within the PKK." Translated by Adrian Morfee. *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, July.

Gültekin, Ahmet Kerim
2019 *Kurdish Alevism: Creating New Ways of Practicing the Religion*. Kolleg-Forschergruppe.

Gumperz, John J
1982 *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge University Press.

Gunes, Cengiz

2013 "Explaining the PKK's Mobilization of the Kurds in Turkey: Hegemony, Myth and Violence." *Ethnopolitics* 12 (3): 247–67.

Hacking, Ian
1990 *The Taming of Chance*. The Cambridge University Press

Hakyemez, Serra
2017 "Turkey's Failed Peace Process with the Kurds: A Different Explanation." *Middle East Brief* 111.

Hedîye, Cîndî
1999 *Hewarî*. Stockholm, Roja Nû Publishers.

Heritage, John
1984 *Garfinkel and ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
1988 "Explanations as accounts: A conversation analytic perspective." *Analyzing everyday explanation: A casebook of methods,* C. Antaki Ed., (pp. 127–144). London: Sage.

Herzfeld, Michael
1997 *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. Psychology Press.
2009 "Performance of Secrecy: Domesticity and Privacy in Public Spaces." *Semiotica* 175 (1): 135–162.

Hirschkind, Charles
2006 *The Ethical Soundscape Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. Cultures of History. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ho, Engseng
2004 "Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46 (2): 210–46.

Irvine, Judith T
2011 "Leaky Registers and Eight-Hundred-Pound Gorillas." *Anthropological Quarterly* 84 (1): 15–39.

Işık, Ayhan
2021 "Pro-State Paramilitary Violence in Turkey since the 1990s." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 21 (2): 231–49.

Jaspers, Karl
2001 *The Question of German Guilt*. 2nd edition. New York: Fordham University Press.

Jenkins, Timothy
1999 *Religion in English Everyday Life: An Ethnographic Approach*. Berghahn Books.

Jongerden, Joost, and Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya. 2013. “Confederalism and Autonomy in Turkey: The Kurdistan Workers’ Party and the Reinvention of Democracy.” In *The Kurdish Question in Turkey*, edited by Cengiz Gunes and Welat Zeydanlioglu. Routledge.

Kadish, Sanford H
1985 “Complicity, Cause and Blame: A Study in the Interpretation of Doctrine.” *California Law Review* 73 (2): 323–410.
1997 “Reckless Complicity.” *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology (1973-)* 87 (2): 369–94.

Kant, Immanuel
1983 *Perpetual Peace, and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*. Hackett Pub. Co.
1998 *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, M. Gregor (ed. and transl.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kaplan, Sam
2006 *The Pedagogical State: Education and the Politics of National Culture in Post-1980 Turkey*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Kaya, Zeynep N
2020 *Mapping Kurdistan: Territory, Self-Determination and Nationalism*. Cambridge University Press.

Keane, Webb
2003 “Self-Interpretation, Agency, and the Objects of Anthropology: Reflections on a Genealogy.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45 (02).
2010 “Minds, Surfaces, and Reasons in the Anthropology of Ethics.” *Ordinary Ethics*, edited by Michael Lambek, Fordham University Press, pp. 64-83.
2014 “Affordances and Reflexivity in Ethical Life: An Ethnographic Stance.” *Anthropological Theory* 14 (1): 3–26. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499614521721.
2016 *Ethical Life: Its Natural and Social Histories*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
2018 “On Semiotic Ideology.” *Signs and Society* 6 (1): 64–87.
“When Speech Isn't Free: Varieties of Metapragmatic Struggle.” Forthcoming, *Freedom of Speech: Anthropological Perspectives*, Matei Candea and Paolo Heywood eds., University of Toronto Press

Kevorkian, Raymond
2011 *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Klein, Janet
2006 “Kurdish militias and the Ottoman state: Implication for present-day conflict resolution” Presentation. Kurdish Institute of Paris: World Congress of Kurdish Studies, Irbil, https://www.institutkurde.org/en/conferences/kurdish_studies_irbil_2006/Janet+KLEIN.html
2011 *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone*. Stanford University Press.

Kockelman, Paul
2004. "Stance and Subjectivity." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 14 (2): 127–50.
2007 "Agency: The Relation between Meaning, Power, and Knowledge." *Current Anthropology* 48 (3): 375–401.

Krohn-Hansen, Christian
2015 "Political Anthropology." In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)*, edited by James D. Wright, 335–41. Oxford: Elsevier.

Küçük, Bülent
2019 "The Burden of Sisyphus: A Sociological Inventory of the Kurdish Question in Turkey." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46 (5): 752–66.

Kutz, Christopher
2000 *Complicity: Ethics and Law for a Collective Age*. Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Law. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Laidlaw, James
2002 "For An Anthropology Of Ethics And Freedom." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8 (2): 311–32.
2010. "Agency and Responsibility: Perhaps You Can Have Too Much of a Good Thing." In *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action*, edited by Michael Lambek, 143–64. Fordham University Press.
2014 *The Subject of Virtue: An Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom*. New Departures in Anthropology. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lambek, Michael
2010 *Ordinary Ethics Anthropology, Language, and Action*. 1st ed. New York: Fordham University Press

Latour, Bruno
1987 *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society*. Harvard University Press.
2003 "What If We Talked Politics a Little?" *Contemporary Political Theory* 2 (2): 143–64.
2005 *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Clarendon Lectures in Management Studies. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
2010 *The Making of Law: An Ethnography of the Conseil D'Etat*. Polity.
2014 "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene." *New Literary History* 45 (1): 1–18.

Leach, Edmund
2004 *Social and Economic Organization of the Rowanduz Kurds*. Berg Publishers.

Lee, Benjamin
1997 *Talking Heads: Language, Metalanguage, and the Semiotics of Subjectivity*. Duke University Press.

Lempert, Michael.
2008 "The Poetics of Stance: Text-Metricality, Epistemicity, Interaction." *Language in Society* 37 (4): 569–92.
2013 "No Ordinary Ethics." *Anthropological Theory* 13 (4): 370–93.
2014 "Uneventful Ethics." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4 (1): 465–72.

Leupold, David
2020 *Embattled Dreamlands: The Politics of Contesting Armenian, Kurdish and Turkish Memory*. Routledge.

Li, Tania Murray
2005 "Beyond 'The State' and Failed Schemes." *American Anthropologist* 107 (3): 383–94.

Luhmann, N
1979 *Trust and power*. New York: John Wiley & Sons

Malinowski, Bronislaw
1923 "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages." *The Meaning of Meaning*, C. K. Ogden, & I. A. Richards (eds.), London: K. Paul, Trend, Trubner, 296–336.

1984 *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. Prospect Heights, Ill: Waveland Press.

Marcus, George E
1995 "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 95–117.

Mardin, Şerif
1973 "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?" *Daedalus* 102 (1): 169–90.

Marston, John
2004 *History, Buddhism, and New Religious Movements in Cambodia*. University of Hawaii Press.

Marx, Karl
1967 *Capital; a Critique of Political Economy.* New York: International Publishers.

McDowall, D
1988 *A Modern History of Kurds*, New York: I.B. Tauris.

Misak, Cheryl
1999 *Truth, Politics, Morality: Pragmatism and Deliberation*. Routledge.

Mohammadpour, Ahmad, and Kamal Soleimani
2019 "Interrogating the Tribal: The Aporia of 'Tribalism' in the Sociological Study of the Middle East." *The British Journal of Sociology* 70 (5): 1799-1824

Nagel, Thomas
1979 *Mortal Questions*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Nakassis, Constantine V.
2019 "Poetics of Praise and Image-Texts of Cinematic Encompassment." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 29 (1): 69–94.

Nussbaum, Martha C
2001 *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press.

Ocalan, Abdullah
1983 *Kürdistan'da Kişilik Sorunu* (The question of personality in Kurdistan), place of publication unknown, publisher unknown
1999 *Declaration on the Democratic Solution of the Kurdish Question*. London: Mesopotamian Publishers.
2015 *Democratic Confederalism*. Lulu Press, Inc.

Ochs, Elionar
1992 "Indexing Gender." In *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, edited by Alessandro Duranti, 335. Cambridge University Press.

Ortner, Sherry B
1984 "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1): 126–66.

Özar, Şemsa, Nesrin Uçarlar, Osman Aytar, Şemsa Özar, Nesrin Uçarlar, and Osman Aytar.
2013 *From Past to Present: A Paramilitary Organization in Turkey: Village Guard System*. First edition. Diyarbakır: DİSA Publications.

Özoğlu, Hakan.
2004 *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries*. SUNY Series in Middle Eastern Studies. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Pamuk, Orhan
1998 *Benim Adim Kirmizi*. Istanbul: Iletisim Yayincilik.

Parrish, John M.
2009 *Paradoxes of Political Ethics: From Dirty Hands to the Invisible Hand*. 1st edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pasternak, Avia
2013 "Limiting States' Corporate Responsibility." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 21 (4): 361–81.

Paul, L.
2008 "Kurdish language: History of the Kurdish language." In *Encyclopædia Iranica*. www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kurdish-language-i.

Paz, Alejandro
2009 "The Circulation of 'Chisme' and 'Rumor': Gossip, Evidentiality, and Authority in the Perspective of Latino Labor Migrants in Israel." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 19 (1): 117–43.

Pedersen, David
2013 *American Value: Migrants, Money, and Meaning in El Salvador and the United States*. University of Chicago Press.

Peirce, Charles S
1955 *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. New York: Dover Publications.
1986 "How to Make Our Ideas Clear", *Popular Science Monthly*, 12(January): 286–302; reprinted in *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition* (Volume 3: 1872–1878), C. Kloesel, M. Fisch, N. et al. (eds.), Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 257–276.

2020 *The Doctrine of Chances*. Independently Published.

Pickles, John
2004 *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping, and the Geo-Coded World*. Psychology Press.

Popper, Karl
2014 *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. Routledge.

Porta, Donatella della, and Mario Diani.
2015 "Introduction: The Field of Social Movement Studies, Mapping the Field." Oxford Handbook for Social Movements. Oxford University Press

Povinelli, Elizabeth A.
2011 "Routes/Worlds." *e-flux*, no. 27.
2012 "The Will to Be Otherwise/The Effort of Endurance." South Atlantic Quarterly 111(3): 453–475.
2014 "Geontologies of the Otherwise." *Society for Cultural Anthropology,* From the series: The Politics of Ontology.

Putnam, Robert N.
1993 "What Makes Democracy Work?" National Civic Review 82 (2): 101–107

Reynolds, Michael A.
2011 "Abdürrezzak Bedirhan: Ottoman Kurd and Russophile in the Twilight of Empire." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12 (2): 411–50.

Robbins, Joel
2004 *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. University of California Press.

Rosaldo, Renato
1986 *From the Door of His Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor*. University of California Press.

Rosen, Lawrence
2017 *Law as Culture: An Invitation*. Princeton University Press.

Sacks, Harvey
1963 "Sociological Description." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 8: 1–16.
1972 "Notes on police assessment of moral character." *Studies in social interaction*, ed. David N. Sudnow, 280–293. New York: Free Press.
1995 *Lectures on Conversation*. Malden; Oxford: Wiley Blackwell Imprint.

Sacks, Harvey, and Emanuel A. Schegloff
1974 "A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation." *Language* 50 (4): 696–735.

Sahlins, Marshall
1981 *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom*. University of Michigan Press.
2013 *What Kinship Is-And Is Not*. University of Chicago Press.

Said, Edward W
1979 *Orientalism*. First Vintage books edition. New York: Vintage Books.
2000 "Invention, Memory, and Place." *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2): 175–92.

Schäfers, Marlene
2018 "'It Used to Be Forbidden': Kurdish Women and the Limits of Gaining Voice." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 14 (1): 3–24.

Scheele, Judith
2019 "Segmentation Versus Tyranny." Edited by Judith Scheele and Andrew Shryock. *The Scandal of Continuity in Middle East Anthropology: Form, Duration, Difference*, 187.
2021 "State-like and State Dislike in the Anthropological Margins." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 27 (4): 909–27.

Scheele, Judith, and Andrew Shryock
2019 *The Scandal of Continuity in Middle East Anthropology: Form, Duration, Difference*. Public Cultures of the Middle East and North Africa. Bloomington, Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press.

Sennett, Richard
1977 *The Fall of Public Man*. 1st ed. New York: Knopf.
Shryock, Andrew
2004 *Off Stage/on Display: Intimacy and Ethnography in the Age of Public Culture*. Stanford University Press.
2012 "Breaking Hospitality Apart: Bad Hosts, Bad Guests, and the Problem of Sovereignty." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18 (1): 20–33
2013 "It's This, Not That: How Marshall Sahlins Solves Kinship." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3 (2): 271–79.

Sidnell, Jack
2005 *Talk and Practical Epistemology: The Social Life of Knowledge in a Caribbean Community*. John Benjamins Publishing.
2017 "Action in Interaction Is Conduct under a Description." *Language in Society* 46 (3): 313–37.
2017b "Distributed Agency and Action under the Radar of Accountability." *Distributed Agency* 87–96.

Siegel, James T
2006 *Naming the Witch*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Silverstein, Michael
1976 "Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description." *Meaning in Anthropology*. Keith Basso and H. A. Selby, ed. Pp. 11–56. Sante Fe, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
1979 "Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology." *The Elements*. P. Clyne, W. Hanks & C. Hoauer eds. Chicago Linguistics Society, 193–248.
1993 "Metapragmatic Discourse and Metapragmatic Function." In *Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metapragmatics*, edited by John A. Lucy, 33–58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Simmel, G.
1950 *The sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free Press.

Sipahi, Ali
2020 "Deception and Violence in the Ottoman Empire: The People's Theory of Crowd Behavior during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 62 (4): 810–35.

Stasch, Rupert
2008 "Knowing Minds Is a Matter of Authority: Political Dimensions of Opacity Statements in Korowai Moral Psychology." *Anthropological Quarterly* 81 (2): 443–53.

Strathern, Marilyn
1991 *Big Men and Great Men*. Cambridge University Press.
1996 "Cutting the Network." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2 (3): 517–35.
2004 *Partial Connections*. Rowman Altamira.

Suny, Ronald Grigor
2017 *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide*. Princeton University Press.

Tambar. Kabir
2013 "Historical Critique and Political Voice after the Ottoman Empire." *History of the Present* 3 (2): 119–139
2014 *The Reckoning of Pluralism: Political Belonging and the Demands of History in Turkey*. Stanford University Press.
2017 "The Uncanny Medium: Semiotic Opacity in the Wake of Genocide." *Current Anthropology* 58 (6): 762–84.

Tapper, R.
1983 *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, London: Croom Helm.

Taussig, Michael T
1999 *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*. Stanford University Press.

Tezcür, Güneş Murat.
2009 "Kurdish Nationalism and Identity in Turkey: A Conceptual Reinterpretation." *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, no. 10 (December).

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt
2011 *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press.

Türkay, Cevdet
1979 *Başbakanlık Arşivi belgeleri'ne göre Osmanlı İmparatorlugu'nda oymak, aşiret, ve cemaâtlar*. Tercüman.

Uçarlar, Nesrin
2009 *Between Majority Power and Minority Resistance: Kurdish Linguistic Rights in Turkey*. Lund Political Studies 157. Lund: Department of Political Science, Lund University.

Üngör, Uğur Ümit, and Mehmet Polatel
2011 *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property*. London; New York: Continuum.

Unknown
2014 *Asiretler Raporu*. Istanbul: Kaynak Yayinlari.

Ünlü, Barış
2016 "The Kurdish Struggle and the Crisis of the Turkishness Contract." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 42 (4–5): 397–405.

Uzun, Mehmed
2014 *Dicle'nin Sürgünleri / Dicle'nin Sesi 2*. Ithaki Publishing.

Vali, Abbas
2003 *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*. Kurdish Studies Series; No. 4. Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers.

Warner, Michael
2002 *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books; Distributed by MIT Press.

White, Paul J., and Joost Jongerden, eds.
2003 *Turkey's Alevi Enigma: A Comprehensive Overview*. BRILL.

Williams, Bernard
1973 *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956–1972*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
1981 *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers, 1973-1980*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.
1985. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
1993 "Moral Incapacity." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 93: 59–70.

Yadirgi, Veli
2017 *The Political Economy of the Kurds of Turkey: From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Yalçın-Heckmann, Lale
1991 *Tribe and Kinship among the Kurds*. Frankfurt am Main; New York: P. Lang.

Yarkın, Güllistan
2015 "The Ideological Transformation of the PKK Regarding the Political Economy of the Kurdish Region in Turkey." *Kurdish Studies (London, England)* 3 (1): 26–46.

Yılmaz, Bediz
2015 "Spatial Segregation and Politics of Equilibrium in Mersin: Unintended Consequences of Forced Migration." *Turkish Migration Conference 2015 Selected Proceedings*, 314–22.

Yüksel, Metin
2021 "Kurds and Kurdish Nationalism in the Interwar Period." In *The Cambridge History of the Kurds*, edited by Cengiz Gunes, Hamit Bozarslan, and Veli Yadirgi, 205–28. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zigon, Jarrett
2008 "Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand: A Theoretical Framework for an Anthropology of Moralities." *Anthropological Theory* 7 (2): 131–50.

Zuckerman, Charles

2020 “‘Don’t Gamble for Money with Friends’: Moral-Economic Types and Their Uses.” *American Ethnologist*, January, 432–46.