Mosul, the second largest city and former commercial hub of Iraq, was conquered by the Islamic State (IS) in June 2014 after a quick and humiliating retreat of the Iraqi armed forces. Tens of thousands of soldiers and policemen fled within days when confronted by less than 1000 IS fighters, leaving significant amounts of US-made weaponry behind and encouraging the following march of the terrorist group southwards. The Iraqi army with the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and a coalition of militias launched an offensive in March to recapture the city but bad coordination, suspiciousness and lack of the appropriate equipment make their demanding effort even more difficult.

On March 24, the government of Iraq signaled the beginning of the long awaited operation to recapture Mosul. A large force was deployed south of the city and set up bases at the strategic Makhmour area of Nineveh province in Iraqi Kurdistan for the first phase of the Fatah (Conquest) Operation. The Iraqi armed forces, Kurdish fighters, the Popular Mobilization Forces (Iranian-backed militia with a predominantly Shi'a identity) as well as Sunni tribesmen and US troops came together there to coordinate the mission. The joint forces advanced westwards and managed to recapture several villages. However, their progress has not been impressive enough to explain the optimism expressed by some Iraqi officials and the President of the USA who believe that the area will be IS-free by the end of the year. Unfortunately, the whole effort is mired by mistrust, incompetence and divisions among the allied forces. The Peshmerga complain frequently for their poor equipment in contrast to the rich US-made weaponry of their Iraqi allies. Actually, the Kurds have largely proved the most effective fighters on the battlefield against the IS in Syria and Iraq by using mainly old Russian rifles. The problem gets more complicated due to the US law which does not allow the government to equip directly sub-state entities, such as the Kurdistan Regional Government, and the American fear of undermining the Iraqi government’s already crumbling authority. Thus, Washington leaves the final word to Baghdad concerning the distribution of ammunition. Meanwhile, the allies’ shared bloody past and religious as well as ethnic differences shadow their relations and cause an additional headache to their American advisors. Moreover, Mosul is by far the largest city controlled by the IS in either Iraq or Syria and it is heavily populated, complicating any mission to retake it. As a top Kurdish counter-terrorism

**IN THIS ISSUE**

- Preserving the Identity: The Kurdish Food
  Kurdish minorities struggle to bring their ignored traditional cuisine to light as a credential of their existence

- An anarchist approach on the Rojava experiment
  The main component of the Rojava experiment is the belief in a model of direct democracy where power derives from the bottom up

- The Significance of Memoirs in Legitimizing the Kurdish Struggles
  Personal and experiential writings are able to provide a different account on the events and facts concerning the Kurdish history and plight

- Diversity among the Kurdish population
  The absence of an independent Kurdish nation-state created diversity among the Kurdish population

- Kurdish Nationalism in Iran since the Islamic Revolution
  The intensity of Kurdish nationalism in Iran has fluctuated since the Islamic Revolution but it has always been present and consistent in its demands for autonomy
Kurdish food is described as simple yet rich, spicy and tasty and is heavily defined by the flavors with other traditional cuisines of the Middle East like the Turkish, Arab and Armenian, it claims its own existence and recognition in the area. It is undeniable that Kurdish food culture has no mention in Turkey. Specifically, it is often referred as the regional cuisine of Southeast Anatolian region of the country. Within Turkey, Kurdish restaurants are a few, while in Istanbul’s Kadınlar Pazari, also known as “Little Kurdistan” there are only restaurants offering “southeastern food.” The new generation of Kurds tries to raise the minority’s voice as well as to bring its ignored culture into existence. 32 year-old Delal Seven promotes Kurdish cuisine through her blog, making Turkish society aware of special

Kurdish folklor though is notably suppressed in Turkey, for the sake of a homogenous Turkish identity. Kurdish food is not the exception, rather than the epitome of the suppression. Kurdish food culture has no mention in Turkey. Specifically, it is often referred as the regional cuisine of Southeast Anatolian region of the country. Within Turkey, Kurdish restaurants are a few, while in Istanbul’s Kadınlar Pazari, also known as “Little Kurdistan” there are only restaurants offering “southeastern food.” The new generation of Kurds tries to raise the minority’s voice as well as to bring its ignored culture into existence. 32 year-old Delal Seven promotes Kurdish cuisine through her blog, making Turkish society aware of special

FOOTNOTES
5. Ekurd Daily, “Iraq’s Mosul Battle will be ‘Bloodbath,’ Kurdish Commander Says,” (22/3/2016) [http://ekurd.net/iraq-mosul-battle-bloodbath-2016-02-22]

All links accessed on 3/5/2016

Preserving the Identity: The Kurdish Food
by Maria Kourpa

Cooking and food is a great chapter in Kurdish identity and tradition. Kurdish people offer and share their food as an indication of friendship and hospitality. Each family and region has its own oral recipes, which are passed down from generation to generation.

Kurdish food is described as simple yet rich, spicy and tasty and is heavily defined by the products offered by the land. The fertile soil between Tigris and Euphrates produces a lot of vegetables and fruits like grapes, pomegranates and figs but also herbs and nuts. Meanwhile, Kurds, as nomads living in infertile grounds and mountains, they also include in their diet lots of meat, especially lamp or chicken. From the ancient years, the people of Kurdistan grew wheat and domesticated goats, sheep and pigs in the mountains of Kurdistan that now belong to Iraq. Kurdish people took advantage of their lands and formed culinary culture rich in vegetables and dairy products.

Despite the differences between the Kurdish culinary customs, acquired by the different countries that the Kurdish people live in, Kurdish cuisine lives with the Kurdish Diaspora in the United States of America and Europe. On the other hand, things are way different in the Middle Eastern countries where the Kurdish minorities live. Kurdish food is not recognized as such and Kurdish restaurants are rare.

In Iraq, the only way to taste typical Kurdish food is to eat with a Kurdish family. A limited number of traditional Kurdish street foods can be found in Erbil or Sulamaniyah. Things are no different for Syrian and Israeli Kurdish food. The first Kurdish restaurant opened in Mahane Yehuda, the heart of the Kurdish community in Jerusalem, a couple of years ago by a Jew Kurd, influenced by his grandmother’s cooking that marked his childhood. Kurds are making 3-hour drives to reach the restaurant, as food is one of the few remaining elements in the Kurdish culture of the country’s minority.

Kurdish dishes but also preserving the traditional recipes. Unfortunately, that is as far as the Turkish society can bear, as fears are expressed that an openly Kurdish restaurant would definitely be the target of racists, nationalists or the deep state.
They say that reading a book can transform a person. In Rojava's case it transformed an entire community. It all began when Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK), read the work of Murray Bookchin in prison, on the island of Imrali in Turkey. Bookchin was a political philosopher, once a Marxist-Leninist, who denounced his ideology, as he rejected its authoritarian tendencies. Instead he developed his own radical ideology, which he termed “social ecology.” He believed that hierarchical relations in society are the main obstacles in creating an egalitarian society. He proposed an alternative form of social organisation, which he called “libertarian municipalism,” where relations would be based on mutual participation in governance of all elements of society, regardless of sex, race, religion or social standing. The abolishment of hierarchies was essential to the creation of a decentralised power structure, where local communities would replace the state through the creation of local governing bodies.

Ocalan was deeply influenced by Bookchin’s work. He studied it, embraced it and in 2005 he published the “Declaration of Democratic Confederalism in Kurdistan.” In it, he urged all PKK members to read Bookchin’s book “The Ecology of Freedom” and to dedicate themselves to the creation of an infrastructure of local self-governing assemblies that would subsequently form a larger confederation. Ocalan’s ideas were propagated through PKK to the Kurds of Rojava, and although there were hesitations over Ocalan’s turn towards confederalism by some, these ideas took root. Few years later, the Arab Spring, even if indirectly through the disintegration of Syria, gave the opportunity for these ideas to be implemented in Rojava. The TevgeraCivakaDemokratik (Tev-Dem) (Movement for a Democratic Society) with the help of the Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat (PYD) was created, and governs the autonomous regions of Rojava ever since.

TEV-DEM never claimed to have an anarchist agenda, or to be influenced directly from an anarchist world view. However, there are anarchist elements in their theory that cannot be overlooked. The main component of the Rojava experiment is the belief in a model of direct democracy, where power derives from the bottom up (although the existence of a centralised government, in the form of a parliament, indicates that PYD does not reject the state as a power mechanism). Also, the denial of the nation-state as the main pillar of social cohesion points to anarchist theories. The combination of these two principles has led to the creation of local organizational structures, where everyone is free to participate, regardless of which ethnic or religious group he/she belongs to. Moreover, the participation of women is not just strongly encouraged, but it is rather self-evident. Women participate as co-chair persons in all assemblies, while they are actively contributing to every aspect of civil administration. Gender equality along with freedom of religion and minority rights are enshrined in the Rojava Constitution that was adopted in 2014, as essential ingredients in the construction of an inclusive society.

The Rojava experiment has been the target of severe criticism. Many have commented, and not without reason, on the existence of a more centralised government in the region. It has been criticised as being in contradiction with the libertarian nature of the confederalist governance of Rojava since the mere existence of these two parallel structures of governance creates doubts over the final form this type of dual representation will assume. Moreover, there have been accusations of intimidation, harassment and authoritarian abuses of power against the PYD by other Kurdish factions in Syria. While the government of Rojava has been denying these accusations vehemently, they could throw a dark shadow over the limits of its egalitarian endeavor. Notwithstanding the criticism, on March 16, TEV-DEM declared the establishment of a federal state of government in Rojava, taking the next step towards confederalism.

**FOOTNOTES**

1. Barzinji, Ala, Traditional Kurdish Food: An insight into Kurdish culinary heritage, Troubador Publishing Ltd: 2015, p. 8

All links accessed on 5/5/2016
The Significance of Memoirs in Legitimizing the Kurdish Struggles

by Aliki Sofianou

As historian George Egerton described in his article Political Memoirs as Polygenre, political memoirs or diaries constitute in part “forms of contemporary historiography: by nature they each address a past which lies within the personal memory of the writer.” Namely, Kurdish-authored memoirs describe events experienced in the past and seek to provide information of historic transformations of their nation due to wars and conflicts, to collect the personal records of people who have a word on the important events and facts, as well as to pass it down to the next generation. However, there are advantages and disadvantages on using a personal narrative in order to present ones story. First off, the author may advance his argument by narrating his own experience and also, by utilizing empathy, one can affect the reader emotionally. Conversely, the writer cannot be straightforward with his argument because he will have to ease his way on narrating his story than just stating it.

Thus, the reader should treat Kurdish memoirs, which are experiential and autobiographical forms of writing, as part of a distinct literary genre. Personal and experiential writings are able to provide a different account on the events and facts concerning the Kurdish history and plight. A way to answer how have Kurdish people endured and overcome the hardships caused by different actors depending on the area they were living in, is to explore their efforts to construct and sustain a national identity through their own personal accounts. By writing down memories and experiences which later become best-selling memoirs, Kurdish authors created their own political mentality and space wherein they were able to express their opinions and make their voices heard on political matters.

Out of a big collection of Kurdish memoirs, two good examples of them that highlight the significant role of eyewitness actors are My Father’s Paradise: A Son’s Search for his Family’s Past by Ariel Sabar and My Father’s Rifle: A Childhood in Kurdistan by Hiner Saleem. These memoirs could serve as a tool to examine the self-narrative and self-presentation of the Kurdish plight. Moreover, they set an example on how an autobiography should be written and what information or details should be given in regard to Kurdish political history.

Kurdish authors touch upon how they have constructed their national identity through a narration of their history, efforts and initiatives alongside political participation. Their goal is to make their community’s voices heard and for their struggles to be recognized and attended to at a diplomatic level. As a matter of fact, Kurdish memoirs constitute a corpus of the Kurdish literature, whereby the authors manage to transform the trauma and the hardships, experienced by many within the Kurdish community, into a radical and active political engagement and intervention, as a way to work on and improve the Kurdish cause.

Ultimately, memoirs should be considered important writings on the Kurdish struggle, for the authors are valuable correspondents of historical events. Due to the fact that Kurdish voices have been intentionally or unintentionally silenced or ignored by some scholars, authors and analysts, one should treat Kurdish stories and reflections as principal. Many authors share common perspectives on the oppressive past and history of the Kurdish community as well as the preservation of their identity. Moreover, they offer testimonies about past events and they present themselves as “fighters” and not as victims.

### Footnotes

Diversity among the Kurdish population
by Iris Pappa

The fact that the Kurdish population is divided mainly among four countries (Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria), due to the absence of an independent Kurdish nation-state, has made the Kurdish society diverse. This diversity that can be mainly found in differences regarding religion and language, has differentiated the Kurdish society, shaking at the same time its unity.

The Kurdish Language
Historically, Kurdish belongs to the family of the Indo-European languages and more particularly to the Indo-Iranian branch of this family. According to the Kurdish Academy of Languages, Kurdish dialects are broken into three major groups: The Northern Kurdish dialect (Kurmanji), which is spoken by the Kurds living in Turkey and Syria; the Central Kurdish Language (Sorani), written in the Arabic script and spoken by Kurds in Iraq and Iran; and the Southern Kurdish language which is also spoken by Kurds in Iraq and Iran and encompasses nine sub–dialects. Within these three major groups there is significant variation and as a result the speakers of different dialects cannot necessarily understand each other.

From time to time, teaching the Kurdish language as well as using it publicly was prohibited. After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey for instance, its government adopted a radical policy of nation-building. Ethnic diversity was perceived as a threat to the integrity of Turkey and Kurds, as the largest ethnic minority, constituted the biggest threat. Turkey suppressed all the external symbols, prohibited the teaching and public use of Kurdish and changed even the Kurdish names of towns and villages to Turkish ones. Similarly, in Iran and Iraq Kurdish were also prohibited from time to time in an effort to avoid the emergence of a common language, spoken by the whole population.

This suppression of Kurdish in Turkey, Iran and Iraq, that had successfully prevented the emergence of a common standard language, the most important tool for social cohesion and unity to a population, resulted in a reality where Kurds living in different areas were not able to understand each other.

Religion
Religious distinction among the Kurds also serves as a divisive factor. However, in the case of religion, differences are not that extreme. According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center back in 2011, 98% of the Kurds identified themselves as Sunni Muslims, while the rest 2% as Shiite Muslims (particularly in the southernmost part of Kurdistan). Besides these two major varieties there are also various syncretistic sects “with beliefs and rituals that are clearly influenced by Islam but owe more to other religions, notably old Iranian religion,” with the most important ones being the Alevi and the Yezidis.

Religious diversity has played an outstanding role in the Kurdish movement throughout time, since its rebellions were influenced by the different stance Kurds of different religions had. More particularly, during the rebellions that broke out between the 1880s and the 1930s, Sunnis were divided into two mystical orders that could not cooperate effectively, Shiite Kurds did not take part in the Kurdish national movement and the Alevi Kurds fearing Sunni fanaticism did not support the Sheikh Sa’id rebellion in 1925.

At this point, however, it should also be mentioned that despite the various religious groups, Kurdish society is currently moving toward a more tolerant religious road. In 2012, the government of Iraqi Kurdistan (KRG), in a broad-minded move of religious equality, “declared that its schools will now be religiously tolerant,” without giving preference to a specific religion. Such a decision could unite more the Kurdish population since it might lead to a reality where faith in different religions will not constitute a barrier to their common good.

Even if differences in language and religion influence the social cohesion of a society, Kurdish people share a common past, filled by memories and national feelings, that is capable to protect their national identity and keep them united. Besides, their mutual dream and goal for independence seems to be stronger than any other factor affecting their unity.

Footnotes
Kurdish Nationalism in Iran since the Islamic Revolution

by Charitini Petrodaskalaki

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Kurds have been expressing their wishes for autonomy, but the failure of negotiations between the Kurdish national parties and the Islamic regime led to a long-standing armed conflict. After a brief enfeeblement in the late 1980s, the Kurdish movement in Iran reinvigorated since the late 1990s and early 2000. The developments in Iranian Kurdistan might be less heard in international news than the ones in neighboring Kurdish regions, nevertheless, Kurdish resistance and demands for autonomy and national recognition have not ceased.

In the end of the 1970s, Iran was facing serious domestic political unrest; the memory of the Algiers agreement between Iran and Iraq in 1975 gave the Kurds in Iran enough incentive to join the revolution and show their active opposition to the Pahlavi regime through extensive public demonstrations. At first, Kurds were generally positive towards the new regime; however, after they presented their demands for autonomy, they were soon disappointed by Khomeini’s pronouncement that Kurds were no different from other Muslims and should be content with an Islamic government. While Sunni sentiment has been of minor importance in the Kurds’ attitude towards the new Islamic republic, it should be noted that many Shi’a Kurds remained supportive of the Islamic regime. The stalemate of negotiations between the Islamic Republic and the Kurdish nationalist parties (mainly KDPI) exacerbated tensions, and a well-organized revolt erupted in March 1979 in major Kurdish cities; The conflict was so brutal that an estimated 10,000 Kurds died in the first two years. The conflict intensified sharply when the Iran-Iraq war broke out, as it was assumed that Iraqi and Iranian Kurds would cooperate; by 1983, the Iranian government controlled most of the Kurdish areas, driving the Kurdish guerilla headquarters to Iraqi territory.

In the 1980s, as the regime took control of more areas of Iranian Kurdistan, the Kurdish national movement gradually weakened; apart from the recurrent splits among the various political parties, another fatal blow was the successive assassinations of Iranian-Kurdish political leaders in Iraqi-controlled territory by the Iranian regime, signifying how serious the Islamic republic was in silencing dissidents. A change in the Kurdish national movement in Iran came in the 1990s, as a result of the relative liberalization of the Khatami presidency, when Kurds experienced an unprecedented amount of cultural activities that eventually formed a new nationalist discourse. In addition, since 2003 and the establishment of Iraq’s Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), the Kurds in Iran were motivated to push for similar rights in Iran. However, with the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005, the Kurdish demonstrations that erupted were brutally suppressed, while banning of Kurdish newspapers was common occurrence during his presidency.

As things change rapidly for Kurds in Syria, Iraq and Turkey, Iranian Kurdistan appears oddly quiet; however, this does not mean that nothing happens in this area nowadays. In May 2015, the death of a 25-year old Kurdish girl triggered waves of national and political protest across Iranian Kurdistan against the government, namely one of the biggest Kurdish uprisings in years. Moreover, seeing their own struggle stalled compared to the gains of their brethren elsewhere, KDPI and other Kurdish groups outlawed in Iran have taken up arms once again, returning to the mountains of the Iran-Iraq border.

To sum up, the intensity of Kurdish nationalism in Iran has fluctuated since the Islamic Revolution, but nevertheless it has always been present and consistent in its demands for autonomy. The situation might seem relatively quiet now; nonetheless, any regional developments in favor of the Kurds elsewhere will affect Iranian Kurds, the second largest Kurdish population in the Middle East, and this is why the Iranian regime is against an independent Kurdistan in Iraq.