

BOOK REVIEWS

Between Muslims: Religious Difference in Iraqi Kurdistan, by J. Andrew Bush, Stanford UP, 2020, 216 pp., \$25.00, (hardback), ISBN: 9781503611436.

As an anthropological account of everyday life of Iraqi Kurdistan, Andrew Bush's groundbreaking study entitled *Between Muslims: Religious Difference in Iraqi Kurdistan* offers a panoramic picture of Iraqi Kurds through religious differences embedded in ordinary relations. Bush criticizes long-held assumptions about the derivative relationship between ethnicity and religiosity, which primarily assumed that ethnic identity shapes religious behavior (Batatu 1978) and draws ethnographic attention on micro-level forms of everyday relations in the course of being a pious Muslim. Bush argues that overall explanations on the religious differences have derived from simplistic accounts and established basic negligent stereotypes. A predominant view, in this regard, has simplified the nexus between ethnicity and religiosity, emphasizing that a human being's racial or ethnic identification determines or qualifies the person's adherence to Islamic traditions. To this end, a vast scholarly inquiry tends to use Kurdish Islam as a phrase to draw an ethnic boundary across religiosity and correlates irreligiousness with the Kurdish left, which has been widely perceived as a result of marginalization of Kurds following the establishment of four major nation states (Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey) in the Middle East. Instead of this reasoning, Bush prefers the phrase of "*Islamic traditions in Kurdistan*" to attribute wide range of debates about what counts as Islamic and scrutinizes "*Islamist movements*" instead of leftist movements regarding whether these prompt the *turning away from piety*, a term Bush refers to the arm's length stance to the Islam. Among three untapped patterns to deviate from the Muslim identity, Bush addresses the third group in Silêmanî and Erbil – those who still have faith (*iman*) but are not ambivalent for turning away from piety. Bush seeks to clarify why individual reactions to Islamic rules vary by enhancing his primary explanatory argument through "*interaction with others.*"

The book is composed of an introduction, five chapters, and a brief epilogue. The introduction points out the existing accounts on the Islamic orientations of Iraqi Kurds. Two competing views, in this regard, are depicted to explain varied orientations towards the Islam. The first point is that Islam is not a single normative view of the world but can instead be defined as a field to contest, experiment, and debate different customs. The second view, which examines the people who turn away from piety, attributes this turning away to secularism, which is thought of as the colonial effort of the European modern states to shape characteristics of states beyond Europe and illustrates those people with the rising secularism in the region. In order to interpret the reliability of these competing views, Bush pays scant attention to the ordinary relations between Muslims by observing them in the field. Taking account of current ethnic and religious identifications, he argues that many Muslims fulfill the religious requirements of Islam in private life while they have a commitment to the ethos of secularism in public life.

Varied facets of Islamic traditions in everyday life embedded in ordinary relations is understood through the Pexshan by whom Bush seeks to address how non-Islamic traditions affect person's aversion to the being a pious Muslim (chapter 1). Bush reinterprets aberrant religious behavior as stemming from everyday interactions within the family and community, drawing inspiration from Pexshan's interpretation on the tenets of founding texts such as the Qur'an and Hadith. Pexshan's criticisms towards the Islamic duties fulfilled asymmetrically by the people have been expanded to the pilgrimage, which is another main requirement of Islam as well. Pexshan and her brother had quarreled with each other about the Saudi's special benefits from the

pilgrimage upon the Pexshan's arguments about the real intention of the pilgrimage, which is rather different during the Prophet Muhammed's times when Muhammed and his pursuers went there for trade. The Pexshan case illustrates how Islamic duties and main requirements for praying and worship have been perceived differently by those who have tended to adopt the third orientation of Islam. The poetry tradition is the reference point, and Pexshan legitimizes her aversion to Muslim piety and attraction to the non-Islamic traditions acknowledging that poetry, as a reminder, echoes uncertainties in founding texts. For this individualistic shift, Bush points to the nationalist tendencies that grew in Kurdish poetry and gives further examples from prominent poems such as those by Ehmed Muxtar Caf, who encourages colonized minds to be aware of national self-consciousness.

In chapter 2, Bush aims to strengthen his arguments about the effect of non-Islamic traditions on turning away from piety with a particular focus on the Kurdish poetry. Bush's curiosity about the poetry tradition and its association with the Islamic re-orientations among Kurdish Muslims comes from his observation on the interlocutors' negotiations about the meaning of poetry in the teahouses. Inspiring the people's enthusiasm for the poetry, Bush collects a wide range of poetics including *dîwans* and pursues the Sufi poetry's imaginations on divine unity, which metaphorizes the love that can have only one beloved. When symbiotic manner comes to fore, Bush realizes that metaphors widely preferred in the couplets create a similar analogy between Muslims and *Kafir* to the law of attraction that compels them to worship. Among other facets of the oral tradition, chapter 2 also focuses on the socio-political circumstances shaping boundaries of Iraqi Kurdistan. After the collapse of Ottoman rule and the ascension of British colonial effects, local uprisings led by Sheikh Mehmed have spread over the region. The colonial efforts of the missionaries and the presence of British in the Northern part consolidated religious and ethnic identities, and this eventually became a problem beyond the Ottoman state. Policies aimed for keeping pluralistic religiosity under the universal citizenship, however, mitigated the regional autonomy and extended the crisis of ethnic identification. These broadest conditions have reshaped the Sorani Kurdish poetry and firmly politicized Kurdish national identity in new ways.

Based on elucidative framework outlined in the previous chapter, Bush looks to the distinctive outcome of the Kurdish poetry in the case of Newzad in chapter 3. Newzad is a rather distinct person who neither prays nor fasts but is instead drunk at a bar so often. Furthermore, he does not explicitly identify himself as a devout adherent of his religion, and instead relies solely on the official identification card issued by the state, which bears the emblem of the Islamic faith, to signify his affiliation with Islam. Similar to the pattern experienced by Pexshan, Newzad also affected changing socio-political conditions and poetry traditions that create nationalistic uprising among Kurdish Muslims. His brother's political affiliation with the Islamist mobilization also played a major role in turning Newzad away from piety and pressured him to be "Muslim on ID." Emphasizing the greater effect of the widespread Islamist movements across Iraqi Kurdistan, Bush extends his arguments on the relational aspects among Islamist mobilizations and turning away from piety in chapters 4 and 5. With special focus on the Mela Krêkar, Bush demonstrates that Krêkar's call for radical transformation has purged imperialist pressure over the Kurdish society and led us to know that transformative ordinary relations can also be a matter to grasp asymmetrical behavior in staying within Islam. Utilizing the lens of Kurdish poetry in chapter 5, Bush focuses on the in-family relations of Shadman and echoes overlapping differences about the religious orientations in a household.

This book has very explanatory keys for anyone interested in the derivative relation between ethnicity and religiosity in Iraqi Kurdistan. Given the sparse amount of inquiry on contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan, this book will also be useful for researchers interested in the relation between oral history and ethnic/religious cleavages across the Middle East. So-called ordinary relations and its effect on the religious behavior of the people may bring new scholarly interest to catch everyday de-alignments in fulfilling religious duties. For the audience at broadest size, people who have less ethnographic and idiographic knowledge about poetry and socio-political circumstances of Iraqi

Kurdistan may encounter a little challenge because of the lack of evidence about the sociological literature and intellectual debates in the book.

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Photography and Political Repressions in Stalin's Russia: Defacing the Enemy, by Denis Skopin, Routledge, 2022, 168 pp., \$170 (hardback), ISBN 9781032027050, \$47.65 (ebook), ISBN 9781003184744.

Many visual editing programs today allow users to radically alter an image in three clicks—five at most. Select an unwanted detail, a person, or a part of the background. Cut it. Save an “improved” version. If you are adventurous enough, you can copy and paste a new visual content into the emptied area.

It would be strange to associate this routinized technical managing of visual materials with any moral dilemmas or existential angst. Different iterations of the image's original content and structure are nothing more than attempts to operationalize visual data. An image is never final. Nor finalizable. Editing is hardly a “violation” of its integrity; it is a way to “enhance” and “augment” it. Refreshingly, *Photography and Political Repressions in Stalin's Russia* by Denis Skopin reminds us about predigital times when alterations of images were a much more complex affair with serious political, psychological, and social consequences.

Skopin is noticeably inspired by David King's pioneering effort in documenting a sustained Soviet visual practice of obfuscating portraits of “enemies of the people.” His collection powerfully exposed the subjection of photographic or artistic pictorial records to diverse acts of mechanical defacing—be it airbrushing, blackening, whitening out, or physical excising (see David King, *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia*, Metropolitan Books, 1997). Far from being accidental or random, such retroactive editorial interventions from the Revolution of 1917 onward engendered an eerie subgenre of the Stalinist visual culture: partially destroyed artifacts with gaping holes instead of the individuals, whose graphic (and physical) presence was deemed to be politically and socially inappropriate anymore. *Photography and Political Repressions* is motivated precisely by this dual historical quality of such visual documents—that is, by their constant oscillation between a particular historical moment, which was recorded by the original photo, and physical traces of the active reshaping of the initially recorded information later. It is the acquired fluidity of these photographs' temporal identity and evidentiary performativity that constitutes the book's core material.

As Skopin rightly observes, King's volume—despite its enormous influence—had no conceptual or interpretative ambitions; mostly, it was concerned with displaying ominous manifestations of Stalinist cancel culture. The book under review makes a few important steps further by exploring reasons, emotions, assumptions, and consequences that such defacing interventions could have had. If King was preoccupied with demonstrating the life of the image *before* and *after* its editorial “cleanup,” then, Skopin focuses on the dynamics that took place *during* the process of their visual “decluttering.” By studying “mutilated photographs,” Skopin asserts, the book provides “an insight into the psychology of Stalin's terror and the process of subjectivation of Soviet citizens during this