Borders, authoritarian regimes, and migration in Kurdistan
An intersectional inquiry

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This paper examines the interplay between borders, regimes, and migration by focusing on the Kurdish case. It explains migration as being causally related, (a) to the ways in which territorial boundaries of the states were redrawn, (b) the processes by which the political regimes have been established and (c), to the authoritarian and homogenous state policies and practices that followed and continue to exist. To make sense of this interconnectedness, I present the concept of structural migration to explain the phenomenon of migration as being engineered by and built into the institutional and ideological structures of the political regimes ruling over Kurdistan.

Introduction: An overview of the Kurdish case

Migration is a complex phenomenon with multiple forms, causes and outcomes. It has been, and remains, part and parcel of human history and condition, dating back to the very origins of our species (Crawford/Campbell 2012: 1) and involves a "multifaceted process with distinct stages and decision points" (cf. Helms/Leblang 2019: 2). The story of mobility continues to be relevant today as "very large flows of people are on the move in all directions within countries and across the world" (Richards 2018: 6). Scholars across diverse academic fields have offered a range of explanations as to why individuals, voluntarily and involuntarily, leave their homelands. Search for a decent life, economic, political factors, better living standards, a better future

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for the next generation, the desire to improve economic well-being and enhance the life-chances of offspring have been identified among the universal drivers of emigration (cf.Richards 2018: 5; Agnew 2008: 187). At the broadest level, two main competing theoretical approaches to migration movements can be identified, namely the microeconomic, and the historical-structural perspectives. Whilst the former "focuses primarily on the rational calculus of the individual actor; the latter stresses the origin of the costs and benefits the potential migrant confronts" (Wood 1982: 300). As such, the macroeconomic perspective considers migrants as utility maximizers who assess opportunity in cost-benefit terms and act accordingly (Wood 1982: 299), whereas historical-structural approaches emphasize economic inequalities, exploitation, and asymmetries of power relations, and the international division of labour as the main factors in producing migration movements (cf. Wood 1982: 302ff.). Taken together, it is always about 'push and pull factors' which are considered by many scholars as central to any explanation of the phenomenon of migration. As migration is recognised as a multifaceted phenomenon generated by an intersectionality of multiple structural factors as well as individual motives and choices, an adequate understanding of the causes and outcomes of migration should include both individual motivations as well as structural factors. Keeping that in mind, in what follows, I would like to highlight the basic features of the Kurdish case.

The Kurds not only account for the largest territorially concentrated national community in the world "without its own nation-state" (Jüde 2017: 847), but also one of the largest diasporic communities as well. Over the past decades, through a combination of "labour migration, refugee migration, family reunion and settlement of the second and third generation" the Kurdish diaspora has expanded considerably in Europe (Keles 2015: 78). Currently, it is estimated that around two million Kurds live in Europe, of which approximately one million reside in Germany alone (cf. Keles 2015: 73ff.; Baser et al2015: 133). There are also sizable Kurdish communities in Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK.

More recently, following the Syrian civil war and the resultant refugee crisis, new arrivals have increased the size and composition of Kurdish diaspora communities in Europe over the past several years. As summarized by Eccarius-Kelly, "thousands of Kurdish refugees fled without papers; some relied on human smugglers; and many have been forced to remain in the

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shadows as undocumented laborers across the continent" (Eccarius-Kelly, 2019, p. 29 see also Ayata 2011: 7). In addition, beyond Europe, Kurds have also established communities in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and elsewhere. It is therefore extremely difficult to fully capture the multitude of socio-political nuances which have emerged within and among Kurdish communities in all of these countries (Eccarius-Kelly, 2015: 178).

Although a considerable number of Kurds from Turkey migrated to Europe as 'guest workers' in the 1960s, it was only after two coups d'état in 1971 and 1980, as well as the escalation of military conflict between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK) in 1984, that the numbers of new arrivals across Europe increased exponentially. Forced deportation from some 3,000 villages created thousands of internally displaced people and refugee flows of more than three million Kurds (cf. Baser et al. 2015: 132). The development of the Kurdish diaspora and the formative experiences that shape diasporic communities stand and fall by the politics of 'host' states which are often determined by critical junctures in global and/or Middle eastern politics, such as the end of the Cold War, the Gulf War, the Arab spring and surge in Kurdish self-determination movements, as such 'events' have fundamental bearings on the states ruling over Kurdistan. The Gulf War (2 August 1990–17 January 1991) that followed the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait, and the subsequent Kurdish uprising marked another critical juncture that caused Kurdish mass migration across international borders.

Finally, the Arab Spring, the Syrian Civil War and the rise of ISIS have generated new flows of migration and displacement, which have provided new momentum for transnational diaspora mobilisation, ranging from campaigning via social media, fundraising for displaced people to second-generation Kurds joining the fight against ISIS. The seizure of Kobanê by ISIS, and the internationally acclaimed resistance against it, led to widespread expressions of solidarity among Kurdish communities in both the homeland and the diaspora. The urgency of the suffering of the Kurds in Syria and the genocidal assault on the Yezidis in Iraq pushed for wider cooperation among the Kurdish forces such as the KRG's (the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq) peshmerga, Kurds in Syria, and the PKK. This has also strengthened a sense of belonging among Kurdish communities in the diaspora (cf. Baser et al. 2015: 142). In addition, scholars have shown how the ethnotheocratic state of Iran "continues the practices of systematic and steady de-

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mographic engineering and displacement to undermine the distinct ethnic profile of Kurdistan" (Mohammadpour/Soleimani 2020: 10).

The lack of demographic data on the Kurdish diaspora and homeland communities continues to act as a permanent source of scholarly unease, as any estimate of the size and composition of the Kurds is immediately exposed to the test of reliability. But the fact that there are no official records is part of the problem and indicative of policies of the states ruling over Kurdistan, and indeed "mirrors the condition of statelessness for the Kurds and creates a gap in the literature when it comes to research about the specificities of their life conditions" (Baser et al. 2015: 134).

As the foregoing review makes clear, whatever the actual number of Kurds living in the diaspora may be, and however different the individual motivations for leaving or fleeing their country of origin are, one thing about the formation and development of Kurdish diaspora is certain: its coming into existence is essentially attributable to the politics of the 'host' states in which they live as well as the shifting dynamics of geopolitics in the Middle East, that is to say, momentous events which produce particular effects on the states ruling over the Kurdish regions, such as the Gulf War, the invasion of Iraq and removal of Saddam regime, military putsches and conflicts, the Arab spring, and the Syrian civil war etc. Currently, the Kurdish-ruled areas in Kurdistan/Iraq and Rojava (in Syria) are under threat because of cross-border Turkish military interventions, which have given rise to new flows of forced migration. Indeed, "[o]ne of the three cantons ruled by the Kurds in Syria, Afrin, is already back in the hands of Turkey-backed Syrian opposition groups. The remaining two areas are under threat from both Turkish attacks as well as the expanding control of the Bashar al-Assad regime throughout northern Syria" (Yılmaz 2018: 2). This conflict has had a profound effect on the local population with many forced to flee the region in search of safety. As stated elsewhere, the Turkish government resorts to a combination of security-related, geopolitical, expansionist arguments to justify its cross-border aggression against a foreign movement. On the one hand, the military expedition is touted as a last-resort action to defend Turkey's national security and territorial integrity against hostile Kurdish forces, whilst on the other, the offensive is aimed at expanding Turkey's geopolitical influence in Syria, with the intention of ethnic cleansing (Bezwan 2018: 63).

Consider also the recent, and still ongoing, cases of Turkish military incursions into north-eastern Syria in 2018 and 2019. Two cross border military

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expeditions were conducted by the Turkish Armed Forces and their allies the "Free Syrian Army" against the Syrian Democratic Forces in Afrin District in north-western Syria, and the Syrian Arab Army in northern Syria. Turkey views the Syrian Kurdish organisations, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the People's Protection Units (PYD), "as an extension of the PKK and considers it a terrorist organisation" and justifies its military operations on that ground (Kajjo 2020: 283).

The first attack was launched in January 2018, targeting the Kurdish city of Afrin, a strategically and economically important area located in the heart of the Kurdish region in Syria, while the latest offensive was conducted on 9 October 2019 when the Turkish Air Force launched airstrikes on Kurdish towns and settlements across the Syrian border. This military offensive immediately followed the internationally condemned withdrawal of American forces from north-eastern Syria on 6 October 2019 by the Trump administration[1]. These Turkish military incursions into Syria have caused the expulsion of tens of thousands of refugees and thousands of deaths, including civilians[2]. The conflict resulted in the displacement of over 300,000 people and has caused the death of more than 70 civilians in Syria and 20 civilians in Turkey. Amnesty International stated that it had gathered evidence of war crimes and other violations committed by Turkish and Turkey-backed Syrian forces who are said to "have displayed a shameful disregard for civilian life, carrying out serious violations and war crimes, including summary killings and unlawful attacks that have killed and injured civilians"[3]. The explicit aim is to dismantle the territorial and societal cohesion of the Kurdish regions in Syria and to destroy the self-determining political structures governed

1 The internationally criticized American withdrawal from the frontline of the most successful alliance in fighting against ISIS has thrown the Kurds into a mortal predicament. The critique has been evolved around facilitating the resurgence of ISIS, calling American credibility into question, strengthening the Russian, Iranian and Syrian axis in the Middle East, and not least giving the green light to the Turkish invasion.

2 The conflict resulted in the displacement of over 300,000 people and has caused the death of more than 70 civilians in Syria and 20 civilians in Turkey. Amnesty International stated that it had gathered evidence of war crimes and other violations committed by Turkish and Turkey-backed Syrian forces who are said to "have displayed a shameful disregard for civilian life, carrying out serious violations and war crimes, including summary killings and unlawful attacks that have killed and injured civilians"

3 https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/amnesty-international-decries-shameful-disregard-civilian-life-syrian-offensive, accessed on 21 February 2021.

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by the PYD. Similarly, as late as 2017 Iran, Iraq and Turkey have jointly undermined the Kurdish quest for independence after the 2017 independence referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan.

While itself having caused massive internal and external displacement through its politics, Turkey has not shied away from using the refugees fleeing from the Syrian civil war to Turkey as an instrument of foreign policy. In an effort to counteract European critique against Turkey's military cross-border military campaigns, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has on different occasions reiterated his threat of 'opening the gates'. As late as the 10th of October 2019 Erdoğan declared that if the EU tried "to frame our operation in Syria as an invasion, our task is simple: we will open the doors and send 3.6 million migrants to you" (cited in Jennequin 2020: 1).

The continuous instrumentalisation of the refugees provides a textbook case of what has been conceptualised as "coercive engineered migration" (Greenhill 2010, p. 2). It refers to "those cross-border population movements that are deliberately created or manipulated in order to induce political, military and/or economic concessions from a target state or states" (Greenhill 2010: 13.). In this sense it denotes "a very particular non-military method of applying coercive pressure—the use of migration and refugee crises as instruments of persuasion" (Greenhill 2010: 12). The use of migration as a bargaining chip was accompanied by expansionist and aggressive politics that has caused tens of thousands of refugees, and both internal and external displacement on a massive scale.

My main argument is that migration in its varieties and shifting dynamics is located precisely at the interface between the establishment of the nation-states model on the Kurdish territories to the exclusion of the Kurds and the drawing of the state borders cutting through the predominantly Kurdish inhabited territories. In other words, migration is conceived of as resulting from the state coercive capacity, the level of collaboration between the states ruling over the respective part of Kurdistan, the political expedients as provided by the wider geopolitical environment in the Middle East, and the Kurdish resistance.

Finally, a thought on the theoretical and empirical focus of the study shall be in order. The present study is not intended as an analysis of the Kurdish self-determination conflict as such, nor the associated positions and perspectives of the parties to it. While presenting the ways in which political regimes and their borders have been installed in the post-Ottoman Middle

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East as a tool for understanding the pattern of migration, narratives of migration could not be addressed in a warranted manner, essentially because of space constraints. In addition, the empirical focus on the Kurdish example was chosen for two principal reasons. First, it presents a paradigmatic case of structural migration and yet remains understudied. Second, and perhaps more importantly, because of the author's expertise, and familiarity with the Kurdish case along with his epistemological interest in interrogating this case through the lens of comparative border and migration studies.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. In the next section, I will consider the interconnectedness of borders, authoritarian regimes, and migration in relation to the Middle East. The second section is concerned with the Kurdish case. By placing migration at the intersection of the reconstitution of political authorities, the redrawing of territorial boundaries, and the restructuring of populations in the post-Ottoman political geography, this section is informed by an interest in providing an explanatory framework for the Kurdish case of migration. The third section under the heading of "State borders as colonial institutions and sites of decolonial resistance" provides selected examples of how, and by what means, policies and practices of bordering and the ordering of local populations and territories are imposed by the state. Finally, I will conclude by summarizing the main insights drawn from the essay and indicating possible avenues for further research.

An overview of the politics of borders, authoritarian regimes and migration in the Middle East

Many countries across the Middle East stand out as being among the most "critical geographies of migration"—defined "as spatially informed theories and practice explicitly directed towards understanding and challenging migration as a site of exploitation" (Gilmartin/Kuusisto-Arponen 2019: 18). The concept of critical geographies is concerned with the causes of migration by focusing "on efforts to restrict people's movements across national borders, whether legally or physically", while emphasizing "the effects of migration, particularly through a focus on the experiences of migrants who are vulnerable, marginalized or exploited" (ibid.). As these experiences are intersectional, "critical geographies of migration are increasingly address-

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ing the relationship between migrant status, race and sexuality, adding to a longer-standing interest in migration and gender" (ibid.). After all, the scholarly literature on borders, border regions, and migration provides fresh insights and opens up new perspectives on the nature of state, sovereignty, citizenship, territory and territoriality. One of the main objectives of this essay is thus to make use of insights provided by this scholarship to better understand the causal factors affecting mass migration in the Middle East, by focusing on the emergence of political borders and regimes from a historical and multidisciplinary perspective. However, referring to the phenomena of the past in colonial and/or postcolonial settings to explain the outcomes in the present requires mindful methodological considerations and approaches. This also holds true of the Middle East. The invocation of history in the context of the Middle East is indeed abound with contradictory, anachronistic, often misleading and justificatory arguments. Given the (mis)uses of the past, it is therefore of paramount importance to carefully examine, and critically reflect on, the contextual and historical conditions under which the phenomena of interest have emerged, changed, eclipsed and yet reenacted and reactivated.

Having said that, there is indeed no getting away from the overwhelming significance of the historical processes when analysing contemporary phenomena such as state violence, migrations, and refugees in the Middle East. The task then, is twofold: first, to forsake the trap of the irrelevance of the history as an essential part of as an explanatory framework, and second, to overcome the trap of using history for justifying, for example, the policies of repression or expansion—both of these tendencies need to be carefully scrutinised and deconstructed. What is needed is not the renunciation of history altogether, but instead its careful contextualisation and conceptualisation as an explanatory variable.

In what follows, I will discuss the interconnectedness of political borders, regimes and migration in the Middle East drawing on insights derived from this critical scholarship outlined above. It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper to examine the phenomenon of mass migration across the Middle East in any length. What I will provide is instead a cursory glance at the mechanisms I argue to be responsible for the occurrence, frequency, recurrence and intensity of migration movements during the last century.

Paraphrasing the late Charles Tilly's dictum that "states make wars and wars make states", James Scott indicates that the corollary of Tilly's adage

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should be: "States make wars and wars—massively—make migrants" (Scott 2009: 146). Based on the evidence gleaned from his selected region of investigation Scott identifies four eras in term of the level of 'stateness': "1) a stateless era [by far the longest], 2) an era of small-scale states encircled by vast and easily reached stateless peripheries, 3) a period in which such peripheries are shrunken and beleaguered by the expansion of state power, and finally, 4) an era in which virtually the entire globe is 'administered space' and the periphery is not much more than a folkloric remnant" (Scott 2009: 324). This classification provides a useful starting point for understanding the state of political geographies of the Middle East.

By the turn of the 20th century there was neither 'state' nor 'nation' in the sense as envisioned by the homogenising and plurality-hostile logic of the nation-state model. Instead, the vast amount of areas in the wider Middle East were under imperial domains with multi-ethnic and multicultural populations, and varying degrees of state capacity and penetration into 'stateless' peripheries. This situation, however, came to be radically changed in the aftermath of the First World War. If the drawing of modern state borders can be dated back to the transformation from feudal to absolutist to territorial nation-states in Europe where territory became foundational to the state and sovereignty, the phenomenon of territorially based "nation-states" in the specific European sense emerged only after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of First World War in the Middle East. This epoch-making event brought about "dramatic and often destructive changes to colonial lands, societies, and economies, including the imposition of European norms of sovereignty, territoriality, and borders" in the Middle East (Diener/Hagen 2012: 46). "Ottoman expansion", as historian Kasaba puts it, "involved the conquest of a series of castles, major towns, and crucial waterways and passes", but it would be difficult to find any indication of where the Ottoman lands ended since there "were no border posts or barbed wires that separated the Ottoman Empire from its neighbours, and one certainly did not need a passport to travel to and from the territories of the surrounding states" (2004: 29).

The post-war period, however, witnessed the establishment of the "national state model" and the redrawing of political and social boundaries in ways that were indeed unknown to the peoples of the region except for the emergent nationalist elites. The Middle East emerged out of this momentous historical process as a critical geography where the reordering of political

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authority, the redrawing of territorial boundaries, the restructuring of populations, and the ensuing processes of migration, forced or otherwise, took place on a massive scale.

In contrast to the creation of nation-states within the Balkan part of the former Ottoman Empire, the emergent nation-state regimes in the Middle East "either received a different territory from the one they wanted, or were unclear about the territory to which they aspired" (Brandell 2006: 7). Here boundaries were all drawn in the aftermath of the First World War, "when the principles of the Westphalian sovereign nation-state were dominant, with the concept of sovereignty now understood in the double sense of an inviolable right to a territory *and* the right of every people to self-determination if it so desired" (emphasis in original, ibid.).

As this paper intends to show, there was another variant with far-reaching consequences, namely the use of sovereignty as an instrument of territorial acquisition, land grab, and coercive domination of communities denied a state of their own by the imperial powers of the day and the emergent nation-states, all the factors that also created flows of migration. As insightfully stated by Aristide Zolberg, "the adoption of the nation-state model by countries with ethnically mixed populations accounts for many refugee flows of the twentieth century" (1983: 30). Taking on the homogenising and nationalising nation-state model in a region marked by a sheer diversity of peoples and a plurality of national, cultural and religious communities, I argue, necessitated and produced two interrelated policy paradigms: forced assimilation and forced migration. The latter can also be conceptualised as the 'migration of ethnic unmixing' which was enforced by population exchange, deportations and expulsions, whereas the former was aimed at communal destruction of the targeted groups by long-term state-engineered coercive public policies. Locating the phenomena of "ethnic unmixing" within the historical context of the dissolution of empires in the wake of First World One, Brubaker conceptualises migrations of ethnic unmixing as resulting from periods of political expansion, contraction and reconfiguration involving simultaneously "the reconstitution of political authority, the redrawing of territorial boundaries and the restructuring of populations" (Brubaker 1995: 213). Migrations of ethnic unmixing were thus, as Brubaker observes, "engendered not by war as such, but by war in conjunction with the formation of new nation-states and the ethnic 'nationalization' of existing states in a region of intermixed population and at a time of supercharged mass ethnic

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nationalism" (Brubaker 1995: 194). In trying to establish the link between the migrations of ethnic unmixing in the past and the present, Brubaker states that just as "the great 1989 exodus of Bulgarian Turks to Turkey marked the continuation of an intermittent process of unmixing spanning more than a century, so too the centripetal migration of ethnic Hungarians resumed, forty years after the last significant episode, in the late 1980s" (ibid.).

Attempts at explaining migration of ethnic unmixing as well as the broad question of forced migration go to the very heart of *geopolitics* as it has been applied to Kurdistan, and to the Middle East at large for the past century or so. Given that, a brief explanation of the concept of geopolitics, its manifestations and implications should be presented. Geopolitics is commonly referred to as the study of the relationship between geographical features and international politics, with a focus on the political effects of geography, such as climate, topography, arable land, and access to the sea. In his critical analysis of geopolitics Ó Tuathail rightly emphasises that "[T]he region of knowledge that would later be dubbed 'geopolitics' was born in the colonial capitals of the rival empires of the late nineteenth century, within the established universities, geographical societies, and centers of learning of the Great Powers" (Ó Tuathail 2005: 16). So, geopolitics, the politics of "giving space power", as indicated by Dahlman, has its roots in the emerging geographical conditions of the world order at the end of the nineteenth century (2009: 87). While the major paradigms of geopolitics are still essentially determined by strategies of security, domination and expansion, critical scholars "seeking to unveil the manner in which politicians discursively construct geopolitical spaces, often by manipulating 'geographical facts' for strategic purposes" (cf. Dahlman 2009: 98).

As political geographical research gained momentum, questions of borders, territory, political identity, power, and resistance emerged as central to its constitution" (Agnew 2015 et al.: 4). The political geography as a way of thinking about (world) politics as constituted through everyday spatial practice and experiences, with border studies have come to form "an increasingly vibrant field" (cf. Agnew et al. 2015: 4). Political geography plays a role "in crafting an understanding of the political as not only a product of representations and representational practices, but also imbued with materiality, the non-human, and the affective" (ibid.). At the heart of political geography lies "a recognition that where political processes unfold is central to the nature and outcomes of these processes" (Agnew et al. 2015: 7). A critical and an-

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alytical understanding of geopolitical research must therefore expose how "the power relations are normalized through the appropriation of the word 'geopolitics', while provid[ing] explanations of how politics and geography intersect to make the world the way it is" (Flint/Mamadouh 2015: 2).

One conclusion that can be derived from the foregoing is that geopolitics, or political geography for that matter, is not so much about the effects of geography on politics as the effects of power relations and politics on geography. Such a shift in emphasis may provide a more accurate description of geopolitics[4] than the one that concentrates on properties of geographies. Geopolitics then can be defined as power and politics as being applied in their combined effects to a given geography in order to establish a political order based on the securitarian, economic, ideological interests of the more powerful. On a more general level, the political order that comes into being under the logic of geopolitics can be described as a "top-down order, imposed and maintained by coercion" (Lebow 2018: 49).

The modern history of the Middle East in general, and that of Kurdistan in particular, is predicated on and defined by geopolitical and territorial parameters within which the inherently unequal power relations and power politics come together to produce devastating outcomes, ranging from civil war to mass migration, and from abysmal regional disparities to external and regional military interventions. This has many implications for borders, regimes and causal pathways of migration. One major implication is that borders are understood both as sacred and violable at the same time. Put differently, geopolitics lends itself to a very specific understanding of territory, as it implies an extended notion of territoriality[5] that is not always equivalent to the internationally recognised territory of the state in question. That the borders were drawn arbitrarily and unjustly as a result of imperial legacies is not taken as a point of departure for an engagement in addressing historical injustices and grievances of those affected. In fact, quite the opposite is true:

4 For a concise summary of different strands of geopolitical discourse along with leading figures involved in "productions of global space", including Halford John Mackinder (1861–1947), Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), Alfred Mahan (1840–1914), Rudolf Kjellen (1864–1922), Karl Haushofer (1869–1946), Nicholas J.Spykman (1893–1943) (see Ó Tuathail 2005: 20–45).

5 In a general sense, territoriality refers to "the activity of defending, controlling, excluding, including", while territory is "the area whose content one seeks to control in these ways" (Cox 2002: 1ff.). "Territorial politics is, in turn "about how politics is organized and fought out across territory" (Gibson 2012: 15).

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arbitrariness and unjustness are put at the disposal of a geopolitics that creates and legitimates authoritarian rule, military interventions, expansion, thereby generating new injustices.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the conduct of Turkish policies towards Kurdistan. The sacralisation of state borders to all intents and purposes goes hand in hand with periodic military interventions into neighbouring countries on the pretext of crushing Kurdish insurgency in the cross-border regions. More tellingly, Turkey's extra-territorial expansion as reflected in the past and ongoing military incursions and campaigns, is justified by a ubiquitous and self-righteous rhetoric, and accompanied by a strategic framing of the argument of territorial integrity and national security. As Turkish President Erdoğan strikingly put it in a speech made on 10 November 2016: "Turkey is larger than Turkey. We cannot be imprisoned in 780,000 square kilometres. The borders of our hearts are elsewhere. Our brothers in Mosul, Kirkuk, Skopje, may be outside our natural boundaries, but they are within the borders of our hearts, at the epicenter of our hearts" (cited in Jennequin 2020: 2).

The preceding account raises a set of questions to be dealt with in this study: Why are Kurdish aspirations towards autonomous existence of any kind considered a mortal threat to the territorial integrity of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria? What explains the politics of the states in question vis-à-vis the Kurdish regions and communities? To what degree do the politics and policies of these states intersect with, or differ from, each other? And, perhaps even more importantly for the purposes of the present study, to what extent are respective policies and practices of these states towards the Kurds are causally responsible for Kurdish migration movements and refugee flows?

Having set the historical stage, the following section then turns to the Kurdish case in order to illuminate how the state borders and state structures which emerged out of the process of the dissolution of the Ottoman empire have affected both Kurdish society in general, and the phenomenon of Kurdish migration in particular.

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Conceptualising the Kurdish migration

As this paper draws on political geography, critical borders studies and migration studies, I shall provide a brief review of the relevant literature, before laying out the conceptual framework adopted in this essay. Scholarship on migration and borders offers a variety of conceptual tools and (re)definitions of the concepts of border, boundary and frontier, boundary-work, borderland, borderscape, borderity, networked borders, as well as methodological approaches to the study of borders, ranging from relational to intersectional, to the understanding of borders as method, as process or assemblages (cf. Lamont/Molnar (2002: 168ff.). Contrary to rather state-centered understanding of borders and frontiers, recent scholarship underlines the socially constructed nature of boundaries and the importance of relational approaches to the study borders and well as their intersectionality with migration, exclusion and inclusion (cf. Dell'Agnese 2013: 122-123; /Neilson 2013: 7ff.). Some scholars also highlight the importance of studying borders as a process, an idea that should help deconstruct the material and symbolic dimensions that is firmly attached to border by including changing dynamics over time and space (cf. Meier 2018: 496).

Amilhat Szary and Giraut offer 'borderity' as another new term to "help develop an analysis that would throw off the constraints of the tautological relationship between territory, state and borders" (2015: 3). Building on Foucault's work on state, territory, sovereignty and governmentality, they define borderity as "a principle of intelligibility of what is, but is also what should be" and as a technology of power grounded "in the governmentality of territorial limits and their access" (Amilhat/Giraut 2015: 7). On that view, the spatial characteristics of borders and their functions, "a mobile dimension that breaks with its traditional fixity in time and space, [and represents] an epistemological shift away from fixed border" (Amilhat/Giraut 2015: 6).

The concept of borderscape is another novel approach offered by Suvendrini Perera. Based on his analysis of the Australian policy towards refugees, Perera uses the concept of borderscape to refer to the making and remaking of different forms of border space in the Pacific region (Perera 2007: 206). "Like the detainees of the war in Afghanistan held on Guantanamo Bay by the United States", Perera maintains, "the asylum seekers held in Australia's offshore detention camps under the Pacific Solution occupy a legal limbo, a deterritorialized space of indeterminate sovereignty", because under the Pa-

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cific Solution, "asylum seekers are considered out of reach of both Australian law [and the international obligations it entails] and the domestic law of the states where the camps are located" (Perera 2007: 207). Thus, the conceptualisation of the borderscape, it is argued, "allows for the inclusion of different temporalities and overlapping emplacements as well as emergent spatial organizations" (ibid.).

The recent scholarship on borders advances two broad arguments: first, it emphasizes the need for new approaches that conceive borders as being elastic, moveable and subject to a process of constant formation and transformation, rather than viewing them as unchangeable and fixed. And second, it calls for multi-layered and differentiated understandings of space, territoriality, sovereignty, and identity.

Having that in mind, this essay relates migration to the imposition of territorial boundaries of the states, the authoritarian regimes on these territories, and to the consequences of nationalising and homogenising policies. Methodologically, the paper adopts a relational and intersectional approach to the phenomena of state borders, political regimes and migration. The relational, or transactional approach, is a spatio-temporal understanding that focuses on "dynamic processes-in-relations" and thus unfolding transactions, and not pre-constituted attributes of some immobile entities (cf. Emirbayer 1997: 293ff.). Moreover, this approach "sees relations between terms or units as pre-eminently dynamic in nature, as unfolding, ongoing processes rather than as static ties among inert substances" (Emirbayer 1997: 289). On that view, "concepts cannot be defined on their own as single ontological entities; rather, the meaning of one concept can be deciphered only in terms of its 'place' in relation to the other concepts in its web" (Emirbayer 1997: 300).

While also essentially relational, the intersectional approach brings the importance of the interconnected nature of events, structures, or processes to the fore. Having first been introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw in a seminal article on *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* (Crenshaw 1989: 139), the basic argument of intersectionality is that the intersectional experience as determined by a combination of equally relevant elements such "racism and sexism" is greater than the sum of any single factor in bringing about an outcome of interest. Intersectionality emerged as an analytical term to go beyond a single-axis framework and to bring into focus the "multiple-disadvantaged experiences of Black women that cannot be captured by the single-issue framework" (Crenshaw 1989: 139). For example, since race and

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gender cannot be treated "as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis", any approaches which detach racism from sexism would be unable to capture the whole spectrum of discrimination, so "any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw 1989: 140). Proceeding from this argument Crenshaw points out that "Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional" (Crenshaw 1989: 149).

Whereas relationality is grounded in a spatio-temporal understanding of "dynamic processes-in-relations", intersectionality holds up the importance of overlapping and interdependent effects of social categories and structures, including those such as state, sovereignty, borders. These, of course, are not immobile, static and monolith at all as they are subject to continuous processes of power struggle, negotiation, claims, counter claims, adaptation, and change. Nor are they devoid of any causal capacities. As suggested by Elder-Vass, the causal powers model views causation as resulting from the causal powers of social entities which in turn result from "interactions between multiple causal powers" (Elder-Vass 2012: 16). This suggests that evidence of empirical regularities does not constitute a causal explanation, instead "we only have a causal explanation when we can identify the mechanism *responsible* [emphasis in original] for a regularity" (Elder-Vass 2012: 17).

To conclude, combining elements of relational and intersectional approaches with the idea of causal power would help to better identify the causal pathways of migration over time and space, while simultaneously relating factors behind migration to the nature of state borders, authoritarian regimes, imperial geopolitics and colonial legacies. Drawing on methodological considerations presented here, I use the term *structural migration* to provide a framework that explains migration as a phenomenon that is built into the ideational and institutional structures of a given political regime, and therefore systematically engineered by its policies and practices. For the purpose of the present study, structural migration is explained as causally related to the structures of dominance over Kurdistan, to the nature of state borders which cut across economic, cultural, and societal lifelines of Kurdish communities and regions, and to the concomitant policies of de-

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development[6] as well as the non-recognition and repression enacted to differing degrees by the states in question. As such, while specifically focusing on the sources of internal and external sources of migration, the concept of structural migration is capable of linking colonial legacies to authoritarian rule and policies in the present.

Two possible critical questions about the usefulness of this concept spring to mind. First, given the multiplicity of motivations and compelling reasons behind migration, whether, and to what extent, the making of migration, forced or otherwise, can be deferred from abstract entities. As reflected in the introduction, while emphatically embracing a multi-causal explanation of migration, my focus here lies on the identification of causal pathways of *mass migration*, its recurrence, frequency and intensity across time and space. The second point leads me to link personal and structural dimensions. One way to reframe this linkage is to draw on the scholarship of state criminality, which refers to a type of "criminality organized by the state [and] consists of acts defined by law as criminal and committed by state officials in the pursuit of their job as representatives of the state" (cited in Kramer 2016: 233)[7]. This definition has laid down the foundation for subsequent framings of state-organised crimes of which forced migration, whether internally displaced persons, or refugees are part. According to another influential definition state crime is defined as resulting from "state organisational deviance involving the violation of human rights" (Green/Ward 2004: 2). State crimes may involve "an act or omission of an action by actors within the state that results in violations of domestic and international law, human rights, or systematic or institutionalized harm of its or another state's population, done in the name of the state regardless of whether there is or is not self-motivation or interests at play" (Rothe/Kauzlarich 2016: 102).

While concentrating on state borders, borderlands and the ways in which such areas are designated by the state, this essay sees particular merit in an-

6 On the concept of "de-development" see (Roy 1987: 56). Its use in the Kurdish context see (Yadirgi 2017:; Mohammadpour/Soleimani 2020: 4).

7 The concept of state crime goes back to Bill Chambliss. In his 1988 Presidential Address to the American Society of Criminology, he introduced his speech by emphasizing that: "There is form of crime that has heretofore escaped criminological inquiry, yet its persistence and omnipresence raise theoretical and methodological issues crucial to the development of criminology as a science. I am referring to what I call 'state-organized crime.'" (cited in Kramer 2016: 232).

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thropological approaches that focus on "the ethnography of the state as embedded in practices, places, and languages considered to be at the margins of the nation-state" (Das/Poole 2004: 3, see also Barth 2000). As a mode of knowing that privileges experience, ethnography "offers a unique perspective on the sorts of practices that seem to undo the state at its territorial and conceptual margins" (Das/Poole 2004: 4). This is not because "it captures exotic practices, but because it suggests that such margins are a necessary entailment of the state, much as the exception is a necessary component of the rule" (Das/Poole 2004: 4). Keeping in mind that the framing of a region as a 'margin' and frontier may posit a prejudgment or entail discursive strategies to justify the imposition of rule, order and discipline, the political geography of Kurdistan provides a particularly interesting vantage position from which to study state functions and the consequences of borders.

Linking personal motivation to the structural logic behind the workings of state institutions and policies is crucially important for an enhanced understanding of the causal pathways of the politics of migration and displacement by authoritarian regimes. It is hoped that the concept of structural migration would allow us, first, to ascertain the criminogenic structures put into operation which generate mass migration, and second, to focus more specifically on the driving forces behind state-engineered migration, that is to say, on policies executed by states and perpetrators acting in the interest of the state. The concept of de-development presented above is another concept that can be fruitful for the inquiry into state-engineered migration—understood here as shorthand for resource extraction and exploitation combined with low levels of investment in social and economic infrastructure and human development—in regions marked by abysmal disparities, inequalities and injustices in the use and allocation of vitally important resources and infrastructures (Bezwan forthcoming).

To sum up, structural migration may take various forms of migratory movements, existing on a continuum from being latent to manifest. In normal times, it causes less visible migration, whereas in times of crisis, such as civil war, resurgence of political opposition, economic crisis of great scale, it brings about mass migrations and refugees, mostly in the form of *survival migration* and *forced migration*. The former refers to people who are outside their country of origin because of an existential threat for which they have no access to a domestic remedy or resolution. The concept does not focus on a particular underlying cause of movement—whether persecution, conflict,

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or environment. Instead, as Alexander Betts argues, "it is based on the recognition that what matters is not privileging particular causes of movement but rather clearly identifying a threshold of fundamental rights which, when unavailable in a country of origin, requires that the international community allow people to cross an international border and receive access to temporary or permanent sanctuary. Refugees are one type of survival migrant, but many people who are not recognized as refugees also fall within the category" (Betts 2013: 4–5). The concept of survival migration brings into focus the peculiar situation of people whose countries of origin are unable or unwilling to ensure their most fundamental human rights and yet who fall outside the framework of the refugee regime (cf. Betts 2013: 5 and 188).

Many cases of mass migration across the region can also be taken as typical instances of survival migration. For instance, the 5.6 million refugees from Syria, and 6.2 million internally displaced created by the Syrian civil war which started in March 2011, are but survival migrants. This also holds true for the bulk of Kurdish migration from across the four states. By way of illustration, tens of thousands of Kurds became displaced and fled the war zones following the Kurdish and Iraqi wars in the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s, the first Gulf War in the early 1990s, and ensuing uprisings altogether created several million Kurdish refugees and forced migration. One of the most significant instances of mass migration relates to the coup d'état of September 1980, especially after the escalation of military conflict between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK) in 1984. During this time, the Turkish military engaged in widespread destruction in the Kurdish regions burning over 4000 villages and forcing as many as two million Kurds to flee from their homes. This displacement of Kurdish citizens "was a deliberate strategy of the state with the objectives of establishing territorial control in the Kurdish regions and weakening the Kurdish mobilization in Turkey" (Ayata 2011: 4). Through displacement "the Kurdish conflict has become deterritorialized and relocated to urban centers where it reemerges in the guise of socio-economic problems such as unemployment, poverty, crime, child labor" (Ayata 2011: 5).

In what follows, I will discuss the major processes and policies by which the boundaries were drawn between the Kurdish regions and indicate their implications on patterns of state violence and migration.

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State borders as colonial institution

On the whole, despite their tremendous impact on Kurdish societies and Kurdish self-determination conflict over a century, state borders cutting across Kurdistan have received scant scholarly attention, as was demonstrated by the fact that it was not included in the excellent book *A Companion to Border Studies* by Wilson and Donnan (2012). By contrast, in a more recent book, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Political Geography* (Agnew et al. 2015), the editors gave the Kurdish case prominence by narrating the battle of Kobani in the introduction to their edited collection, and by displaying a picture taken during the battle on the front cover. This is a striking example of how a forlorn border town can emerge out of the oblivion to which it was consigned and become a focus of attention. Before considering the underlying issue of *coloniality of border and rule*, I shall begin this section by briefly outlining the tale of Kurdish border town Kobani that has been the epicentre of an epic resistance recently. The town is located in Syria at the Turkish border and was home to roughly 50,000 inhabitants before the start of the war (cf. Agnew et al. 2015: 1). As Agnew et al. state, Kobani has been part of the Syrian state since it was created as a French protectorate under the authority of the League of Nations after the First World War and the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire. In an attempt to provide some historical context to the event, the authors point to the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) which proposed a Kurdish state that would have encompassed most of the region's Kurds, indicating that Kurdistan did not survive the final Peace Treaty signed in Lausanne in 1923 since the lands that would have been Kurdistan were ultimately divided between Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Having said that, the authors conclude that "the tragic and highly complex situation of Kobani and its connections to historical, regional, and global dynamics illustrate the importance of geopolitical literacy and the potential for political geographical analysis to illuminate the dynamics and contingencies of current affairs" (Agnew et al. 2015: 2).

As suggested elsewhere, the break-up of the Ottoman Empire resulted in, among other things, the "partition of Ottoman Kurdistan" (McDowall 2017: 115). This process was then officially completed by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) between Turkey and the victorious powers of the First World War, and the ensuing international border agreements. The first border treaty was signed between Turkey and the mandatory State of Syria and France in May

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1926, followed by border agreements between Turkey and the Mandatory state of Iraq and Great Britain in June 1926, and between Turkey and Iran in January 1932. The agreements not only involved redrawing state boundaries, but also security-related arrangements targeting the Kurds as potential destructors of the emerging post-war status quo (Bezwan 2008: 270; Bezwan 2018: 63–64). This essentially meant that regimes hostile towards Kurdish national demands became legally entitled to rule over Kurdish communities. As the post-war order began to take shape, the Kurds found themselves losing their territorial and societal integrity. Contrary to the promises of equal treatment and self-rule, Kurds were exposed to a double exclusion: being denied minority rights in the newly established states while simultaneously deprived of a state of their own.

As has been argued throughout this paper, structural migration goes back to the processes by which empires, in our case the Ottoman empire, were transmuted into nation-states. The League of Nations (1920–1946), the first worldwide intergovernmental organisation created after World War One, granted mandates to France and Great Britain in 1920 to rule over present-day Iraq and Syria respectively. This momentous development "fostered the penetration of the western territorial sovereignty state system and secured the foundations of the implementation of this model in the Middle East through elites production and the political control of the new states" (Meier 2018: 498). The international borders drawn up in the aftermath of World War One "created formal borders cut across the major Kurdish linguistic and cultural groupings in Kurdish society" (Chatty 2010: 233). As a result, "the vast Kurdish region was divided, and the Kurds were left under the control of Atatürk in Turkey, Reza Shah in Iran, British-appointed Prince Feisal in Iraq, and French politicians in Syria. However, the Kurds did not simply accept these territorial divisions. Inspired by the concepts of nationalism and self-determination, there were various revolts in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq" (Culcasi 2010: 113).

Alluding to three cases of partitions after World War I, namely the partition of Ireland in 1920, that of Hungary in 1920 and the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) that partitioned Kurdistan between the novel British mandate Iraq and Turkey, Brendan O'Leary characterises these partitions as 'fresh cuts' (cf. O'Leary 2012: 30). For him, a political partition necessarily involves "a new fresh border cut through at least one community's national homeland, creating at least two separate political units under different sovereigns or

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authorities", including some border adjustment "because there must be a fresh, novel border" (O'Leary 2012: 29ff.). Yet political partition is always executed and maintained by imposing rule on the territories and societies involved and drawing the boundaries between them. The partition was manifested in wire mesh fencing, minefields, and air surveillance to make it more difficult for people to cross frontiers other than at official border crossings (Chatty 2010: 233). Walls and fences were constructed by successive governments since the late 1920s to close off the Kurdish territories by inter-state security regimes[8]. One of the fundamental consequences of the reordering of the Middle East then, was the territorial and societal disintegration of the Kurdish communities across four states. The transnational boundaries of the states became established as intra-Kurdish borders, with Kurdish communities living on all sides of the respective state borders. One important and enduring implication of that process has been the fact that Kurdish regions have become reconstituted by the emergent nation-states ruling over respective area of Kurdistan as antagonistic 'tribal' peripheries at the margins of the state boundaries, hostile frontiers and thus unruly "borderlands" that should be pacified and incorporated into the respective state territories in order to be ruled at any price.

Referring to the arbitrary nature of states and frontiers in Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Latin America, the late Fred Halliday has offered the concept of "the postcolonial sequestration syndrome" to make sense of the predicament of national communities like the Palestinians, Tibetans and the Kurds (Halliday 2011: 332). Whilst this category may appear somewhat abstract, Halliday maintains that, "the lived experience it denotes is real and multiple: that is, the cases where countries or peoples have at a decisive moment of international change, amid the retreat of imperial or hegemonic powers, failed [through bad timing and/or bad leadership] to establish their independence" (ibid.). The concept of post-colonial sequestration is referred to as explaining the fates of national communities which have been unable to form an independent state following periods of momentous histor-

8 Chief among them was the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), originally known as the Baghdad Pact or the Middle East Treaty Organization (METO) based in Ankara, designed as a military alliance of the Cold War. It was formed in 1955 by Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the United Kingdom and dissolved in 1979. The main purpose of the Baghdad Pact was to prevent communist incursions and foster peace in the Middle East. It was renamed the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO, in 1959 after Iraq pulled out of the Pact.

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ical change, only to find themselves legally possessed by another or "imprisoned in a state not of their own making" (Owtram 2019: 301).

The peculiarity of state boundaries dividing the Kurdish regions lies in the fact that they form nothing less than intra-Kurdish borders, that is to say, borders cutting through Kurdish communities inhabiting all sides of the borders drawn between them by Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. To put this into perspective, consider the following thought experiment. Imagine the multiplication and amplification of the Berlin Wall (1961–1989) over an extended period of time. Such an analogy would probably provide a good point of reference against which one can better assess the impacts of state boundaries dividing Kurdish societies.

In early spring 2019, having found myself on a train from Innsbruck to Bozen (the capital city of South Tyrol in Italy), I could not resist thinking what would happen if citizens belonging to the same Tyrolean community on both sides of border would not have had the liberty to cross the border whenever they want without fear and restriction. And think of the members of an extended Kurdish family living, let say, in Kobani, the above-mentioned border town in the Kurdish region of Syrian, and Suruç, a Kurdish border town on the Turkish side of border—they have to either get passport, if possible at all, to take long journey to visit their relatives or risk of going through some deadly minefield and being exposed to a bullet of border security.

One particular, and particularly upsetting, outcome of state boundaries across Kurdish regions and communities is the recurrent and continued massacres at border crossings. One of the most vulnerable groups among those which are subject to state violence and being targeted on an almost daily basis, are the people involved in cross-border trade activities. As demonstrated by Soleimani and Mohammadpour in their examination of what they called *"kolberi"* (cross-border labour) in Iranian Kurdistan, where 389 *kolbers* (cross-borders laborers) have been shot at border crossings since 2015. In that year alone, 126 kolbers were killed as a result of direct shooting by Iranian security forces (Soleimani/Mohammadpour 2020: 11). *Kolberi* is referred to as arising from "the state's policy of de-development [or internal colonialisation] of the Kurdish region" (2020: 1). For many Kurds living on borderlands, *kolberi* has become a path to survival, although viewed by the participants themselves "as a low-income transient, unreliable, and dangerous work, they desperately stick to it as their only means for economic survival" (2020: 14). As an extremely dangerous and precarious cross-border

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economic undertaking to earn a living, Kolberi is not technically illegal, "but it is punishable by death without ever being designated as a crime" (Soleimani/Mohammadpour 2020: 9ff.). As such, kolbers are both inside and outside the juridico-political order with no laws criminalizing kolberi and no legal mechanism in place "that allows redressing the grievances of those kolbers who fall victim to the state violence" (ibid.).

By way of concluding this section I would like to outline two other cases of border crossing and their tragic consequences. These cases too bear testimony to how state borders dividing the Kurdish communities have become a "landscape of death" with the functional equivalence of a colonial regime, that causes durable human suffering and forced migration on the one hand, and resilience and non-compliance on the other. To begin with, the first instance involves the extrajudicial execution of 33 Kurds in 1943 in a remote town near the Turkish-Iranian state border. On the night of July 30, 1943 in Özalp, a district of the city of Van, a border town located at the Turkish-Iranian border, the thirty-three Kurds were killed accused of smuggling. The talk of smuggling and smugglers as it is framed by the official discourse is inherently discriminatory and has always produced dehumanising effects. It has legitimised the killing of 'smugglers' and the banning of cross-border trade activities, exchanges that have occurred mostly between the members of extended families or groups of families and relatives they happened to be on the wrong side of state borders. Such accusations of smuggling or 'terrorism' are telling examples of how state borders across Kurdistan can determine issues of life and death. What the states take to be criminal and subversive activities can by all accounts be regarded as a natural tendency among communities that share historical, cultural and familial bonds and geographical vicinity, and yet are fractured by the state borders. This is what happened in Özalp in 1943.

The murders at Özalp, euphemistically called "the 33 Bullets Incident", are referred to by the Kurds as the "Seyfo valley massacre". Some 7 years later, a trial was finally opened against the perpetrating General Mustafa Muğlalı, then the 3rd Army Inspector in Diyarbakır. Muğlalı was found guilty by General Staff Military Court General on February 3, 1950 and sentenced to death. But later a court decided to lower the verdict to 20 years of imprisonment. He died in a military hospital in Ankara in November 1951 (for a summary of the event cf. Özgen, 2016: 85-88).

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The poet Ahmed Arif (1927–1991), one of the most widely read poets in Turkey, created a literary monument to the memories of those who were brutally killed in a poem entitled "Thirty Three Bullets": *In a solitary corner of the mountains/ At the hour of morning prayer/ [...]. I have been shot/ My dreams are darker than night/ No one can find a good omen in them/ My life gone before its time/ I cannot put it into words/ A pasha sends a coded message. And I am shot, without inquest, without judgment [...].*[9]

One striking aspect of this poem is the Arif's use of the singular first person to emphatically embrace the victims' perspective while simultaneously signalling identification with their destiny and dignity. I have chosen this poem because it brings to the fore the brutality of borders and the sense of resistance under the most life-threatening circumstances one can imagine.

The influential Kurdish poet and intellectual Musa Anter (1920–20 September 1992) was among the first authors to publicly criticise this extrajudicial killing of 33 innocent people. In one of his pieces published in 16 December 1948 in Dicle Kaynağı (literally the Source of Tigris), a magazine he edited, Anter criticised the government policy towards the Kurds, underlining that the killing would not be forgotten, and that the perpetrators must be held accountable. Decades later Anter himself was assassinated at the age of 72 by Turkish JITEM (Turkish acronym for the Turkish Gendarmerie's Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Service) in September 1992 because of his cultural work and political activism[10]. While writing an investigative book, entitled *Yas Tutan Tarih. 33 Kurşun* (A History of Mourning: The 33-Bullets) published in 1989 in Istanbul, another influential Kurdish author and journalist Günay Aslan, doubly exiled (in 1994 and 2016), and now lives in Cologne, was subjected to a criminal investigation. The book provides a well-examined account of the extra-judicial killing and the circumstances surrounding it, citing the ordering general Muğlalı as saying that "the Kurds cannot be treated by normal laws of the states"[11]. For his book, Aslan was charged and found guilty of "separatism and undermining national unity" by

9 By Ahmet Arif translated by Murat-Nemet NEJAT.

10 After long delays, cover-ups and systematic attempts by the Turkish authorities to obstruct the justice, the Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counterterrorism was finally found guilty of Anter's assassination and Turkey was fined related to his murder in 2006 by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). A Diyarbakır court in 2013 allegedly charged four individuals with Anter's murder of them all of them are fugitives.

11 Confirmed by Aslan in an interview held on 4 August 2020 in Cologne.

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the then State Security Court which sentenced him to 2 years in prison. After serving 20 months of his sentence he was released and felt compelled to leave his country for Germany.

The state borders, that is to say, the intra-Kurdish borders, have been working as a "landscape of death", to use a striking term coined by Joseph Nevins to criticise critical contemporary borders (2002: 120). The border regimes imposed upon Kurdish societies too are "part of longer histories of displacement, segregation and persecution" (Raeymaekers 2019: 61). The states ruling over Kurdistan themselves have always characterised the Kurdish regions in terms of states of exception by which life is permanently put into question. While deemed as *the national and territorial other* by the states in question, Kurdish areas are disparagingly cast as backward peripheries that should either be assimilated into the dominant society and/or eliminated, not least by forced migration and depopulation (Bezwan forthcoming). Following the definition of the concept of the margin offered by Das and Poole, the Kurdish regions are taken by the states to "form natural containers for people considered insufficiently socialized into the law and order" (2004: 9). The task then becomes to "manage" or "pacify" these populations "through both force and a pedagogy of conversion intended to transform "unruly subjects" into lawful subjects of the state" (ibid.).

This pattern of killing at the border crossings presented here would repeat itself periodically, targeting both ordinary citizens, and activists from across Kurdish political movements. The most recent example of this was the Roboski Massacre, committed in a small, isolated mountain village on the Turkish Iraqi border known as Roboski. While once more highlighting the role of state borders as a "landscape of death", the massacre unfolded as follows: "On December 28, 2011, an American Predator drone flying over the mountains along the Iraq–Turkey border detected a surge in wireless communication. U.S. officials alerted Turkish military officials about the crossing of a suspected group of Kurdish armed militants belonging to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) into Turkish territory. Within a matter of hours, Turkish jets and artillery responded by bombing the group. The bombardment lasted 45 minutes (cf. Eralp 2015: 450)[12]. On the night of

12 As pointed out by Eralp, "members of the PKK identify themselves by wearing identifiable uniforms as required by Article Four of the Third Geneva Convention on lawful combatants in an armed conflict, be they members of a state's armed forces or militia. "The

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December 28, 2011, thirty-four of a party of 38—19 of them children—were slaughtered in an aerial bombardment by a Turkish F-16 fighter jet. In their report following their visit to the families, Green and Karakaş state that those killed were engaging in traditional cross border trade. Roboski is a poor village where there is little or no work. Cross border trade provides a small and welcome income for the older men and pocket money for the purchase of notebooks, stationery, and pens for the teenagers (2014).

Many villagers who have been killed living near the Iraqi border, had been smuggling goods for many years with the knowledge of the Turkish authorities. At the time of the military operation, there was no military activity at the border. After the massacre was committed, authorities claimed that the operation had been conducted to prevent the passing of the terrorists from the border (combatants of the Workers' Party of Kurdistan, PKK), but there was "no evidence that proves that the villagers were carrying weapons or posed any threat to the security forces. On the contrary, the PKK members operating at the border were already known to patrol in much smaller groups" (Altiparmak 2020: 2).

Impunity in dealing with the Kurds has been one of the defining features of the states ruling over the Kurdish regions. Here too the mass killing was typically denied by "state criminals" on the ground that the attack was against PKK operatives crossing the border. In fact, "none of those killed had any connection with the PKK or any terrorist organisation" (Green/Karakas 2014). The Roboski massacre finally led to an investigation undertaken by the Military Prosecutor of the General Chief of Staff. On 6 January 2014, the court ruled non-prosecution against five suspects, who were members of the Turkish Armed Forces. Because of "the frequency of the terrorist attacks against the security forces" in that border region, the prosecutor makes clear, "the decision of the personnel of the Turkish army to conduct an aerial attack on the area in question was the most effective and appropriate method" (Altiparmak 2020: 2). The prosecutor based his justification on the assumption of an unavoidable mistake, a line of reasoning that was also confirmed by the Military Court of the Air Forces Command on 11 June 2014 (ibid.). Following this rejection, the Roboski case was then filed to the Turkish Constitutional Court on 18 July 2014. After a preliminary review of the petitions, the appli-

PKK has a clear line of command, and its members wear uniforms and carry guns openly" (2015, p. 450).

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cants' legal representative was notified on 4 August 2014 that the application file was incomplete, whereby "the applicants were asked to address the shortcomings, which was done with a 2-day delay accounted for with a medical excuse" (Altiparmak 2020: 8).

The Section of the Constitutional Court (the tribunal that passes judgment on the merits of a case) rejected to consider the case. Interestingly, the rejection is not set forth as a judicial decision, but regulated as an administrative decision, issued by the Commission's Rapporteur in Chief with no judicial mandate, a line of action that renders the application invalid from the outset. Therefore, Altiparmak concludes, "the Section's rejection in the Roboski application is not only the first decision of its kind, it is the only decision of its kind!" (2020: 8). As the Section has no authority to rule such a rejection, the Constitutional Court issued a decision of rejection on 24 February 2016 contrary to all procedural rules "in an application regarding one of the biggest massacres in the history of Turkey, the massacre of Roboski" (Altıparmak 2020: 14)[13]. While the Constitutional Court has been "instrumental in creating impunity and injustice", not seldom have the rulings of the ECtHR on Turkey provided a cover up for the grave cases of injustices in Turkey (cf. Altiparmak 2020: 15). As strikingly put by Das and Poole drawing on Agamben, "law produces certain bodies as 'killable' because they are positioned by the law itself as prior to the institution of law" (2004: 12). The impunity is the mechanism that puts life in question by producing a category of killable lives.

Almost a decade after the massacre, "victims' families are still being denied their basic right to know how and why their family members were killed, with the continued denial of truth that "prevents the transformation of hurtful memories and robs families of their right to mourn properly for their sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers" (Eralp 2015: 454). In December 2013, two years after the massacre, the Diyarbakir city government unveiled a Roboski monument in commemoration of those who lost their lives. "The

13 As if that were not enough, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) too endorsed the logic on which rejection decision of the Turkish Constitutional Court rests and issued an "inadmissibility decision" (17 May 2018) concerning the application of the Roboski massacre "on the grounds that domestic remedies had not been exhausted". This unwavering trust, as Altıparmak concludes, "has resulted in the once-and-for-all burial of the truth about one of the gravest massacres in the history of Turkey without a proper examination of the allegations of the applicants (2020, p. 1).

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monument", in the words of Eralp, "depicts a Kurdish mother with raised open arms shouting at the sky while sitting in the middle of a circle surrounded by eight missiles dropped that day. The Predator Drone is conspicuously missing in the monument very much like the truth that is being denied and made invisible by the Turkish and American governments" (2015: 454).

At this point in time, things seem to have turned full circle. In October 2016, the metropolitan mayor and co-mayor, the well-respected Gülten Kışanak (female) and Fırat Anlı (male) respectively, were removed from their office and replaced by a state-appointed administrator (*Zwangsverwalter* or Turkish *kayyum*). Kışanak and Anlı were immediately arrested on charges of dissemination of the propaganda of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). In February 2019, Kışanak was then sentenced to 14 years and 3 months in prison entirely on political grounds. Yet, her own political and public engagement can in many respects be seen both as resumption and résumé, as recurrence and summary of the recent history of Turkey, including the drivers and dynamics of forced migration, nature of state borders and suppression of the Kurdish quest for self-rule. To begin with, as a young student of the Faculty of Education in Diyarbakir, the very Kurdish metropole that would elect her to its metropolitan mayor in 2014, Kısanak was arrested following the military putsch of the 12th September 1980 in Turkey. The widespread politics of *Gleichschaltung* conducted by the military regime (1980–1983), among other things, caused a flow of Kurdish and Turkish political refugees to Europe and elsewhere. As suggested in the introduction, this has indeed played an important role in the formation of the Kurdish diaspora across Europe.

After her arrest, Kişanak was then imprisoned in the (in)famous Diyarbakir Prison for two years, a prison that according to all accounts of its former prisoners and Kisanak herself, has embodied a system of organised inhumanity, identical with unimaginable methods of harassment and torture. Following her release from this prison, Kisanak subsequently took up the study of journalism in Izmir, in 1986. On the 16th March 1988, however, she was again arrested on the ground of protesting Saddam Hussein's attack on Halabja, a genocidal chemical attack against the Kurdish civilian people conducted during the closing days of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), an attack that caused mass migration and flow of refugees across international or intra-Kurdish borders for that matter. Kişanak was released one year afterwards and began to continue with her political and public work in the years

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to come, including as a member of parliament (elected 2011) on behalf of a pro-Kurdish party and as mayor.

On the other hand, the *kayyum*, the *forced administrator*, has removed the Roboski monument by destructing the marble tables on which the names of the deceased were engraved, along with banning all Kurdish linguistic and cultural activities supported by the mayoralty. The physical extermination of 34 of people through an aerial bombardment is followed by the enactment of symbolic violence on the memory of the deceased. After all, one of the striking features of the (re)established Turkish presidential system since 2016 has been the widespread use of *kayyum*. Hundreds of elected Kurdish mayors and co-mayors have been dismissed, arrested, and sentenced to years of prisons. Perhaps not surprisingly, among 95 mayoralties whose mayors and co-mayors were exposed to the kayyum regime by the government, there is no single female kayyum. As an instrument to force the elected incumbents of public institutions into receivership by arresting, harassing and replacing them through state-appointed officials, kayyum emerges as a new colonial figure and form of colonial administration. As an emergent entity, however, it arises out of coloniality of border and rule imposed on the Kurdish communities. The effects of this development on the upsurge in external and internal migration cannot be overemphasised.

Concluding remarks

Building on an expanding body of literature on the critical conceptions of borders, frontiers, boundaries, borderlands on the one hand, and migration studies on the other, this study has established the transformation of empires into nation-states by means of ethnic, cultural and religious homogeneity as the key driver behind the mass migration and refugee flows of the twentieth century. This historical process has taken the form of either forced assimilation or forced migration, both of which have caused large-scale migration movements, as well as external and internal displacement. By focusing on the Kurdish case within the wider context of the Middle East, this paper has tried to deliver a tentative analysis of how state borders, state structures and migration have acted together to produce what I have described as structural migration, defined as a phenomenon that is engineered by and built into the very structures and policy paradigms of political regimes in the Middle

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East and elsewhere. As such, structural migration has been generated both by "migration of ethnic unmixing" and the politics of forced assimilation, that is, the systematic targeting of the communal existence of territorially and historically settled communities. The predicament of non-Muslim communities in the Middle East and their forced migration, which has not been treated in this paper, is an important case in point (Bezwan forthcoming).

I have argued that the phenomenon of mass migration across the Middle East, among other things, can be explained by two main factors which are intimately related: first, the effects of colonial legacies, and second, more importantly, the policies and practices of postcolonial and/or post-imperial authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. The former refers to the ways in which borders and regimes were imposed on the region, and to the imperatives of imperial geopolitics, whereas the latter brings the authoritarian and exclusivist institutional and ideological features of the political regimes to the fore as they are currently applied and maintained across the Middle East. Put differently, the imposition and maintenance of the religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural homogenisation by the states (whether secular, theocratic, or a combination thereof) against a background of historical/colonial legacies has been, and still continues to be, the most decisive factor behind mass migration across the Middle East. Moreover, this is compounded by the fact that all societies, state and non-state communities alike, in the Middle East have been, and are, paradigmatic examples of diverse and plural societies, realities that are fiercely denied by the sovereign powers across the region. The politics of non-recognition then facilitates homogenisation, both of which in turn act as the main source of state coercion and of migration for that matter.

As for our understanding of the Kurds' situation and of Kurdish migration, the main subject-matter of this essay, it can be concluded that the reconstitution of political authority, the redrawing of territorial boundaries and the restructuring of populations in the post-Ottoman political geography laid the foundations of the Kurdistan question along a continuum with three dimensions: the territorial and societal disintegration of the Kurdish regions, their incorporation into the newly established states to the exclusion of the Kurds, and the politics of non-recognition of Kurdish rights and aspirations both by the elites of the emergent nation-states, and the major powers leading the international community. Put differently, the territorial partition, forced incorporation and non-recognition refer to the primal

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mechanisms which have not only produced historical injustices, but more importantly, continue to shape the parameters of the Kurdish predicament and are responsible for migration movements from Kurdish regions across the Middle East (Bezwan 2018: 63ff. and forthcoming).

The majority of cases of Kurdish migration throughout modern history, as I have argued, have their root cause in the ceding of Kurdish territories to the emergent nation-states, to the exclusion of the Kurds, and to the imposition of direct rule on the Kurdish communities. While splitting the Kurdish regions and communities across four states, state borders function as markers of colonial rule and power execution. In fact, by all appearances these borders are not only the longest standing but also the longest boundaries that have ever existed in human history which cut through the same national communities who inhabit the border regions across four states. This state of affairs has had fundamental implications on the pattern of migration in and around Kurdistan. First, new state borders brought about border regimes that divided Kurdish communities, leading up to their societal and territorial disintegration. Second, it gave rise to the collaboration and joint strategies of containment on the part of the states ruling over Kurdish territories. Third, the redrawing of state borders set in motion a long process of marginalisation, peripheralisation, de-development and exclusion of Kurdish communities from proper social and economic infrastructure, as well as human and societal development. Fourth, the policies and practices of boundary-making and domination of the Kurdish communities have produced a spiral of repression and resistance, mostly manifested in the recurrent and durable patterns of state-organised mass violence on the one hand, and Kurdish non-compliance, periodic uprisings, including armed resistance, on the other. And finally, fifth, all of this has led to the use of mass violence and mass migrations, flows of refugees, internal and external displacements, and deportations. Which may explain why the borders between the states ruling over the respective parts of Kurdistan have been, and remain, as colonial institutions par excellence, and sites of decolonial contention, producing mass migration, state violence and resistance.

As stated by Martin van Bruinessen, one of the leading scholars of Kurdish studies, scholarship on the Kurds "to a considerable extent reproduces the division of Kurdistan into four main parts (van Bruinessen 2015: 125). Complicated by the nature of the available sources and the multiplicitiy of languages, "(T)he relations cutting across the different parts of Kurdistan

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have for this reason perhaps received less scholarly attention than is warranted. There has been little comparative work, and most of it has been based on secondary sources" (van Bruinessen 2015: 126).

I conclude by echoing this statement and uttering a final word concerning research desideratum. There are many studies on Kurdish diaspora(s) and aspects of forced migration, but no studies exist that deal with the Kurdish case of migration in its entirety from a historical, multidisciplinary, and comparative perspective. Works that focus on diaspora typically fail to look at the structural conditions and causal pathways of the migration in the country of origins, whereas studies that deal with the country of origins mostly neglect to consider the phenomenon of migration and its impact on the Kurdish communities and receiving societies alike (for a review of literature on Kurdish diaspora see also Baser et al. 2015: 143ff.). The frequency, recurrence and intensity of the phenomenon of Kurdish migration in particular and the Middle Eastern migration in general, however, call for comprehensive studies that focus on the nature of migration in relation to geopolitics, borders and authoritarian regimes, by more systematically combining relational, intersectional and structural approaches to ethnographic methods and field research.

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