Cenk Saraçoğlu. *Kurds of Modern Turkey: Migration, Neoliberalism and Exclusion in Turkish Society.* I.B. Tauris: London, 2011, xiv + 228 pages.

Saraçoğlu's *Kurds of Modern Turkey: Migration, Neoliberalism and Exclusion in Turkish Society* is a well-written book that provides a new lens for looking at an lingering and disconcerting phenomenon in Turkey; the Kurdish question. Unlike many other approaches that restrict the Kurdish question to a political issue regarding the cultural and political rights of the Kurds, the book successfully attracts attention to the anti-Kurdish sentiment in Western Turkish cities and its underlying conditions. Saraçoğlu employs refined conceptual tools and applies them well within a very coherent theoretical framework to explore the ethnicization of the Kurdish migrants by middle class people in the Western Turkish city of Izmir.

The central argument of the book is twofold; it first posits that, since the 1980s, the neoliberalization of the Turkish economy, the intensifying conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state and massive migration from Eastern Anatolia to Izmir have all constituted a new urban social space in which the middle class inhabitants of this city have developed a new perception of Kurdishness—termed "exclusive recognition" by the author—through their encounters with and observations of Kurdish people (p. 6). Second, it is argued that such exclusive recognition both "recognizes" the Kurds as a different homogeneous ethnic group and then "excludes" them in certain ways and is therefore by no means the extension or manifestation of the traditional mainstream nationalist ideologies in Turkey, which rest on non-recognition and assimilation of the Kurds (p. 4). These arguments require both an elaborate analysis of the representation of the Kurds in various state discourses and detailed presentation of the data in relation to the sources of exclusive recognition in urban social space.

Saraçoğlu starts by undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the state discourses in the late Ottoman Empire, including Ottomanism, Islamism and Turkish nationalism, and concludes that the Kurds, as Sunni Muslims, were never the object of negative stereotypes. Interestingly, there was no radical change in the image of the Kurds in the discourse of Turkish nationalism either. This he relates to two facts; first, the theory of Turkish nationalism in the last decade of Ottoman Empire was too insubstantial to describe the position of the Kurds consistently, and second, the Kurds, living in the same region with the Armenians, were strategically important in winning the Turkish War of Independence against the allied powers. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire

in World War I, it was again this strategic position of the Kurds that ensured their positive position in the eyes of the military elites that were leading the resistance movement, which aimed at building the "National Will" (*Milli İrade*) from the greatest unit possible among the ethnically mixed Muslim population of Anatolia. Unlike these earlier discourses, that of the modern Turkish state represents a significant change in the image of the Kurds; it placed Turkishness as a demarcation distinguishing the nation, state and society from "others," and described the Kurds as "prospective Turks" to be assimilated. Saraçoğlu argues that what is common to all these discourses is that none of them recognized the Kurds as a distinctive category, and yet sought to assimilate them. Thus, for Saraçoğlu, the lack of a previous systematic discourse identifying and excluding the Kurds means that exclusive recognition is unprecedented. Yet, if not from the state discourses, where does exclusive recognition stem from?

It is the urban social life that Saraçoğlu identifies as both the spatial context and content of exclusive recognition (p. 63). The transformation of urban social space through both the neoliberalization of the economy and the massive migration of the Kurds fleeing from the rising insecurity in Eastern Anatolia culminated in their socioeconomic and spatial segregation from the rest of the population in İzmir. Socioeconomic segregation emerged as an outcome of neoliberal politics, which, by enlarging the informal economy, reducing employment opportunities and increasing inequality, led the Kurdish newcomers to be concentrated in the various segments of the informal sector; both before and after migration, the Kurds' abrupt escape from the region of conflict also left them vulnerable to extremely disadvantageous conditions compared to other migrants. Spatial segregation surfaced particularly with the commodification of land in the neoliberal restructuring of urban space, pushing Kurdish migrants to specific zones of Izmir and causing the consequent segregation of their living spaces from middle class settlements. While spatial segregation along class lines had already become an established fact in the form of shanty-houses (*gecekondu*) before the 1980s, at this time it also started to demarcate ethnic boundaries; the emergence of a socioeconomically disadvantaged Kurdish migrant community concentrated almost exclusively in the poorest *gecekondu* zones and slums of Izmir. In such a context, for Saraçoğlu, the content of exclusive recognition has been shaped through repeated material social relationships and encounters by middle class *Izmirlis* with the Kurdish migrants, which Saraçoğlu calls urban everyday life (p. 63-64). Middle class *Izmirlis*, due to their relatively lower socioeconomic profile compared to upper class

Izmirlis, often encounter Kurdish migrants in the city center or in marketplaces doing informal jobs. Through these urban encounters, middle class *Izmirlis* both recognize the migrant Kurds as a distinct ethnic group and develop certain pejorative and exclusionary stereotypes by depicting them as culturally inferior and intrinsically incapable of adapting to modern life, or as occupiers and separatists.

Pointing to these urban encounters and observations as the source of exclusive recognition also means that the stereotypes or pejorative labels are based on the experienced other not the imagined other. This is where Saraçoğlu reinforces his argument that the content of exclusive recognition, emanates from the class positions of middle class *Izmirlis* and the Kurdish migrants in urban social space, rather than being inherited from nationalist state discourses. To exemplify, stereotyping the Kurds as ignorant and uncultivated has empirical foundation because, being socioeconomically and spatially segregated, they are indeed poorly educated and have low cultural capital, because of which they are exposed to the stigmatization in urban everyday life. Saraçoğlu warns, however, that the stereotypes are not accurate reflection of reality because exclusive recognition, as a cultural racist ideology (Chapters 10 and 11), emerges from a sort of "false theorization" or "partiality" that disregards the historical and structural dimensions of immediate observations and experiences in urban life (p. 132).

Saraçoğlu's book successfully adopts a consistent theoretical framework in which macro and micro processes are effectively combined to explain the transformation of urban social space in Izmir. Within this framework, the author also provides an elaborate in-depth analysis of the changing conditions in the city before and after the 1980s, and brilliantly points out the socio-cultural aspect of the phenomenon, making it possible to understand the issue in its context.

Aside the originality of the study, however, there are still some possible points of contention, especially regarding research design and the central arguments of the book. While the presentation of the methodology is in general conclusive, the exposition of the data to support arguments in various parts of the book is weak to some extent. For example, it is maintained that the "groupist," ethnicized language used by the media to portray the Kurds as a bloc political actor in the Middle East could at best reinforce the recognition of the Kurdish migrants as homogeneous ethnic group in the context of Izmir but not form it (Chapter 9). Yet, while basing this argument on the narratives of the respondents (p. 168), Saraçoğlu does not explain how he infers this finding. There is not one single reference to the respondents' remarks, and it is therefore quite

mysterious how he constructs this "reinforcing relationship" as a "type" or "category" from the data.

My second point of criticism relates to the first point, but is more fundamental in that it calls for a careful re-examination of the central findings within the scope of the data. Saraçoğlu maintains that exclusive recognition is related to the social experiences and interactions of the middle class *Izmirlis*, and stems from their class position. However, because the sample design covers the semi-structured interviews conducted *only* with middle class *Izmirlis* who express such views (p. 29), he seems to jump to a sweeping conclusion without providing sufficient evidence regarding the cognitive world of other middle class *Izmirlis* who do not express such views. Therefore, the deliberate exclusion of the latter in the sample weakens the finding that exclusive recognition stems from class position.

My last criticism is related to the operationalization of the theoretical framework regarding the relationship between exclusive recognition and nationalist state discourses. Saraçoğlu employs a genetic structuralist approach in the study (Chapter 3). Accordingly, the structure of any social phenomenon is related to the larger structure of the social realities in which the phenomenon occurs.[1] While Saraçoglu successfully defines the elements of exclusive recognition as a mode of thought, he makes no effort to place them into the even larger structure; the nationalist discourses of the modern Turkish state that have penetrated every corner of society by means of the ideological state apparatuses. This is why, while accurately characterizing the change in the respondents' perception of Kurds, Saraçoğlu fails to link this change to the recent modification of the image of Kurds in nationalist state discourses. A careful analysis shows that the respondents' recognition of the Kurds as a homogeneous community goes hand in hand with the waning of the idea that Kurds are prospective Turks at both official and popular levels. Both Turkey's candidacy for the EU membership and the establishment of a Federal Kurdish state have reinforced the Kurds in Turkey as a second territorial-linguistic community, and have thus also worked to disrupt the meta-image of Kurds as prospective Turks.[2] The recent emergence of the new terms such as Kurds as "traitors" or "pseudo-citizens" suggests that perceptions of Kurds are now subject to a fundamental

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1   William W. Mayrl, "Genetic Structuralism and the Analysis of Social Consciousness," *Theory and Society* 5, no. 1 (1978): 19-44.

2   Mesut Yeğen, "Banditry to Disloyalty: The Kurdish Question in Turkey," in *Symbiotic Antagonisms: Competing Nationalisms in Turkey*, eds. Ayşe Kadıoğlu and E. Fuat Keyman (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011).

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change.[3] Thus, rather than arguing that they are different discourses, more efforts might have been made to explore the linkages between the changing perception of the Kurds in nationalist discourses, and particularly those appearing in the media, and the perception of middle class *Izmirlis* about the Kurds.

Aside these contentions Saraçoğlu's book achieves the difficult task, rarely undertaken by researchers, of putting the Kurdish issue into its social and historical context. It is a welcome contribution, not only for researchers and students in the fields of sociology and politics but also for those interested in the Kurdish question.

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3   Jülide Karakoç, "A Critical Note on 'Exclusive Recognition'," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 4 (2011): 730-736.