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A. H. Gültekin, Ç. C. Suvari, *The Ethno-Cultural Others in Turkey: Contemporary Reflections*, Yerevan: Russian–Armenian University Press, 2021 – XII + 271 pp.

This book provides a succinct overview of the present status, development, and future prospects of ethno-confessional and linguistic minorities residing in Turkey, including those not officially recognized as such. The publication comprises a foreword by the editors of the book, a prologue by Martin van Bruinessen, and ten sections, each dedicated to specific communities within Turkey.

Before delving into the chapters, it is essential to provide a brief introduction to the foreword and prologue.

The foreword by Gültekin and Suvari offers a concise historical overview of minority conditions during the Republican period, highlighting their struggle for independence during the decline of the Ottoman Empire. They note the shift in defining minorities primarily based on linguistic affiliation after the establishment of the national state in the 1920s as opposed to the Ottoman era when people were identified by religious rather than ethnic criteria (even heterogeneous Muslims were integrated to the Empire), with only Abrahamic religions included in the *millet* system. The authors discuss the forced Turkification and Islamization of non-Muslim non-Turkish speakers under the new national identity of Turkified Islam in the Republic. Despite the dissolution of the *millet* system, the authors point out its continued influence in defining minorities, predominantly in terms of non-Muslim status, as outlined in the Lausanne Treaty. Additionally, they provide extensive literature in both English and Turkish on ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey.

In the Prologue, Martin van Bruinessen reflects on the historical trajectory and status of ethno-confessional minorities in both the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. He highlights significant events such as the loss of territories with majority Christian populations, the Arab-speaking regions, and the tragic events like the mass slaughter of the Armenians, and population exchanges between Turkey and Greece, which led to the establishment of a

more homogeneous Republic. Bruinessen also surveys the existing literature on ethno-religious minorities in Turkey, encompassing both Western and Turkish sources. He categorizes minorities into indigenous and immigrant communities, noting that immigrant communities are dispersed throughout the Republic, while indigenous groups are often tied to specific regional settings. In the final section, he discusses the marginalization and dwindling of certain groups, such as the Syriacs of Mardin and the Yazidis.

Chapter 1 by Ahmet Kerim Gültekin delves into the complex issue of Kurdish Alevis, the author asserting that religion remains the primary determinant in defining minorities. He contends that certain minorities, lacking international legal protection, have been forcibly assimilated into the Turkish national identity, leading to restrictions on language and religious practices, exemplified by events like the Koçgiri and Dersim rebellions and massacres. Gültekin highlights key periods of heightened identity politics, notably in the 1960s and 1990s. He focuses on Kurdish Alevis in Dersim, where Alevism is predominant, characterized by beliefs in nature and sacred lineages. In the meantime, he emphasizes the fact that Kurdish Alevis are designated as Zazas, and sometimes as Turks by some other authors. Gültekin also discusses the linguistic aspect, noting that most religious leaders (*talips*) speak Kirmancki, identified as Zazaki by some scholars. He examines the victimization of Kurdish Alevis, tracing it from the dismantling of Kurdish chiefdoms in the mid-19th century to the mass migration to Europe as political refugees in the 1990s. He contextualizes the current situation in Dersim within historical events such as the Armenian Genocide and the Russian invasion during WWI. The author depicts Kurdish Alevis' initial optimism toward the Republic for citizenship and constitutional rights, juxtaposed with accusations of communism due to their leftist leanings. He rejects attempts to assimilate Kirmancki-speaking Sunni Muslims with Kurdish Alevis, emphasizing their distinct ethnic and historical identities.

Hakan Mertcan's piece enlarges on the underexplored topic of Arab Alawis—also known as Nusayris or Batinis—who primarily reside in the regions of Antakya, Adana, and Mersin in Turkey. The author begins by addressing the lack of legal and constitutional recognition of the Arab Alawi community, both as an ethnic and religious minority. He then traces the emergence of the Alawi sect within Islam and provides a historical analysis spanning from the Ottoman Empire to various periods of the Turkish Republic. Mertcan highlights that during the Ottoman Empire, Arab Alawis were considered a heretic community within Islam. Changes began in the 19th century, and with the emergence of Arab national thought after World

War I, further shifts took place. The author argues that from the early years of the Republic, the Arab Alawi community faced assimilationist policies, including centralized education, closure of sacred sites known as *ziyarat*s, and the switch to the Latin alphabet, which eroded their religious identity. Moreover, Mertcan discusses the attempts of some Turkish nationalists to portray Arab Alawis as Turks, claiming they were successors of the Hittites who were also considered Turks. He adds that during the multi-party system, most Arab Alawis leaned towards secular or leftist parties, although elites were more aligned with right-wing politics as compared to the general population. Mertcan notes the presence of newspapers and NGOs still advocating for the recognition and rights of Arab Alawis, indicating ongoing efforts to address the marginalization of this community.

Chapter 3 of Arakelova's paper expands on the Yezidis in Turkey, a Kurmanji-speaking endogamous ethno-religious group structured around a caste system. The author begins by tracing the origins and distinct features of Yezidi religious beliefs which evolved from the Adawiyya Muslim Sufi order into a syncretic, non-dogmatic, and mystical form of monotheism—an act that became the cause of the persecution of Yezidis in the Muslim environment. Central to their faith is a holy triad comprising Malak Tawus (the Peacock Angel), Sheikh Adi, and Sultan Ezid, revered historical figures. Yezidism incorporates elements from Shia Islam, Sufi traditions, and Gnostic teachings, and it strictly prohibits interfaith marriages and breaches of communal principles, leading to expulsion from the community. Arakelova also evaluates the contemporary condition of the Yezidi community, highlighting their historical exodus from Turkey between 1915 and 1918 as well as in the 1980s. Many of them sought refuge in the neighboring countries such as Armenia, Georgia, Europe, or Syria. The author concludes by suggesting that recent regional upheavals, particularly the rise of ISIS and globalization, could potentially reshape the ethnoreligious landscape of the region and impact Yezidi identity itself.

In Chapter 4, Eberhard Werner explores the complexities surrounding Zazaki and the Zaza people. He begins by discussing Zazaki, a Western Iranian language, once an exotherm that has turned to an emic term for the language nowadays. Werner highlights the emergence of written history in Zazaki, starting in 1930, and the subsequent increase in studies—including those published in Zazaki—particularly from the 1980s onwards. The author also examines the social divisions among the Zaza people such as tribes (*aşiret*), family branches (*ezbet*), and extended families (*kuflet*) as well as their historical habitat along the shores of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Werner

estimates the Zaza population to be around 3 to 5 million, with only half residing in their homeland. He delves into the religious affiliations (followers of Hanafi *mezhep*, Shafi'i *mezhep*, and Alevis) within the community which align with linguistic divisions, distinguishing between Southern Zaza, Eastern Zaza, and Northern Zaza groups. Werner addresses the issue of identity, debating whether Zazaki constitutes a separate language, a Kurdish dialect, or Kurmanji, as well as discussing whether Zazas are a separate ethnic entity or not. Additionally, the chapter gives information about the Zaza diaspora in Europe which originated from labor agreements in the 1960s and in the aftermath of the 1980 *coup d'état*, leading to cultural shifts (e.g., from endogamy to exogamy). Furthermore, Werner highlights challenges related to child education in public schools in Turkey.

Chapter 5, authored by Nilüfer Taşkın and titled “The Laz: The Good Citizen of Multicultural Turkey”, focuses on the evolving ethnic identity of the Laz people in Turkey over the past two decades, when it transitioned from being “invisible” to “visible” within the society. Taşkın begins by defining the Laz as an ethnic group residing in the Black Sea coastal regions of Turkey, particularly in the provinces of Artvin and Rize, as well as in Georgia, and speaking a non-written Caucasian language. The author briefly touches upon the religious shift of the Laz community from Christianity to Hanafi Islam during the Ottoman rule. She also discusses the traditional economy of the Laz, primarily centered around tea farming, which has both increased their dependence on the state—due to state encouragement and subsidies for tea production—and transformed them from lower-class peasants to middle-class farmers. Taşkın delves into the impact of state cultural policies on the development of the Laz identity, particularly the state project aimed at turning the heterogeneous population of the Ottoman Empire into a homogeneous nation. She discusses the role of the language in preserving and transmitting identity, noting challenges in maintaining the Laz identity in large urban centers but also mentioning initiatives such as elective courses in the Laz language launched in Laz regions during the 2000s. The author emphasizes comparisons between the Laz and Kurds, both rural-dwelling groups, with the Laz historically perceived as less demanding compared to Kurds. She concludes by noting the emergence of cultural movements among the Laz people, indicating a growing assertion of their identity within the multicultural landscape of Turkey.

In Chapter 6, Aude Aylin de Tapia conducts a comprehensive historical analysis of the Rum community in both the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. The chapter begins with an exploration of the term

“Rum” and its evolution over centuries, when it transitioned from a purely religious designation to one encompassing language and ethnicity within the identity. De Tapia initially examines the position of Rums during the early Ottoman Empire, where the term “Rum” simply referred to Orthodox Christians of Byzantine heritage, without specific consideration of their ethnic background. She notes that the Tanzimat period marked the formal codification and institutionalization of the *millet-i Rum*. The author discusses the impact of the independence of Greece, which sparked a resurgence of Hellenism contrasting with Ottomanism and Turkish nationalism. De Tapia observes that Turkish-speaking Rums often gravitated more toward Greek nationalism than Turkish nationalism. Regarding the Rum community in the Republican period, she highlights various events that led to a significant decline in the Rum population in Anatolia. One of them was the population exchange of 1923, dictated by the Treaty of Lausanne, which allowed only Rums of Istanbul and Eastern Thrace to remain in Turkey, granting them Turkish citizenship. Subsequent events such as the internment of Rums in camps in 1941, the imposition of a wealth tax in 1942, the 6 to 7 September 1955 pogroms targeting Rums and triggering a wave of emigration, and the government’s decision in 1964 to expel Greeks with Greek citizenship from Istanbul and adjacent islands further contributed to the decline of the Rum population.

Chapter 7 by Erdoğan Boz, titled “The Circassians of Turkey: Others from Outside” begins by defining the term “Circassian” as an exonym (self-designation: *Adyghe*) for the indigenous people of the Northwestern Caucasus. The author proceeds to explore the language of the Circassian people (the Northwest Caucasian language), focusing on its morphological, phonological, and syntactic characteristics. He notes its historical transition from being primarily unwritten to the adoption of various scripts including Arabic, Latin, and now Cyrillic. Boz then delves into the social organization of the Circassian society, describing it as semi-feudal and tribal, with internal class distinctions within each tribe. He further discusses the historical relationship between Circassians and the Ottoman Empire, which began through their involvement in the slave trade via the Crimean Khanate until it was annexed by Russia. It is highlighted that Circassians who migrated to the Ottoman Empire were dispersed throughout different regions to maintain religious and ethnic balance and prevent the formation of separate communities, which led to their assimilation with the Turks over time. Attempts to write a comprehensive history book failed, but Circassian associations were established, and an official journal was published during

the late Ottoman period. As Boz notes, the Republican era brought increased repression and assimilation efforts targeting the Circassian community, although some easing of restrictions could be observed in the early 2000s with the introduction of Circassian programming on TRT. The author concludes by underscoring the role of Turkish Circassians in international activism, highlighting their ongoing efforts to preserve and promote Circassian culture and identity.

In Çakır Ceyhan Suvri's piece, the author explores the historical relationship between local residents and Molokans in Kars, Turkey, focusing on their exile to the region in the late 19th century. Although Molokans are not prevalent in Turkey, the article discusses their unique beliefs and social system as well as their interaction with the local community and the state. Suvri begins by defining the origins of Molokans, tracing their emergence among peasants in the Russian Empire (the sect rejected baptism, icon worship, formal church organization, and clergy hierarchy, promoting social equality and incorporating some old Russian pagan practices). The author particularly expands on the life of Molokans who stayed in Kars after 1920, noting that many of them eventually left due to a small population size and restrictions on marriage among relatives, with some Molokan women marrying Muslims and converting to Islam. The majority emigrated in 1962, purportedly due to religious concerns, although specific reasons are not mentioned. Suvri also discusses studies on Molokans conducted in Turkey, suggesting that many of them were influenced by political ideologies associating Molokans with communism. Consequently, they were not fully integrated into the Turkish society due to their distinctive religious and social practices. However, the author notes that contemporary attitudes toward Molokans have become more cordial, as they are perceived as posing no threat to the dominant culture.

The paper by Benedetta Panchetti and Marcelllo Mollica is titled "Tragic Memories Encountering Ethno-Religious Revival in Contemporary South-Eastern Anatolia: The Case of the Assyrian Church of the East". It provides insights into the history of the Assyrian Church of the East, tracing its separation from mainstream Christianity in the 5th century and recounting the tribulations endured by the community during Arab, Mongol, and Ottoman rule. The authors highlight the significant event of 1964 when the Assyrian Church of the East split in two distinct entities: the Assyrian Church of the East and the Ancient Church of the East. Panchetti and Mollica delve into the tragic events of the *Sayfo* ("genocide") targeting the Assyrian people during World War I under the Ottoman Empire. They discuss the

Assyrians' participation in the 1919 Paris Conference, where they sought political support for the creation of an Assyrian state but were ultimately unsuccessful. However, they were granted constitutional citizenship in the Turkish Republic. The authors expand on the Assyrian population in both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, also discussing the legal provisions that prohibited those who had left their land from returning and repurchasing land that had fallen into state ownership. Additionally, they address the portrayal of Assyrians as traitors in state propaganda.

Chapter 10, titled “The Forgotten Armenians: the Armenians in Turkey”, by Philip O. Hopkins, focuses primarily on the slaughters of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, including the Hamidian massacres often overlooked by other authors who predominantly study the events of 1915. Before delving into these historical atrocities, Hopkins provides a brief overview of the social and religious status of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. In the concluding section, he reflects on the present-day Armenian population in Turkey, examining their number and involvement in the society.

The significance of the book lies in its comprehensive coverage by a diverse array of experts, both Turkish authors of varying ethnic and religious background and renowned scholars who delve into various ethnic and religious entities. While addressing much discussed topics such as Kurds and Alevis, the book also sheds light on minority groups that have been often overlooked and marginalized throughout history. They include communities not officially recognized as minorities by national and international laws such as the Zaza, Laz, Circassians, Arabs, Assyrians, Yezidis, and Molokans. By examining these diverse and less-discussed groups, the book offers a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of Turkey's ethno-religious landscape. It provides insights into the experiences, struggles, and contributions of these communities, contributing to a richer appreciation of Turkey's cultural diversity and historical complexity.

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