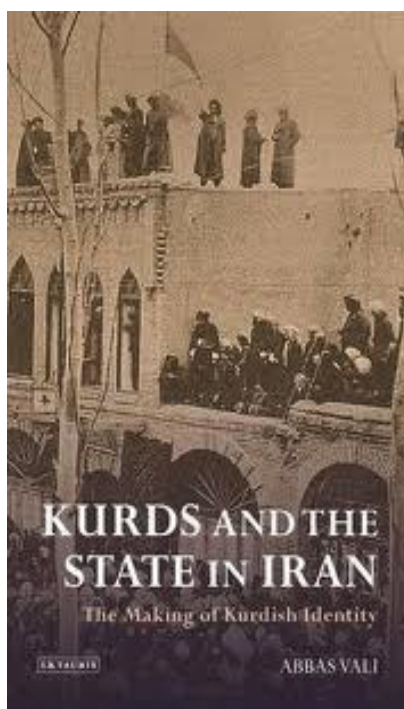


BOOK REVIEW

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**Kurds and the State in Iran:
The Making of Kurdish Identity**

Abbas Vali

I B. Tauris, London 2011, 215 pages

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Review by

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An independent Kurdish republic namely The Mahabad Republic in the North West of Iran was declared in early 1946. Although short-lived, this step indeed had a significant influence on the successive Kurdish Nationalist Movements in Iran and other Kurdish-inhabited areas in the regions. The most discussed and accepted reason for the formation of this republic is the Soviet intention to dissect Iran at the time of Cold War. However in this book, Abbas Vali tries to dispute the existing causes and puts forth some other causes that he

thinks helped in building this republic. Such reasons point to Iranian central authority's homogenization project following the constitution which led the minorities to greater awareness about their distinct identity. The author, thus, relegates the mainstream argument of Soviet political moves in accordance with Azeris and Kurds in Iran and went into the constructivist's question of ethnicity and nations i.e. how these are the structures built by outside forces and how such a condition played its role in the formation of Kurdish Republic in Iran.

Instead of burdening the readers with lumps of historical accounts, the author blends this history with the ideas that he relates to. In this brief discussion, he gives four chapters on the evolution of events that induced the formation of the Kurdish republic. He starts with giving an idea of the Kurdish community in Iran, its politics and how it was related to the sovereign central authority; also how the Pahlavi absolutism became one of the preconditions for development of Kurdish nationalism and the formation of Komalay JK or Komalay Jiyanaway Kurdistan, signifying the revival of civil society in Kurdistan. Next he discusses how the Komalay JK was abolished and transformed into Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran and details the Soviet policy towards Kurdistan at that time. Here the author tries to show that the common idea on Soviet interest on the Kurdistan provided great encouragement for them in the formation of Kurdish republic process. The author also discusses how the structure of Kurdish Democratic republic in its brief existence tended to be only an urban centric phenomenon and also delves into the Russian diplomacy between Azeris and Kurds. Finally, he concludes his historical narrative with an account of the failure of the republic.

The author theorizes the Kurdistan republic's being a consequence of the attitudinal difference between the 'self' and the 'other'. The Republic of Kurdistan was formed because of emergence of new identity amongst the Kurds in response to the exclusionary effects of political and discursive processes and practices of the modern Iranian nation-state and the national identity that came into existence after the constitutional revolution in 1906. Ethnicity is a political construct needing a political force from outside to animate, the latter being nationalism. In other words nationalism helps in constituting ethnicity as a legitimate principle for nationalist struggle and linking between rights and powers. In this process nationalism also helps in formation of the nation.

Descriptive and analytical, this book is a must read for knowing the account of Kurdish nationalism and politics with identity of Kurds not only in Iran but also in the region as a whole. Although sometimes, the book tends to be repetitive, given the analysis of the subject matter at different levels, it has well accomplished its goal of giving a constructivist perspective of the rise of Kurd's as a separate identity. The theoretical aspects that the author aspired to bring

about are apt with the tune of the book; the historical accounts are justly served. As a whole this book is a must read for attaining an altogether different idea on the Kurdish issue.

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