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Exclusively in the new print issue of CounterPunch

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SEPTEMBER 04, 2014



Know Your Yazidi

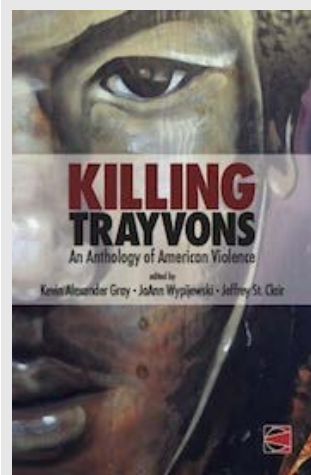
Who, What and Where are Iraq’s Turkmen?

by BARBARA NIMRI AZIZ

Know your Yazidi. An anthropological sketch will assure support for US and Peshmarga military advances across Iraq, and sequester a competing other minority—Iraq’s Turkmen.

International concern in Iraq pivots around saving the Yazidi people. Christians seem to count too; the Shabak also merit some attention. One can only applaud humanitarian support for any threatened population. But why the total dismissal of their neighbors and fellow Iraqis, the Turkmen? They too are at **grave risk**. Augmenting Al-Mufti’s account from the ground is **a report** noting how, “While the European Parliament ... officially acknowledges the situation faced by minorities in ISIS occupied Iraq, their resolution ... [2014/2716(RSP)] made no specific mention of Iraqi Turkmen... among the worst affected”.

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Save The World, Really?

Yes, Iraqi Turkmen are among millions now terrorized by the insufferable ISIS. Turkmen's expulsion is not new however. A review of their history over the past decade reveals a pattern of forced removal from cities and villages across north Iraq. Not by ISIS, by American allies: Iraqi Kurds.

Telafar, a majority Turkmen city of 200,000 was all but **depopulated** beginning in 2003 when Kurdish Peshmarga reportedly conducted massacres there; attacks targeting Turkmen continued thereafter. This coincided with a **political campaign** to absorb ancient Kirkuk City along with Ninevah and Diyala provinces by Kurdish authorities. In 2009 the parliament of Kurdistan voted on a constitution to claim these areas, extending Kurdish rule beyond Suleimaniya, Dohok and Irbil. Mass Kurdish migration into Turkmen homelands displaced Turkmen, creating new facts-on-the-ground. In 2011 the **Peshmarga Kurdish militia** occupied Kirkuk, ostensibly to protect local inhabitants. The Turkmen National Front has been struggling with little success to push back Kurdish takeovers. They've no militia of their own and support from Baghdad, always weak, has now collapsed.

International news and human rights agencies consistently disregarded Kurdish advances into Turkmen areas. Today too. Turkmen are being whited-out of the picture. Why? It appears to be part of a strategy to consolidate Kurdish claims over all the Turkmen homelands.

Kurds took command of Kirkuk a month ago, again "to save" the city, this time from ISIS. The Peshmarga militia is a major US ally; resupplied with heavy weapons, it's now engaged with the US military to push ISIS out of Mosel.

We may find Kurdistan awarded full control over Ninevah and Diyala-provinces they have long coveted. Its illegitimate constitutional claim becomes a reality.

One does not seek to tarnish one people at the expense of another. But the current situation in northern Iraq suggests it's more than a heroic drive to protect endangered civilians. Here is an opportunity to answer Kurdish territorial and political ambitions.

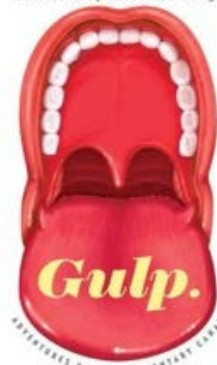
Iraq's Turkmen are ancient inhabitants of Iraq. Estimates of their numbers vary from 1-3 million: possibly 13% of the population, Iraq's third main ethnic group. Turkmen are well known as loyal Iraqi nationals, Shiia and Sunni. They speak Turkish and Arabic. They've used just means to hold onto their rights and their homeland. And they deserve to be heard and embraced. Even as observers, let's not be manipulated by the divide-and-rule policies of others which have done so much harm across this land.

Barbara Nimri Aziz is a veteran anthropologist and journalist. Her latest book is *Swimming up the Tigris: Real Life Encounters in Iraq* (2007).

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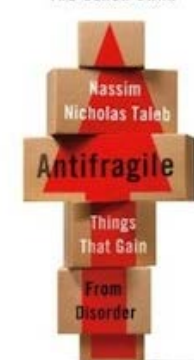
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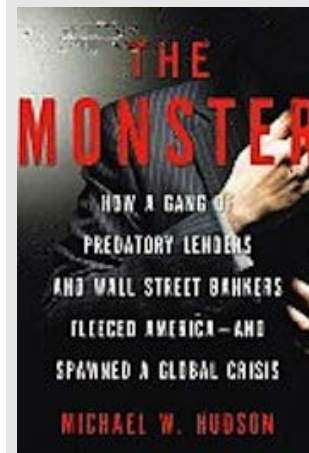


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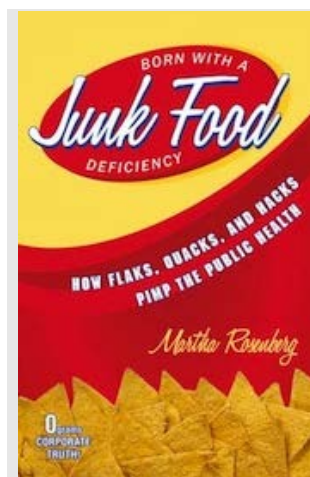
DAVID YEARSLEY

That Sidewalk Sound

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