Diane E. King  

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq is now a participant in the world’s system of states, even though it is, technically, only a ‘region’ within a federated state. It conducts its own foreign policy business without going through Baghdad. Iraqi Kurdistan has long been called ‘autonomous’ within Iraq, but it in many ways now exercises autonomy in the world, too.

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Kurdistan on the global stage … the first part of the book title suggests a treatment of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as in the mirror of international relations, processes of state-building, securitization policies, or migration. Anthropologist Diane King, however, guides the reader through Kurdistan using a radically different lens in an effort to understand social and political change in an unrecognized state. Her key concept here is “patriliny.” She describes people’s practices in everyday life and in the political field as significantly pre-structured by imaginations and rules related to gendered categories, and defines these practices as “connecting”:

> It is people’s social and symbolic life, enacted in ways specific to their milieu. What I do in addition, however, is to contextualize Kurdistani connecting within the global. Much of what this book is concerned with could be called ‘primordial’ symbols and social relations, which are now maintained, reformulated, and questioned in globalizing Kurdistan, forming something not local, not global, but glocal.

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Diane King’s study offers valuable insights into Iraqi Kurdistan’s past and present and is arranged in seven chapters. She introduces the region and its people to the reader in the first chapter and, illustrated by excerpts from her field notes during several stays between 1995 and 2010, gives an idea of what rapid change in this region means in terms of material life and social relations. Chapter 2 deals with the issue of “fieldwork in a danger zone,” intertwining the researcher’s experience with lessons on the violent past of Iraq and Kurdistan. King discusses “patriliny” as related to identity and space in Chapter 3, showing “how patriline is connected to claims of origin in specific places, which lend identity to the members of the patriline” (p. 38). In Chapter 4, the author turns to women as they “navigate patriliny;” she argues that although “the logic
of patriliny impels women to cloister themselves and their male kin to enforce their cloistering” at the same time “the globalized world invites them to exercise their ‘freedom’ as ‘modern’ women” (p. 102f.). Following this argument, Chapter 5 discusses “political activity in the form of conversation and actions”, a practice the author calls “politicking”, by which she means “the political stuff of state, local, tribal, and lineage governance, aspirations to such governance, as well as economic jockeying both licit and illicit” (p. 138). Chapter 6 is devoted to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); here the anthropologist suggests that “contemporary Kurdish migrations complicate primordial/local and modern/global refuge and asylum regimes” (p. 40). In the final chapter, Diane King shows how Iraqi Kurdistan connects to the world in general and at the same time—as a place of both ideological reference and refuge—to the Kurds in the Middle East and worldwide in particular.

What makes this ethnographic study compelling is its alternative approach to reading Iraqi Kurdish society and the changes and continuities in social relations. Stressing the historicity of social concepts and figurations, the author argues that “patriliny” as a structuring principle of family and house (Kurdish: maļ) is likewise translated into other contexts, such as patron-client relations (162–160), and that this structuration principle persists in the modernized state.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, patriliny remains salient, even though some of its features are undergoing new scrutiny in light of new possibilities fostered by globalization. I regard patriliny as one of the most important social and symbolic forces in Kurdish life, the glue that fosters many of the social connections in Kurdistan.

Diane King suggests that “patriliny” also applies to the political system of the Kurdistan Region and is visible in gender relations in the political realm as well as in policies on “minorities” in Kurdistan. She thus declares:

Patriliny is still integral to the political system in the Kurdistan Region. The Kurdistan Parliament has seats reserved for people belonging to certain ethnic and religious categories, which the Ba’thist state never did.

As alternative as the “patriliny” lens is to the dominant approaches used in studies on Kurdistan, at this point and elsewhere in the book Diane King’s deci-