

**MEHMET KURT**, *Kurdish Hizbullah in Turkey: Islamism, Violence and the State* (London: Pluto Press, 2017). Pp. 296. \$95.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780745399348.

Unlike its more well-known namesake in Lebanon, Kurdish Hizbullah, an Islamist organization with a constituency among the Kurds of Turkey, has not attracted substantial scholarly interest. Mehmet Kurt's *Kurdish Hizbullah in Turkey* is the first book-length English-language manuscript about this organization. Kurt adopts a historical and sociological approach that offers a more insightful understanding than the security-centric and conspiracy-prone perspectives exclusively focusing on Hizbullah's violent practices. Drawing upon his own encounters and interviews with individuals involved in Hizbullah, Kurt presents new findings about the origins, internal dynamics, and membership structure of an organization that is difficult to study.

The book is composed of three sections. The first section provides a historical overview of the multiple phases of the transformation of Hizbullah from the late 1970s to the 2010s. Kurt identifies three sources of inspiration for Hizbullah, which was founded by a group of religious scholars and university-educated young activists: (1) the religious interpretations of Sa'id Nursi, an influential Kurdish-Islamist thinker; (2) the ideas and practices associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and Sayyid Qutb, and; (3) the Iranian Revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini. Initially an informal group centered around a bookstore in Diyarbakır, Hizbullah espoused the formation of an Islamic state. The group grew in size and influence via its networks in mosques and schools through the second half of the 1980s. This was also the period when the Kurdistan Workers' Party—better known by its Kurdish initials, PKK—launched a major insurgency to challenge the authority of the Turkish state. The 1990s witnessed the metamorphosis of Hizbullah into a highly secretive violent entity committing brutal murders against PKK sympathizers, individuals affiliated with rival Kurdish Islamist groups and sometimes even its own members, often with the complicity of state security forces. A police operation in January 2000 resulted in the death of its leader, Hüseyin Veliöğlü, the mass arrests of its members, and the dismantling of its structure. Hizbullah reinvented itself first as a “civil society” organization in 2003, and as a political party, Hûda-Par, in 2012. While Hûda-Par has failed to maintain any significant gains, Hizbullah remains a tight-knit community with a capacity for violent action, as the riots of October 2014, characterized by lethal clashes between PKK and Hizbullah supporters, demonstrated. Kurt's accessible discussion demonstrates how these transformations led to tensions within Hizbullah circles and defections.

He also reveals how the group leadership continues to rely on conspiracy theories to reject any accountability for its highly violent past, despite otherwise pragmatically regarding organizational expansion and strategic alliances. As much as Hizbullah increased its references to Kurdish ethnic identity, Islamism prevails as its guiding principle.

The second section is devoted to a sociological analysis of Hizbullah on the basis of personal stories, and the third section focuses on the group's ideology drawing from novels and stories. Kurt visualizes affiliation with Hizbullah as four concentric circles ranging from its secretive core to a larger number of individuals attending Hizbullah sponsored events, such as popular rallies in celebration of the Prophet Mohammed's birth. As I also personally observed in my own research, Hizbullah's fierce anti-PKK stance gives the group a degree of credibility among other Kurdish Islamists who perceive it as a shield against the PKK's hegemonic aspirations. Kurt's portrayal of Hizbullah as an all-encompassing organization that aims to achieve fusion between group and individual is compelling. He indicates how Hizbullah promotes an anti-intellectual provincial conformism, readily justifies violence as a mechanism of self-defense, cultivates a culture of victimhood and martyrdom, dehumanizes its perceived aggressors, and defines politics in terms of binary distinctions. This ideology leaves little room for coexistence, compromise and tolerance. Women are unapologetically given subordinate roles. Nonetheless, the group is prone to defections and splits despite its tight structure and ideological rigidity. As Kurt briefly discusses, the outbreak of the Syrian civil war presented a challenge to the organization, as some of its members joined so-called "jihadists," including the Islamic State, while its leadership struggled to keep a distance from these groups.

The main weakness of the book, from a scholarly perspective, is that it was originally written for a Turkish audience. An earlier and longer version was published in Turkish in 2015. While Kurt is aware of his own positionality as a researcher and embraces a self-reflexive stance, he fails to offer a satisfying discussion of the dynamics and challenges associated with ethnographic research. A methodological discussion of the two dozen in-depth interviews he conducted (i.e., criteria for selecting interviewees, biases involved in self-reports, scope for generalizations) as well as his participant observation techniques (i.e., selection of sites, interactions with gatekeepers, etc.) would contribute strongly to the value of the book. Furthermore, Kurt could have enriched his ethnographic work by interviewing other Kurdish political activists and intellectuals about their views of Hizbullah. Their perspectives would provide a more comprehensive picture of the future potential and limits of Hizbullah's sociopolitical activities. In addition, a more analytical

and thematic approach informed by the vast literature on Islamist social movements would enable him to address broader questions. For instance, unlike many other Islamist movements elsewhere, the Kurdish Hizbullah has remained under the shadow of the Kurdish nationalist movement and its mass mobilization capacity has remained limited. Kurt seems to suggest that its extreme forms of violence played a role in tarnishing its reputation and curbing its appeal, but he does not address this puzzling situation directly.

*Kurdish Hizbullah in Turkey* is a valuable contribution to the growing literature on religious nationalism in Turkey. One of its main strengths is its analysis of Hizbullah's ideological and social practices, as narrated by its former and current affiliates. It will remain a point of reference for scholars of Kurdish and Islamist politics in Turkey. ✂

DOI:[10.1017/rms.2018.44](https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2018.44)

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**JAMES MCDUGALL**, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Pp. 358. \$28.49 paper. ISBN: 9780521617307.

Some of the best recent historiography on modern Algeria consists of sharply focused monographs probing overlooked and occasionally unknown aspects of colonial history. The profusion of memoirs, journals, and similar accounts by participants in the 1954–62 revolution, and the tumultuous decades after, sought to justify or rationalize the actions and choices of their authors, often asking their readers for personal vindication. Rarely did these personal accounts have a *mea culpa* attached. The sweeping breadth of the work under review in *A History of Algeria* rises above the historiographic norm and cements James McDougall's place as the preeminent historian of modern Algeria writing in English. His skillful use of both Arabic and French (as well as other western language sources); his familiarity with the contemporary Algerian literary, journalistic, and cultural scene (both high and popular); and his interviews with the principals about whom he writes create an unrivaled work of Algerian history.

McDougall's stated—and largely accomplished—goal is to understand and convey to his readers how Algerians have understood their own history, for which he offers an empathetic, but scrupulously honest evaluation. In contrast to many other surveys of Algerian history, McDougall avoids recounting a series of clichés and banalities: the unalloyed evil of the colonial period, the romanticized heroism and sacrifice of revolutionary