The London School of Economics and Political Science

Expanding War, Expanding Capital:
Contemporary Capitalism in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology of the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
London, October 2018

For

my grandfather Necati Eskioğlu and grandmother Behire Eskioğlu,

who raised me with so much love and care,

&

the workers who left their homes to earn a living...

Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

I declare that my thesis consists of 84, 908 words.

Abstract

This thesis explores a heterogeneous migrant labour force, particularly Kurdish workers from Southeast Turkey, working at a private steel mill outside Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The wider context is one of war, population displacement, political disintegration, and economic instability. The dissertation builds on ethnographic fieldwork conducted over a period of 16 months between November 2014 and February 2016 southwest of Erbil, ten miles away from the town of Gwer, the then ISIS–Kurdistan Region of Iraq war front. It demonstrates how political and economic fragmentation created a zone for the appropriation and super-exploitation of cheap material and human resources and facilitated an expansion of unregulated capitalism in the region. In this process, industrial production has been freed from the cost and constraint of labour, as war, political disintegration, and Kurdish nationalism created not only coercion but also consent for the corporate control of local resources. It is under this articulation that the steel mill manufactured a field of experiment in organization, industrial production, and labour relations, in a manner exemplary of contemporary capitalism.

The dissertation opens with a discussion of relational and holistic approaches to labour, accumulation, and capitalism. It then moves to examine the Hiwa district as a frontier landscape between the relative stability and security of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the insecurity and instability of the conflict zones of Iraq, Syria and South-Eastern Turkey. Chapters 1 and 2 describe how production and destruction, regulated and unregulated markets, and deregulation and criminalization are functionally integral to the recycling of scrap to which the steel mill owes its expansion. Chapters 3 and 4 turn from the fragmented landscape to labour relations, and examine the heterogeneous workforce, composed of migrant men from India, Syria, Turkey, Iran, and the rest of Iraq, whose labour has been made cheap through distinct formal and informal work practices within the wider dynamics of war, dislocation, and deregulation in the region. Complementary to this structural analysis, Chapters 5 and 6 turn to individual life stories of migrant labourers, focusing on how they experience uncertainties ranging from everyday employment insecurities to the life-threatening risk of HIV infection in a frontier region. In so doing, the thesis aims to document the moral and material consequences of contemporary capitalism in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq for migrant workers on a more intimate level.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Theoretical Issues

Introduction 13

A Relational and Holistic Approach to Capitalism, Accumulation, Labour, and Class 15

Contradictory Articulations of Nationalism, Regional State, and Capital in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq 23

Case Study

The Geographical and Historical Context 31

A Time for the Kurds 34

The Economic Transformation 36

Uncertain Neoliberal Times and Alternative Futures 41

Entering the Field 45

Locating the Hiwa District 53

Outline of the Chapters 58

Chapter 1

Capitalization of a Landscape in Conflict

Introduction 61

The Evil Within/Without 62

Landscape of Violence 65

Neighbouring ISIS 66

Insecurity as a Structure of Feeling 68

Accumulation in the Wild 72

Conclusion 79

Chapter 2

Capitalization of War Debris

Introduction 81

The Fragile, Metallic Mill 81

War Scrap 83

Scrap Merchants 85

Storing Scrap 89
Recycling Scrap 93
Morality of Metal Recycling on the Frontier 98
Conclusion 105

Chapter 3

Capitalization of Weak Labour

Introduction 106
A Refugee Labour Reserve at the Factory Gate 107
Contracted Indian Migrant Labourers 112
Physical and Social Separations of Labour 117
Conclusion 123

Chapter 4

Ethnic Labour and Flexibilization of Production

Introduction 126
Instability and the Rotation System 127
Ethnic Context of the Rolling Mill 130
Ethnic Fatherhood and Rotations 132
Rotations as Seen by Labour 140
Conclusion 146

Chapter 5

Bargaining with Patriarchy and Market

Introduction 149
Instability as Context 150
Remittance Cash 153
The Never-Ending House 155
Rupture 157
Movement 161
Restoration 164
Conclusion 166

Chapter 6

Contradictory Moralities of Sex, Work, and Body

Introduction 168
Dark Purple Spots 169
Ruby, the Filipino Masseuse 170
How to Have Sex? 173
Labour Deportations 176
Societal and Moral Setting of HIV/AIDS 178
Working Until Death 180
Conclusion 185

Conclusion: Contradictions

Inconsistent Field Notes. 187
Heterogeneity 188
Uncertainty 192
Negotiation 194

Bibliography 197

Appendix 221

List of Figures

Figure 1. Map of Iraqi Kurdistan..... 32

Figure 2. A widely used picture of Moll Mustafa Barzani..... 34

Figure 3. Erbil's skyscrapers..... 40

Figure 4. The Clock Tower..... 42

Figure 5. Baram's Parrot..... 47

Figure 6. The steel mill..... 49

Figure 7. The Location of Hiwa district and the steel mill..... 53

Figure 8. The landscape of Hiwa district..... 54

Figure 9. A plan of the steel mill..... 56

Figure 10. The war front and Hiwa district, 2015..... 63

Figure 11. The Herki village..... 64

Figure 12. The scrap metal piles in the Hiwa district..... 75

Figure 13. The giant mill on the right of the Erbil–Gwer road..... 82

Figure 14. Yousef picking through scrap in the yard..... 86

Figure 15. The scrap metal yard..... 91

Figure 16. Shells and explosives found in the war scrap..... 92

Figure 17. The arrival of an armed Iraqi vehicle..... 93

Figure 18. Scrap is broken into small pieces and placed near the blast furnaces..... 94

Figure 19. Indian furnace tenders working on the night shift..... 95

Figure 20. Semi-finished billets left to cool..... 96

Figure 21. The rolling stand through which hot iron is passed..... 97

Figure 22. Iron bars cut and left to cool..... 98

Figure 23. The World Trade Centre/Gulan Park..... 99

Figure 24. The scrap suspected to have arrived from Silopi..... 103

Figure 25. The Indian Labour Camp 118

Figure 26. The exterior of the Ferman's house. 152

Figure 27. The interior of the Ferman's house 153

Figure 28. Migrant labourers from the region, 2015 221

Figure 29. Migrant labourers from India, 2015 221

Figure 30. Steel companies in the region that proliferated between 2006–2016 222

Figure 31. The Erbil–Gwer Road, 2015 222

Figure 32. The Herki graveyard 223

Figure 33. A scrap metal dealer 223

Figure 34. A scrap metal yard, an area where several scrap traders accumulate scrap 224

Figure 35. A small shrine in one of the rooms in the Indian camp 224

Acknowledgements

For their assistance during the research and the equally arduous following stages of preparing this thesis, there are people to whom I feel grateful more than I could possibly express here. Before everyone else, I would like to thank my supervisors, Martha Mundy and Mathijs Pelkmans, whose wisdom, counsel, and continuous support have been essential to the successful completion of this thesis from the outset. Both generously offered academic and emotional support, guidance, and constructive advice over several years. I also owe Martha Mundy and Richard Saumarez Smith thanks for inviting me to spend a week together with them in their summer house in St Macaire, collecting raspberries and working on the thesis, a time I will never forget.

I have been supported by The Department of Anthropology for the past five years which gave me a warm institutional space along with the amenity and the resources at the London School of Economics – a process which has helped me transform from an economist into an economic anthropologist. Within the department, Gisa Weszkalnys, Mukulika Banerjee, Deborah James, Jason Hickel, Laura Bear, Catherine Allerton, and David Graeber all provided ideas, feedback, and reading suggestions at various points, all of which meant a lot at the time and to this very day. I want to thank Tom Hinrichsen and Yan Hinrichsen for their administrative support, particularly during my fieldwork. Furthermore, absent the group of friends at the LSE during writing, this research would not have been completed. They have always supported me by reading early versions of this work, offering invaluable ideas and critiques, not to mention the emotional welcome I stood in need of at least as much. It is unfortunately beyond my ability to mention each and every single one of them by name here, but I would like to express gratitude to Clelia Viecelli, Gabriela Piña Ahumada, Becky Bowers, Frédéric Pelat, Giovanna Milella Gonzalez, Chiara Arnavas, Sayed Jalal, Hanne Veel, and Giulio Ongaro. Thanks also go to Leston Buell and İpek Potur, who carefully edited the final manuscript with patience.

I owe equal thanks to Lale Yalçın-Heckmann for helping me work through ideas and arguments, reading and commenting on my work during an invitation to the Max Planck Institute, Halle, where I spent three weeks surrounded by a nurturing group of colleagues. I am also grateful to Şevket Pamuk, Mine Eder, Özlem Öz, Edwin Mehmet Nafi Artemel, Sevtap Demirci, Ebru Kayaalp, Çağla Diner, and Devrim Sezer for their continuous advice and support throughout my academic career.

Emel Elif Tuğdar has helped me prepare for fieldwork by putting me in touch with the University of Kurdistan, Hewlêr, which provided me with academic affiliation, allowing me to obtain the residence permit needed to conduct my ethnographic research. For that, I will always remain in her debt. Likewise, I would have been extremely ungrateful if I had not mentioned Yusuf Begg, who proved to be an excellent roommate during the first two months of my fieldwork and helped me establish contacts with the steel mill and its migrant workers. I am deeply beholden to several scholars and friends from the University of Kurdistan, Hewlêr for their continuous support throughout my fieldwork, and to Alex Danilovich, Khaled Salih, Rashid Begg, Anwar Anaid, Sardar Aziz, Ala Ghafur, Michie Will, Sara Salahaddin Mustafa, Asuda Rwandzi, Rebin Fatah, Kamal Chomani, and Ali Hüssein for their guidance and friendship.

This research would never have been completed without the continuous support of the managers and migrant workers at the steel mill. They have looked after me untiringly and assisted me with my research. I will never forget the migrant workers who threw a birthday party for me at the steel mill, while living just ten miles away from ISIS terror, and who taught me how to play cricket in the scrap metal yard full of old artillery shells and casings. To protect their identities, however, I will not mention them by name.

Finally, the last five or so years have been made possible by the constant, loving encouragement of my mother Püren Kuruüzüm who is a famous artist (at least among us), self-acclaimed anarchist grandmother Behire Eskioğlu, and a number of super-best friends outside the world of anthropology – Tuğba Büyükbeşe, Zeynep Merve Uygun, Ömer Besim Çobanoğlu, Melis Kobal, Aylin Yardımcı, Fatih Önder, Tuğba Ülger, Ayşegül Kayaoğlu, Nimetullah Kaplan, and Cihat Arınç – who have always been an inspiration for me. My wife İpek Miscioğlu came to this project in the first year of my PhD; she supported me with her encouragement and unconditional love during my stay near ISIS border and became a best friend during the obsessive final stage of sitting back down after so long a time spent on the go and writing this thesis.

This PhD project was sponsored by the Turkish Ministry of National Education, Studentship. I am very thankful for this generous assistance. I also would like to express endless gratitude to my life-long teacher and friend Tuncay Saygın who trusted me all the way through, signing my studentship documents and agreeing to become a trustee for me after I quit my job at a private bank to become an anthropologist.

Finally, I am also much obliged to Victoria Goddard and Don Kalb for their invaluable inspiration, encouragement, and suggestions provided for the critique and revision of this work. All responsibility for the views expressed remains, of course, with me.

Introduction: Theoretical Issues

Introduction

Iraq was devastated due to expanding wars and resulting refugee crises, as well as handicapping sectarianism, particularly since the 1990s; the region has been further disintegrated by the recent rise and fall of a unique extremist movement known as ISIS.[1] The country's political authority has fragmented along many axes – not just between Kurdish, Sunni Arab, and Shia lines – with the U.S. state-building project having significantly contributed to that fragmentation (Herring and Rangwala 2006:2). Consequently, the turmoil in the region has condemned millions of people to displacement, pushing the life, as they knew it to a precarious and abrupt end. No longer allowed to retain their usual economic activities and resources, those refugees were often forced to embark on extremely precarious journeys across the borders. In this context of political and economic fragmentation and insecurity, thousands have fled to Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish territory in the northeast, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, whose relative calm and prosperity in an otherwise conflict-ridden region attracted not only refugees but also migrants who seek better lives and greater economic opportunities.[2]

It is against the background of this unremitting war, political fragmentation, and disorganization that this dissertation examines the expansion of contemporary industrial capitalism. It focuses on a private steel mill, which I call the Kurdish Steel Mill (KSM), with a sizeable migrant workforce from Turkey, India, and the rest of Iraq, operating in the Hiwa district southwest of Erbil, ten miles away from the town of Gwer along what was at the time the ISIS-Kurdistan Region of Iraq war front.

In the thesis, I focus particularly on the Kurdish migrant labourers coming from Şemdinli, a small town in Southeast Turkey, at the intersection of borders with Iran and Iraq, and document their cultural contexts, processes of differentiation, forms of devaluation and exploitation, class relations, and articulated life-course perspectives, while comparing them to the migrant labourers coming from India and the rest of Iraq.

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[1] See the U.S. Institute of Peace Fact Sheet for a brief current situation in Iraq.

[2] In 2015, nearly a quarter million Syrian refugee were reported as displaced in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, while over 3.3 million Iraqis were forced out of their territories countrywide (see Trafficking in Persons Report 2016).

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 16 months between November 2014 and February 2016 in the region, I examine the recent political and economic fragmentation, uneven legitimacy of the semi-feudal Kurdish quasi-state, rise of the Kurdish 'nation as an imaginary protective shield' (Kalb 2015:50), rural patriarchal kinship organization, aggravating inequalities, and the modern global labour market from 'a relational and processual perspective' (Carrier and Kalb 2015; Kasmir and Carbonella 2008; Kalb 1997). In other words, I study how nationalism, ethnic politics, patriarchal kinship organization, and violence become entangled in structuring 'present-day forms of exploitation and capital accumulation' in 'place' and across 'space', as Narotzky (2017:383) depicted.[3] Within this framework, the thesis examines three relational articulations: integration between the demise of political regimes and the growth of industrial manufacturing and the exploitation of cheap labour; between the globalization of the capitalist value regime and the local ethnic, political, and household governance structures and values; and finally between structural fragmentation and disorganization at the macro level and inconsistencies at the micro level.

Overall, I argue that political and economic fragmentation have created a zone for the appropriation and super-exploitation of cheap material and human resources and facilitated an expansion of unregulated capitalism in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq.[4] Wars and other violent struggles, as well as political and organizational disintegration in the region, have ripped people from their previous livelihoods and resources and disrupted social mechanisms and political sovereignty. The displacement of millions of human beings and the deregulation of the Iraqi Kurdistan landscape induced by the destruction of the centralized Iraqi state have 'accelerated the expansion of a pool of super-exploitable labour' (Smith 2015:33) and free (or nearly free) environmental resources – a process opportune for imperialism to benefit from and to further perpetuate 'inherent-continuous primitive accumulation' (De Angelis 2001:4). Consequently, the process of production became freed of labour regulations and labour rights, erasing the conditions that would lead to class resistance, leaving industrial work a precarious, unsteady, and transitory line of work for most migrant labourers in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It should be underscored that this fragmentation is certainly not devoid of emotional and moral charge. Moral and emotional reactions and

[3] For Narotzky (2017:376–377) the domain for the formation and transformation of actual existing people 'by the articulated forces of capital, labour, and the state' over time, is place. Space, on the other hand, is the abstract assessment of the value of localities in political, symbolic, and economic terms. For her, ethnography is what makes room for us to address the relationship between place and space in making history under the complex processes of capitalist realization.

[4] Resources here include material resources such as war debris, institutional frameworks such as labour, business, and environment regulations, and finally humans with their different skills, kinship relations, and political and status positions.

actions express the connections and disconnections in social relations bound up with the advance of capital (see Goddard 2017:36–37).

In relation to these themes, the thesis attempts to answer the following questions: How do patterns of violence, nationalism, and semi-autonomous political governance and, at the level of individuals, expectations and identities articulate with the recent global capitalist expansion in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq? How do violence and war disengage resources from local political and social control and create consent and coercion for foreign corporate control (Ali Kadri 2014:7)? In what ways does capital disorganize political structures and reduce state capacities? To what extent can the reproduction of household arrangements and of domestic relations be seen as functional for capital in the Kurdish context? How do the vulnerability and exploitation of women relate to discourses of gender and shame in the region? How do labours' priorities change in relation to instabilities in the market? How do unprotected workers process uncertainties and take action (or refrain from taking action) under uncertain circumstances? What are the socially structured inconsistencies, doubts, and ethical dilemmas relating to everyday life under the globalizing value regimes of capital exploitation and accumulation?

A Relational and Holistic Approach to Capitalism, Accumulation, Labour, and Class

As Don Kalb (2015b:51) identified, the expansion of capitalism also means the expansion of its contentions: articulations of accumulation and dispossession, security and insecurity, the establishment of political organizations and declining governance capabilities, economic development and rising inequalities, and the advancement of nationalism and ethnic/racial fragmentations. In other words, separation and irregularity are constantly being manufactured while capital is accelerating in space and over time. Thus, capitalism is neither standardizing, nor unchanging and monolithic; rather, it relies on 'a web of contradictory dynamic relations and interactions' in which people must engage every day, in order to be able to sustain their livelihoods (see Kalb 2015a for a relational Marxian approach into the globalizing value regime of capitalism). In short, capitalism is constructed relationally; it has no location of its own that is separated from the rest of social life in practice, and it is in constant transformation in response to practical environments.

Throughout the thesis, this holistic and relational perspective of capitalism inspired by scholars such as Don Kalb, Victoria Goddard, Sharryn Kasmir, August Carbonella, Jean and John Comaroff, Anna Tsing, Ali Kadri, and Janet Roitman will escort us to explain the

articulations and integrations between different domains of life and unexpected outcomes against the teleological models of capitalism (see Ferguson 1999; De Haan 1999; Breman 2004; Parry 2005 for the ethnographic examples of the unexpected outcomes of capitalist paths).

To build a relational and holistic method to analyse the expansion of capitalism in the context of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, I shall begin with tracing the inheritance of 'Marxist' economic anthropology (see Hann and Hart 2011:73 on why 'French Marxist anthropology enjoyed cult status in the Anglophone world'). Keith Hart (2009) writes, a Marxist 'economic anthropology is a set of analytical constructs of the capitalist mode of production, modified by awareness of the world that preceded and lies outside capitalism'. Thus, exploring not only economic relations and structures, but also those of kinship, of politics, and of ideology is essential for a Marxist economic anthropology (Copans and Seddon 1978:35). Generally speaking, Marxist economic anthropologists would recognize no such autonomous domains as political, economic, or ideological within a capitalist society (Kahn and Llobera 2013:94). As Claude Meillassoux (1972:95) claimed, men are indeed never immune to dependencies, be they social or personal.

By maintaining this holistic approach, Meillassoux (1975:95) elaborated an understanding of the 'organic relations between capitalist and domestic economies' in which imperialism introduced a mechanism for 'reproducing cheap labour power to its profit'. He underscored that 'the capitalist mode of production' compensates the labourer only for his or her instantaneous survival (see Kiely 1995:75–80 for a brief analysis of orthodox and structuralist Marxism). Therefore, what is being paid per hour only pays for the labour power during the time of work. This is why 'preservation of the relations with the village and the familial community is an absolute requirement for the wage-earners, and so is the maintenance of the traditional mode of production [farming] as the only [means] capable of ensuring survival' (Meillassoux 1972:103) – a subject that will be explored here in the context of Kurdish migrant workers travelling between work in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and home in the south-east of Turkey.[5]

Meillassoux (1981 [1975]: 107) reminds us, through the use of cheap migratory labour force, 'capital exploits the domestic community in underdeveloped' states (see Mackintosh 1977:124 for a critique of Meillassoux's [1975] *Femmes, Greniers et Capitaux*). It is here of significance to underscore that the confrontation between distinctive modes of production

[5] See Hill 1975 for an analysis of peripheral capitalism and Marxist perspectives.

'cannot be considered as entailing the substitution of one for the other, but rather their mutual transformation or the dependency of one on the other', according to Meillassoux (1981 [1975]: 96; see also 1978a:150–154, 1978b:159–169). Consequently, Meillassoux (1972:103) highlighted the fact that 'agricultural communities, maintained as reserves of cheap labour, are being both undermined and perpetuated at the same time' under capitalism. In this perspective, capitalism and agricultural communities are in functional integration as well as contradiction. Throughout the thesis, I shall study these articulations and disarticulations in the region not only structurally, but also on a perceptual level.

Neoclassical economic theory regards the economy as a closed system, defining it through the linking of the atomistic and independent components of a system, without any external impact (see Boerger 2016 for ontological premise of neoclassical economics). As Marshall Sahlins (2013:167) argued, economy cannot be dealt with as a separate system, since the 'impact of so-called exogenous factors is a necessary part of any economic explanation'. That is, the domain called economy functions intertwined with the rest of life and as an integral whole. For Marx (2004 [1867]: 899–900), economic production relies on 'extra-economic force' such as state structures for the enforcement of exchange relations. Yet, this exchange system may still come into contradiction with the social relations of non-capitalist exchange structures and their encompassing valuing systems, and capital has to turn to violence and terrorism in order to defeat resistances (De Angelis 2001:3). In short, as is widely acknowledged, *capital never acts alone*.

In his book, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, Jason Moore (2015:65) interpreted modern capitalism as a new way of organizing nature – engaging in environment making and activating the 'work of particular natures in order to appropriate particular streams of unpaid work'. Moore (2015:17) recognizes the function of exploitation in 'extra-economic processes that identify, secure, and channel unpaid work outside the commodity system into the circuit of capital' (see Nayeri 2016 for a review and critique of Jason Moore). In his relational analysis, the appropriation of value is reconstrued as the 'appropriation of cheap nature' operative from the outset of capitalism especially between 1450 and 1650 (see Moore 2000:124, 141). Cheap nature is here understood essentially as the so-called 'four cheaps' of 'labour power', 'food', 'energy', and 'raw materials'. For Moore (2015:53), the current, swiftly enlarging, and ceaselessly inventive expedition to transform the work of the environment/life into assets is what lies at the heart of capitalist expansion. In this process, Moore (2015) acknowledges that capital never acts alone: for surplus value accumulation, extra-economic factors – that is, the articulation of the

market with other domains of life – are at play and central to an adequate comprehension of capitalism.

Primitive accumulation, *as a result of which the practice of accumulation began*, is a key concept here to truly represent how capitalism maintains various life domains relationally interconnected with its rule. As stated by Glassman (2006:610), 'primitive accumulation', first of all, for Marx, is the long-running mechanism of separating 'producer from the means of production'.[6] This is how the farmers were forcefully transformed into proletarians who had nothing more than their labour to sell to companies to survive. Hence, as described by Marx (2004 [1867]: 714), primitive accumulation occurred through destroying the ways of life peculiar to agrarian communities, particularly at a specific time, in a specific location, namely during the enclosures of the commons that took place in England and Scotland.

Rosa Luxemburg's (2003 [1867]: 64) 'continuous primitive accumulation' approach furthered Marx's idea by underlining how capitalist production involves 'a constant and inherent' process of divorcing people from the means of production (see De Angelis 2001:3–4, 13 for elaboration of Rosa Luxembourg's primitive accumulation thesis). For her, the establishment of connections between capitalist and non-capitalist production is essential to surplus value. That is, for Luxemburg (2003 [1867]: 447), capital *continuously* requires others or something outside of itself to develop.

Wallerstein (2000:142) also underscored this point by claiming that 'the situation of free labourers working for wages in the enterprises of free producers is a minority situation in the modern world'; that is, capitalism continuously relied on the preservation of 'non-proletarian' and 'semi-proletarian labour' as much as in the making of proletarian labour (see Glassman 2006:613 for a discussion of Wallerstein and other neo-Marxist scholars in relation to capitalist resistance against the full proletarianization of the labour force). In this process, for Wallerstein too, capital externalizes the social cost of labour.

The articulations and separations of diverse life domains in relation to continuous primitive accumulation are traceable in various historical ethnographic texts. For instance, Mintz (1985) drew attention to the use of arbitrary power and naked violence to the reproduction of capitalism as a synthesis of violent field and factory in the emergence of the global sugar industry. Kalb's (1997) analysis of 'flexible familism' showed the entanglements

[6] De Angelis (2001), reinterpreting Marx, argued that the notion of 'primitive accumulation' is a process that created an essential material circumstance for capitalism to function and to expand (see Glassman 2006:615 for theorizing ongoing primitive accumulation under the globalizing value regime of capitalism; Brown 2013:7 for the application of De Angelis' (2001) formulation of continuous accumulation within the context of 'settler colonialism').

of patriarchal kinship, religion, and capitalist power in an industrial expansion zone. Finally, Federici (2004:115) analysed how the discourse and narrative of 'natural inferiority' (the myth that women are naturally inferior to men) and the patriarchal domination of women's bodies enabled the sexist division of labour and concealed the females' unpaid domestic work, thereby, helping capital to accumulate women's devalued labour. As seen in these historical ethnographic texts, it should be clear by now that capitalist accumulation is always in part parasitic on and articulated with non-capitalist processes.

If we consider contemporary theoretical discussion, we find a recent application of the concept of continuous primitive accumulation in the work of David Harvey (2003). Expanding Luxemburg's 'continuous primitive accumulation', he highlighted the global growth of capitalism and the development of continuous primitive accumulation through a concept called 'accumulation through dispossession' (see Glassman 2006:608–609 for the interpretation of Harvey's thesis of accumulation through dispossession as a continuous primitive accumulation). For Harvey (2003:140–142), neoliberal accumulation by dispossession involves stripping working classes of their social and material means of production and commodifying resources and forms of labour that had been outside the global capitalism's reach. For Harvey, these separations (from material and social resources) are practiced in different forms and extend into two distinct geographies, namely in the 'Global South' (where peasants lose communal land rights and resources) and 'Global North' (where workers lose pensions, retirement benefits, healthcare coverage, and employment security). This rests on a typology of global labour as defined by the North/South divide (see Smith 2016; Kadri 2014; Cope 2012) heavily criticized by Kasmir and Carbonella (2014:6; 2008:8, 19).[7]

If we expand these recent discussions particularly in relation to contemporary economic geography, we find that writers such as John Smith (2016), Ali Kadri (2014), and Zak Cope (2012), likewise David Harvey (2003), have seen that the higher degree of exploitation prevalent in the Global South, as the fundamental driving force allowing capitalism to grow. Smith (2015) has argued that capitalism is being rescued from the stagnation in which it found itself in the 1970s, through the enlargement of the super-exploitation of unprotected and unregulated new, youthful, and female proletarians in low-income countries (see Suwandi 2015 for a discussion on labour arbitration and comparison of Marxist scholars on the geographical division and exploitation of labour). For Smith

[7] Capital is seen by Harvey as *the essential driving force of neoliberal process*; he attributes less significance to the role of labour struggle (see Kasmir and Carbonella 2014:6).

(2015:28–43), today, neoliberal capitalism has expedited the growth of highly exploitable labour by forcing millions of southerners, both workers and farmers, from their work in fields of agriculture and various industries. Zak Cope (2012:202) builds on similar grounds, noting that as manufacturing becomes international, companies rush in to reduce costs and move to the underdeveloped states so as to assure a high profit on the appropriation of weak labour and the control of economically essential natural resources (see Suwandi, Jonna, and Foster 2019 for an analysis of Zak Cope in relation to fighting for low-cost production). Finally, Kadri (2014:8–9) has shown that wars, violent conflicts, and dislocations are inherent to the global economy, which works for the elimination of national means from the possible political control and for the displacement of farmers and workers. In this regard, administrations have been progressively stripped of independence and self-government, and citizens have been robbed of the autonomous mechanisms to own, control, and use their resources for their own advantage. Kadri (2014:4) argues that the drive for wars of 'accumulation-by-encroachment' and dislocation originates in the global crises of capital accumulation, which requires the domination and incorporation of cheap labour in the Third World by U.S.-led capital.

Kasmir and Carbonella's (2015:46) attempt to take a more holistic and relational approach to contemporary primitive accumulation than David Harvey, Zak Cope, John Smith, and Ali Kadri, seeing accumulation not only in varied acts of geographically oriented privatization, enclosure, or dispossession, but also in the 'accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class' across geographies.[8] To briefly summarize the ongoing debate, Harvey (2003:166) complains that the labour movement in the Global North flirted with imperialist capitalism in return for higher wages, leading to the cheapening of labour in the Global South. Nevertheless, Kasmir and Carbonella (2014:4) claim that the conditions of the global North and South are similar today in terms of informal, non-unionized, criminalized, precarious, military, child, and service sector work being common in both.[9] In

[8] Recent ethnographic work building on this line of thought also make it easier to appreciate the relevance of this perspective. For instance, Walker (2004) shows how the exploitation of different labour groups by agricultural businesses has been achieved mostly as a result of continuous differentiating racial practices, thus making the dispossession of labour a perpetual, continuing aspect of agricultural accumulation (Walker 2004:66 cited in Glassman 2006:618). An understanding of the relation between detachment and transformation in the Northeast U.S. has been made by Carbonella (2014), who indicated how waves of constant deficiency depended upon the making of ethnic and social dissimilarities and the creation of inequalities among workers in the paper and forest industry. Finally, Kasmir (2014) highlighted the long-standing dispossession of U.S. autoworkers since 1980s stressing how GM's Saturn project led to segregations and ruptured solidarity among the organized labour, demonstrating how distinction is continuously manufactured and sustained over time to exploit cheap workers and reproduce accumulation.

[9] I stand closer to scholars such as John Smith, Zak Cope, and Ali Kadri here, emphasizing the distinct processes

this manner, Kasmir and Carbonella (2014:6) aim to move beyond old dichotomies of working class versus poor, formal versus informal, waged versus non-waged, and North versus South in the pursuit of connections between working humans who are inversely marked by the global processes of capital accumulation. Their approach is to develop a relational and holistic understanding of accumulation, which for them necessitates a focus on connecting relationally distinct struggles and moral discourses against dispossession (see Kasmir and Carbonella 2008:22).

At this point, Sylvia Federici (2004) offers an illuminating example of dispossession by showing how the sexual division of labour emerged over the course of the long transition to capitalism in Western Europe. Federici (2004:63) indicated that intra-group differences and divisions, including gender, race and age for the workers are simultaneously hardened. As Kasmir and Carbonella (2015:11) explained in relation to Federici's argument (2004), the life blood of labour exploitation and value accumulation is 'the making and remaking of such differences and divisions', a continuous process. This brings us to Kasmir and Carbonella's (2015:56) conceptualization of labour as a relational category that points to the politically loaded routes of categorizing, separating, or merging the various ways of being labour. Seen from this perspective, labour denotes *the making of difference and similarity*, as clarified by Don Kalb (2015b:56).

Drawing on this line of thought, I understand continuous primitive accumulation as the appropriation of racial, ethnic, and regional political and cultural distinctions among the fragmented labour force in the steel mill.[10] Relying on such a relational and holistic study of the experiences and historical relationships of migrant working men within the spatial process of global capitalism, I shall document how ethnic/religious/racial/physical separations are functionally integrated with the exploitation of labour in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Through industrialization and state-building, war and displacement, nationalism and ethnic politics, contemporary capitalism has produced a range of new and distinct labour relations, classes, and labour struggles in the region. In this process, violence increasingly served to differentiate and disorganize labour. The resulting insecurity of the ongoing war, and the lack of organization in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq labour market, left workers as atomized and weak individuals differentiated by regionalism, skill, ethnicity, language, and

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and rate of exploitation in 'the Global South'. However, I agree with Kasmir and Carbonella (2014) that this position should not create binary opposite categories of labour, as it is politically incorrect to divide labour, a division that is itself a tool of capital accumulation.

[10] For Goddard (2017:37–38), the identification and pursuit of alternative forms of value and labour are required here, that is, engaging with different moral and symbolic orders and the pursuit of alternative frameworks through which things and persons are connected, while paying attention to people's everyday life.

religion against the capital. Labour has been further divided according to the degree of their proletarianization depending on their livelihood conditions such as kinship ties, legal status, and party affiliations, and competitive positions in the local labour markets from which they come. Consequently, the differential processes of racial, ethnic, and gender violence, war, dispossession, disorganization, and global capital flows created a flux of formal, informal, flexible, bonded, criminalized, military, and refugee labourers working side by side.

As Don Kalb (2015b:54) wrote, labour is not solely 'the Fordist blue collar worker' but rather denotes 'all those human acts necessary to produce life, to reproduce life, independent of the exact relationships such labour maintains within the networks of capital and the ways in which capital gleans surplus value from it.' Seen from this perspective, it was also crucial in this case to explore and to document connections and interrelations of distinct labouring populations under the expansion of contemporary accumulation (see Carbonella and Kasmir 2014:25).

Building a holistic and relational perspective to contemporary capitalism and accumulation also has implications for the Marxist notion of class. Kalb (1997:9–10) expanded the scope of class by treating it as 'a form of social domination, determined largely by changing relations of production', yet also fabricated by social and cultural dynamics such as livelihood patterns, patriarchal culture, ethnicity, age, and religion. Thus, in this formulation, class does not arise primarily from the point of production, as Kalb (2015c:18) underscored; rather 'wider market conditions determine exploitation or life chances'. Seen from this perspective, as Friedman (2015:192) wrote, class then is 'a distribution of positions within the field of social reproduction that is a product of the logics of that reproduction'.

Drawing on Kalb's (1997) relational theoretical insight on class, throughout the thesis I shall also focus on the historically embedded, shifting relations between social groups as they are linked through manufacturing at the factory and reproduction in the wider context of political and economic relations in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Overall, the thesis attempts to sketch the interconnected, shifting, and antagonistic web of social relations in relation to capitalism in a particular site. For Elias (1978 [1970]: 74), power is 'polymorphous', that is, many-sided and inherent in all human relationships, and to understand it, the 'interdependency' is of great significance. It is this holistic and relational approach to the articulation of polymorphous power that will help us to hypothesize capitalism (and its subjectivities) not so much as deterministic and consistent, but as shifting, dynamic, and contradictory in the context of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Contradictory Articulations of Nationalism, Regional State, and Capital in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq is both a part of and apart from Iraq: it has yet to become an independent state in the global organization of states, but its informal powers outstrip the formal powers of the state of Iraq (see Soguk 2015 for the analysis of Iraqi Kurdistan as a liminal political organization between political independence and a semi-autonomous regional government). With an elected parliament, a cabinet, a president, a flag, a Foreign Relations Ministry, a booming oil economy, and separate business and oil laws and policies, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq exists empirically as a state, albeit not formally declared or recognized as such politically (Soguk 2015:958).

It is indeed this web of tension and fluid conditions that manufactures a fertile place (and space) and chaotic environment for international capital to extract profit in an atmosphere of rising nationalism and political fragmentation. In other words, fragmentation (a resource for capital here) resulting from the combination of the division of the Iraqi state and the deployment of neoliberalism in the region is both an apparatus and a result of a recent imperialist governance (see Rigi 2008 for how neoliberalism in the North Caucasus is articulated with the Chechen War; Ali Kadri 2014 for how neoliberalism is articulated with the Iraqi War in 2003).[11]

Geographical areas open to chaos and violence, with exploitable resources, are propitious for what Georg Elwert (1999) referred to as 'markets of violence'. For him (1999:24), violence is 'used to maximise profit to such an extent that it is on a par with other economic methods' particularly in the context of fragile or failed states stuck in armed conflicts and political corruption. The 'market of violence makes the (relatively) higher wages and profit opportunities in the violent market sector absorb workforce and capital' (Elwert 1999:15). According to Elwert (1999:3), markets of violence can be found in geographies where criminalization, militarization, and resource extraction become articulated (for ethnographic settings of the articulation of violence with markets see Watts 2012, 2014 for Nigeria; Rigi 2008 for the Caucasus; Roitman 2005, 2004 for the Chad Basin of Africa, Ferguson 2005 for Angola). Correspondingly, important features of the Iraqi Kurdistan landscape can be also interpreted as a violent regime of accumulation, with the effect of

[11] See Rigi (2007, 2004) for the emergence of the 'chaotic mode of domination' and violence in the Chechen War of the 1990s as the ruling elite's reaction to 'the late Soviet crisis of hegemony'. In this respect, the 'chaotic mode of domination' was a tool by which 'the communist elites' of the past reshuffled their forces not just to hold onto their power and privileges, but also to enlarge them.

Regional Government power being to maximize the conditions for capital accumulation regardless of the aftermath for labour or social well-being.

It should be noted at this point that markets of violence involve dual life organizations. On the one hand, there are 'violence fields' in which violence offers an efficient tool for disorganizing and appropriating human and material resources from previous livelihoods and ecologies. On the other hand, there are 'violence-free' realms in which the markets are linked and reproduced, through national or international organizations and institutions, to the rest of the world (Elwert 1999:4). These two fields, which seem to be opposites, are intertwined with each other. In this case, cheap human resources and raw materials are provided from one side, while the accumulated surplus value is maintained and globally captured, secured, and circulated on the other. Otherwise speaking, these two seemingly distinct ways of organizing life are mutually interdependent and bound up functionally, as also in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Nationalism is particularly nurtured in these dual economic and social organizations. In the Iraqi Kurdistan context, ISIS declared a caliphate that aimed to reconquer the Muslim lands of Iraqi Kurdistan and to restore them to the Muslim nation. Kurdish forces rushed to capture the field left by Iraqi military forces that fled areas as ISIS forces approached. Iraq assumed control over several of the disputed areas held by Kurdish troops. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq stood right in the middle of all these different claims and movements. Consequently, violence heightened nationalism, uniting the Kurds against the ISIS terrorism and the oppressive governments of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, while at the same time foreign corporations became synonymous with the nationwide emancipation of the Kurds and development of the Kurdish state.

In this process, 'the rhetoric of transition' (transition from an Iraqi past to an independent Kurdish state) functionally masked the practical actions of the KRG and its corporate partners on the ground, as well as the social reality of privileging corporate control of national resources (see Frederiksen and Knudsen 2014:2–10 on 'the transition paradigm' and its critique). Similar to what Frederiksen (2014a:309) has shown about the concept of transition from Soviet socialism to market capitalism in the context of Georgia, the workings of the political administration in the KRG were legitimized by a final goal of political and economic independence to which contemporary accumulation was to be but a stepping stone. Capitalism in this context combined imperialism functionally with independence and more importantly and ironically with the Kurdish nationalism. That is, nationalism integrated with violence became a means of capital accumulation to create citizens commensurable with the

neoliberal theft or what David Harvey more politely termed accumulation through dispossession. Correspondingly, I here take ethnic war, nationalism, and violence as the epitome of processes of capitalist development and industrialization, and claim that the rising nationalism and state development in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is intimately articulated with the expansion of global accumulation.

It should be noted at this point that a Marxist interpretation of the character of today's Iraqi Kurdistan departs from the principal themes of scholarship on the region more generally. If we turn to the sociological and political science literature on the Kurds, particularly in Iraq and Turkey, nationalism (Iraq), ethnic separatism (Turkey), political violence (Turkey and Iran), and Kemalist modernization (Turkey) seem to be the dominant concerns of scholars (see Bengio 2014, 2012; Shareef 2014; Kirmanj 2014, 2013; Gunter and Ahmed 2013; Lowe and Stansfield 2010; Romano and Gurses 2014; Houston: 2008; Romano 2006; O'Leary, McGarry, and Salih 2005), followed by racial segregation and involuntary migration (see Yegen 2016, 1999); trauma, memory, and life story narratives (see Alinia 2013; Fischer-Tahir 2012; Davis 2005); and gender politics (see Alinia 2013; King 2013, 2008; King and Stone 2010).[12]

Most recent work on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq particularly highlighted ethnicity, assimilation, racism, nationalism, self-determination, and state-building efforts as explanatory factors for the recent transformation in the Kurdish north (see Gurbey, Hofmann, and Seyder 2017; Bengio 2014, 2012; Shareef 2014; Kirmanj 2014, 2013; Romano and Gurses 2014; Gunter and Ahmed 2013; Lowe and Stansfield 2010; Natali 2012, 2010, 2005; Romano 2006). With recent political developments, the Kurds have had a historic opportunity to promote self-determination and build their ethnic, sovereign state, hence the popularity of political explanations (see Houston 2017; 2008:92–96). By contrast, scholars devoted little attention either to the integration of capitalism, the regional semi-autonomous political structure, and nationalism, or to individuals whose life has been dramatically changed by the contemporary regional capitalist transformation.[13]

The perspectives of political scientists formed an invaluable resource for understanding the Kurdish political landscape, but were of limited use to understand today's capitalism and its local articulation with the discourse of state-building and Kurdish nationalism. The emergence of the Kurdistan Region in federal Iraq after the invasion of the

[12] See Houston 2017 for a brief literature review on the Kurds and Kurdistan.

[13] Exceptions can be made for works of Mills (2016), Paasche and Mansurbeg (2014), Gray (2012), some Kurdish economists (Aziz 2017; Heshmati 2010; Noori 2012), and the theses of Kurdish graduate students in Iraqi Kurdistan, such as Waladbagi (2015), Al-Jaleel (2015), Tahseen (2015), and Salih (2011).

country by U.S.-led allied forces and the subsequent 'carbon-based economic transformation' in the region brought new questions of industrialization, environmental degradation, and increasing inequality (see Mitchell 2011 for the relationship between 'carbon-based economic transformation', imperial interest, and cartel formation from a historical perspective). I certainly depart from the political science literature by seeing nationalism and state-building in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq not as an end in itself, but as a mechanism of continuous capital accumulation. In this respect, one of the matters I explore and document in the thesis is how bureaucratization ensures a degree of organization and assurance along the chain of patronage and profit in transferring resources to foreign corporate control, while violence is turning the region into a scrap wasteland and divorcing humans of the region from their material and social means of production.

In the ethnographic literature on the Kurds (King 2014, 2008; Yalçin-Heckmann 1991; Van Bruinessen 1992; Beşikçi 1969; Barth 1954, 1953; Leach 1940), scholars have generally focused on rural topographies of Kurdish society. Ethnographies (in particular Van Bruinessen 1992; Beşikçi 1969) engage in a repetitive debate over the extent of the domination and exploitation of tribesmen by aghas, while this simultaneously affective and exploitative relationship remains under-theorized, as scant attention is paid to the subject's own experience and understanding, as Houston (2017; 2008:93) wrote.[14] Living for a long time in the midst of individuals who express their hopes, fears, dilemmas, and insecurities, ethnographers are indeed in an excellent position to chart the experience and ambiguities of kinship (see Peletz 2001:414 and Sarkisian 2006:804–806). Nevertheless, scholars seem to have devoted little attention to ambivalence and ambiguities in kinship structures and to have failed to develop a nuanced sense of kinship relations and rural life (see Houston 2008:72–96). Finally yet importantly, there also seems to be limited interest in documenting sexuality, marriage, family roles, relations, and expectations under the capitalist transformation in the region except, to some extent, in King's (2014) ethnographic work, *Kurdistan on the Global Stage: Kinship, Land, and Community in Iraq*. By moving beyond the shop floor and focusing on the individual life experiences of Kurdish migrant workers towards to the end of the thesis, I shall document the boundaries and ambiguities of sexuality, masculinity, marriage, household relations, and everyday life in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

[14] Within the tribal structure, agha (elder brother) is the title given to tribal chieftains, either supreme chieftains or village heads. The title is also given to wealthy landlords and owners of major properties in urban Kurdish centres. In the Iraqi Kurdish context, 'an agha is typically a Sunni Muslim Kurd, a tribal chief who owns the land on which peasants sharecrop and on which they depend for their livelihood' (King 2014:70).

I am constantly referring to the contemporary capitalist transformation, so let's start talking a little bit about what happened in the region. Following Iraq's post-invasion constitution of 2005, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, now a semi-autonomous region in the north, adopted an investment law in July 2006, which turned business into an untaxed and unregulated activity. The Kurdistan Board of Investment (KBOI) was established in the same year to draw foreign investments and link potential profitable businesses with the elites in power and their close partners in business. Equally significant, The Kurdistan Region of Iraq Oil and Gas Law (2007) completed the legal part of the capitalist transformation by opening the Kurdistan Region of Iraq up as a new resource space for international and corporate oil exploration and extraction. Compared to this, unsurprisingly, there has been little institutionalization and regulation in the fields of human rights, anti-corruption, ecological protection, agriculture, and the labour market in the region. As a result, the capacities of the new Regional Government have thus been subordinated to facilitate and to assist unregulated foreign capital accumulation, violating a fundamental precondition for local democratic governance.

In the process of developing a new unregulated Kurdish market, earlier Iraqi state defences were progressively dismantled by the U.S.-controlled post-war Iraqi Government, and arrangements for collective self-defence, such as trade unions and other instruments for collective bargaining, were disempowered by the new Kurdistan Region of Iraq administration (Kadri 2014:2-4). In Iraqi Kurdistan, what replaced the old structures of the Iraqi central state was not a new form of rule of law, but a kind of free-for-all capitalist space, where risk-taker companies and entrepreneurs from the West built partnerships with the KRG, profiting from asset-stripping and buying up cheap and weak labour and unregulated material resources (see Pine 2015:34 for comparison in the context of the transition succeeding the termination of the Soviet Union).

The introduction of new neoliberal laws alongside a discourse of building a future Kurdish state rendered the neoliberal economic conversion not only functioning, but also legitimate. Thus, economic growth through international companies and their investments have been interpreted as an essential condition for welfare and security in the recently established Iraqi Kurdistan. In this framework, the goal of the KRG has been seen as encouraging entrepreneurship at every level, purportedly to expedite the growth of a financially self-sustainable polity in the north of Iraq (see Tsing's 2003:5103 for the role of political structures in the destruction of Kalimantan forests). It is in this articulation, as argued earlier, that nationalism manufactured a degree of consent and legitimacy for the

appropriation of local social and material resources by corporate control, in the name of political independence and social well-being.

It is in this business-friendly context that the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has been transformed over the last decade from a marginalized region into a new capitalist frontier area for oil exploration and exploitation, reconstruction contracts, and cheap commodity imports from Turkey, Iran, and China (see Natali 2010:82–83 for the economic transformation of Iraqi Kurdistan between 1995 and 2015).[15] It has been revealed that the economy of Iraqi Kurdistan has grown between 6 and 12 per cent each year from 2006 to 2012, at a time when the world was dealing with a global economic crisis starting in 2008 (see Invest in Group 2013a). Yet, in the meantime of economic boom, the region has also seen the proliferation of shady entrepreneurs and the expansion of inequality, human trafficking, sex trafficking, forced labour, kidnappings, ethnic, religious, and political conflicts, and violence (see Trafficking in Persons Report 2016).

Within this economic growth, the two ruling families (Barzani and Talabani) and their political parties served a stimulating role in the petroleum, telecommunication, construction, and steel sectors in the region. It became exceptionally difficult to distinguish domestic, foreign, and government ownerships in the booming Kurdish market, given the mix of investors, the central importance of patronage, and the slippage between political parties and private enterprise (compare Tsing 2003:5103 in relation to the role of president's family in the plantation economy of Indonesia). Analogous to what Tsing (2005, 2003) revealed in the case of making of a resource frontier, through the collaboration of state, military, and foreign companies, in the eastern part of South Kalimantan during the 1990s, the porous boundaries between public and private, foreign and local, and legal and illegal particularly allowed the expansion of capital, and the appearance of the market entrepreneurship itself in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.[16]

On the Hooghly River in Kolkata, Laura Bear (2011:47) observed that political governance formed decentralized business and improvisations along networks that cross between state and corporations. She argued that the role of bureaucrats has been utterly reduced to stimulating partnerships, extracting revenue, and finding cheap, fast ways of

[15] As specified in the Iraqi constitution approved in 2005, the federal government in Baghdad agreed to allocate 17 per cent of Iraq's national budget to the Kurdish region, amounting to about US$1 billion per month.
[16] While the recent expansion of oil extraction stands out in this case, the expansion of rubber plantations forms the basis of frontier economy and patchwork governance and polity in Tsing's (2005, 2003) ethnography.

raising income for the state.[17] Correspondingly, here too, the Kurdish bureaucracy and the role of public employees in the region have been effectively reduced 'to connect' and 'to back' foreign venture capital in the region for individual wealth accumulation. All these considered, at this point, it might be necessary to ask what is the effect of all these capitalist transitional relations on the state in the case of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq?

In his book, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times,* Giovanni Arrighi (1994:34) has underscored that there is a 'recurrent contradiction between an "endless" accumulation of capital and a comparatively stable organization of political space'. Lash and Urry (1987) has shown a recent increase in the contradiction between political space and capital, in particular, following the termination of 'organized capitalism' and the appearance of 'disorganized capitalism', which is the growing spatial and functional deconcentration and decentralization of corporate control.[18] Cumings (1993:25) mentioned the term 'capitalist archipelago' to refer to East and Southeast Asian 'islands' of capitalism that benefit from a busy web of business exchanges with the rest of the world. For him, behind their 'success' story, however, are highly exploited workers and usurpation of material resources (see Arrighi 1994:23). Lastly, Ferguson (2005) has shown that particular forms of global integration in some African countries wealthy in mineral resources have been coexisting 'with specific – and equally global – forms of exclusion and marginalization'. He (2005:380) emphasized that capital interacts with territorialisation selectively in a patchwork of transnationally networked places where 'oil fields are secured, enclaved, and globally networked' whilst the surrounding area may be simply abandoned to violent chaos for which old animosities and corrupt rulers could be blamed. In brief, all these scholars have emphasized that contemporary uneven capitalism is expanding by separating, differentiating, and manufacturing inequality, and in doing this, it particularly upholds a polity based on patchworks of regulations, functions, and strategies to reproduce its exploitation and accumulation.

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq is another exemplary of heterogeneous and uneven development of contemporary capitalism (and governance), and a significant showcase for the contradictions of capitalism. Far from a 'developmentalist' state that creates nationwide homogenization and standardization of territories and populations, the Regional Government

[17] See Bear 2011 for a similar ethnography of the Kolkata Port Trust during liberalization in India, as her study tells the stories of how boatmen, shipyard workers, port bureaucrats, and river pilots on the Hooghly River engage in helping to extract profit from unregulated labour in networks that cross the line between state and corporations.

[18] See Arrighi 1994:2–3, 34–35, 76–77, 345 for a historical discussion of contradictory relationship between capital and state in relation to Robert Jackson, Charles Tilly, Bruce Cumings, and Scott Lash and John Urry.

generated forms of exclusion and marginalization by selectively developing its institutions and territorial governance in tandem with global oil and business corporations.[19] Thus, here, as unstable environments expanded (disengaging local resources from political control), 'selectively territorialized capital' advanced (see Ferguson 2005:378).

In examining the origin and endurance of Third World countries since the end of the Second World War, Jackson (1990) termed 'quasi states' to describe political entities that have been given statehood in theory but remain incapable of performing all functions traditionally required by sovereignty. He explained that these states rely more on the backing of the international political forces (or let's directly say imperialism) than on the capacities and strengths of their own administrations and citizens. Similarly, I see the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as a type of a quasi-state, situated and reproduced by the international capital in an ambiguous legal but economically productive site, between a semi-autonomous region within Iraq and a member of the interstate system, which creates a fertile universe for capital to develop nationalism, violence, and patchwork polity as instruments of resource extraction, cheap industrial production, and unregulated accumulation.

In the next chapter, we shall start with a short review of Iraqi Kurdistan, the location of the field site and the site of the case study, and reflections on the nature of the field study on which this dissertation draws.

[19] By focusing on capital investment in Angola and the spatial configuration of oil extraction, Ferguson (2005) argued that venture capital was aggregated in secured enclaves, following an increasing capitalist growth model in the world, as also in Sudan and Iraq, connecting mineral-rich enclaves with capitalist production and disconnecting local resources from the rest of the local populations.

The Case Study

The Geographical and Historical Context

Prior to the case study, a word or two regarding the geographical, political, and economic background of Iraqi Kurdistan is in order, for readers not entirely familiar with the region. In contemporary usage, 'Kurdistan' denotes parts of northern Iraq (Iraqi Kurdistan), north-eastern Syria (Syrian Kurdistan), north-western Iran (Iranian Kurdistan), and south-eastern Turkey (Turkish Kurdistan). For their part, 'Kurdish nationalists who wish to represent Kurdistan as a single ethno-national territory' speak of Northern Kurdistan (*Bakurê Kurdistanê*) for the Turkish region, Southern Kurdistan (*Başûrê Kurdistanê*) for the Iraqi region, Eastern Kurdistan (*Rojhilatê Kurdistanê*) for the Iranian, and Western Kurdistan (*Rojavayê Kurdistanê*) for the Syrian region (Bengio 2012:2).

As Dahlman (2002:274) underscored, there is no accurate population count for the Kurds, and wherever there is actually a count, the figures remain drastically unreliable given the political ambitions of minimizing the size of the Kurdish populations by Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Notwithstanding, various estimates indicate that the Kurds represent a population of between 30 and 40 million in the wider region. There are some 12–22 million Kurds in Turkey, 5–8 million in Iran and 2–2.5 million in Syria. Finally, Iraqi Kurdistan claims 5.2 million inhabitants, but Baghdad defends a figure of only 4.3 million, excluding the Kurdish populations on the disputed territories (Mills 2016:2).[20] It should be also noted that the disputed boundaries of the area under KRG rule, particularly around the oil-rich cities of Kirkuk, Sinjar, and Makhmur, also encircle substantial Arab and Turkoman communities, as well a sizeable refugee population of Syrians and Iraqis, alike, who have fled the war in Syria and ISIS-controlled territories in the region.[21]

[20] A number of related dialects of Kurdish are spoken by Iraqi Kurds, of which Kurmanji (mostly in the north) and Sorani (mostly in the south) are the notable varieties (Alinia 2013:14). While this situation can be seen as a barrier against the creation and reproduction of a shared Kurdish identity, the rise of the Regional Government and advanced media and communication technologies have proved instrumental in fabricating a sense of common Kurdish language and identity (Mills 2016:2).

[21] In fact, Kirkuk had always been a centre of Turkoman culture and Turkoman power, and the most significant families of notables were all Turkoman (Van Bruinessen 2005). Kirkuk was subject to a massive Arabization process during the Ba'athist regime, changing the city's demographics (Talabany 2001:103). After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, a *Kurdification* program whereby Turkmen and Arabs have been encouraged to leave the city was launched by Kurds (interviews with Turkmen members of parliament in Erbil and Baghdad in Kirkuk, 2015 and also see Safak 2016 for further analysis on the victims of Arabization and Kurdification policies in Kirkuk).

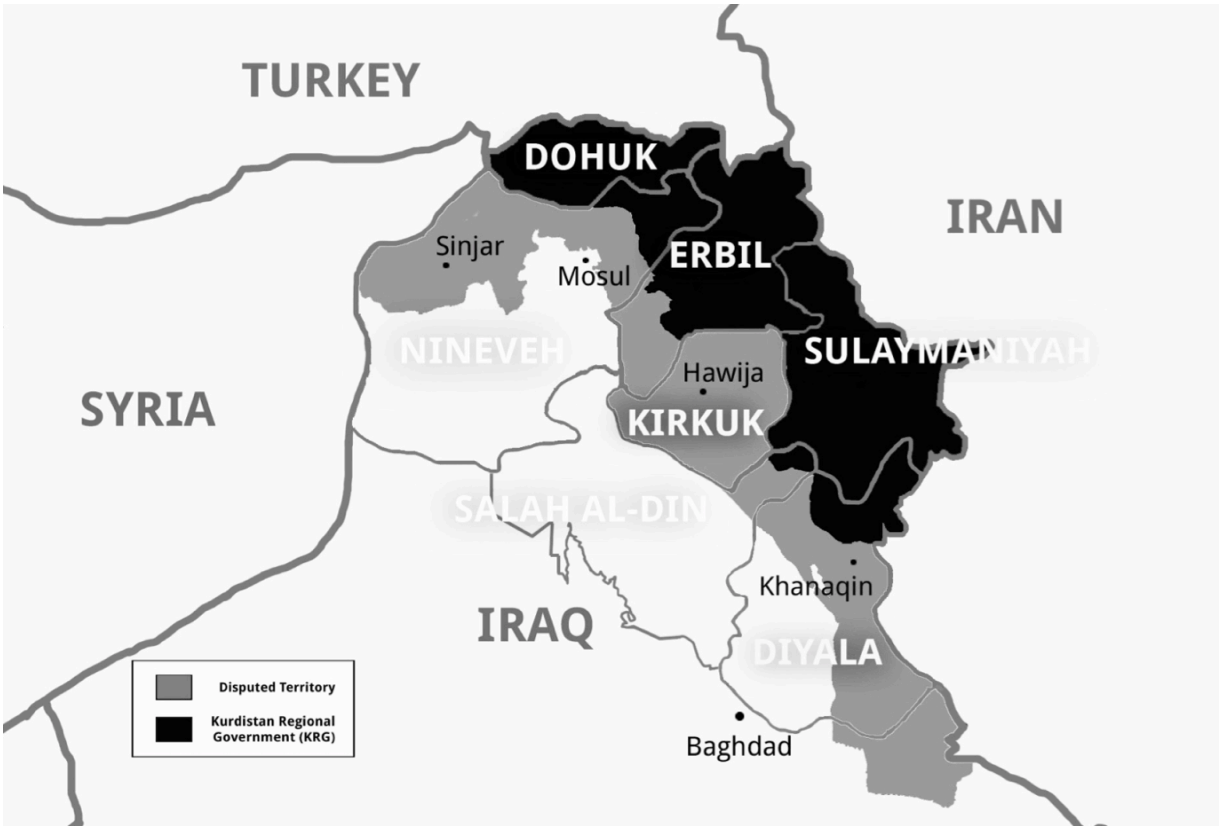

Figure 1. Map of Iraqi Kurdistan

Source: IRIN

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq forms a semi-autonomous area in the north of Iraq, with the capital Erbil, known in Kurdish as Hewlêr, and four northern governorates of Dohuk, Erbil, Suleimania, and Halabja. The KRG was established in 1992 by popular elections (see Dahlman 2013:290 for a brief political history of the Kurdish elections). Kurdish self-rule and the acceleration of the establishment of the KRG followed the creation of the northern no-fly zone after the First Gulf War in 1991 (see Yildiz 2012: Chap. 5 and Chap. 6 for the political establishment of Kurdish self-rule in relation to regional and international bargaining). By October 1991, the Iraqi military withdrew from the Kurdish lands, except for Kirkuk and Mosul, leaving three million people under the governance of 'the Kurdistan Front', a union of Kurdish political parties (O'Shea 2004:167–168).

After three years of fighting (1994–1997), the Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) agreed to cease the conflict that erupted after the 1991 Gulf War and separated their common zone of governance into two distinct regional organizations, with separate parliaments, *peshmerga* forces (armed forces of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq), and intelligence networks until 2005 (see Kaya 2012:140–142

for a brief political history of the Kurdish civil war). Though the discord between the two main Kurdish parties declined following the materialization of the new government in Baghdad during the post-invasion, the two retain different domains of power in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq – KDP in Erbil and PUK in Suleimania – with a smaller area under the control of the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (Dahlman 2012:290).

The exact borders of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq were unclear in 2017. By quickly filling the void left by the Iraqi security forces, the Kurdistan Region was *de facto* extended by the Kurdish peshmerga forces as they strived to include all of the contended territories and populations – increasing its territory by about 40 per cent in 2014 and 2015 (see Natali 2014 and also Cancian and Fabble 2017). Most significant was Kirkuk, which contains significant oil reserves and infrastructure for the export corridor to Turkey – the key economic resource and potential, which may turn the Kurdish dream of independence into reality.

During fieldwork, I came across various maps drawn by Kurds of the boundaries of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in regards to the ongoing war against ISIS in Western Iraq and Northern Syria and conflict with the central Iraqi government over the districts of Mosul, Nineveh Plains, Kirkuk, Sinjar, Tal'Afar, and Khanaqin (see O'Shea 2004 for the politics of maps in relation to Kurdistan). Kurdish nationalist sentiment was strengthened by such maps and gains on the ground that feed into the local population's expectations of a sovereign statehood (see Natali 2014 for Kurdish territorial claims).

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, I spent my time primarily in places under the control of the KDP administration, but also visited towns such as Suleimania and Halabja and nearby villages under the control of Talabani. It is significant to note that crossing from one region into the other required safety checks and searches, by separate peshmerga officers, police forces, and intelligence services.

On the walls of official buildings and houses under the KDP, the pictures of Masoud Barzani, and his nephew and son-in-law, prime minister Nechervan Barzani, were often hung next to each other, both wearing a suit and tie. By contrast, no pictures of Masoud Barzani or Nechervan Barzani appeared on the walls of official buildings and houses under the PUK administration. Instead, the picture of PUK leader Jalal Talabani was hung alongside pictures of Molla Mustafa Barzani, represented in traditional Kurdish clothes, *Jily Kurdi*, photographed with weapons against the backdrop of mountains.

Molla Mustafa Barzani was widely accepted as the legendary leader of Kurdish National Movement (1940–1979) who stood against the Iraqi Arab nationalist Ba'athist dictatorship in Iraqi Kurdistan. Nevertheless, despite the legacy of his father, several Kurds

under the PUK accused his son, Masoud Barzani, of collaborating with the Iraqi government before 1991, obtaining huge profits from smuggling illegal oil into Turkey, and living in a palace complex inherited from Saddam Hussein.

Figure 2. A widely used picture of Molla Mustafa Barzani

Source: [Mullah Mustafa Barzani, Northern Iraq, spring, 1965], William Carter papers (M2083). Dept. of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.

A Time for the Kurds

April 30, 2014, was the day on which the Kurdistan Region of Iraq held governorate elections. During the time of the election, Kurds proudly parading carrying and loudly singing songs from honking cars were a usual sight in Erbil. In that way, elections appeared as rituals organized to buttress the unity of Kurds otherwise separated by national borders. On the night of the vote, I was in the car belonging to Kejo, a peshmerga and a part-time taxi-driver, whom

I regularly hired as driver during the period of my fieldwork in Erbil.[22] A peshmerga driving a taxi to make ends meet was common, especially at a time when the security forces' salaries were being paid late, with some not receiving a salary for months. In the car, while Kejo was honking and running people off the road, Kejo's brother Diyar was firing shots into the air, and his children were flaunting posters of Masoud Barzani, rejoicing in support of the KDP.

In Erbil, Governor Nawzad Hadi of the KDP was fighting to hold on to his seat. His campaign highlighted the capital's development during his administration, stressing Erbil's growing infrastructure including a modern airport and new highways as well as healthcare and security services, not to mention the popular shopping malls and parks. Kejo said, 'People should decide at election times about what governors have done over the last four or five years, and what they are offering for the next four or five instead of voting for their favoured party.' In May 2014, Kejo believed that rapid urbanization had transformed Erbil into a commercial hub thanks to Hadi. 'No one could have imagined this if it was not for Masoud Barzani, either,' Kejo declared, while driving back home in the midst of yellow KDP flags, which seemed to cover every building façade on Erbil's streets. Aiming a cheerful smile at me and wagging his finger towards the crowd, he screamed '*Sarbaxoyi kurdistan nzika!*' (The independence of Kurdistan is near).

As is well known, the Kurds belong to the largest groups of people worldwide without their own sovereign. The Kurds' long-standing demands on independence have been realized once in their history for a brief time through the Mahabad Republic in Iran.[23] Although this first trial was short-lived, their wishes and efforts continued. Today, the PYD (The Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party) has come forward with a unilateral declaration of intent to form a federation inside Syria's Kurdish-governed zones. Turkey's Kurds, likewise, have not given up their demands for some form of self-rule at a time as the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) stepped up attacks against the Turkish state. In comparison, the Kurds in north-western Iran have rather remained silent, hoping to receive assistance from the international power politics and policy-making, particularly in the wake of the dispute between Iran and Israel.[24]

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[22] As is common practice in anthropology, I have assigned pseudonyms to my informants, except when they spoke in an official capacity or had asked me to use their actual name. In selecting pseudonyms, I have tried to be mindful of their ethnic connotations.

[23] Independent Kurdistan was established, albeit for only one single year, in Iran on December I945 (see Voller 2012:102–108 and Roosevelt 1947 for more information on the Republic of Mahabad).

[24] Iran has had a very different policy towards internal ethnic diversity than has Turkey, Iraq, or Syria. National identity in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria was more strongly based on the Turkish and Arab ethnicities; Iranian national identity seems to function as superior to all other identities based on ethnicity in Iran. For example, citizenship in Turkey was more fitting to the German model of ethnocentrism and exclusion, whilst the Iranian one appeared more similar to that of France, soil-based and assimilationist (see Erden 2010:228).

As for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the possibility of a Kurdish declaration of independence was expressed by Masoud Barzani in 2014, at a time when Erbil's public space was filled with discussions on political independence and economic affluence. 'When should Iraqi Kurdistan start to exist as an independent state?' became the most intensely debated question after major oil firms, for instance ExxonMobil (EMKRIL), inked independent deals with the KRG in tacit acknowledgement of its legitimacy over its territory, angering the central government in Baghdad. Consecutively, the deregulation of the Iraqi Kurdistan landscape, the collapse of the centralized Iraqi state, and liberalization (through a liberal investment law) resulted in the attraction of new public–private partnerships and volatile enterprise into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.[25]

For the Kurds, 'the local' or 'national time' of long-awaited independence coincided with the 'neoliberal' or 'capitalist time' that aimed to transform the disadvantaged region into a new frontier market for oil exploration (see Bear 2014:6 for how 'abstract time-reckoning of capitalism comes into conflict with concrete experiences of time' in relation to TATA company in the context of Kolkata).

Economic Transformation

Kurdish petroleum extraction is in its immaturity, but the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) has estimated that the KRG could contain between 45 billion and 75 billion barrels of oil, which would put it roughly on a par with Russia (Robinson and Li 2011:1). It has been estimated that the Kurdistan Region of Iraq contained 4 billion barrels of proved reserves in 2012 (Mills 2016:17). The MNR estimates, on the other hand, are much higher, as they include unconfirmed resources and potential for exploration (see Weszkalnys 2014, 2013, 2008 for the temporal politics of oil exploration and extraction).[26] Recently, in 2015, the oil resource forecast was increased by the KRG from 45 billion to 70 billion barrels, despite the fact that this has not been independently proved, and the forecast presumably included at least some reserves in disputed lands such as oil extraction fields in Kirkuk (Mills 2016:17).

In 2005, when the Iraqi constitution was drafted and approved, there were no authorized oil extraction fields in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Webster 2010). At the

[25] The 2006 Investment Law (available online), passed unilaterally by the KRG, has provided foreign companies full ownership, with a 10-year tax exemption for their operations, 'the ability to repatriate all earnings, relaxed local policies, and, for high-priority sectors', either free or subsidized land.

[26] Weszkalnys (2014, 2013, 2008) analyses the temporal politics of economic collapse due to future oil exploration in São Tomé and Príncipe, an island state located in the Atlantic Ocean off Gabon in western Africa.

beginning of oil exploration and exploitation in the region, small and independent extraction companies (such as the Turkish oil company Petoil) rushed in to drill and exploit the unknown (or legally unknown) oil resources, at the risk of aggravating Iraq's central government. The reserves outside the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which are particularly in southern and central areas of Iraq, were opened for investment as the well-known international petroleum companies' preferences primarily depended on the proven oil reserves in the area (see Holland 2012:28).[27]

The foreign oil companies have been attracted by Iraqi Kurdistan's estimated oil and gas reserves, especially at a time when the 2007 Iraqi Kurdistan Oil and Gas Law provided a capital-friendly institutional and legal framework aimed at extracting hydrocarbons from Kurdish soil (see Auzer 2005:105–127 for expansion of the oil and gas business in the region). In 2007, Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) were introduced with the Iraqi Kurdistan Oil and Gas Law so as to develop Kurdish oil and gas resources.[28] The Kurdistan Region of Iraq's PSCs have featured major incentives for upstream energy companies to search for and extract hydrocarbons in the area, specifically when competing with the less advantageous Technical Services Contracts (TSCs) proposed to petroleum corporations in the more developed oil exploration and extraction zones in central and southern Iraq (see Amirehsani 2014 for hydrocarbon investment opportunities in the region). Thus, the empowering of foreign oil companies in the Kurdistan region goes beyond the contractual terms allowed by the Iraqi state in the fields of southern and central Iraq.

After the Norwegian company DNO began construction for exploratory drilling near the town of Zakho in 2004 and struck oil on its very first attempt in 2006 (Tawke field), ExxonMobil decided to take on six exploration zones in Iraqi Kurdistan, followed by Chevron, Total, and Gazprom (Holland 2012:28). In 2015, there were over 50 international petroleum companies exploring for, or already producing, oil in 57 designated exploration blocks in the region. Under these changes, on 1 July 2015, the KRG decided to sell the region's natural resources independently of the Iraqi central government (see Ozdemir and

[27] Holland (2012:28) explained that the reason for this avoidance was a combination of mistrust about whether certain Iraqi Kurdistan licence areas would produce oil and Baghdad's declaration that concessions in the Kurdish areas in the north were illegal.

[28] Regarding the multinational firms' preferred system, the PSC, it is significant to note the government seems to control the oil exploration and private entities of foreign origin go about extracting relevant resources as contracted by the political authority (Muttitt 2005:5). As part of a PSC authorized by a government, the contracted firm has borne all necessary investments and then compensated for it with what is called the 'cost oil' – the initial production necessary to cover the firm's cost. Then came the 'profit oil' whose trade benefits both the company and the government in line with what was agreed in the PSC. The company also pays taxes on its share of that later production (see Muttitt 2005, 2011 for details on production-sharing contracts in Iraq).

Raszewski 2016 for sub-state oil trade between Turkey and KRG). This has created new political conflicts between Erbil and Baghdad particularly in relation to the revenues raised from newly exploited oil fields (see Aresti 2016:11–19 for oil and gas revenue sharing in Iraq). Baghdad's main point of dispute is that the Kurdistan Region of Iraq officially profited from petrol and gas sales, from which Baghdad was excluded, to several states through PSCs.[29]

At the end of all these developments, Kurdish soil has been nurtured as 'a site for the circulation of capital', in particular of international hydrocarbon capital (Bridge 2007:74–75). The form and scale of this underground resource space and the circulation of international capital has consequentially had material and social consequences on the ground – in both rural and urban parts of Iraqi Kurdistan.

In the rural zones, one of the most visible changes was the proliferation of spatially segregated 'mineral-extraction enclaves' (see Watts 2008, 2004, 2001, who has shown in the Niger Delta how petro-capitalism, the particular arrangement of capitalism engendered by oil, functions through territorially organized oil complexes). In May 2014, I encountered an oil complex for the first time in the Khurmala oil field in northern Kirkuk – spatially enclosed within barbed wire compounds and protected by private guards and government security forces. The enclave consisted of a few small villages (with 15–20 houses) across the contractual blocs. In the Khurmala oil field, there were several petroleum engineers from all over the world, but in particular from states in Eastern Europe, such as Serbia, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria.

The spatial configuration of oil production – wherein petroleum resources are 'secured', 'enclaved', and 'globally networked' – seemed to be proliferating as part of 'the global model of resource extraction', at a time when the rest of Iraq suffered political and economic disorder and warfare (Ferguson 2005:380). Extracting minerals in unstable settings represents a brilliant path to higher business profits. In this path, the whole spectrum of the oil business in the region from extraction to dissemination became unsurprisingly militarized (see Le Billon 2001 for the articulation of militarization, accumulation, and resource extraction). The configuration resulted in exclusion and separation of local populations from their social and material means of production in parts of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, comparable to what Zalik (2009) described in relation to physical dislocation in the Nigerian Delta and Peluso (1995, 1992) showed in relation to the criminalization of land and forest

[29] Around 600,000 barrels are exported via the Turkish port of Ceyhan per day, in fact almost all the oil of the region (MERI Report 2016).

rights in Kalimantan.[30] With the use of private armies to maintain security, the rural inhabitants living in the exploration enclaves across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq were forced to leave their homes and economic resources once extraction began – *a process that sets land apart for oil exploration and extraction, to the exclusion of all other uses* (Ferguson 2005:380). Unfortunately, we lack statistics on the effect of oil extraction on the displacement of local populations in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and my own knowledge is limited to that gathered during my trips to KDP controlled oil zones.[31] A separate study would be needed to fill this research gap, although the KRG, the main political parties (KDP and PUK), and global oil corporations might well restrict access.

As for the urban part of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, tertiary businesses including construction, health services, transportation, education, entertainment, tourism, finance, sales, and retail sectors have expanded in parallel to the development of the oil sector. Within a decade, towering office buildings, spacious shopping malls, residential developments, and mushrooming hotels have changed the city's landscape beyond recognition. The small uneven roads in the cities have been transformed into highways. The city's new counterfeit franchise businesses, such as the creatively named 'MaDonal' (McDonald's), 'Dominoes Pizza' (Dominos Pizza), 'PJ's Pizza' (Papa John's Pizza), 'Burger Queen' (Burger King), 'Krunchy Fried Chicken' (Kentucky Fried Chicken), and 'Costa Rica Coffee' (Costa Coffee), have mushroomed around the walls of gated communities with names like the American Village, the English Village, and the Italian Village. In tune with its motto, 'Thank God It's Friday,' the TGI Friday has become very popular for lunch after jumʿah prayers on Friday, an official holiday in Iraqi Kurdistan. In this American-style restaurant, burgers, ribs, steaks, and fajitas are served by English-speaking East Asian staff amidst a modern decor with red-striped canopies, brass railings, and Tiffany lamps. In the big cities, consumers appeared extremely wealthy and the businesses had no reason to complain with respect to profits. The region was on a quick path to becoming the 'next Dubai' (see Diane King 2013:1–40 for the rapid

[30] See Labban 2012, 2008 for the relationship between militarization, oil, capital, and space. In brief, he suggests that the shortage or plenitude of oil is a 'socio-spatial relationship'.

[31] One of the Kurdish journalists I met in Iraqi Kurdistan, Rabin Fatah (2014), who is originally from a village within the Taq Taq oil field claimed that the international oil company operating in the region occupied more than 400 acres of land. To quote him directly, 'Our village's population have been victims of oil exportation. In the era of the Ba'ath regime in 1980, nine villages of the area were destroyed and the people were displaced to bigger cities. After 1991, a significant number of villagers came back to their villages. In our village, nearly 40 families returned but due to the lack of public services, and oil companies occupying their land, some families left the village. Today, only about ten families have remained in the village, the others having settled in the cities' (translated by Kamal Chomani in 2014).

globalization and modernization of Iraqi Kurdistan).[32] The oil cash was so abundant; it could buy anything, and most importantly, it came out of the land – a gift from God to the Kurds – and was spent on imported foreign goods.

Figure 3. Erbil's skyscrapers

Source: The author

In the booming oil economy, migrants flocked from around the world to find employment in the emerging market dream of Iraqi Kurdistan. In Anna Tsing's (2005:xi) terms, this resulted in 'zones of awkward engagement' or 'cultural friction' where complex and convoluted production of forms of interaction proliferated in response to the diffusion of global capital.[33] In these zones, returnees from the Kurdish diaspora (mostly from Sweden and Belgium), expatriates employed in the oil industry and its services (mostly white European and American), refugees (mostly from Iraq and Syria), traders and fugitives (mostly from Turkey and Iran), domestic, industrial, and sex workers (mostly from Turkey, Iran, Lebanon, and

[32] The veneration of ideas of modernity in construction can be seen in the futuristic redesigning of Kazakhstan's capital Astana, labelled as 'Dubai of Steppers' (Pelkmans 2017:12).
[33] By this term Tsing (2005) aimed to capture the dynamic through which different kinds of knowledge and culture come into contact with one another.

South and Southeast Asian nationalities) have all manufactured novel configurations and relations with each other and the local communities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Within this social flux and engagement, I met a local Kurdish agha wearing Levi's jeans and Gucci belts in a Chinese restaurant with Iranian escorts handing out U.S. dollar banknotes to Vietnamese waitresses, an affluent Kurdish businessman and at the same time a public official who had previously been a guerrilla fighter in the mountains against the Turkish state, Shia militants trading scrap metal on the ISIS war front, a Kurdish ghost-employee who had never been in his office but was being continuously paid every month by the KRG, and an Indian businessman making a fortune through trading humans from Southeast Asia. It was contemporary capitalism that fashioned these people as a third kind by continually hybridizing the local and global together.

Uncertain Neoliberal Times and Alternative Futures

For locals and tourists alike, the Shar Garden Square, above which the city's citadel symbolically hails, offers considerable diversity of choices for sightseeing, particularly the Chinese-made clock tower designed analogous to London's Big Ben, whose hourly chimes had become integral to the harmony of the sounds at the historic bazaar where it is located. Hearing it chime, visitors were reminded of the time spent looking for souvenirs. So much for its old charm, however, Erbil's Big Ben has been out of service for a long time, allegedly due to the financial crisis plaguing the Kurdish region. Repairing the tower would be too expensive, and the necessary parts could not be supplied from within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, according to Bezhdar Reza who is the Director of Erbil's 1st Municipality (see Ekurd Daily 2016). Consequently, maintenance of the clock tower had become an expense that the KRG was not willing to approve when I was in the field in 2016.

A time of economic prosperity and independence have been created as a national time at the centre of the Kurdish capital for all Kurds. Nevertheless, with the downturn, this national time came to a halt. The KRG experienced a full-fledged economic crisis in the summer of 2014 as Baghdad suspended its constitutional share from the national budget, the price of oil went down, ISIS forces seized a swath of northern Iraq adjoining the KRG, and more than a million displaced Iraqis and Syrian refugees fled to the semi-autonomous region. According to some estimates, household consumption per capita shrank by 14% in 2014 alone and by a more staggering 24% the following year, pushing down property values and the prices of consumer goods (see MERI Report 2016 for consequences of economic downturn).

Figure 4. The clock tower

Source: The author

According to a World Bank report in 2016, the region's overall economy contracted by a painful 5%, while the poverty ratio more than doubled from 3.5% to 8.1% (World Bank 2016). Under drastic economic conditions, the KRG cut back on the salaries it was supposed to pay the civil servants. Being unable to collect even their reduced pay on time, many public workers including those at the health and education services went on strike. The result was a near paralysis of life in Erbil. Unsurprisingly, independence began to be mentioned less and less as a viable goal even among the most nationalist fractions.

The exploitation of Iraqi Kurdistan's oil resources was paramount to making the peripheral region a wealthy, independent state. The KRG and its national leaders, gifted with petroleum resources to build a nation, were transformed into agents of progress in the Kurdish public discourse, an ideology mobilized to create effective and responsible citizens who see the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in 'national transition'.[34] Expectations of a better future ran high, and the local press supplied readers with good news celebrating every single achievement.

In this context, Kurdish political elites considered international oil firms as catalysts to independence. In fact, those companies had become so 'sacred' to some that they felt too timid to criticize them even in informal conversations. During my initial fieldwork in May 2014, I was sharply criticized by Kurdish nationalists for questioning the image of the oil companies in the region and accused of being a wicked Turk who wants to turn Kurds against those companies and to prevent the region from further development and ultimate independence. Under the articulation of nationalism with petro-capitalism, the future was without problems, radically certain and bright.[35] In the public rhetoric, with the support of multinational exploration and exploitation petroleum corporations, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was on an accelerated path to a bright tomorrow pulling itself away from the failure and corrupt past of the Iraqi nation.

Following the market downturn, the local experiences of time among the Kurds in the region began to contradict the global capitalist temporal understanding (see Bear 2014:4–7 for contradictions of capitalist time in Kolkata). The economic chaos quickly sent shockwaves across the Kurdistan Region, casting doubts over the dream of independence and as to whether multinational oil firms would actually help it come true or would in fact push the region into an abyss of destruction. The exploration of the country's resources by

[34] See Apter (2005), who emphasized the significance of the country's oil boom for displaying a new Nigerian confidence, and Coronil (1997), who devoted much of his focus to the function of petroleum exploration and extraction in shaping the collective consciousness of Venezuelans.

[35] In Frederiksen's (2014a) terms, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq could be named 'a would-be state', which refers to both a condition of 'that which might be' in the future and a Regional Government that gains its legitimacy by promising a better tomorrow.

international businesses became a particular source of dissatisfaction for the Iraqi Kurds. Thus, empty bellies invited full minds.

To further examine this point, we can look at the fluctuating public perception on recently erected high-rise buildings in Erbil. While towering modern buildings continued to represent an imagined future of abundance, it became apparent during the financial crisis that only rich families could enjoy the comfortable, modern, and luxurious lifestyle offered by these buildings. In other words, with the financial collapse and its economic consequences, the modern high-rise buildings in Erbil were filled with multiple meanings. While they were often interpreted as images of progress towards a much-desired independent Kurdish state, embodying the many facades of 'modernity' and 'Westernness', they started to provoke ideas of corruption and conspiracy among ordinary citizens in Erbil, as well as doubts about Kurdish statehood (see Pelkmans 2006 in Georgia, and Grant 2014 in Azerbaijan for comparison on the multiple interpretations of modern buildings).

Kurdish citizens started to raise questions such as 'Who owns these buildings?', 'Who lives in these luxurious apartments?', or 'Where does the money come from?', especially at a time when government workers and military personnel had gone unpaid for months. Far from the implicit supposition that the state is a neutral arbiter of public interest, buildings became charged with a particular sense that the state was indeed inseparable from the interests of the ruling families in the region, particularly Barzani and Talabani (see Nugent 1994 for comparison in relation to state failure and formation of a state-like organization in Amazonas). In this specific political and economic environment, the limited financial transparency in Iraqi Kurdistan both heightened the accusations and blocked efforts to find any evidence of malfeasance, contributing to the popularity of the proliferating narratives and counter-narratives of corrupt practices among Kurdish citizens.

In October 2015, civil servants including teachers swarmed the streets and began to strike for a week in Suleimania to protest the government's inability to pay their wages on time and the deteriorating economic conditions at large. This represented the most serious and largest act of civil disobedience since the economic crisis hit the region. Protesters had a clear demand: '*Gar natwany mucha bday, awa esta dast la kar bkeshawa!*' (If you cannot pay salaries, resign right now). Furthermore, businessmen accused of having benefited from their close relations to the ruling parties were called on to repay their illegal profits to the state's treasury. Demonstrators attacked buildings, set them alight, and, on one occasion, hurled stones at the headquarters of the Rudaw television station, a Barzani family business. Angry slogans called on Massoud Barzani to resign. In the midst of rising domestic criticism over

Barzani's indefinite rule, Masoud Barzani, however, could not miss any opportunity to promote the idea of secession from the rest of Iraq.

As the official narrative failed to accommodate the hard reality on the ground, and the people's everyday experiences fell far short of what the KRG's policies promised, socio-economic zones were opened to uncertainty (see Pine 2015:25 on how contradictions between the political set-up of the Soviet Union and 'actually lived socialism' created a grey zone of uncertainty and ambiguity in everyday life in Poland). The Kurds' experiences of time remained unmatched by petro-capitalism's temporal promise in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the wake of the market downturn – pushing Kurdish well-being and nationalism into contradiction with the region's capitalist transformation. Thus, multiple political patterns, uncertain times, and lost futures became tangible in Iraqi Kurdistan, analogous to what Bear (2014:5) wrote in relation to uncertain times and lost futures in India. Other unexpressed potential alternatives (e.g. PKK, Islamists) suddenly became public and visible with the economic crisis and constant rumours of conflict and political transition. It was true that in the idealization of abundant future with oil and political independence, the KRG gained its legitimacy. Yet, the economic crisis made people doubt this narrative and sparked a public debate about whether oil companies were a blessing or a curse for the Kurds, leading people to scout out solutions elsewhere and other possible futures, such as the controversial path of the PKK or the Islamists.

Entering the Field

It had initially been my intention to conduct research among a small group of people living inside the Khurmala oil production field north of Kirkuk. I arrived in May 2014 in the Khurmala oil field and started to conduct interviews with the Kar Group, the strategically important oil extraction firm that manages most of the region's production and refining capacity, as well as its export pipeline. The company had arrived at the oil complex in 2013 and occupied parts of the land for the purposes of exploration. When the initial exploration results indicated that the region contained significant oil and gas reserves, the company invested in petroleum extraction, which later required the relocation of the local population due to the potential negative effects of the drilling process. The group with which I was planning to conduct research was one of the smaller fringe groups at risk of forced displacement, with a population of approximately 150–200 Kurds occupying a village covering four or five square kilometres near the oil wells. Relevant questions here were: In

what forms do the territorial extraction enclaves exist and how are they governed in Iraqi Kurdistan? What happens to the local population when an international oil company arrives and begins its operations? How do these people perceive their altered situations and adapt to change?

Following my preliminary research, I received the required research permit, returned to London, and started developing my research proposal during the summer of 2014. In the meantime, more specifically in June, Mosul and other places in north-western and central Iraq were swept through by ISIS. It subsequently became evident that the ISIS planned to expand its caliphate to encompass the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as well (Salih 2014).

After filling pages of risk assessment forms and receiving permission for the fieldwork from the LSE, I travelled back to Iraqi Kurdistan in November 2014. I became affiliated with the University of Kurdistan, Hewlêr, a private, English-language medium university financed by the Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, and I began teaching petroleum economics at the department of Petroleum Engineering as a part-time lecturer.

Being a *mamosta* (teacher) allowed me to build trust, partially balancing the suspicions raised by my status as a Turkish researcher coming from London and provided the visa and research permit I needed in Iraqi Kurdistan. Furthermore, the status of lecturer provided me with a title and made access easier for me, such as arranging interviews with the officials and politicians in the region at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Kurdistan Investment Board (KBOI), Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Ministry of Natural Resources. Thankfully, I was also fortunate to have substantial support from my students to understand the cultural context of rumours and jokes and immensely benefitted from language assistance, especially for empirical research and translating purposes.

When I returned, however, I was denied research access to the Khurmala field due to the tightened security measures following the ISIS attacks in the area and the declaration of war on the extremist group by Massoud Barzani in August 2014. At first, I did not give up and spent a month trying to regain access to my field site, filling out forms and attempting to find contacts from the KRG in order to obtain permission. However, each request went unanswered, and when a second attempt met with no better success, the bureaucratic abstruseness began to take on a Kafkaesque quality. Discouraged by the unending bureaucratic procedures and unfulfilled promises, I ended up doing nothing, spending time eating kebab and chatting with local people about their parrots, known as '*kuku*', a popular pet among Kurdish men in Erbil.

Figure 5. Baram's parrot

Source: The author

At that particular time, in a rather whimsical and perturbed state of mind, I realized that apart from a source of joy and pride, parrots were used as an investment, as they can be sold for high prices if they can talk in Kurdish.[36] I visited several people's homes and their Kurdish-speaking parrots, such as the one belonging to Baram, one of my students at the University of Kurdistan. I also participated in a parrot sale in Erbil where a group of men negotiated in a meeting room at the entrance of a house, with guests relaxing on cushions. Most of these parrot traders took pride in making their guests comfortable in the tradition of Kurdish hospitality. In these gatherings, men would talk about other matters as well, such as everyday politics, while drinking tea and waiting for the parrot to arrive through a doorway,

[36] One of my students from the University of Kurdistan, Hewler, told me that his father had purchased a chick parrot for $100 and raised it to full-grown bird that could sing and talk in Kurdish. His father then sold it to an Erbil politician for $1,000.

intentionally left slightly open to welcome the parrot. In these gatherings, as a Turkish speaker, I was often asked to practise my Kurdish with the parrot, and when I did, it resulted in laughter, loud cheers, and thundering applause. Quite frankly, that proved far better than wringing hands in anticipation of what would happen next for my planned research.

Taking advantage of the beam of joy resulting from those parrot visits, I also realized that people kept talking about the tall, modern buildings being erected in Erbil. I then decided to follow and conduct interviews with the Turkish companies and construction workers in the capital city.[37] I found that a large percentage of the companies operating in the region originated from Turkey, with most of the construction labourers coming from Turkey's economically depressed Kurdish areas.[38] Most of the construction materials utilized in the area, such as cement bricks and concrete blocks, as well as prefabricated construction elements such as windows, plumbing supplies, and electrical appliances, were also imported from Turkey (see Invest in Group 2013a; 2013b for the multi-million construction business, contracts, and future projects in Iraqi Kurdistan). Real estate development companies from the United Arab Emirates have also been involved in various large-scale projects in Erbil. One major example was the planned $3 billion downtown Erbil project, which would cover an area of roughly 541,000 square metres with 15,000 homes, hotels, and a shopping mall, undertaken by Emaar, the developer of Downtown Dubai, home to the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa (Invest in Group 2013b). Notwithstanding, the downtown Erbil project has remained unrealized due to the economic recession, and the construction area has rather become home to migrants displaced from elsewhere in the region.

While conducting interviews in the construction sector in Erbil, I learned that most of the iron bar – the basic raw material of the construction sector, alongside cement – was produced by KSM, a private enterprise from Turkey.[39] I saw the Erbil Steel Mill for the first time late on one evening of December 2014 after a half-hour road trip from Erbil. The giant mill appeared just to the right of the gas flares on the road linking the Kurdish capital of Erbil to the Gwer front against the ISIS.

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[37] In 2013, there were 'approximately 1,500 Turkish companies operating, which translated into 65% of all foreign business' in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Invest in Group 2013a).

[38] Erbil International Airport, the new building of the Department of Justice, the Governor's office buildings, Divan Hotel, Naz City, and the Park View Project are given as main examples of residential complexes in Erbil erected by real estate development corporations from Turkey.

[39] The steel mill is considered as one of the investments of Salih Group – an investment company operating in tourism, steel, and construction sectors headquartered in Istanbul, Turkey. KSM was listed as a local company by the Iraqi Kurdistan Board of Investment (KBOI). One of the shareholders of the steel mill is the Darin Group. The Darin Group, which is widely known as having been founded and financed by the KDP in 1998, has been managing diverse portfolios of public construction projects across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Figure 6. The steel mill

Source: The author

Having access through Yusuf, an English instructor at the University of Kurdistan who had previously given English lessons to the Turkish managers and workers at KSM, I planned to conduct interviews about the steel and iron market in Iraqi Kurdistan. I met with Kurdish and Turkish workers and managers from Turkey – a meeting which later evolved into more gatherings in the capital city of Erbil and at the steel mill. My access came indeed by aligning myself more closely with the managers of the company in Erbil nightlife and through economic discussions in the early days of my presence at the mill.

Thanks to my Turkish background and my affiliation with the University of Kurdistan, Hewlêr, which was known as Nechervan Barzani's university, within two weeks I was asked to teach English to Kurdish managers and workers by Mr. Zoro, the steel mill's human

resources manager who is a Kurd from the Kurdistan region of Turkey.[40] I had no idea that I was going to replace Sami as an English teacher, though, when the KSM shuttle first picked me up in front of the University of Kurdistan and headed towards Mosul. But Sami had left Iraqi Kurdistan in December 2014. And that was how I suddenly became the new English teacher at KSM, was granted access to the steel mill, and began to build contacts with the rest of people in Hiwa district by using relations I established there. Being allowed to enter and stay at the steel mill was undeniably a stroke of luck.

When I established myself in the steel mill, I was encountered with surprise by its residents from time to time. For a Turkish researcher from London to live in the Hiwa district was unheard of. I made a particular effort to explain that my purpose in being in Iraqi Kurdistan was to try to understand people's experiences of economic change as an anthropologist. Long after I began working at the mill, a few people, observing the time I spent writing up my fieldwork at the labour camp and shop floor, never ceased to believe that I was actually collecting intelligence for the Turkish government. Some of the Turkish workers came and told me stories about PKK sympathizers at the mill, asking me to report these activities to the Turkish authorities. Some Kurdish workers, hilariously confusing anthropology with archaeology, assumed I was a treasure hunter on a quest for Saddam's hidden wealth. The situation took on bizarre twists when a young migrant Kurdish worker, encouraged by stories from village elders, invited me to search for Armenian treasures in Hakkari and showed me a treasure map, and another worker tried to sell me his metal detector and dowsing rod.

At the mill, I came to know the Kurdish migrant workers from Southeast Turkey best. Their work and life experiences, and connections between workplace and different aspects of social life, gradually opened for my close analysis. I could visit some of the Kurdish workers' households to conduct observation and semi-structured interviews with household members at various locations in Southeast Turkey (Silopi, Şırnak, Mardin, Şemdinli, and Hakkari), and accompany the workers on their journeys between home and work. The insights gained through my travels with migrant labourers and meetings with their families have enriched my understanding of the greater picture, which would have otherwise been overlooked.

[40] Mr. Zoro had personally been keen on learning English to advance professionally and to talk better with the expats coming from abroad. In addition, it was widely believed that learning English would improve communication and coordination between the Kurds and the Indian steel migrants. Mr. Zoro also motivated some of the Kurdish workers to learn English during our lessons so they could advance in their profession and earn a better salary. A Turkish-speaking English teacher was an advantage for the Turkish-speaking Kurds and the Turks, as they could to ask questions and receive answers in their own language.

Sharing a similar culture, language (Turkish), and history facilitated interaction and communication between the Kurdish migrant workers and myself. Nevertheless, given the highly polarized politics of Turkey and my identity as a Turk from the west of Turkey, some Kurdish workers wanted to keep their distance from me. However, the ethnic difference was soon occluded by the experience of spending time together in the everyday routine, sharing a common culture, a language, and an experience of masculinity. I often stayed in the labour camp with the Kurdish workers rather than the Turkish ones and participated in diverse aspects of their social life, attended the mass prayers, cooked for the Kurdish workers, celebrated birthdays, and became a Kurdish freedom supporter on my Facebook page, as specifically requested by my young Kurdish informants.

Time spent in the company compound after work and on weekends in Erbil was crucial for me, as that was when migrant workers caught up on news, exchanged gossip, discussed politics, and participated in consumption and nightlife. I made trips to the Gwer war front, the villages around the Hiwa district, and other border regions such as Kirkuk and Makhmur over the course of my fieldwork to have a sense of the war conditions and to see the circumstances of people in the border region myself apart from the everyday gossip and national media. Towards to the end of my fieldwork, I travelled with Kurdish migrant workers between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan and found time on long bus trips to hear their individual stories and emotional experiences. During these visits, I came to know my informants' families and visited their houses to broaden my understanding of migrant workers' experiences. However, I did not draw extensively on these visits in this thesis, as the resulting data lacks the strength of my presence at the steel mill. For this reason, as in the ethnographic work of Bolt (2011:23) on Zimbabwe's migrant workers in South Africa's border farms, I mostly make sense of migrant workers' experiences in 'situational terms' in terms of life at the steel mill and in the Hiwa district.[41]

While particularly focusing on the Kurdish migrants, I also aimed to follow the work and life of Indian migrant labourers and the refugee labourers fleeing from the war in Syria and Iraq. Nevertheless, my knowledge of and familiarity with the Indian and refugee workers remained more restricted, and hence their presence in this dissertation is not on the scale their centrality in the production system represents. For the Indian labourers, first, the language gap limited our communication and interaction. The language spoken by the Indian community at the factory was Hindi. Most Indians knew some English, but only a few (especially those with

[41] Max Gluckman (1961:69) wrote, 'An African townsman is a townsman, an African miner is a miner', highlighting the fact that understanding of migrants must begin with their current environments.

high-ranking positions) were able to communicate fluently. As a result, my interactions with Indian workers remained circumscribed, something that was compounded by their reluctance to volunteer information. It appeared that many feared receiving disciplinary punishment and being sent back to India. This reluctance in communication also meant that Indian workers had only limited contact with other labour groups at the mill and spent hardly any time outside the company compound. Although they were a part of the factory, they seemed to be absent in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. However, although interactions were limited while in the factory, some workers opened up about their experiences after they returned to India, and with some of them I continue to have conversations on Facebook.

With regard to the refugee labourers, it proved difficult to collect information systematically. First and foremost, geographically as well as ethnically and religiously, they came from very different places in Iraq. The common feature of this diverse category was the displacement of war and the experience of destruction, suffering, and dispossession. A complicating factor, in establishing relationships, was that most of them did not remain in the factory for as long as necessary for the purpose of my study. Of these refugee labourers, the Yazidis formed a relatively coherent subgroup. They arrived in the workers' labour camps between August and October 2014, as they fled from the advancing ISIS forces.

As production declined, these Yazidi labourers were thrown out of the mill. Since they were fully proletarianized, it was costly for the steel mill to train and keep them. These workers had no village base or familial support to compensate their idleness for some period. For this reason, when these workers were laid off, they would never return to the mill at a time of labour demand. Most had to find food, accommodation, and wages in other companies in order to survive. Furthermore, the language that Yazidis speak, Kurmanji Kurdish, the Kurdish dialect spoken in Turkey, is different from the Sorani Kurdish spoken by Kurds in the south. My inadequate competence in this dialect also limited our communication and learning. Finally, the continuation of the war with ISIS during my fieldwork limited my mobility, flexibility, and efforts to follow the expanded life stories of the Yazidis.

Whilst my insights on Indians and refugee labourers are limited, the information I collected from the Kurdish migrant steel workers have proved crucial to my understanding of the general capitalist landscape and to contextualize their position.

Locating the Hiwa District

KSM is situated in the Hiwa district, southwest of Erbil, 45 miles east of Mosul and ten miles from Gwer (Quwayr), a border town between ISIS and Iraqi Kurdistan. The Hiwa district itself lies between two industrial companies: the steel mill and the Lanaz oil refinery.[42] It is located along the 36th parallel in close proximity to an outpost established shortly after the 1991 Gulf War and created by the U.S., the U.K., and France to safeguard the Kurds in northern Iraq and Shiite Muslims in southern Iraq from Saddam's regime. A small Herki village stretches along the east of the steel mill and north of the refinery on the district. Ironically, during the second Gulf War, the Herki village lying next to the steel mill was divided into two parts along the parallel; the southern half remained under the Baʿth party administration while the northern half fell under coalition control.

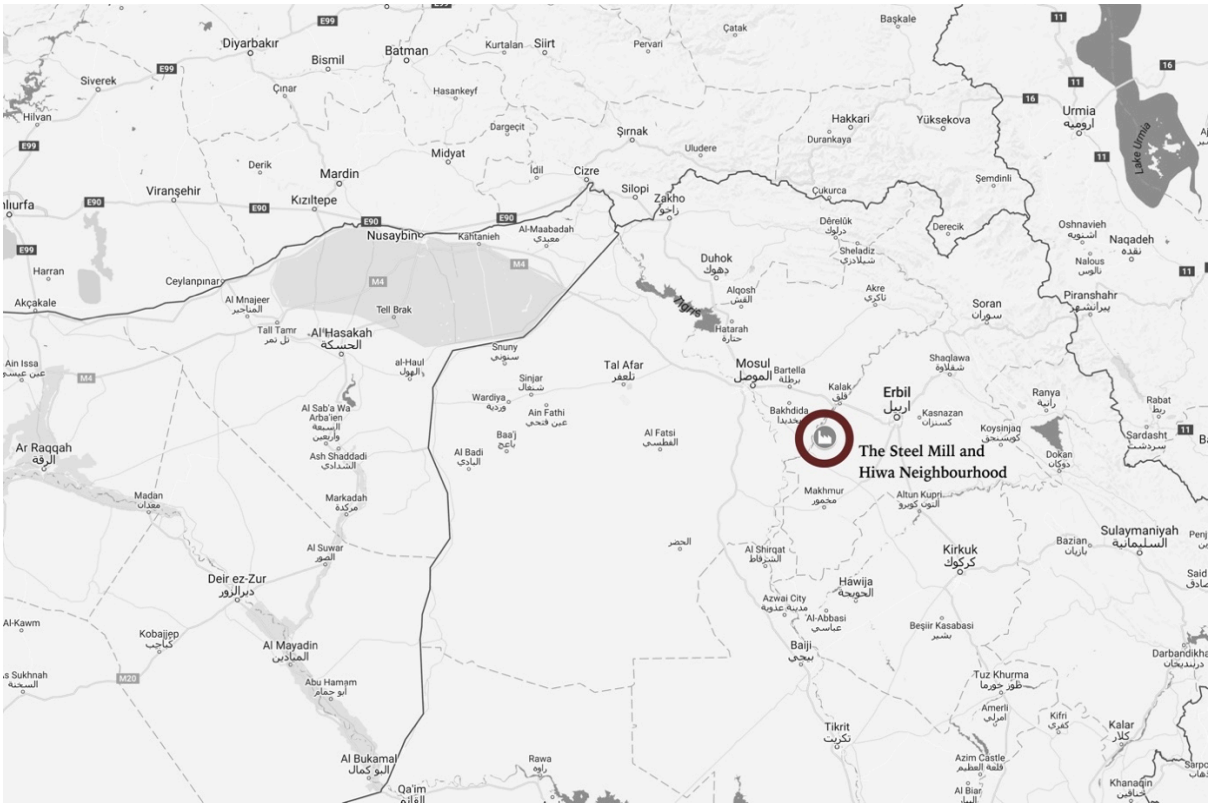

Figure 7. The Location of Hiwa district and the steel mill

Source: Google Maps (adapted)

[42] Opened in 2008, the Lanaz Refinery is one of the largest in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It processes crude oil into petroleum naphtha, gasoline, diesel, heating oil, asphalt, and kerosene.

In 2015–2016, the Herki village contained 300–350 houses sheltering around 1,500 Herki residents. The Herki tribe is one of the largest in the region. Most live in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, with a large minority spread across Iranian Kurdistan; its members live from Mosul to Erbil and concentrated in the city of Urmia, mainly in Mergever, Tergever, Dasht, Dashtabel, Roza, and Berandez (see Joshua Project 2019 for a comparison amongst the Herki Kurds of Iran, of Iraq, and of Turkey). There are also large communities in Turkish Kurdistan around Lake Van and the Semdinan and Ağrı areas. The Herkis trace their ancestry to the Shamzina/Herkobedav tribe located in the Kurdistan Region of Turkey (Joshua Project 2019). Most Herkis speak the Kurmanji dialect spoken by most Kurds, but the Herki living in Hiwa spoke the Sorani dialect (though some village elders did speak Kurmanji with Kurdish migrant labourers from Turkey).

Figure 8. The landscape of Hiwa district

Source: The author

The Herki in Hiwa were mainly rural; most made their living through agriculture and livestock, growing vegetables, tobacco, potatoes, grain, and onions for their own consumption. Their diet consisted of dates, bread, dairy products, tea, and lamb. The more

resourceful among them enjoyed more diverse fare. Alcoholic beverages were discouraged in the Herki village, but young Herki men drank and even sold alcohol in small amounts to migrant workers (particularly to the Indian labour force in the district) in the steel mill and peshmerga forces on the war front. The men's traditional clothes include baggy trousers and usually white shirts, and their waistcoats would consist of colourful belts (Joshua Project 2019). Younger Herki men seem to have abandoned their native costumes in favour of Western garb, such as jeans, sneakers, and slim-fitting T-shirts.

KSM is situated to the west of Herki village, with its integrated steel mill, rolling mill, scrap metal yard, labour camps, electric plants, and oxygen station. It has an annual production capacity of 240,000 tons of iron bars, mostly for use in the domestic construction sector, which makes the mill as one of the most prominent heavy-industry investments in the region. After its factory was built in 2006 as the first steel mill in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the steel mill began production in December 2007. In 2015, it had a market share of about 10% of the Iraqi Kurdistan steel market.

In 2014, Iraq's rebar imports were worth around two billion dollars. Steel companies took this as an opportunity and invested in Iraqi Kurdistan, while enjoying relative peace compared to the rest of Iraq (untitled internal document distributed at steel producers meeting, 2015). In 2015, there were 12 steel companies in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq with a total capacity of about 2,670,000 tons of steel per year. Five of these companies were located in Erbil, five in Suleimania, and three in Dohuk (see Figure 30 in appendix). In total, 3,456 workers were employed in these 12 steel mills, of whom 2,176 came from abroad, in particular from India, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. Apart from workers directly employed at the steel mills, it was estimated that 10,000 scrap collectors, 6,000 rebar truck drivers, 1,400 material delivery drivers, and 7,000 scrap truck-drivers were employed indirectly in the steel market of Iraqi Kurdistan (same untitled internal document cited above).

The mill consisted three primary spaces (see Figure 9). The first was the 'Scrap Metal Yard' covering the hills of the district to the left of the mill's entrance; this yard received scrap metal and arranged it into lots from where it was processed for later melting into new products. The second was the 'Steel Platform', which was made up of two main induction-heating electrical furnaces for reducing scrap metal chemically and converting it physically into liquid iron, called 'hot metal'. The final one was the 'Rolling Platform', in which metal stock was passed through one or more pairs of rollers to reduce and to render uniform the thickness of the steel.

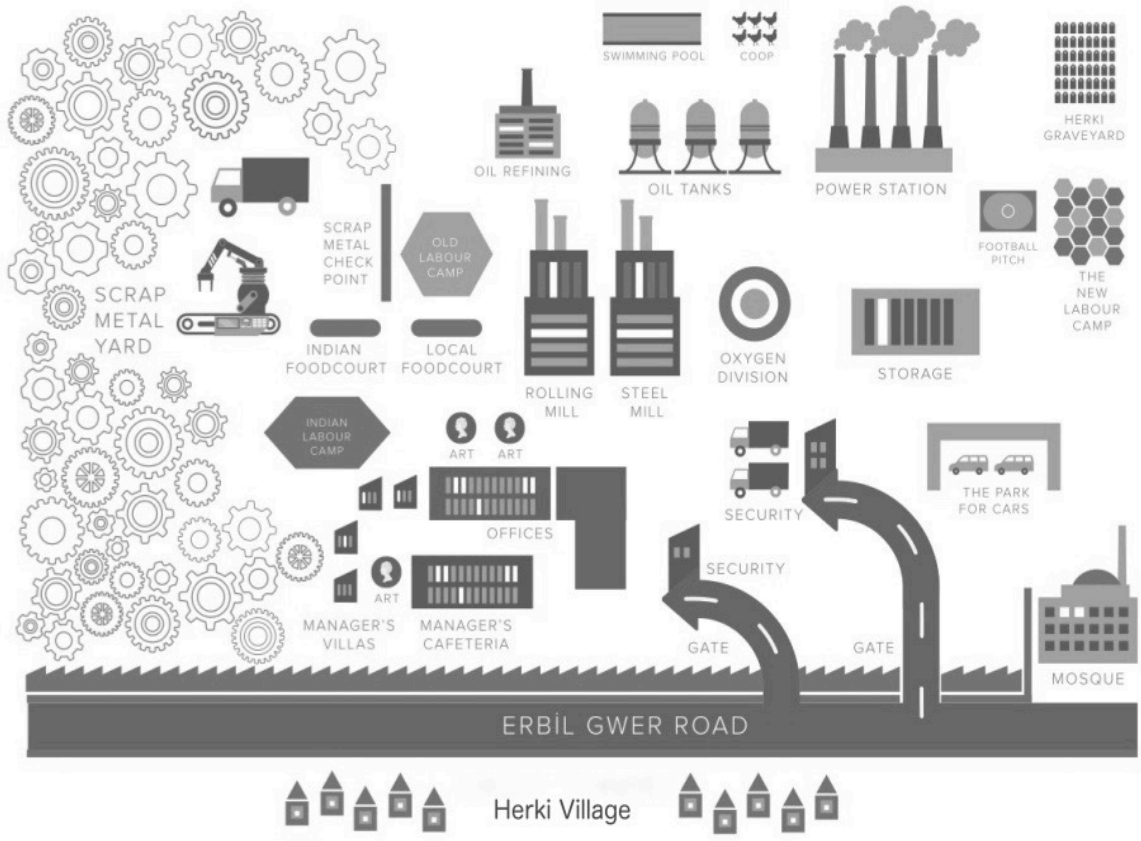

Figure 9. A plan of the steel mill

Source: The author

The ‘Power Station’, which burned petroleum to produce the electricity needed for continuous operation, lay behind the shop floor next to the crude-oil storage tanks. There was a swimming pool next to the power plant where migrant labourers – Kurdish labourers in particular – could relax and enjoy a seamless landscape of Iraqi Kurdistan on the hot summer evenings in June, July, and August. Some managerial offices, such as the quality assurance, human resources, finance, accounting, and time-watch departments were also located in front of the rolling and steel platforms just at the entrance of the mill (see Ebeid 2012:56–58 for an ethnography of a steel mill in Egypt).

Labour camps were located in three different places. One was the ‘Old Labour Camp’ near the rolling mill where Turkish labourers and some of their senior Kurdish counterparts were accommodated. The second one was the ‘New Labour Camp’, where mostly young Kurdish labourers, in particular from Şemdinli, were lodged, located near the football pitch and next to the Herki graveyard (see Figure 32 in appendix). The third labour camp, known as

the 'Indian Labour Camp' and adjoining the scrap-metal yard, was where Indian and Yazidi labourers were lodged.

There were two separate food courts next to the old and Indian labour camps; one of them served local Middle Eastern dishes for Kurdish and Turkish workers, while the other one served Indian dishes for Indian workers. There was an area to the south of the Indian labour camp in the scrap metal yard where Indian labourers occasionally played cricket at the end of their workday. Finally, on the right hand side of the entrance of the mill stood the mosque built by one of the shareholders of the mill and assumed to lie atop the ruins of Saddam Hussein's outpost.

In 2015, KSM had the highest proportion of the workforce engaged in steel work in Iraqi Kurdistan – in total around 750 workers, of whom 650 came from abroad. Of these 650 workers, around 400 of them were skilled or semi-skilled Indian migrant steel labourers, most of them coming from the south and southeast of New Delhi, towns such as Agra, Budain, and Rampur (see Figure 29 in appendix).

There were around 70 Yazidi men who were displaced from the Sinjar district of Iraq under the ISIS assault and started to work in the scrap metal yard after most of the Sunni Arab workers were laid off as a result of their uprising in support of ISIS, when ISIS attacks came near the steel mill in July 2014 (see Figure 28 in appendix).

The mill's workforce had some 20 Iranian Kurds from the west of Urmia, the second largest city in Iranian Azerbaijan and the capital of West Azerbaijan Province (see Figure 28 in appendix). Most of these Iranian workers were distant relatives of Haji Ali, a KSM shareholder, who was himself from the region.

There were approximately 70 Herki men from the Herki village, working primarily as gardeners or security personnel at the mill and around 20 skilled Turkish engineers from the west and north of Turkey, most of whom had previous experience in the steel sector before coming to Iraqi Kurdistan and were employed as supervisors and managers at KSM.

About 120 Kurdish workers were recruited in the steel mill from Southeast Turkey. Most of the Kurdish workers (around 110) came from the town of Şemdinli (see Figure 28 in the appendix). Şemdinli was also the birthplace of Mr. Salih, the founder of KSM, an entrepreneur who became a multi-millionaire from nothing and hence a symbol of hope for several young Kurdish workers.[43]

[43] According to the stories circulated among the Kurdish migrant workers at the steel mill, Mr. Salih is the fourth child of a poor family from Şemdinli, and his father was a shepherd and agricultural worker who died in 1979, when Mr. Salih graduated from middle school. Mr. Salih then could not continue his high school education and

Finally, there was also a small number Kurdish men, about 15, who came from the Makhmur refugee camp established in 1998 in the Makhmur district in Erbil Governorate, which shelters Kurdish refugee families who were forced to leave Southeast Turkey during fighting between the Turkish state and the PKK in the early 1990s.

Outline of the Chapters

The dissertation continues with Chapter 1, which sets the steel mill in the context of the rural Hiwa district, a frontier region between ISIS, Iraq, and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq during my ethnographic fieldwork. Chapter 1 goes on to examine how violence and insecurity turns into a resource as well as a stimulus to capital accumulation. It is against this background that the chapter explores how the steel mill engages in capitalization and accumulation of material and human resources, while animating additional fears, insecurities, and uncertainties for the inhabitants of the district. Yet, the chapter also delves into how resistance to accumulation emerges in multifarious ways.

Chapter 2 focuses on the scrap metal – the raw material for production – coming from war zones and the manufacturing of iron bar at the steel mill for the construction sector in Erbil. The steel mill lies on a frontier zone where the accumulation of capital depends upon the active incorporation of cheap war debris into the manufacturing process. Building on Janet Roitman (2005, 2004), the chapter examines how formal and regulated manufacturing process is articulated with informal and unregulated trans-border commercial scrap metal trading networks. Thus, the chapter studies the diverse ways in which formal and informal markets are connected and reproduce one another.

Chapter 3 offers an analysis of how unskilled war-made, cheap refugee labourers from Syria, Iraq, and Turkey are capitalized and appropriated, and how skilled migrant labour from India is made cheap through the legal terms of a labour contract in the context of increasing

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started work in a small *bakkal* (corner convenience shop) with his elder brother. There, he sold cigarettes, tea, and alcohol and later began selling cloth. Following the Iranian revolution, women were made to cover themselves up, resulting in a high demand for headscarves. Mr. Salih and his elder brother started to buy headscarves, first from Van and Diyarbakır, and subsequently from Bursa and Istanbul, to sell across the border in Iran. He was imprisoned a couple of times for trading goods on the Iranian border. However, he continued his cross-border business ventures, as each time he got out of the prison. Finally, Turgut Özal, who was the eighth President of Turkey, from 1989 to 1993, institutionalized zero-point trade zones across the border within which local traders sell their goods under Turkish state control, and so Mr. Salih found a chance to expand his small business into a huge garment trade business operating between Iran and Turkey. Following this, he expanded his business into steel manufacturing, first near Çerkezköy in Istanbul and subsequently in Erbil. Mr. Salih was widely recognized and appreciated for his contribution in building schools, mosques, giving bursaries for students to continue their education, offering employment for young men, and helping young couples to marry, particularly in Şemdinli.

deregulation in Iraqi Kurdistan. On one side, regional political and economic fragmentation has uprooted a large population of diverse unskilled migrants (Kurds, Yazidis, and Syrians) from their economic and social means of production; these migrants, despite their contrasting backgrounds, represent a large labour reserve on which industrial production is able to draw. From another angle, the political transition and deregulation serve to suppress workers' bargaining power and wages and to facilitate the conditions under which skilled migrant labourers are turned into cheap labour to be bought and sold as easily as possible through tourist agencies trading in Indians. Here, the contract, which can be seen as achieving security for the labour under fluctuating production, paradoxically turns into something restrictive and devaluating for the skilled, contracted Indian migrant steel labour in the context of informalization and deregulation. More generally, the chapter examines how the division between the formal/skilled and the informal/unskilled appears where informality is flourishing.

Chapter 4 focuses on the mill's production system and the cultural mechanisms that *manage flexible workforce arrangements without* adverse effects on the organization and cost of production in a volatile economic and social environment. To be able to evade the high recruitment and training costs owing to worker turnover, the steel mill introduced a method of unpaid leave and a rotation system of a certain part of the workforce, the Kurds coming from Turkey, which relied upon the mobilization of ethnic, rural, domestic, and kinship networks. The chapter reveals how kinship and ethnic loyalties facilitate the precarious and flexible shop floor and labour arrangements at the steel mill.

Chapter 5 turns to the individual lives of workers, focusing on the life story of a young Kurdish labourer, called Ferman, whose choices and moralities reflect the confounding effects of the contemporary capitalist transformation in the region. Ferman would like to travel at the speed of light to affluence by exploiting the boom and bust cycles in the Iraqi Kurdistan real estate market, while striking patriarchal bargains with his father over the flow of remittance cash. The chapter explores the contradictory articulations of the capitalist form of production and domestic relations at a structural and individual level.

Chapter 6 continues to explore the fragmented experience of work and life under contemporary capitalism in Iraqi Kurdistan, highlighting the dilemmas of a Kurdish migrant labourer, Rojan, from Turkey, worried about having contracted HIV/AIDS during a sexual encounter in an Erbil massage parlour. While Rojan suffers from self-deprecatory talk and fears of having been infected with HIV, he does not want to be tested for fear of losing his employment and being deported back to his hometown. The chapter delves into how Rojan

experiences doubt and how his perceptions and reactions relate to wider cultural, economic, and political ideologies and conditions.

Finally, the conclusion grapples with the problems of relating the structural uncertainty of contemporary capitalism and unregulated accumulation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to individual uncertainty and contradiction at the subjective level.

Chapter 1
Capitalization of a Landscape in Conflict

Introduction

In this first chapter, I aim to set the steel mill and life in the context of the rural Hiwa district, a frontier region between ISIS and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.[44] Analogous to Roitman's (2005, 2004) account of the criminalization of the landscape and the proliferation of different forms of governance in the Chad Basin and Tsing's (2005, 2003) case of the capitalization of resource frontiers in the eastern part of South Kalimantan, the Hiwa district examined in this case appears as a wild and uncertain resource landscape where robbery, kidnapping, murder, smuggling, occupation, and appropriation proliferate.[45] Thus, the chapter is about the landscape in which the industrial production and accumulation flourished. As argued in Paul Hirst's (2005:3-4) *Space and Power*: *Politics, War and Architecture* understanding landscape is critical as it is a resource in the structuring of power. Similarly, I approach landscape here as both a resource and a constraint, which generates a field of force (risks and opportunities) for its occupants. Thus, the landscape here does not distribute resources that everyone can use equally but offers more heterogeneous possibilities, insecurities, and uncertainties according to the different social positions people hold.

In this case, the fragmentation of the landscape, where the organizations of the KRG have disintegrated under the pressure of war, refugee flows, and economic crisis, emerges as both a resource and a constraint (see Reno 2000 for a comparison in relation to the integration of clandestine economies, violence and states in the African context).[46] It is a resource because the combination of violence, uncertainty, and criminalization comes to be form an

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[44] In her ethnography *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connections*, Anna Tsing (2005) provides insightful discussion into how we might think about the concept of the frontier. For her (2005:27–29), frontiers are particular kinds of edges, 'a zone of not yet – not yet mapped, not yet regulated' areas 'where the expansive nature of extraction comes into its own . . . and creates wilderness so that some – and not others – may reap its rewards.'

[45] Tsing (2005:26–27) writes that frontiers confuse the boundaries of law and change rules that allow new economies of profit as well as loss. For Hoefle (2004:277–278), frontier was an area of violence that took the shape of 'institutionalized violence against the ethnic groups that stood in the way of frontier expansion' (see Hoefle 2006 for a similar process in Brazil's central Amazon.)

[46] Kopytoff (1989[1987]: 170) wrote that the frontier is 'an area over which [political] control by the regional metropoles is absent or uncertain' (see O'Kane and Ménard 2015 for revisiting Kopytoff's frontier thesis in Sierra Leone, and see Korf, Hagmann, and Doevenspeck 2013 for the relationship between metropolis and the peripheral frontier). For Das and Poole (2004:7), the state's boundaries, namely wilderness, lawlessness, and savagery, both lie outside its jurisdiction and at the same time threaten it from within, therefore, 'the state is imagined as an incomplete project'.

instrument of capitalist and other arbitrary forms of accumulation (see Kadri 2014:3 for socialization of resources through violence in Iraq; Rigi 2007 for the violent seizure of wealth in Chechynya). Nevertheless, at the same time, it also turns out to be a constraint, since uncertainty and arbitrary application of power and coercion animate anxieties, insecurities, and uncertainties in the individual lives in the district, opening paths to conflict, contradiction, as well as resistance.

The Evil Within/Without

The district of Hiwa, where the industrial production site of the steel mill is located, lies to the southwest of Erbil, 45 miles east of Mosul and ten miles from the town of Gwer, an Iraqi Kurdistan frontline against ISIS between 2014 and 2016. The Zab River divided the peshmerga-controlled Gwer from ISIS forces on the other side of the river. ISIS militants periodically crossed this river in small boats and entered Gwer; the militants were driven back each time by Kurdish peshmerga forces. Nevertheless, ISIS surprise attacks killed peshmergas and civilians in the town with a range of weapons including missiles and rockets. Executions carried out against the inhabitants of the area and kidnappings of young girls and women became routine particularly from 2014. Day and night, peshmerga forces near in Gwer listened in on radio chatter to follow ISIS communications in order to prevent attacks against the Kurds. Civilians died on the Gwer frontier, and hundreds of people migrated from the area, leaving their houses, kin, and livelihoods behind. ISIS remained about half an hour away from the steel mill for more than two years. As all of this was happening, the steel mill continued its production.

Despite war and violence only ten miles away, the Hiwa district was often silent, apart from occasional gunfire. One could occasionally see smoke rising from the frontline, blending with the gas flares from the oil extraction sites in the same direction. Despite being in the middle of a violent landscape, one could still see families perched on mattresses picnicking on the hills, especially when the fields were covered with wildflowers in late March. The sky was clear almost year-round, fair weather being reliable save during dust storms, which were most common from late autumn to spring.

These storms occur when strong wind blows sand and dirt from dull surfaces in the region. However, local residents of the district, the Herki people, believed that the heavy dust storms had intensified with the war in Iraq and Syria. The Herkis told me about thick yellow clouds blanketing the district and extending all the way to Mosul, and which most believed

were caused by the use of chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq. Some others also claimed that the dust storms were artificially created by ISIS to blind the U.S. Air Force and shield ISIS troop movements.

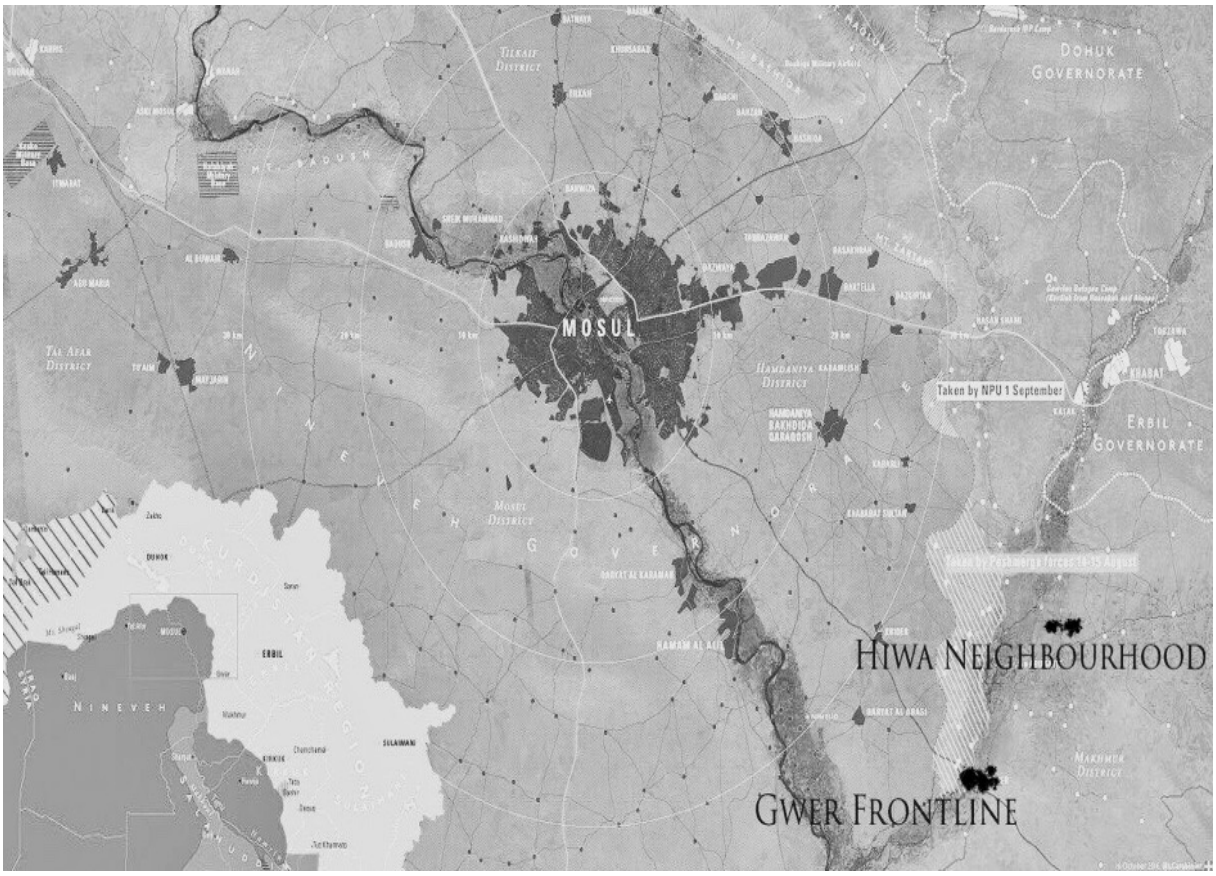

Figure 10. The war front and Hiwa district, 2015

Source: South Front

During one of these dust storms in the district, I was with Omed, a young Herki man, sitting in the garden of his father's house. When the dust storm hit, Omed rushed to gather his daughter Aşna in his arms and then ran into the house. A few minutes later, the storm covered the entire district with a yellow dust. The windows were nailed shut, as it was believed that the dust storms carried harmful particles from the war front. Omed's father, Xorto, arrived soon thereafter and sat on a cushion, his back arched forward and his head touching the floor. He prayed under his breath, leaned back again, raised his hands, and said 'Amen' in a sombre voice. Omed's father then took his granddaughter on his lap and gently stroked her hair. She grinned and gurgled while he smiled indulgently. Taking advantage of Xorto's kind nature, I asked what he was praying for. He replied with a smile, 'I asked Him to heal our land and

protect our house from evil.' Following this, Omar loudly said 'Amen,' wiped his face with his hands, and calmly added 'Protect us from the evil within.'

Figure 11. The Herki village

Source: The author

ISIS was a clear threat to the life and land of the Herkis in the district. The Salafi jihadist militant group invaded the land, stole and plundered, terrorized the local people, damaged the environment, and exacerbated the dust storms, all of which left the Herkis feeling frightened, insecure, and aggravated. For the Herkis, the Sunni group was evil, not comprised of real Sunni Muslims, and God would send them all to hell.

More remarkably, I later realized that Herki people also saw the steel mill as an evil, 'the evil within' as Omar described, similar to ISIS, because it had also invaded the land, stolen its resources, corrupted the young men of the village, and caused concerns, insecurities, and anxieties for Hiwa's residents. For the Herki men, it was easy to denounce ISIS because it was the obvious enemy of all, but they did not know how to get rid of the government-backed

steel mill lying at the bottom of the Herki village, which was both a source of luck for some and of concern for others. Before telling why the steel mill is called the evil within, I will describe the landscape of violence and insecurities in the district, which is a part of our analysis, particularly in this chapter.

Landscape of Violence

Similar to Henrik Vigh's (2009:420) description of Bissau, the hub of the West African country of Guinea-Bissau, the Hiwa district was characterized by the 'constant noise of warfare', dislocations, and the unremitting rumours of fight, as its Kurdish inhabitants labelled. Consecutive periods of conflict and violence since 1961 disturbed the whole region. From the early 1960s, if not before, the region suffered uninterrupted situations of sweeping violence (see Leezenberg 2008:635–636 for the history of violence in the region particularly since 1980s).

The district was faced with an absurd situation in 1990s. The 36th parallel in the north of Iraq during the Gulf War of 1991, from which the U.K., France, and the U.S. declared the 'no-fly zone', divided the area along the parallel into two, with the south under Baʿth Party control and the north under the Coalition forces' administration. It was explained to me that several people from the district were forced to flee north in order to receive humanitarian aid and food relief and protect themselves from a potential conflict between the enemies, while others began to live under Baʿath Party in the south of the Hiwa district, where the steel mill is currently located.

The unrest in the outcome of the 1991 Gulf War triggered continuous tension and armed conflict in the district. In addition, backbiting between the KDP and PUK in the period 1994–1997 led to additional instabilities and insecurities (see Leezenberg 2005:635). The Hiwa Herkis engaged in the Kurdish civil war on the side of the KDP and suffered several deaths. One of the old Herki men explained that numerous men from the district had died during the civil war while engaged in killing other Kurds, a fact considered shameful in the history of the Kurds.

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the only major battleground in the Kurdish controlled zones was the rocky land neighbouring Khurmal on the Iraqi–Iranian border, where the U.S. 'prepared the way for a ground attack against local positions of the Islamist Ansar al-Islam' (Leezenberg 2005:631). Nevertheless, the war and subsequent invasion of Iraq created a panic; the Herki in the district suffered from a continuous sense of insecurity and

vulnerability. Agricultural production had once again collapsed, and residents became reliant on humanitarian assistance and aid in order to meet basic family needs (see Natali 2010 for the dependence of the Kurdish governance on humanitarian aid in the post-invasion phase of the 2003 Iraq War).

The conflict and violence in the district escalated once again in 2014. ISIS seized the opportunity to dispatch operatives to Syria and export its Salafi jihadi influence starting in 2011, at a time when the U.S. army had withdrawn from Iraq and the Syrian Civil War began. Within a few years, the jihadist group had taken over between a quarter and a third of Syria's territory in the east and north. With the fall of Mosul in the summer of 2014, and the capture by ISIS of regions inhabited by Yazidis, the district turned into a frontier region between ISIS and the peshmerga forces. Arbitrary violence marked the Hiwa district, as kidnapping, armed robbery, theft, and murder became increasingly common and everyday life was pervaded by sense of vulnerability, anxiety, and worry.

I now turn to the ethnographic account of instability and insecurity in the district for the period between the fall of Mosul and the failure of ISIS in 2016, which corresponds to my ethnographic presence in the region.

Neighbouring ISIS

On the evening of 6 August 2014, ISIS fighters crossed Zab River to attack Gwer and to seize several villages. Kurdish forces had been forced to retreat. The checkpoint and peshmerga camps were evacuated. As rumours of the ISIS advance spread, Erbil inhabitants become disturbed. The mass inflow of Gwer residents into Erbil escalated concerns; some people left to the east for mountainous towns that are nearby, which resulted in forming long queues at petrol stations across Iraqi Kurdistan (see Salih 2014). The civilian men from neighbouring areas had joined the peshmerga forces on the front lines. Some Kurdish politicians went to the border area, which is only half an hour away from Erbil, and joined the television broadcasts to boost the public's morale (see Salih 2014).

In the KSM, production halted and the workers were moved to a roofed storage area in the capital city of Erbil, while some of the migrant workers volunteered to remain in order to run the coordination with peshmerga forces in the district. When ISIS had advanced to within three miles, Sunni Arab workers who had remained at the mill started a riot by firing their handguns in order to take control and raise ISIS flags around the mill. Mr. Zoro, the human resources manager at the mill, who had chosen to remain that night, told me that some

of the Sunni Arab workers later managed to escape from the mill and joined ISIS (see Chapter 4 for how Mr. Zoro embodied the role of ethnic fatherhood). The riot was suppressed after ISIS's advance was halted through U.S. air bombardment. Most of the Sunni Arab workers surrendered. Following the event, the Sunni Arab workers were replaced with the Yazidi refugees fleeing from the ISIS massacre in Sinjar city. The migrant workers who remained at the mill that night were described as 'heroic' and 'exceptional' workers amongst their colleagues. Pictures of migrant workers with hand grenades and automatic rifles bunkered in front-line trenches were posted on Facebook and Twitter accounts. When shown the pictures, managers praised their workers for their courage in defending the mill. Some also received promotions and salary increases. Stories of courage and rebellion about the night continued to circulate at the KSM even at the beginning of 2016 when I left the field.

When ISIS retreated in the face of U.S. bombardment, peshmerga forces were deployed on the outskirts of the town of Gwer to fill the security vacuum left by fleeing ISIS soldiers. Nevertheless, control of the area remained fragile, and violent clashes continued to erupt between the summer of 2014 and the end of 2016. Thus, ISIS remained a persistent threat to household and land security for the Hiwa district. The high chance of attack left people constantly on the alert and aware of potential escape routes, how to avoid combat on the roads, and how to seek possible sanctuary in nearby rural areas.

The agricultural fields of the Herki were located on the Gwer side, as the Zab River was used for irrigation. Most Herki men left their agricultural production near Gwer. Since Herki men faced the threat of leaving their lands at any time, most have turned to sources of income that raise cash more quickly than traditional agriculture, such as trade and wage labour. Some Herki men, mostly from the older generations, continued to cultivate their fields near the village, but most moved into subsistence farming due to the increased risk and uncertainty concerning access to land since the summer of 2014.

With the appearance of ISIS, a checkpoint was established between Gwer and the Hiwa district. When one drove from Hiwa toward Gwer, peshmergas at the checkpoint signalled to vehicles to stop; they checked identity cards and ask questions. Such checkpoints in the region have increased considerably with the proliferation of migrants and fake documents, illegal border crossings, and the movement of refugees fleeing from ISIS-controlled areas. Showing my Turkish ID, however, I was often waved through checkpoints quickly. Kurdish workers who had a Turkish ID were often equally approved to pass, while everybody who had an Iraqi ID was always made to wait and was often questioned for a long time (see Kelly 2006:89 for comparison).

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the force of documents was always partial and unstable during the war with ISIS, analogous to Kelly's (2006:89) ethnographic work in Palestine during the second Palestinian intifada. At these checkpoints, documents were never trusted, as they might be counterfeit (see Kelly 2006:89–90; Navaro-Yashin's 2002:87 for the ambivalence and uncertainty of documents). Security personnel at the checkpoints habitually required detailed inquiries from the passengers, including where they came from, their place of birth, references and contacts in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, how long they would stay, and what they needed to do.

It should be underscored here that passing a checkpoint did not mean that one was completely safe and clean. That is, travellers who passed the checkpoint were still not completely trusted. For this reason, Hiwa residents were continuously on the alert for cars coming from the direction of the checkpoint (see Jeganathan 2004 for how checkpoints are simultaneously constructed as a security measure in contested territories and 'a map of anticipation' for violence).

Following the proliferation of uncertain and risky sites and events, I will now turn to the perception of insecurity and its role in shaping the life of inhabitants, including the Kurdish and Indian migrant workers in the district.

Insecurity as a Structure of Feeling

Stories of the war and violence in Gwer were among the most important topics of conversation at the mill and the district, attracting everybody's attention. Most migrant workers and the Herki men would talk about the situation in Gwer and develop speculations about ISIS. Common examples include: 'They are going to hit tonight because the sky is dark and it's rainy,' or 'I heard gunfire, a lot of gunfire, and then nothing. I guess they are getting closer,' or 'See that cloud of smoke rising above the trees? Things may get worse tomorrow.' Such speculation often relied on assumptions based on everyday gossip, jokes, media, and news heard from the war front. Some calculations were based on incorrect assumptions: a cloud of smoke blamed on ISIS often turned out to be from burning crops, tyres, waste, or wood in the district. It was against this context of routinized perception of uncertainty and insecurity that the inhabitants of the district wove their existence.

While some of the managers and Herki men have visited Gwer, most migrant workers from India, Iran, and Turkey had never been to the war front. It was partly for this reason that most of my informants described the war front as a landscape of the unknown, which

generated insecurity for them. The unknowns of the front line and the nearby violence of the war generated constant anxiety and discomfort among the inhabitants of Hiwa. Some worried to the point of becoming depressed and overwhelmed with obsessive thoughts of what might go wrong. For example, during his first month at the mill, Abdullah, a Kurdish worker from Turkey who worked at the power plant, became obsessed with going out for a smoke to check for signs of an ISIS assault, as he was unable to hear anything over the noisy, constantly running generators. Some other workers ruminated about how they might be killed if the ISIS ever invaded the mill and captured them. For instance, a Kurdish worker named Newroz described the frontline as a 'devil's cave' from which terror might emerge at any time, and he told us of his fear of having his head cut off:

> I have seen how the ISIS forced a toddler to shoot hostages in the head. The brief video shows the child, dressed completely in black, walking into a decrepit ball pit towards a man whose wrists are bound to the fence. The toddler aims a gun at the prisoner's head, squints for a few seconds, and then pulls the trigger. In another video, they are killing a Kurdish fighter by slicing his throat with a huge knife. There is something they hate about the heads of their enemies. I am afraid of my head being cut off. You know I am afraid of being caught in my bed. The devil's cave is close to where I sleep. I tend to assume the worst in any situation. I was not like this before, but after living in this place, I am anxious and worried all the time.

At the mill, I came to realize that most workers did not openly express their feelings and emotions in front of their colleagues. They preferred to speak with me alone, as they were afraid of being teased, bullied, or ostracized for expressing such feelings in public. Amongst the working migrant men, outward expressions of sadness – drooping posture and facial expression, slumping, and expressing concern for one's own safety – were considered signs of weakness and grounds for shame. Although masculine traits vary by location and context, among the migrant workers they generally include courage, independence, assertiveness, and concern for others, notably for their families left behind. Lack of these traits and contrary behaviour would mark a man as '*karı kılıklı'* (an effeminate man), exposing him to teasing and a general lack of respect at the steel mill. For these reasons, most migrant workers would express themselves in ways they considered adequately masculine. For instance, while

Newroz had expressed to me in private that he was afraid of his head being cut off, in front of his workmates he chose to express his anxieties through his concern for his relatives:

> If ISIS comes, *wallahi* [by God] I'm not worried about being killed. I am afraid of nothing but Allah. I swear that I will, to the utmost of my power, defend our Kurdish land. I will fight the evil beast who is the source of decay in our land. I will fight for my family until my last breath. No worries, *hevals* [friends]. No worries for me. I'm only worried about my family. Every month I need to send money home. If I die, how will my family survive then? I have a young daughter, and she is my entire world.

Living near ISIS breeds anxiety and distress among Indian migrant labourers as well. Most have stated that they forget the war during the workday rush, but immediately become worried again when their routine is interrupted by gossip, humour, news, or announcements about the front line in the media. It was forbidden to use mobile phones or to speak during working hours, but most workers find ways to sneak a look by hiding their devices under their clothes or checking them in the toilet. Any news about ISIS would immediately circulate, resulting in lively debates about possible threats to the steel mill. An Indian worker, Kiaan working on the steel platform, reflects below how he feels when he hears gossip or news while at work and how he deals with the anxiety and distress:

> I am easily distracted by news and pictures about ISIS sent to me on WhatsApp while on the job. I often feel worried and scared about what I read or see. However, I can do nothing but wait, check my mobile phone for more news, and talk to my workmates. This creates even more anxiety, so it's a vicious circle. I experience that nervous feeling in my stomach all day, but I can do nothing but focus on the task at hand and try to forget my concerns.

During my interviews with the Indian workers, I observed that most experience their colleagues as perpetually frightened, even though their workmates do not state such fears expressly. This creates an anxious work environment and can drive employees to demand more information from their managers. Only a small group of the Indian workers could speak English, with only five or six considered fluent. None of the Indian migrant workers spoke Kurdish or Arabic. In times of insecurity and ISIS threats, Indian supervisors would often

report the anxiety among Indian workers to their English-speaking Indian managers. These managers would then relay this anxiety to Kurdish and Turkish managers and wait to receive information to share with the rest of the work force.

In most situations, the Indian workers stated that they received no such explanations, and the lack of feedback further intensified their anxiety. When this happened, the Indian workers would try to obtain more information from their Kurdish or Turkish colleagues after work. Due to language barriers, Indian and Kurdish workers would often use body language, facial expressions, and hand gestures to describe the two basic situations: 'things are good' or 'things are bad'. Even with the language barrier, some workers would attempt to communicate by expressly using some words in Hindi and Turkish, such as '*afsana*' (baseless gossip), '*ilaç*' (medicine), or '*nishaan*' (shooting) to receive some news from the Kurdish workers or to explain their problems and ask them for help.

Finally, for the Herkis, the presence of ISIS and war front brought intensive militarization, military bases, checkpoints, and temporary security zones into the Hiwa district. Unfortunately, lack of authority and control over distinct parts of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the deepening financial downturn, and the influx of IDPs (internally displaced persons) into the region continued to inhibit the KRG's capability to battle against smuggling of goods and human trafficking (see Trafficking in Person Report 2016). Residents experienced unease at the margins of a dysfunctional regional government, and they suffered from the growing criminalization of the district.

With the presence of ISIS and the increased flow of people crossing borders, the local residents came into contact not only with refugees and migrants, but also with criminals, robbers, thieves, corrupt soldiers, and smugglers criss-crossing international borders who strove to make use of the productive potential of informalization and deregulation in the region. Since August 2014, burglars and bandits seeking to steal cash and gold from the Hiwa village proliferated at a greater rate. Some Herki men would dig a hole under their bedrooms to hide their valuables and cash from armed burglars and bandits. Given the dangerous situation, even younger Herki men learnt to use a handgun and started keeping knives, homemade bombs, and grenades in their cars to protect themselves and others in the district.

Kidnapping has increased, and stories of sexual abuse, physical torture, and executions have proliferated. For some, it became a profitable business to kidnap girls and sell them to ISIS. Women and girls came to be vulnerable in the district, and it became inappropriate for them to leave the area around the house. They were not left alone in their homes; the eldest man in the family began to stay at home with them while the younger household members

were at work. It became dangerous to stop a car at night because robbers wearing formal peshmerga clothes proliferated on the Gwer road. The robbers would stop cars and ask for documentation just like at an ordinary security checkpoint and would then steal the cars. The stolen vehicles were then sold very cheaply at the second-hand car bazaar in Erbil, as new plates could be easily obtained through contacts and relatives in the offices of the KRG.

In this unsettling and violent environment, the KRG remained incapable of exerting control over criminalization. The district became wild and uncontrolled as the political governance became unable to practise its ways of order and law-making (see Anders 2005:150 for the rise of unregulated and clandestine economies).

Rigi (2007:37–38) described the territory of Chechnya during 1990s as a place where in the nonexistence of law and regulation, relations of power became negotiated through the use of violence and abrupt threats. In his case, the Chechen War turned the market deregulated and criminalized. It also caused the informal market to expand and the violent seizure of wealth to become more prevalent, and these came to be seen as legitimate modes of wealth creation (Rigi 2007:57; Chossudovsky 1998:228–229). Comparably, along the Gwer road, uncertainty became productive for those who were imaginative in turning landscape elements, livelihoods, and previous ecologies into wild resources available for capture and wealth creation (compare Tsing 2003:5100).

Following this, I will now focus on how this wildness and uncertainty came to be articulated with accumulation.

Accumulation in the Wild

In this part, let us try to delve deeper into the relation between the growing insecurity and uncertainty in the district and the phenomena of land grab, theft, and illegal economic activities as a common mode of wealth creation. Most residents believed that with the thriving insecure and uncertain conditions in the district, people were trying to create wealth as quickly as possible. There was no legal assurance in the vicinity the war. There was nothing to guarantee or to protect one's wealth and belongings. Furthermore, police protection mechanisms against arbitrary seizure of wealth were not satisfactorily functioning. For this reason, inhabitants of the district acquired arms and sought to protect themselves and their wealth on their own. The war and violence in the region, transformation of the Iraqi state, smuggling, kidnappings, theft, and panic encouraged ever-intensifying forms of seizure and conquest; anyone could come to use and claim the Hiwa district's material and human

resources. With growing threat and arbitrary violence, the deregulated landscape of Hiwa became ‘wild’ and ‘unpredictable’; boundaries between what was legal and illegal became blurred; inhabitants turned to criminal economic activities to raise cash in a short time; and industrial capital benefited from asset-stripping, analogous to what Tsing (2003:5102–5103) has shown in relation to the ‘growing power of corporate transnationalism’ in the eastern part of South Kalimantan.

For the KSM, one of the sources of wealth in the district to capture was the abundance of free land. The mill’s main goal was to reserve as much scrap metal as possible in view of the fear of economic instability, so it began to expand into adjoining lands and to stock its scrap metal on them. As more metal came in, the mill began to occupy more land in the district. After a while the mill began to enclose areas that might be needed in the future beyond its present needs. The mill did not fence the area, so as to avoid an armed clash with the Herki, but the tension between the Herki and the steel mill over the occupied land became tangible at times and on occasion evolved into protests and armed fights near the steel mill. In fact, the tension dates back to the establishment of the steel mill on Herki common agricultural land in 2006, when a legendary cash payment of $30,000 was made to the village’s previous *mukhtar* (the head of a village). In several versions of the story regarding the amount paid to the agha, ranging from $20,000 to $50,000, the villagers were not aware of the transaction. It has been said that the mukhtar then disappeared, while some of his relatives also claimed that he died in the war front as a peshmerga.

The Herkis claimed that no one could sell the village’s land without a consensus, adding that no one has even seen the cash supposedly paid to the mukhtar or knows what happened to him after the transaction. Furthermore, the amount of land sold to the mill for that $30,000 remains unclear. While some in the district told me it amounted to around 10,000 square metres, others claimed between 3,000 and 5,000 square metres according to the original agreement. Neither the amount of land registered at the Tapu Office nor the actual number of square metres in use were known. I was told by a manager in the KSM that the land was registered in the Tapu Office in 2006, but also he explained that he had actually not seen the document, so he did not know the exact area of land registered. In the Hiwa district, various people said inconsistent things about the matter to me, and no one ever specified the details concerning the land the KSM currently occupies.

The Herkis objected that the sale was invalid and insisted that the steel mill must pay compensation for the use of their lands. However, the villagers had no title deed to the land themselves, as ownership was reassigned to the Herki people 30 years ago on the verbal

promise of the KDP.[47] The Herkis claimed that the village and the surrounding district were registered in the name of the mukhtar. Once the land was registered, the Herki tribal group had quasi-inalienable, inheritable tenancy rights to the land. Rights to use the land can be transferred and sold between them, but not just anyone can buy or own it (see Van Bruinessen 1992, 2005 for the historical account of land registration and allocation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq). Otherwise speaking, although rights to the lands could be subject to transactions, they should only be transferred to a Herki, preferably one from the village in the Hiwa district. Notwithstanding, with the new Business Law of 2006, the land on which production is based in the district was allocated and protected as a strategic, licensed project of the KBOI, under the provision of law.[48] With the legal protection of the land under the new Regional Government, tension abated somewhat, as the Herki men had no choice but to accept the regulation and official procedures. Yet, with the increased ISIS presence and violence in the district, the steel mill began to enter into larger areas, creating new tensions and struggles between the Herki and the mill.

After August 2014, the mill's desire to store as much cheap war scrap as possible led to the scrap piles overflowing into neighbouring lots. By 2015, the mill had expanded more than four hectares, as a consequence of the construction of a different labour camp to the north of the mill. In 2015, the steel mill took over yet another two or more hectares to house the increasing inflow of scrap metal. Through these expansions the steel mill divided the Herki graveyard from the rest of the village. Herkis now had to take a side route around the steel mill in order to visit their graveyard located on the west side of the district.

Most Herkis saw the location of their graveyard, established some 30 years ago, as evidence that the land belonged to the Herki. For the Herki, several people from the village had lived and died there and were buried in fresh plots across the district. The steel mill must respect the bodies of these dead Herki people, and if the steel mill wanted to use the land, it had to first compensate the Herki.

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[47] The Herkis in the Hiwa district were originally from the Qandil region, a rocky area of Iraqi Kurdistan neighbouring the Iraq–Iran border. The 1980–1988 war with Iran hit the border regions, leading to the ruin of thousands of villages and even bigger towns, such as Halabja and Qala Diza (see Leezenberg 2005:635 for a historical and political analysis of the region). Under war and extreme shortage conditions, the Herki people were forced to flee from northeast Iraq in the mid-1980s and had been resettled in the Hiwa district in return for their political and military support for the KDP.

[48] Based on the Section 4 of the Business Law, Article 4: 'Upon receiving a proposal by the Kurdistan Board of Investment, the Council may transfer the ownership of plots of land that are allocated to strategic Projects, at a promotional price or free of charge, provided that the nature and importance of the Project and the public interest will be taken into consideration when transferring the ownership as an exemption from the Law of Sale and Lease of Properties of the State, which is applicable in the Region.'

Figure 12. The scrap metal piles in the Hiwa district

Source: The author

KSM managers agreed that the mill had been expanding its production complex since the summer of 2014 and explained that non-monetary compensation had been made in return. Managers emphasized that the steel mill had recruited more than 70 Herki men, now contributing to their families' budgets and improving their quality of life. Furthermore, I was also informed that the mill provided the village with free electricity and had built a mosque as a token of respect and gratitude for the death of the Herki tribal group. Seen from the perspective of the managers, the mill had not invaded anyone's land or violated anyone's rights; in fact, the mill used available land that would otherwise be idle. According to the managers, when the steel mill arrived in the region, there was no agricultural production on the current site of production and the district was filled with mines. The mill cleared all remaining mines from the time of the Gulf War. For this reason, managers instead demanded that the Herki should be grateful to the steel mill for clearing dangerous explosives from the district and making it available for agricultural production.

For the Herkis, compensation meant cash in U.S. dollars; all other rewards were considered subordinate. There were frequent disagreements about the sum to be paid. In spite

of minor agreements, the dispute over the land and cash compensation grew hotter during my presence in the district. In one of these cases, some of the younger Hiwa men came together and complained at the steel mill with their guns, shooting into the air and demanding cash in return for their land. In response, the steel mill sent their armed security guards; a clash was prevented by the arrival of the peshmerga forces. During the clash, the two groups accused each other of being bandits, criminals, and thieves seeking to take advantage of the increased deregulation and criminalization in the district.

For the Herki, the mill was stealing land from them, denying local inhabitants access to assets upon which their livings depended. Herki men were anxious about the danger as tons of war scrap were arriving in the district each day, the scrap containing used and unused, live and partially live rockets, missiles, and ammunition shells, which could explode when offloaded or later separated. The mill was bringing in foreign people near the village, including scrap traders, sex workers, and refugee and migrant workers, creating further insecurities and risks for the local inhabitants. Furthermore, the steel production subjected the district to constant noise day and night. The Herki stated that some people had difficulty falling asleep after the mill first began production, with some suffering from increased thirst, a frequent urge to urinate, and hair loss. I was also informed in the village that the massive amounts of dust produced by the mill had caused many villagers respiratory problems, as well as irritation to the eyes, ears, nose, throat, and skin.

The Herki contended that various local bodies of water have also been heavily polluted by ongoing effluent discharge from the steel mill, leaving villagers to draw their drinking water from polluted rivers, with dirty tap water, and other unsafe sources. During my visit, people in the district regularly suffered from bacterial infections and intestinal parasites picked up from water during bathing, washing, drinking, and preparing and consuming food. When I first arrived at the Hiwa district, I was told not to drink water in the village, even though most of the villagers boil their water to kill the bacteria and then let it cool to room temperature. From the Herki perspective, the steel mill denied these problems and ignored most of them. One exception was installing a system that improves air quality and safety by removing particulate matter from air discharged due to breathing complications experienced by the Herki residents. In return, the Regional Government remained unable to regulate and to control the negative externalities of the production process. The KDP had neither the power nor the motivation to regulate the private sector. The Herki saw the mill as a resource belonging to the KDP and therefore did not expect much to change.

With the decline of agricultural production, young Herki men who left agriculture began to look for new ways to earn cash and found subsistence in the growing lawlessness and informalization of the district. After a while, the Herki decided that they needed to struggle to solve their issues themselves. In this context, young Herki men did not see stealing from the mill or selling prostitution to its workforce as illegitimate or illicit, as these activities had been reframed as a means of protest and resistance. However, it can be seen not only a means of protest and resistance, but can also be explained more as an adaptation to the growing criminalization in the area. Let me explain this situation with a further case.

In 2014, the mill received roughly around 30–35 truckloads of scrap each day, accounting for tens of tons of metal deposited into the scrapyard, covering the hills of the district. These scrap piles expanded each day, but the yard itself had no gates or walls and could be accessed by various access pathways leading to different sections. These paths were well known among the young Herki men, some of whom then began stealing scrap metal at night and selling it back to the mill. The scrap was first carried by hand to a Toyota pickup truck and quietly deposited in a storage area from which Herkis sold small quantities to a scrap metal trader each day. The mill ended up purchasing its own scrap metal via this loop, which somehow went unnoticed for around a year.

Eventually, some Indian migrant labourers saw Herki men stealing metal pieces from the scrap metal yard at night. These Indians thought that the men were ISIS agents and reported the situation to the Indian contractor at the steel mill. The Herki were later caught, but were then released to avoid an armed conflict with a group of Herki men who quickly arrived with guns and rifles in front of the steel mill. The Herki insider, who had been employed as a gardener, escaped from the steel mill shortly thereafter. The mill remained unable to recover the thousands of dollars it had spent to repurchase its own scrap metal. Following the event, the steel mill installed 24-hour high-definition security cameras with a backup system in place to protect its scrap metal resources. Furthermore, massive light towers were installed around the scrap metal yard, and watchdogs were posted to give warning about unwanted intruders and chase them off. Some of the Indian men were recruited as night-time security guards at the scrap metal yard, replacing the Herki guards, who were likely to partner with their relatives in the village rather than to protect the interest of the steel mill.

In this way, the Herkis managed to secure thousands of dollars with the help of a fellow Herki man employed at the mill and a scrap metal trader in Iraqi Kurdistan. Most invested the money they had earned in cars and started making a living as taxi drivers in Erbil. Yet, they continued to look at other options besides taxi driving after realizing that they could

raise large amounts of cash by engaging in the expansion of lawlessness and deregulation. Some of them began selling alcohol to migrant workers from their cars in labour camps located on the outskirts of Erbil. Migrant workers would not need to travel to Erbil to buy alcohol, as the taxi was a mobile alcohol shop. With an eye to saving money, Indian workers generally preferred to buy their whiskey from Herki men. Kurdish men often bought beer. It was a particularly good service for the Indian workers, who were considered 'ethnic aliens' in the region and were often discouraged of leaving the labour camp in the district due to kidnapping and ISIS-related danger. Herki men often obtained the alcohol from the Christian quarter of Erbil, where Turkish-made counterfeit alcohol brands were sold. There were also genuine brands of Turkish beer, which were more expensive. At night, Herki men drove with their alcohol to areas near the companies in the south of Erbil around the Hiwa district and sold as much as they could.

Herki taxi drivers later began to carry sex workers and created a 'mobile one-stop shop for prostitution' for migrant workers living in labour camps. Most of these sex workers were women from South and South East Asia. Taxi drivers would bring these women from their homes and carry them to areas near the companies at night. For the steel mill, the location was behind a hill near the scrap metal yard. Migrant workers would come and spend around half an hour in the car with the woman, paying around $30–40, which was almost half what a migrant worker would have paid going to a prostitute in Erbil, apart from the cost of taking a taxi and money spent on food. Some of the Herki men who were worried about the cleanliness of their cars came up with the idea of setting up sex tents, which allowed them to keep their cars clean and gave them the added benefit of letting them work with multiple sex workers on the same night. Most of the young Herki men engaged in this business made a lot of cash with multiple sex workers, and the taxi driver also took a share in the money earned that night.

Trapped between the evil within and without, some young Herki men saw prostitution as a legitimate mode of moneymaking in the breakdown of order. Unsurprisingly, this helped the expansion of sex-trading and the abuse of sex workers in the Hiwa district and exposed migrant workers to increased risk for HIV infection, creating further insecurities and uncertainties for the marginalized inhabitants of the Hiwa district, which will be the topic of Chapter 6.

Conclusion

This chapter has described an expansion of violence and instability in the Hiwa district, which freed up local and political control on land and transformed the area into a 'space of desire' as well as a 'space of resistance', open to exploration, appropriation, and exploitation (Tsing 2005:32). In *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, Sennett (1998:9) argued that capitalist production and expansion today ceased to develop workplaces and labour securely rooted in stable contexts as sites for value creation. Instead, industrial manufacturing moves elsewhere, as Comaroff and Comaroff (2001:4) indicated, to where labour and land 'is cheaper, less assertive, less taxed, and less protected by states and unions'. In this respect, the Hiwa district offered almost instantaneous riches for entrepreneurs who could master its extralegal and illegitimate apparatuses, and simultaneously disciplined the lives of those who did not, such as atomized migrant workers who were encouraged to survive in full collaboration with capital in the context of an external, violent, and uncertain environment.

The steel mill grabbed land, polluted water and air resources, and amassed live shells and explosives in the hills of the village without being restrained by laws and regulations in practice, at a time of ISIS threat. Land became devalued and was either bought cheap or grabbed as for free, and a sense of fear and vulnerability pervaded everyday life. Agricultural production had diminished gravely, and district residents became dependent on cash from any source they could muster in the context of violence, uncertainty, and deregulation. In the meantime, the Regional Government played its role here by providing protection to strategic industrial projects (the KSM) under the provisions of the new Business Law 2006.

Considering everything, the steel mill furthered the conditions for the enlarged reproduction of violent accumulation locally, causing social, economic, and environmental insecurity in the life of the Herki residents, who began to find alternative means of organisation and subsistence in the context of growing violence and deregulation. Comparable to what Tsing (2005:) has shown in relation to the collaboration of wildness and violence in the context of plantations of oil palm, rubber, and acacia for the pulp and paper trade in the eastern part of South Kalimantan and more recently to Laungaramsri (2012) in the context of the recent growth of large-scale rubber plantations in border regions of Laos, accumulation in this case is articulated with violence and wilderness and captured beyond industrial

production on the shop floor, rather in an interstitial place, where the puzzlement of borders between law and violence proliferate.

Chapter 2
Capitalization of War Debris

Introduction

This chapter concentrates on the appropriation and recycling of cheap war debris on the Hiwa frontier. The accumulation of capital at the steel mill based on recycling scrap into iron bar depends upon the active incorporation of cheap and abundant debris from war-ridden towns into the manufacturing process. In this respect, the steel mill finds the necessary conditions for self-expansion and continued production by mobilizing unregulated trans-border commercial networks and so extending its appropriation and capitalization of cheap war scrap. Thus, the chapter studies how formal production in the steel mill relies upon the informal and unorganized cross-border trade networks in the region, analogous to what Janet Roitman (2005, 2004) described for the border economy of the Chad Basin.

What consideration of the 'bush economy' (Roitman 2005:137) here enables us to see is how unregulated trans-border commercial networks form integral components in the functioning of the steel mill and a lucrative business in the district. More abstractly, to understand how the steel mill functions, we need to look beyond the shop floor and examine how the organized and the unorganized markets are functionally integrated into each other (see Pine 2015; Dunn 2008; Ledeneva 2006; Volkov 2002 for the integration of legal and illegal markets in different ethnographic contexts).

In relation to these discussions, the chapter attempts to answer the following questions: Why do steel companies from the rest of the world come to Iraqi Kurdistan? How are the steel-manufacturing sector and scrap metal trade benefiting from Iraqi Kurdistan's quasi-state form? How are informal economic activities developed to meet a certain need of the formal economic activities? How do political and ethnical issues affect contemporary steel manufacturing in Iraqi Kurdistan? In what ways are the ideologies of war and reconstruction interwoven to become a motivating force behind the steel production? Which desires and commitments motivate and shape scrap traders? How are trust relationships built and maintained along the scrap metal trade in a volatile and unstable environment?

The Fragile, Metallic Mill

I saw the KSM for the first time late in the evening in December 2014. The road from Erbil was full of craters and holes, so it felt like going along the path off a road. Traffic was heavy

with Turkish oil trucks carrying fuel from Kurdish oil fields to the Khalil Ibrahim border gate, from which point oil is conveyed to the Mersin refinery and the İskenderun terminal for petroleum products. On the road leading to Mosul, I had seen drilling stations across an untold number of acres, a lot of oil was flowing, and the pastures flickered with the light of gas flares. Eventually, the giant steel mill appeared just to the right of the gas flares on the road linking the Kurdish capital of Erbil to the Gwer front line against ISIS.

Figure 13. The giant mill on the right of the Erbil–Gwer road

Source: The author

At first glance, the massive, metallic structure looked intimidating and alien against the pastoral background of the surrounding brown hills with moving flocks of sheep and small grey-brown houses with little staircases. The dirt, smells, and incessant noise of the steel mill beat against the silent district. The structure appeared fixed in space and immobile. Only later, after I became aware of the mill's expansion and contraction over time, did I come to see the steel mill more as alive, than as a fixed, solid structure. This was because I observed that the production and size of the steel mill relied on the flow of war debris from the wider surroundings. So long as debris from Syria, Mosul, and the rest of Iraq arrived at the mill, it continued to grow in workforce, production, and size. Yet any disruption in the influx of

debris resulted in cutting back production, laying off employees, and reducing the size of the steel mill.

For the expansion of accumulation and survival of the steel mill, access to war debris was crucial. This understanding was built into the structure of the mill. Should it lose access to cheap scrap metal, the metallic mill can even be disassembled for reassembly at another location where scrap was more abundant and cheaper and where business was more profitable.[49] Thus, relocation of the steel mill was proposed in the management board as a solution to the scrap metal crisis in September 2015, when the supply of war debris from Iraqi Kurdistan's southern border became disrupted due to political problems with Baghdad and the expansion of ISIS in Iraq.

Some managers suggested moving the steel mill to Rojava, the de facto Kurdish self-governing region in the north of Syria, where access to cheap war debris was considered more reliable at the time. In the end, the mill survived, thanks to the proliferation of unregulated trans-border networks of scrap traders criss-crossing the borders between Syria, Iraq, and Iraqi Kurdistan. Notwithstanding, the issue remained under consideration and resurfaced again and again in the conversations of managers and migrant workers on multiple occasions when the availability of minor scrap metal was disrupted between 2014 and 2016.

War Scrap

Properly handled, scrap is a continuous and valuable resource that can be melted down and used as a raw material in the manufacture of new commodities. Thus, unlike much other waste, scrap has monetary value. Metallic waste contains recyclable materials remaining from manufacturing, storage, and consumption. It can be obtained from all kinds of metallic waste. For example, vehicle parts, demolished industrial units, burned-out tanks, used ammunition crates, building supplies, surplus materials, and the hulls of ships can all be disaggregated to deliver exploitable scrap metal. Metal reprocessing overall includes the recovery and processing of scrap metal from used materials to produce crude steel, which is subsequently rolled into steel bars and in some cases into pipes, profiles, and panels.

Scrap is abundant in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and can be obtained at low cost. Debris from the Iran–Iraq war between 1980 and 1988, the Gulf War between 1990 and 1991, and the Iraq War in 2003, and the subsequent U.S. invasion and occupation until 2011 has made Iraq a major source of scrap. Furthermore, the Syrian Civil War since the beginning of

[49] Some parts of the KSM were also imported from disassembled steel companies in Italy, India, and Turkey, where the cost of steel production had risen and production had come to a halt.

2011 and the rise and fall of ISIS between 2012 and 2017 turned the region into a haven for dumping various kinds of war material such as broken tanks, armoured vehicles, and airplane shells.

In Iraq, the scrap metal trade is a domestic business affair, first due to scrap metal's inherent low value-to-weight ratio, and second because the escalation of conflicts and wars in distinct sites of the region hindered the circulation of scrap metal across borders. Furthermore, most developed countries have banned the importation of scrap metal from Iraq and Syria because scrap from war zones often contains live shells or explosives. Restricting the global circulation of the region's scrap metal resources, as well as the ban imposed elsewhere on the import of scrap metal from Iraq and Syria, made the scrap cheaper and available for domestic consumption, opening up new profit opportunities for capital. Nonetheless, it is evident that some of the scrap still continues to find its way to countries like India, Bangladesh, and China, which has been importing heavy melting scrap by container loads for decades also from Bosnia and Kosovo.

War scrap is usually coveted, since it is cheaper than scrap from Europe and the U.S. and because it also contains highly valued components such as copper. With the large amount of scrap remaining to be appropriated, steel mills proliferated in the west and south-west of Iraqi Kurdistan, as close as possible to war scrap metal supplies from Mosul, Raqqah, and Deir-al Zor, yet in the relative security for industrial production enjoyed in Iraqi Kurdistan. Earlier, debris in Iraq had been traded to steel companies in Turkey, but the importation of debris from Iraq was banned in 2007 following the death of several workers in an explosion near the İskenderun region of Turkey from a consignment of scrap metal imported from Iraq. In 2017, Iran's customs authority also banned the import of any scrap metal from Iraq, including ferrous scrap, which made scrap metal cheaper and production more profitable in Iraqi Kurdistan.

In this context, the KSM was established by Turkish and Kurdish businessmen in 2007 as the first steel mill in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Other companies followed suit. The number of steel companies in the region expanded from one in 2007 to 12 in 2015, giving a total capacity of around 2,670,000 tons of rebar production. The end product of these steel companies, iron bar, is consumed in the domestic market for the reconstruction of Iraqi Kurdistan, itself devastated by war and exodus of population in earlier cycles of conflict. Taking advantage of the real estate boom and reconstruction in the Kurdish region, steel companies engaged in competition for control over the scrap metal to transfer it to their factory gates from the destroyed cities of Iraq and Syria. In 2015 alone, the six top steel plants

collected around 2,900,000 tons of scrap from the region per year, of which 584,000 tons (roughly 20%) contained explosives, live shells, and pieces of live ammunition in Iraqi Kurdistan (untitled internal document distributed at steel producers meeting 2015).

Scrap Merchants

Trade continues to be a significant source of livelihood and employment on the 'margins of the global capitalist economy' (Marsden 2015:1014). Scholars such as Magnus Marsden (2015) on Afghan traders in an extensive series of contexts in the former Soviet Union, Beth Buggenhagen (2010) on Senegalese Muslims through official and unofficial trade networks in Africa, and Jeff Sahadeo (2011) on Uzbek traders in Russia demonstrated how trade becomes a subsistence tactic by traders resisting the conversions and constraints in the organization of markets and life moulded by capitalism. Scrap trading can be accepted here as one of these proliferating livelihood activities in the peripheries of the world. In the midst of war and destruction, scrap collection and its trade provided economic livelihood for populations in the war-torn towns of Iraq.

In this trade, debris was collected and broken down, and then sold to scrap metal traders and other middlemen who traded the debris from the war-torn cities into Iraqi Kurdistan, where steel mills proliferated after 2007. The collection of scrap metal is hierarchically structured; it starts with scrap metal collectors, who gather small amounts of scrap to sell to middle men. These collectors form the frontline participant in the scrap supply chain. In Erbil, unlike many Western cities where local municipalities operate recycling programs, refugees drive a significant part of this effort. One can often see refugees and migrants from Iraq and Syria or migrant workers from India and Bangladesh cycling around Erbil and collecting small quantities of scrap from houses and commercial businesses to sell to scrap dealers, who then resell it to steel mills in Iraqi Kurdistan (see Figure 33 and Figure 34 in appendix).

In one of the scrap metal yards in the south-east of Erbil, I met Yousef, a young Syrian scrap metal collector who arrived in Erbil in 2014. Yousef, who was given a place to sleep in a scrap metal storage yard, was one of several other refugees from Syria employed as a scrap collector at the bottom end of the scrap metal trade. He was thin and tall with a short beard, speaking all the time with a cigarette between his lips. He checks dump sites in Erbil districts throughout the day, scans the roadsides where individuals put out longstanding materials they no longer use, and searches garages, backyards, junkyards, and even public dump sites. With

Yousef, I realized that *one man's trash is indeed another man's treasure* in the scrap metal business. Yousef told me, 'Nobody gets rich by collecting scrap, but for refugees who have few options, it means income.' He could earn at least $400–600 a month working under the supervision of his Kurdish boss, scrap metal dealer and peshmerga, Kak Bali.

Figure 14. Yousef picking through scrap in the yard

Source: The author

Kak Bali, a Kurdish man from Erbil, was short and black-haired and always wore a red *poshu* scarf around his neck instead of customary black-and-white chequered one. He told me, 'It is needed to cover the face, first for protection from the dust, and second for camouflage if necessary.' He knew a lot of people in the scrap metal trade, and he was known as a scrap dealer who inhabited economic frontiers in the region and facilitated transactions similar to the 'brokers' and 'middlemen' described in Pine (2015) in Poland, Brković (2015) in Bosnia, and Gotfredsen (2015), and Frederiksen (2015) in Georgia. He had three Toyota pickup trucks for collecting scrap metal in small quantities from the region if needed, and a big scrap truck for selling it in larger quantities to the steel mills.

Kak Bali was a trader, but at the same time he was a soldier under the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs in Erbil. His brokering role was institutionalized, in the sense that he was a salaried state official. He carried various guns and knives with him, as well as a hand grenade

in the boot of his car. I asked him a couple of times what he did as a peshmerga, and each time he gave the same answer, 'I protect the interests of the Kurds.'

Being both a soldier and a scrap trader, he spent most of his time criss-crossing the border between Iraqi Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq. He often claimed to represent the KRG in contested territories of Iraq both as a soldier, an extension of the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs, and a businessman protecting the economic interests of the KDP.

For Kak Bali, when he leaves the last checkpoint behind in Gwer, the lines between being a soldier, a public officer, dealer, and a businessman are muddled. Kak Bali here exemplified personification of state power, comparable to 'Peruvian local strongmen' in Poole's (2004:43) ethnographic work and 'Colombian paramilitary forces' in Sanford's (2004:258) ethnographic case (see Das and Poole 2004:14). For Das and Poole (2004:14), such figures represent 'the fading of the state's jurisdiction and its continual refounding through its (not so mythic) appropriation of private justice and violence'.

It was a routine for Kak Bali to get into his Toyota pickup and set out towards Mosul, making visits to Sunni Arab and Kurdish villages situated between ISIS and Iraqi Kurdistan. He, as a peshmerga, sometimes conducts interrogations in these frontier territories, collects information for the KDP, and at other times acts as a dealer, strengthening his trade networks by distributing gifts to his business partners and associates. It was precisely because Kak Bali also acted as a representative of the KRG (and the KDP) that he was able to move across the borders and interact with other scrap traders.

In the frontlines of the connected world, where the state power was absent and the environment is accepted as wild and unrestrained, people were 'infrastructure' in the frontiers between Mosul and Erbil for Kak Bali (see Simone 2005 for the notion of 'people as infrastructure' in the inner city of Johannesburg). Kak Bali also linked his associates to himself by distributing gifts such as cigarettes, alcohol, and electronic goods, all of which served to extend the trust and effective range of his social and affective relationships. In this context, interpersonal alliances turn out to be 'a platform providing for and reproducing life' for both Kak Bali and other traders in the context of civil war and of unreliable and inadequate public political and economic organizations (Simone 2005:408). It is in this setting that Kak Bali explained to me that bringing scrap from destroyed cities is cheap, but depends on successful contacts and negotiations with different partners and mediators. For him, the scrap business is something that can't be done without a reliable contact and is made attractive by low risk if one engages with 'good' and 'reliable' contacts in the field. Kak Bali

here explains how the chain of scrap metal trade from Mosul to Erbil depended on good contacts and trustworthy trade partners:

> Sami [the Sunni Arab scrap trader] gathers the scrap mostly from the east of Mosul. It's cheap, so I buy from him. I have a man there, Mustafa, who deals with him. Mustafa is one of my wife's [a Sunni Arab from Syria] relatives, so he can be trusted. If the gate is open, everything is fine, as things are routine. Mustafa sends me scrap, and I receive it on the other side of the last Kurdish checkpoint and then cross the checkpoint and drive to Erbil. Everybody wins in this chain. Collectors, merchants, and border gate officials get some. If the border gate is closed, things start to change. First, we sell the stocks we have at a higher price. That's one of a few tricks in the scrap trade that can increase profits: store as much as possible when the gate is open, then sell it dear when the gate is closed. If we haven't got any scrap in stock and if the companies are willing to pay more and more, then we find other ways to bring scrap, which requires greater efforts and cost. I use Toyota pickups to cross the border using small roads and paths. Robbers appear alongside the chain of the scrap metal trade and fake checkpoints are set up on back roads by bandits wanting to get a share from the scrap business. The cost of scrap and the risk of being involved increase until the wheels of business turn as usual. Only a few people can move on these roads. I am fearless, because I represent the Kurdistan state.

Moving commodities across the border is unexceptionally considered illegal unless it is declared at official border gates; however, there is no fixed place for border gates between Iraqi Kurdistan, the rest of the Republic of Iraq, and ISIS. The zone is all a wide area of relatively flat land. There are official checkpoints moving back and forth along the roads. It is simple to build a new checkpoint on the ground or to move it elsewhere. In frontiers between Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan, and ISIS, fake checkpoints, which look like official checkpoints with bandits in fake peshmerga uniforms, have proliferated since 2014, seeking to extract taxes and tolls from the off-road movement of goods across them, notably scrap and medicines. It should be noted that most of the goods, including medicines, food, gold, arms, and scrap, were carried to and from the Makhmur, Gwer, and Kirkuk frontlines, the contested territories under dispute between Shi'a Arabs, Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and the PKK, and in parts under ISIS control between 2014 and 2016.

Scrap metal is sold in Erbil at a low price. In 2014, a ton of scrap cost around $350 in Turkey, while steel mills could get a ton of scrap metal for around $90–170 in Iraqi Kurdistan, depending on whether the border gates were open or not. If the border gate was open, as explained by Kak Bali, scrap collectors on the Iraqi side often sold scrap to Shi'a scrap dealers for around $35–40 per ton, and Shi'a scrap dealers would sell it to Kurdish dealers near Kurdish checkpoints at around $55–60, and Kurdish scrap dealers then sold it for at least $85–90 to steel companies in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The scrap coming from Syria fetches similar prices, but in that case Sunni dealers sell scrap to Kurdish dealers who then sell it to steel mills. If the border gate is closed, the prices almost double, as Kak Bali explained, as the risks and cost of labour increase for moving scrap in Toyota pickup trucks.

Seen from the perspective of the steel mill, the cost of production increases dramatically once the checkpoints are closed. Thus, in order to deal with the fluctuations in scrap metal prices, most of the mills created huge scrap metal yards in order to stock as much war debris as possible and to protect themselves against price volatility.

Storing Scrap

Cheap scrap metal cuts the costs of inputs for the mill and increases gross profit from the sale of each product, allowing for an enormous profit – for the KSM, a couple million dollars each month. In other words, the cheap scrap plays a significant role in this profit; so one can say that the mill's success is determined by the amount of scrap captured and stored by in its scrapyards.

Ideally, the machines on the hot-steel-melting-platform should run continuously, producing steel day and night, and any disruption in the process can lead to financial losses. Securing reliable and unhindered access to scrap metal, the raw material of the mill, is therefore crucial to operating in an uninterrupted fashion. Furthermore, some of the successful mills traded scrap by buying cheap and selling high to mills less successful in collecting scrap metal, creating opportunities for additional profit from trade apart from production. Thus, like the other mills in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, one of the most significant goals for the KSM was to ensure the continuous supply of scrap metal needed for the production.

The absence of scrap for production could lead to temporary production cuts or suspensions. For instance, production at the FF steel mill, established in 2013 with an investment of around 200 million dollars by Doğa Group from Turkey, came to a temporary

halt due to the shortage of scrap metal. In the summer of 2015, the mill slowed down its production and reduced its workforce due to uncertainty about scrap supply and rising prices following an acute shortage of scrap. When I visited the mill, managers were waiting to be fired, as the steel mill were losing huge amounts of money while operating only at 25 per cent of its capacity, producing less than 300 tons a day. FF steel was technologically advanced and used automatic rolling to ensure quality. It had started its operations with 650 people in 2014, most of them skilled or semi-skilled migrant workers from Turkey, but reduced its work force to about 200 people a year later.

In contrast to FF steel in the summer of 2015, the KSM collected vast amounts of scrap, by taking in around 20–30 tons of scrap each day at its scrap metal yard. In June 2015, the KSM had around 100,000 tons of scrap metal stock on the ground, and another 200,000 tons of scrap metal underground in its scrapyard. At the end of 2015, the FF steel mill changed hands, with its operations taken over for the next ten years by Mr. Salih and Kak Sirwan (who was known to be representing the KDP share in the steel sector), partners from the KSM.

Difficulties in the supply of scrap metal were resolved, and FF began producing again at the beginning of 2016 with around 800 tons a day and came to be known from there on as Mountain Steel. Most of the skilled or semi-skilled steel labourers from Turkey were replaced by cheaper labourers brought in from the northeast of India. Following the management change, Mr. Salih and Kak Sirwan consolidated their market share in the Kurdish steel market and developed new business positions for exporting the iron bar to the rest of Iraq. Other steel companies have received a clear message from the incident: collect and store as much scrap as possible no matter how if you want to stay in the market.

The influx of debris into the KSM's scrap metal yard and its circulation on the shop floor begins with the arrival of scrap trucks at the factory gate. Each truck is first weighed, as the weight of the load determines the value of the scrap for the smelter, rather than the shape the metal may be in. The density, sizing, and preparation is crucial for efficient furnace operation by minimizing the time needed to charge enough scrap for a full melt. Thus, large pieces of scrap were dismantled into small pieces with the help of a machine known in the scrapyard as 'the octopus', and some of the huge scrap metal pieces were buried underground to decrease their carbon content.[50]

[50] It is known that the lower the carbon content of the steel, the higher the corrosion resistance.

Figure 15. The scrap metal yard

Source: The author

The debris brought in is in principle checked for safety beforehand at the entrance of the scrap metal yard. That is, once a scrap metal truck arrives, the scrap load has to be first scanned for radiation, and if radiation is detected, a hand terminal is used to identify the source of the radiation and the authorities have to be informed. Scrap dealers use hand-held detectors for close proximity monitoring to check scrap metal in their hands for a radioactive source in order to avoid returns. At the mill, each vehicle carrying scrap to the factory gate is directed to the radiation detection system to monitor radioactive materials hidden away in metal destined for recycling. If the material is clean, the scrap is unloaded into the scrapyard and is later checked again and sorted out by Indian and Yazidi migrant labourers, who prepare the scrap for the furnaces.

Most of the shells found in the scrap were rusted, but some were live. In principle, if contaminated scrap or shells are found during the screening process, the peshmerga must be informed. In some cases, peshmerga arrived at the KSM and spent some hours checking and defusing shells recovered from scrap imports at the scrap metal yard. Nevertheless, in most cases, workers separated war remains with their own hands, using rudimentary tools such as sticks while sorting out the debris in the yard. Though all scrap material brought into the

Kurdistan Region of Iraq had to carry a ‘no war material’ certificate, there was no legal enforcement or screening procedures at the border gates; hence, the scrapyard acted as a dumping ground for hazardous waste.

Figure 16. Shells and explosives found in the war scrap

Source: The author

Scrap metal from weapons containing hazardous materials and toxic gases could make its way into the scrapyard, even after the scan had been completed. In fact, much scrap of this type does contain hazardous materials and can pose a serious threat to the labourers who work in the scrapyard, the Indians and Yazidis. Insufficient examination and consequent incorrect storage of the war scrap can even lead to deaths and serious injuries: in 2015, two Indian labourers suffered from burns while sorting out the debris when flammable materials left inside exploded. The war debris can be also deadly, as the KSM discovered between 2007–2009, when a total of six workers at the scrapyard were killed in an outburst initiated by live shells in the yard and inside a blast furnace in the steel mill. All those killed were Indian migrant labourers, the cheapest labour in Iraqi Kurdistan’s industrial labour market, whose salaries, as we shall see, are roughly half of those of other nationalities at any level.

Figure 17. The arrival of an armed Iraqi vehicle

Source: The author

When I asked questions about what precautions should be taken to prevent these deaths, the managers of the KSM denied any wrongdoing in connection with the deaths of migrant workers at its site. I was told that the steel mill had already acquired the relevant certificate from its Iraqi and Syrian suppliers, as per Iraqi Kurdistan government rules, stating that the material did not contain any explosives. Nevertheless, these certificates were no more than a paper stamped and adorned with a patterned background on one side of an A4 sheet of paper.

Recycling Scrap

The KSM has two main platforms for iron bar production: the first is the steel mill platform, which includes 'iron-making' (transformation of scrap to melted steel) and 'casting' (concretion of the melted steel), and the second is the rolling mill platform, which includes 'rolling billet' (downsizing the mass of the blocks) and 'rolling product' (completed forms). Through these two integrated operating platforms, the steel mill processes scrap metal and manufactures finished steel products for the market.

Figure 18. Scrap is broken into small pieces and placed near the blast furnaces

Source: The author

The steel mill platform, which consists of two principal induction-heating electrical boilers, chemically reduces and physically converts scrap metal into liquid iron, called ‘hot metal’. On this platform, the scrap metal brought from the scrapyard is picked up with the help of two round scrap-magnets, designed to lift large volumes of scrap in and out of scrap areas. The magnets carry tons of scrap and deposit them in the two induction furnaces. There were often two or three Indian furnace tenders standing near the furnaces to clear up the pieces of scraps that fell from the magnets and use a shovel to throw them back into the furnaces boiling at 1600 °C. Each of the induction furnaces has a capacity of 25 tons and is used to melt scrap metal.

These furnaces, along with all other operations in the steel mill, run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Continuous furnace operation is advantageous because charging furnaces is dead time. In addition, energy is lost every time the furnace roof is opened, which is costly. Thus, the productivity of the furnace is maximized and the cost is reduced by minimizing such dead

time. For this reason, the hot metal process was designed to work continuously on two shifts to sustain high production output with minimal maintenance costs.[51]

Figure 19. Indian furnace tenders working on the night shift

Source: The author

In the next stage on the steel platform, liquid metal is tapped into a ladle and taken to the continuous casting machine. The mould is later cooled down with water to harden the heated iron which is known as primary cooling. Following this process, slab is then cut into 4-metre-long, 13x13 cm billet and then passed over to either a stockpile or succeeding rolling at the rolling mill (see Figure 20).

[51] Nearly all Indian workers near furnaces meet with silica dust, yet Indian workers standing right near the furnaces were in addition being exposed to fumes from molten metal and dusts from grinding. For this reason, being a furnace-tender was considered as one of the worse jobs at the steel mill; furnace tenders were believed to be at a higher risk of developing lung cancer soon after returning to India.

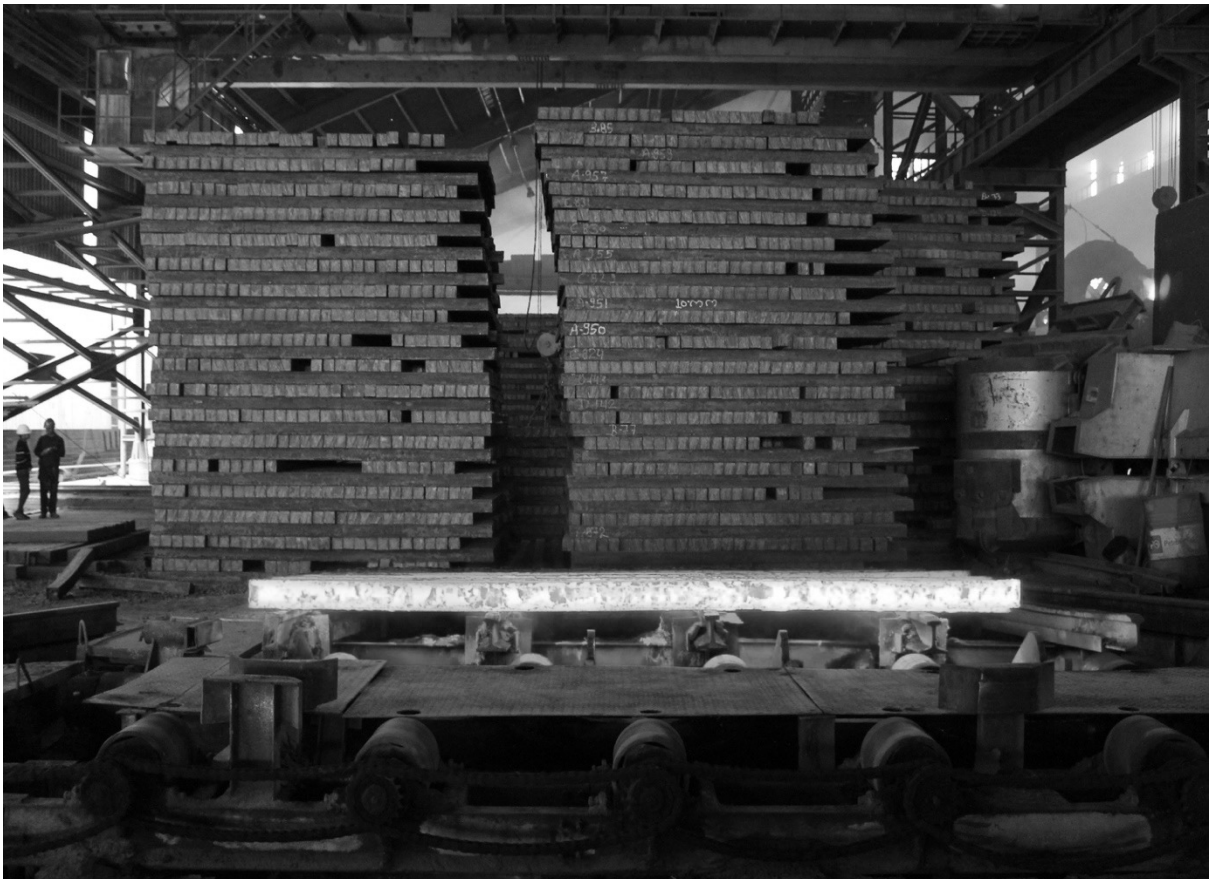

Figure 20. Semi-finished billets left to cool

Source: The author

To say a few words in relation to electricity and steel-recycling in the region, the induction furnace is an energy-efficient melting process compared to other means of metal melting used in the region such as the electric arc furnace. For instance, each of the induction furnaces in the mill could melt down 25 tons of scrap in two hours using around 18,000 kW. By comparison an electric arc furnace such as the one at the FF steel factory could melt down the same amount of scrap in 45 minutes, but would require four times more electricity.

The electricity available from Erbil power stations is not reliable enough to power industrial operations in the region. In March 2015, Erbil provided most of the residents and businesses with about 8–10 hours of electric energy a day during my fieldwork. Consequently, power plants were not capable of meeting the demand, and electric cuts continued during my visits roughly between 2014 and 2016. As a result of the shortfall, homes and businesses continued to obtain half their power needs from fuel-powered electric generators (see Hasan 2018 for the deterioration of electric power system in the region due to the war in Syria, drop in oil prices, and the influx of refugees).

Figure 21. The rolling stand through which hot iron is passed

Source: The author

Fortunately, the KSM has its own power station, which burns petroleum to produce electricity and which is designed for continuous operation; this station is situated behind the shop floor next to the crude oil storage tanks. Here, crude oil is first converted into fuel oil in the refining division and then sent to power plants to be burned as fuel. The power station has equipment to transform the heat power from combustion into mechanical energy, that later runs 6 electrical generators giving light and power not only to the mill, but also to Herki village and the immediate district, including the Gwer frontline. This electricity is crucial for the steel platform processes. The power station runs the electric generators for the induction furnaces 24 hours a day to keep production running without interruption so as to ensure a standard production of 600 tons of steel billet per day.

The subsequent process in metalworking is the rolling platform, where metal stock is passed through one or more pairs of rollers to form it, specifically to make the billet thinner and to ensure all billets are uniform (see Figure 21). The main purpose of the rolling mill is basically to re-melt the semi-completed iron billets, then to roll them lengthier and thinner, and finally to tie around the long iron bar for carriage to the next stage. Iron bars in different sizes are manufactured to meet customer needs; however, the most common reinforcing steel bar produced by the mill is in lengths of 9 or 12 metres (see Figure 22).

Figure 22. Iron bars cut and left to cool

Source: The author

The average price for a ton of rebar across the region was around $650 in 2012 but dropped as low as $350 in 2015. If the price of scrap metal in Turkey ($350 per ton) is taken into consideration, it becomes evident that it is unfeasible for steel mills in Turkey to sell the end product rebar at such a low price. When world rebar prices dropped due to the recent economic recession in China, steel companies in Turkey were forced to cut production and, consequently, their production workforces. By contrast, the KSM was able to remain profitable through access to low-cost war debris.

Morality of Recycling on the Frontier

One of the iconic high-rise buildings Erbil is the World Trade Centre/Gulan Park on the western side of Erbil, the city's new central business district, where foreign businesses and expatriates tend to cluster, distinct from the capital's old and cultural hub, the Citadel of Erbil. In 2014, almost half of the building had been completed and could be seen from almost anywhere in Erbil. The World Trade Centre/Gulan Park was named a life-complex project, consisting of business towers, residential blocs, shopping malls, and recreational areas.

Billboards were installed in front of the construction site depicting what life would be like once the construction was finished. These billboards feature tall women with blue eyes, light hair, light skin, and a narrow nose, wearing casual business wear and working at offices alongside their male colleagues, going to the gym wearing workout pants and sports bras, and shopping in malls wearing tight skirts and sheer blouses. The men on the boards wear dark sunglasses and talk on their mobile phones while relaxing by the swimming pool (see Pelkmans 2006 in Georgia and Grant 2014 in Azerbaijan on the relationship between construction projects and popular imagination of the state).

Figure 23. The World Trade Centre/Gulan Park

Source: The author

The World Trade Centre/Gulan Park was developed through a partnership between Korek Telecom (one of the two main telecommunication companies in the region) and Mr. Salih. Korek Telecom is known to be owned by the KDP as one of the Party's several other lucrative business initiatives in the region. However, as a top public official in the Ministry of Justice explained to me, on paper, these associations and links are of course invisible or untraceable. Despite being particularly challenging to trace, corruption in Iraqi Kurdistan is considered to be 'an open secret', as Aziz (2017:113) labelled.

In everyday conversation, there is a common perception of a disproportionate corporatism on the part of the elite families in the region, remarkably in sectors such as oil and gas, medicines, cigarettes, imported vehicles, telecommunications, and real estate (see Aziz 2017 for a discussion on corruption in the region). Most people believe that these sectors are captured and ruled by the governing Barzani and Talabani elites and their commercial contactors. Otherwise speaking, it was recognized that individual associations between investors and party/government employees facilitate and constitute access to the emerging, yet highly lucrative private sector.

It is in this context, during my fieldwork, proliferating narratives of corruption frequently revolved around questions such as 'Who is making money off of these constructions?', 'Where does all the money come from needed to finance these projects?', 'Who lives in these modern luxurious buildings?', and 'How can they afford it?'

During the construction of the World Trade Centre/Gulan Park, the KSM quickly sold out of its stocks of iron bar. Steel manufacturing at the mill expanded, and steel workers secured their employment for some time and found overtime work to earn some more extra cash. In other words, the construction of these high-rise buildings meant high demand for iron bar, ensuring the continuation of production in the mill. Several steel workers visited the construction area and took pictures from the top of the building, others calculated to pool their savings and get a discounted apartment from Mr. Salih, and yet others looked for ways to find an office job at the World Trade Centre/Gulan Park.

Once the sales of iron bar were assured during the construction of World Trade Centre/Gulan Park, everyone started to pray for scrap to flow into the scrap metal yard. Muslim workers prayed at the mosque to invite scrap metal trucks, and Hindu workers offered sugar and rice to the pictures of Shiva, Parvati, and Ganeshji standing on elevated tables in their rooms. Scrap came with 'good fortune' and 'triumph' in securing production and employment of workers. Everyone waited for the scrap to come, more of it.

In this atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity, praying became a way of coping with the fragility of capitalist manufacturing and employment at the steel mill (see Dein 2016:1 for how 'religion and ritual serve universal functions in coping with contingency or the fragility of human life'). In other words, insecurity, anxiety, and doubt arisen from the unpredictability and imperviousness of the steel sector were communicated through religious practice among the migrant steel workers (see Moore and Sanders 2001 for how supernatural discourses characterize a mode of communication for insecurity and uncertainty revealed in ordinary life under the worldwide capitalist market). As a consequence of this, some workers engaged in

contradictory thoughts and feelings. Demanding and praying for more war debris in order to keep the mill's furnaces running full blast was coupled with ethical tension, as for some workers, steel recycling was bound up with war and destruction. Poised between this odd coupling, the binary complementarity of the production of iron bar in the steel mill and war and chaos in the region, some workers expressed suspicion over hidden the connections of the scrap trade from the cities of Mosul, Raqqah, and Deir-al Zor, which were predominantly ruled by ISIS during my fieldwork. Hasan, one of the migrant Kurdish workers recruited at the rolling mill, explains his unease and displeasure below at being involved in making steel and cash out of other people's remains:

> I prayed to God to send us more cheap metal. Then I felt discomfort and pain just as I always had when I asked for this. I apologized to God. The arrival of cheap scrap depends on the war. What if the war ends? Steel companies would rush into Syria. I don't know if I can find work there. I'm good in Kurdistan; home is close. I have friends and brothers here. So, I want to stay here as long as possible and save my earnings start my own business in Kurdistan. On the other hand, deep down somewhere in my heart, I want war to go on. While one side of the region is being destroyed and people die there, here on the other side, buildings rise up and people earn cash. We melt down the remains of the houses and buildings where other people used to live and go. You know, we don't buy houses that have been repossessed because it is a transfer of wealth based on the misery and weakness of the other people. No good comes of that. I also believe that the constructions in Erbil made with the steel we produce are rising up on the remains of the other people's houses. So, I wouldn't live in these buildings, since they contain other people's sorrow and suffering.

It can be said that the scrap recycling is an emotionless production process from the point that the scrap enters the steel mill to when it exits in the form of iron bar. Correspondingly, it seems to be enough for the migrant steel workers to hold on to the jobs they have. Notwithstanding, the capitalist cycle of iron bar production – from melting scrap to re-rolling billets in one continuous material flow process – works against the grain of this materialistic sterilization and desensitization in this frontier region (see Navaro-Yashin 2012:33 for 'the senses of governance, or governance as sensorial'). Most workers knew that the scrap was coming from Mosul. In those years, Mosul meant ISIS. For them, in their own words, 'There

must be some people making trade deals with the ISIS and bringing scrap from Mosul to Erbil.' Some asked, 'Who gets paid in the end?', and others questioned, 'Isn't it criminal?'

Managers and workers alike believed that the end of the war and of the prevalence of criminal networks would signify the end of cheap raw material, and consequently, the termination of steel production in Hiwa. If the war and conflict were to come to an end, migrant workers believed that war scrap would continue to arrive at least for a certain period of time, at rising prices. For them, the steel investors from the rest of the world would rush into Syria to convert cheap and abundant war scrap into high profit while meeting the high demand for reconstruction of Syrian cities after the end of the Syrian civil war.

The steel sector grows and develops more in the destroyed cities than in stable and continuous capitals. That's how the steel sector creates a profitable business in the formal sector: transferring cheap resources from the war to the entrepreneurial form of manufacturing through the mechanism of unregulated trans-border profitable networks. Related to this, Mr. Mahmut, the previous CEO of the mill, explains below how the war in Syria and Iraq created a lucrative steel sector in Iraqi Kurdistan:

> War is a bad thing, but it opens up opportunities. Without wars around us supplying continuous scrap, the company would not exist right now here today. I would not be able to find this job. I am thinking, 'What if the war ends and the scrap metal stops arriving?' Scrap prices would go up, and I would lose my job here. Kurds have suffered a lot, and now it is time for us to live in comfort a bit. If the buildings continue to rise up like this, I believe, we will win independence soon. On the edge of the destruction in Syria and the rest of Iraq today, the Kurdish nation state is rising up in the north. In the past, Syria and Iraq had ascended, as the Kurds were devastated. Is this how nations become independent and rise, that is, on the destruction of others? Apart from independence, the truth here is, we all hope that the war continues so we can save as much of our salaries as possible until peace comes and production stops.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2001:7–8) write about 'the ontological conditions-of-being under millennial capitalism' and show the 'experiential contradictions at the core of neoliberal capitalism'. For Comaroff and Comaroff (1999:279), far from disengaging with modernity, a melodramatic magnification of appeals to enchantment seems to be on the rise everywhere, in particular with the abstraction inherent to capitalism itself. With a peculiar coupling, and

binary articulation of the lawful with the unlawful, excessive regulation with deregulation, and abstraction with enchantments, capitalism in the Hiwa district presented itself less as 'an economic mode of production' than as an 'epitome of immoral accumulation' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001:5), parasitic on insecurity and instability. This immoral accumulation was traceable through the lives and experiences of the workers.

Figure 24. The scrap suspected to have arrived from Silopi

Source: The Author

One night in January 2016, while returning back from the mill to Erbil, I came across a Kurdish migrant worker from Silopi, a town where residents were forced to flee their homes during a 36-day curfew imposed to conduct military operations in December 2015.[52] He showed me a photo of the scrap metal that had arrived the day before, and asked, '*Abe bunlar*

[52] The third phase of the Kurdish–Turkish conflict erupted in July 2015, following the two-and-a-half-year peace period that aimed to resolve the long-term struggle. The ongoing military fight between the Turkish Government, and the PKK shifted from rural lands to urban places primarily in the cities of Diyarbakir, Cizre, Silopi, Yüksekova, and Nusaybin. Young activists erected barricades to seal off neighbourhoods they had declared outside the authority of the Turkish state, using rocket launchers and homemade bombs to defend the enclaves. Consequently, towns in the south-east of Turkey (Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Şırnak, Muş, Mardin) have been demolished through armed battles and brutal combat; tank fire and explosions left neighbourhoods ruined and desolated (see the ICSR Report 2017 for more details).

bizim ordan geliyo olmasın?' (Does it come from my town?). He suspected that the debris had this time arrived from his hometown Silopi, waiting to be melted down and recycled into iron bar for sale. Newroz looked at the picture and said, 'This one could be the ruins of my uncle's house.' Sure, the Khalil Ibrahim border gate remained closed for about a month during the clashes, so officially there was no possibility for trucks to cross the border to transport scrap from Silopi to the steel mill. However, Newroz knew very well that war debris from his hometown might still have made its way to the mill through traders smuggling scrap crossing the Iraqi–Turkish border. For this reason, Newroz walked away with a bottle of Coca-Cola in his left hand headed towards to the scrap metal yard that night, to search for something valuable and familiar to him.

Seen from the perspective of capital, scrap metal is scrap metal, and the most important thing is to get access to it as cheaply and bountifully as possible. It will be all melted down and recycled into a new standard product irrespective of where it comes from or how it was obtained. For the steel mill, once it is melted down, it is a new and different thing. However, as seen from the perspective of workers, the mechanical capitalist process itself, from melting debris down to rolling it into iron bar, cannot erase the 'corrupt', 'unethical', or 'ambiguous' character of the scrap metal. Otherwise speaking, while ambiguous qualities of the scrap metal become 'standardized', 'sterilized', and 'purified' in the furnaces of the KSM, rendering iron bar for global circulation, melting and rolling processes are not able to disassociate 'immoral' attachments from the war debris.

In this moral and ethical understanding of steel-making, the conversion of steel cannot be considered as devoid of excess feelings and morality. Navaro-Yashin (2012:124–126) and Kelly (2006:90) wrote about ID papers and documents that enter into the lives of individuals who carry them, 'not as reifying abstractions', but as an erratic and uneven practice of administration, manufacturing 'fear' and 'uncertainty' for all those individuals. Comparably, scrap metal coming from Mosul, Raqqah, and Deir-al Zor through ambiguous and corrupt chains of people and relations here penetrates into the lives of steel workers, making industrial work a form of sensorial immersion and vicarious embodiment in addition to material conversion.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to analyse an essential characteristic of frontier production in the Hiwa district: the entanglement of capitalist steel production, war, and unregulated cross-border scrap metal trade. In this productive articulation, the seizure of cheap scrap metal resources appears to be a lucrative business by linking formal and legal steel manufacturing in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to the informal and unregulated scrap metal business in the destroyed cities of Iraq and Syria. Thus, capitalist production is placed just within the legal and formal boundaries of the Regional Government, yet its relations of production and reproduction remain outside the legal and formal economic regulations.

The future of the steel mill certainly relies on its ability to sustain the active incorporation of cheap and abundant war debris into the production process, through the inclusion of informal and illegal trade relations in its production. When opportunities for cheap scrap appropriation decline, the cost of production rises, and capital searches for new frontiers of appropriation. As war and scrap trade networks grow, the steel mill serves as the engine of high profit, national reconstruction, and modernization in the region.

In this process, debris travels from the regions of war and conflict into the mill, circulates in the production processes, and becomes part of buildings. Fundamental to this capitalist conversion is the manufacturing of not just commodities and profit, but sentiments of concern for others' suffering. So, as underscored above, the capitalist cycle of rebar production – from melting scrap to re-rolling billets in one continuous material flow process – works against the 'grain of the sterilization and desensitization' of impersonal and rational capitalist production (Navaro-Yashin 2012:33).

Such an affective dimension animates unsettling effects of uneven production on the individual level, as scrap metal becomes 'alive' and 'active', rather than passive and stable, being constantly recycled or reused at the end of its first and succeeding lives (see Barry 2013:7–12 for active material politics along an oil and gas pipeline between Georgia and Turkey). Consequently, scrap carries a 'history', 'morality', and 'fantasy' for the workers who live and reflect on the processes of material conversion.

Chapter 3
Capitalization of Weak Labour

Introduction

In this chapter, we turn from cheap material resources to cheap human resources in the expansion of steel production and the capitalization of profit. At issue is how war and conflict-made migrant/refugee labour in the region is capitalized and appropriated on the shop floor of the steel industry and how deregulation serves to make labour cheap and disciplined. We will see how human resources are made available for capitalist production, a process that draws on expanding reserves of both unskilled and skilled labour from regional and intra-Asia migration flows, through the extra-economic mechanisms of displacement, deregulation, and disorganization. In other words, we will explore how the expansion of industrial production in the area is parasitical on ongoing processes of displacement, disorganization, and dispossession of humans in the wider region including Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and India. In this framework, this chapter will both describe the fragmented labour market in Iraqi Kurdistan and study the relation between the collapse of states and dislocations, on the one hand, and the formation of unregulated work zones for the super-exploitation of weak and disorganized migrant labour, on the other.

Two different extra-economic processes and conditions that create cheap labour are to be discussed here. First is the manner that regional political and economic fragmentation has uprooted a large population of diverse unskilled refugees and migrants (Kurds, Yazidis, and Arabs) from their economic and social means of production, providing a large vulnerable, malleable labour reserve. Second is the complementary process of deregulation. Political transition and disintegration have created conditions under which labour contracts, which on paper would guarantee and secure employment and freedom of labour, come to restrict and devalue skilled Indian migrant steel labourers. As a conclusion, it will be underscored that ‘when the informal economy is flourishing and the institutions of government are incapable (or unwilling) to exercise control’ (Roitman 2005 cited in Anders 2005:150), the division between the formal/skilled and the informal/unskilled becomes imprecise.

In present chapter, capitalism once again appears in specific cultural and historical forms, this time in relation to the labour market which ‘is fragmented but continuous, and the social relations that constitute it in everyday practice are multiple, entangled, and result from their historical interaction’ (Narotzky 2018:38). Central to this historical articulation in

relation to labour now is the integration of war, displacement, and the political disorganization.

Refugee Labour Reserve at the Factory Gate

One morning in March 2015, I once again found a number of men at the factory gate smoking cigarettes while waiting in the hope for employment. Most of these men were young, aged around 16–22. Some of them glanced up as I approached. I also lit a cigarette and offered another to the man standing next to me. His name was Sami, a Sunni Arab, who was forced to leave his home and to flee to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq after ISIS militants seized Mosul in a lightning advance in early June 2014. I then saw Sami a couple of days more at the gate waiting to be called up for work. Then, he vanished.

One important effect that Syrian Civil War and ISIS expansion have had on the Iraqi Kurdistan region was an influx of IDPs and refugees. In 2015 there were over 1.4 million people seeking refuge in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Richardson Institute Report 2015). In 2015, refugees and IDPs came to represent about 30% of Iraqi Kurdistan's total population (UNHCR Report 2015). Most of these IDPs and external refugees first moved to refugee camps across the four governorates (Duhok, Erbil, Suleimania, and Halabja) of Iraqi Kurdistan. However, these camps only had a combined capacity for around 250,000 persons, leaving most of the refugees still needing adequate shelter (World Bank Report 2015:90).

The majority of the young refugees left their families in the refugee campgrounds and moved to cities to pursue employment opportunities in the burgeoning cement, steel, construction, and oil industries. Some of them found shelter in labour camps, others slept in churches, schools, and the shells of half-constructed buildings abandoned after the financial downturn that began in 2014. For them, living in the UNHCR refugee camps was perceived as a 'living death', whereas looking for opportunities in the Kurdish cities presented them with some hope, similar to what Turner (2015:189) has shown for the relationship between 'hope' and 'future' amongst Burundian immigrants in Nairobi.

Seen from the Hiwa district, the refugee men, who have nothing to sell but their labour, were like fish caught in the steel mill's nets. For them the mill meant a place to sleep, a meal to eat, and money to send to their families left behind. It was crucial for the refugees to earn their livelihoods because it allowed them to cope a little better with their situation. That is why they would come to the factory door and wait for hours for work. In the ranks of this reserve army of labour, first of all, one could see Yazidis who managed to escape from the

Sinjar Massacre.[53] Some of these men had lost their families while fleeing from ISIS along the way and sought employment, food, and a place to sleep; others expected to earn cash so as to buy food, medicine, and other vital supplies for what remained of their families in the refugee camps. In demanding employment from the managers of the steel mill, young Yazidi men would often tell horrific and extraordinary stories of how they escaped from ISIS and emphasize their Kurdish ethnic background.

Some of these Yazidi men could find employment in the scrapyard, depending on the production level and the total demand for iron bar that month. Large numbers of Yazidi men (40–50) were also taken in on the shop floor following the mass removal of Sunni Arab workers from the mill due to their campaign for ISIS during ISIS assaults in August 2014. Nevertheless, some of the Yazidi men were laid off following the reduction in the production process resulting from shortages in scrap metal a couple of months later. The young Yazidi men were employed in simple tasks requiring little or no experience, such as sorting out scrap metal, which, as we have seen, is one of the most dangerous jobs at the mill. The standard number of working hours at the scrapyard for the Yazidis was 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. In practice, most of the Yazidis put in more than 12 hours a day, in some cases without a day off during the week in order to earn extra cash.

In the crowd at the gate, it was also common to see Sunni Arab immigrants and IDPs who had been enforced to leave their households under ISIS in Iraq and Syria and to flee to Iraqi Kurdistan. Some others had lived under ISIS for months and were afraid of being persecuted by Shi'a militants following the withdrawal of ISIS in their towns, as happened in Samarra. In order to be recruited, these Sunni Arabs often claimed Kurdish descent in their families, and some of them would attempt to show that they spoke the appropriate dialect of Kurdish; others would wear Masoud Barzani T-shirts or carry Kurdish flags. Sunni Arabs had less of a chance of being recruited at the steel mill, as they were seen as unreliable and unsafe due to their potential sympathy and support for ISIS. If recruited, Sunni Arab workers would then be the first group of labourers amongst the uncontracted work force in the mill to be laid off on the occurrence of any production cut, freeze, or price stabilization.

Starting from the summer of 2015, the steel mill witnessed another influx of refugees and migrants reaching the steel mill's gate, this time from the Kurdish towns of south-east Turkey. Mass displacement in Kurdish towns due to the escalation of armed fight between the Turkish state and the PKK left civilians without houses and jobs. Several families fled the

[53] The killing of 5,000–7,500 Yazidi people in Sinjar Region in Iraq's Nineveh Governorate by ISIS militants in August 2014 (Yazda and The Free Yazidi Foundation 2015).

mainly Kurdish-populated cities of Cizre, Sur, İdil, Şırnak, Yüksekova, Şemdinli, and Nusaybin during the armed conflicts and curfews, and those who returned to their districts found their possessions destroyed. During military operations, it was reported by the UNHCR that between 350,000 and 500,000 people were dislocated in the south-east of Turkey (UNHCR Report 2017). Most of the families who were deprived of their economic resources and homes had no choice but to move in with their relatives in cities to the west, pushing young male family members to seek out new employment opportunities. Some of them crossed the border to the south and arrived in the boom towns of Iraqi Kurdistan such as Zakho, Dohuk, and Erbil, in the hope of earning wages in U.S. dollars and supporting the families they had left behind. These young Kurdish men were given priority in recruitment if they had some contact in the mill, and most of them were likewise recruited for the scrap metal yard.

Finally, the Makhmur refugee camp, which is located close to the steel mill, was a place to recruit Kurdish manual workers if needed. The camp had opened in 1992 to accommodate Kurds fleeing the destruction or the forced evacuation of villages in the mainly Kurdish south-east of Turkey. The camp has been run by the UNHCR, and Makhmur's occupants – Kurds from Turkey and their descendants – were officially listed as refugees. Kurdish workers from the camp were placed in limbo by birth as refugees with no citizenship. During my fieldwork, the camp had been bracing itself for a new wave of displaced people from the mountainous areas who had escaped from military operations carried out by Turkish troops during 2015 and 2016.

Refugees from Makhmur were permitted to go to the KRG-controlled region to seek employment (see Cewlik 2009:14–15). To do so, a refugee is required to organize transportation and to travel a long distance, passing through a military checkpoint to arrive neighbouring industrial production sites including the KSM. The young men had a very uncertain future due to Turkey's pressure to shut down the camp, which the Turkish government labelled it as a 'PKK recruitment ground'.[54]

At the steel mill, there were 10–12 young workers from the camp who were continuously worried about being fired and becoming unemployed again, as most of them had been dismissed several times at other companies in Iraqi Kurdistan due to Turkish government pressure. Most of the refugees from Makhmur were recruited as administrative

[54] Garden of the Martyrs was erected at the centre of the camp for the remembrance of the Kurds who died while fighting for the PKK, which furnished another source for accusations.

staff in the offices of the steel mill due to their multilingual skills in Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic.

Of the unskilled men recruited none had a contract. They were monthly labourers who lived in temporary accommodations and were in fact constantly moving house like modern hunter-gatherers. These workers were kept in a state of transience and forced to accept the lowest wages (around US$300–350 per month) and the most precarious work in the steel mill's manual. Comparable to the ethnographic work of Allen (1994) on the coalminers of Chikuho on Japan's southernmost island of Kyushu and Mintz (1986) for Caribbean sugar plantation slaves, it is easier to explain why Indian and refugee labourers here accept to work long hours and under terrible conditions (see Parry 2005:145). As Parry (2005:145) argued, they are particularly separated from their social and material means of livelihood, and unorganized, unprotected, and weak, similar to what Maxim Bolt (2011:41, 248, 252) has shown us in relation to migrant agricultural labourers on the settler farms of the Zimbabwean–South African border.[55] Though violence and coercion could be considered as rather less direct in this Iraqi Kurdistan context, refugee/migrant workers were made 'free' from their social and economic means of production also through regional wars, ethnic violence, rebel ethnic targeting, and displacements. The occupation of cities and towns in Syria and Iraq, dormant and flaring wars, and rural areas living with the threat of abrupt and violent conflict bring about the preconditions for capital accumulation, dislocating individuals from their social and material resources, turning them into atomized migrants who have nothing to sell but their labour.

In some cases, the illicit nature of refugees' and migrants' border crossings place workers into unauthorized status in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which reduce their bargaining power and value. Some of them travel through mountains in the north-east and deserts to the west of the Euphrates, alongside roads without authorization. Others enter with valid documents, but then later become invisible and unauthorized. For instance, some of the Arab refugees and migrants from Syria had neither Iraqi identity cards nor temporary work permits. Most Kurdish migrants from Turkey arrived in Iraqi Kurdistan with their passports, but stayed beyond the expiration date of their visas (Turkish citizens have the right to remain in Iraqi Kurdistan for 15 days for each entrance) in order to find employment in the region. Some of the Kurdish migrants and refugees who had no passport crossed the border illegally.

[55] For Bolt (2011:41), in his frontier border context, the 'transient labour surplus is a malleable and cheap [solution], with workers easily controlled because of their grey legal status'.

Most Kurdish migrants crossing the border without a legal document were unable to acquire such legal documents needed to enter the region, as most of them went absent without leave from compulsory military service in Turkey. If arrests were made, those caught would be deported back to Turkey and face prison time and monetary fines.

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, in order to receive residence and work permits, foreigners must have a local sponsor or *kafeel*. Some of the refugees and migrants avoided obtaining work and residence permits, which would require them to receive an in-country guarantor (see Export of Manpower Analysis 2016:18 for a brief review of the *kafala*, sponsorship, systems in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf). The holder of work and residence permits is required to continually report his place of employment and other personal information to the immigration office of the KRG, which makes migrants dependent on the steel mill as a sponsor in this case, and makes them fear that if they are laid off, they can be deported at any time (compare Coutin 2005:201 in relation to unauthorized migrants who are en route from El Salvador to the United States).

To avoid the risk of being deported, some workers did not pursue the formal processes of acquiring residence and work permits, turning them into 'visible immigrants' (see Coutin 2005:201 and Collyer 2007:676). Coutin, Maurer, and Yngvesson (2002:827) argued that documents represent another person's power to choose one's existence or non-existence. In this case, particularly Kurdish migrant men choose to control their life through non-existence on paper. Even Kurdish refugees from the Makhmur camp who had residence permits and refugee status chose not to be seen as recruited in official documents, as they were afraid of being dismissed from the mill and becoming unemployed again due to their label as PKK devotees.

In that context, the steel mill actively enables the transient nature of such labour so as to exploit the crisis situation, which devalued and reduced of the bargaining power of labour. Non-existent on paper, refugees and internally displaced people become unregulated and exempt from contracts stipulating working hours, holidays, and protection against unfair dismissal. Weak and marginalized, these men worked as long as they received their wages and were given accommodations, and they left when told to do so. Otherwise speaking, industrial production in this part of the world became less and less regulated, contracted, and therefore less constrained by the costs of labour.

Continuously supplied with cheap labour made available through violent dislocations in the region, the industrial production in the district induced a continuous flood of cheap labourers deprived of their economic and social means of production. Cheap labour, in return,

creates opportunities for greater profits for the steel mill. The process of making labour cheaper and undervaluating it – the undervaluation upon which unequal exchange depends – continues when migrants are recruited and hired on the shop floor through extra-economic means of war and displacements.

In the next part, I will concentrate on the other major component of the labour force, the permanent and skilled Indian migrant labourers, who have been brought to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq with an employment contract which might be assumed to protect labour in the context of growing precariousness and deregulation, but which in fact turns out to be as highly exploitative as the work conditions of those unskilled labourers without contracts.

Contracted Migrant Labourers

As Andrew Gardner (2015:5) revealed, the Gulf States relied severely on South and Southeast Asia for labour work during the last decades of the 20th century. The migration system in the Gulf Region has been explored ethnographically from various perspectives (see GLMM Report 2014; Pessoa, Harkness, and Gardner 2014; Gardner 2012, 2011, 2010a, 2010b, 2008; Longva 1999, 1997). In this section, I will offer an ethnographic viewpoint on a territory that has been unexamined in the academic literature on foreign labour, that is, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The economic expansion and urbanization in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq since 2006, built on oil exploration and extraction, has required a substantial labour force in the region. The extent of this requirement has long exceeded national capacity. In other words, with the growth and opening of the Kurdish economy towards to the rest of the world, the region's labour market has also been liberalized (Aziz 2017:109).

The Kurdistan Regional Government Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Muhamad Hawdyani explained that more than 45,000 foreign workers entered the Kurdistan Region between 2007 and 2014 (personal communication 2015). From January 2015 to October 2015, 7,390 foreign labourers in Iraqi Kurdistan were registered with the MLSA, most of them from South and South East Asia (MLSA internal document 2015). However, official numbers were underestimates, as data refer only to those who had official work status with the MLSA in 2015. I was also told that there is no coordination between the MLSA, the Ministry of Interior (MI), and the Ministry of Health (MH); each has its own registration system for work applications and residence permits. Different ministries have different figures regarding foreign workers in the region, and the data could not be aggregated due to the lack

of coordination and bureaucratic difficulties across the ministries. Furthermore, official numbers and estimates given by tourism agencies often differed due to the large number of unauthorized refugees and immigrants brought into the region who were not registered. Consequentially, security problems, impartial control over parts of the country, economic restrictions, and an influx of refugees and immigrants, particularly into the KRG, went on to rigorously hinder the KRG's ability to fight against trafficking (see Trafficking in Persons Report 2016).

Half of the registered 7,390 migrant labourers entering into the region between January and October 2015 were categorized as project labour in the MLSA, which refers mostly to men working in industrial complexes in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The other half was categorized as 'domestic labour', which refers mostly to women employed in homes and businesses and whose work may include everyday duties such as cooking, laundry, taking care of children, elderly, and sick family members, gardening, and giving care to household pets.[56] Major sources of domestic workers in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq include Thailand, Cameroon, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, the Philippines, Georgia, India, Sri Lanka, Ghana, and Ethiopia.

It should be underscored that half of the project labour is Indian, the rest coming from China, Lebanon, Jordan, Macedonia, and Syria. I met Chinese, Macedonians, Romanians, and Arabs from the Gulf Region mostly in oil exploration and extracting sites and Lebanese at universities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Indian migrant labourers were predominantly hired in lower-paying positions as compared to workers coming from the Gulf Region, China, and Eastern Europe and were therefore preferred in industrial workplaces such as in cement and steel factories in the region. The KSM had the highest number of Indian labourers of all the steel companies in the region; in 2015 some 650 Indian migrant workers were employed at the scrap metal yard, power plant, oxygen plant, and hot metal platform.

At the steel mill, the Indian migrant workers were recruited by the subcontracting firm of Mr. Raj, an Indian businessman from New Delhi. Mr. Raj was highly respected both as a businessman and as a person among the Indian workers and was well liked as an associate by Turkish managers who worked with him. He often participated and funded Indian religious festivals at the steel mill such as Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights celebrated every year in the district in October or November. During the Diwali of 2015, Indians lighted festive fireworks, strings of electric lights, and bonfires outside their labour camp and the factory

[56] See ILO Domestic Workers 2019 for the definition, population, and the geographical distribution of domestic workers throughout the world.

gate to symbolize the inner light that protects us from spiritual darkness. Mr. Raj celebrated Diwali by lighting a lamp in front of his office to invite Lakshmi into the mill and by sharing sweets with the Indian workforce.

Mr. Raj's firm, Indianco had been subcontracted by KSM since the establishment of the steel mill in 2006. He first took over the hot metal processes of the steel platform, followed, over time, by most other operations, including KSM's power plant, oxygen plant, and scrap metal yard. In 2016, it was a debated whether Mr. Raj would subcontract the rolling mill and bring additional Indians into the Hiwa district or not. Indianco received remuneration for each billet it produced for the KSM. The raw material and other facilities were provided by the steel mill, while Indianco directed production and covered the cost of labour to ensure the minimum requirement of 600 tons of steel per day. The steel platform, scrap metal yard, and power plant operated continuously with no interruption except for time off for measuring the growth of cracks.

Mr. Raj worked in partnership with Mr. Kabir and Mr. Manish, who owned and managed an Indian restaurant chain called Indian Door,[57] established in 2011, and a tourist agency called India Co. Tours & Travels,[58] established in 2006 as the first Indian tourism agency to open in Iraq. In addition to the restaurant chain and travel agency, and in the absence of an Indian consulate in Erbil, between 2014 and 2016 Mr. Manish had also been serving the citizens of India for their official dealings at his fast-food Indian cafeteria in an Erbil shopping mall. When I visited India Co. Tours & Travels in Erbil, Mr. Manish emphasized that the company was different from other tourism agencies operating in the region in that it avoided human trafficking and prostitution.[59] Mr. Raj brought over several migrant workers through contacts and partnerships with India Co. Tours & Travels. Most of the Indian migrant workers were brought from the south and south-east of New Delhi, towns such as Agra, Budain, Rampur, Varanasi, Chhapra, Mairwa, Gorakpur, Gopalganj, and Jaunpur. Though less numerous than those from the north-east, I also met Indians who came from the east and south, towns such as Adoor, Pathanamthitta, and Ahmedabad.

[57] India Door had another branch in Suleimania, but it went bankrupt in the economic downturn of 2014 in the region.

[58] The company specializes in providing tickets and visas to many parts of the world, provides services such as passport renewal, and manages human resource services and *ikame* (work and residence permit) registration. India Co. Tours & Travels has recently specialized in medical and educational tourism from Iraqi Kurdistan to Dubai and India.

[59] In one famous case, migrants were given arms to fight with Peshmerga against ISIS even though they had signed contracts to work as housekeepers (see IRIN 2007).

In India, an unemployed or underpaid potential migrant is connected to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq through a brokerage firm that sells work packages including employment, work permit, visa application, accommodations, and transportation.[60] This work package is expensive, considering that Indian workers in the steel mill commonly paid around $1,500 to the broker, in this case Mr. Raj's tourism agency India Co. Tours & Travels, for a two-year work contract. Following the financial crisis since the beginning of 2014, tourism companies that specialized in importing foreign workers to Iraqi Kurdistan made certain changes for their clients by lowering the price for brokerage services. For instance, one such company in Erbil gave a 20% discount and some others introduced loan options for potential migrant labourers seeking employment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.[61]

Indian migrant men, similar to Sri Lankan women employed in domestic service (Frantz 2013:1081), cannot quit or move to another employer during the period of the contract. Upon the Indian migrants' arrival, their passports are taken by the India Co. Tours & Travels to limit their movement, and they are only returned to them when they have fulfilled their contractual requirements after two years' effort. Within this framework, Indian migrants were successfully bonded to their companies, India Co. Tours & Travels, and the subcontracting firm, and through that to the steel mill, comparable to what Frantz 2013 (1072–1073) wrote in the case of unfree labour in Jordan. In this bonded condition, Indian migrant labourers worked at the mill 12 hours a day, six days a week and occupied the lowest stratum of the workplace hierarchy and wage rate, considering that Indianco's procedures were designed for an operation 24 hours a day, with two shifts, seven days a week.

Compared to Gardner (2015:6), who tells the commonality of non-payment of promised wages in the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf region, I have not observed non-payment of salaries in the context of the steel mill. Yet, it should be noted that a fee was extracted from Indian workers' salaries. This amount was extracted by Indianco as a 'service fee', with the effect that workers received less than the amount agreed in the contract. The fee was extracted because the steel mill had to deposit cash ranging from US$500 to $1,000 in a public bank for each worker in order to comply with the Article 9 of the Regulation for Foreign People Employment in Iraqi Kurdistan. However, some Kurdish migrants explained

[60] The brokerage here stands at the juncture of communication and information between sending and hosting countries and engages in assessing and revealing what might be appropriate for their local partners, as Gardner (2015:9) described. For example, India Co. Tours & Travels brought over migrant labourers who had earlier worked in steel factories for the mills in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In this regard, most of the Indian workers were skilled and experienced in various steel-making processes and operations.

[61] The amount paid to the broker usually required mobilizing the funds of an entire household, as well as commercial loans and personal debts held in India, as Gardner (2015:6) also highlighted.

that the fee went to the account of Mr. Raj. A Kurdish accountant at the mill also confirmed that the wages of Indian labourers were recorded as higher in the accounting books than the actual salaries they received. At the mill, the total amount of cash Mr. Raj earned from these fees was calculated at around $70,000 per month, an amount that was a source of curiosity and subject of humour and speculation among the migrant labourers. Accordingly, Mr. Raj was nicknamed 'the Bloodsucker' by the Kurdish migrant workers, because the more the Indian workers worked, the more money he earned. The KRG turned a blind eye to the situation, given that an Indian worker's wages were still higher than the minimum wage required by law, which was IQD285,000 (around $200) per month.

As Elizabeth Frantz (2013:1084) brilliantly argued, the fact that these Indian men arrive legally with valid passports, visas, and work contracts does not make them less susceptible to mistreatment. Thus, one of the ironies of the situation here is that the work contract that suggests a worker's 'security' and 'legality' in the context of uncertainty and precariousness turns out to also be exploitative. Their movement across countries and regions can be regulated and controlled, but the work itself remained informalized and deregulated. Certainly, the employment contract here too, linked with the abuse of extra-economic conditions and spatio-temporal complexities, leads to what Frantz (2013:1079) labelled as 'extreme forms of attachment between worker and employer' and reproduced unregulated exploitation.

The classification into 'skilled' and 'contracted' as opposed 'unskilled' and 'uncontracted', coinciding with a split between formal and informal tasks, has led to the two being described as distinct social classes in the Indian industrial labour literature (see Parry 2008:326). For Parry (2005:144), while those who work in the formal sector are generally seen as the 'aristocracy of labour', whose life and ambitions converge with the middle class, those in the informal sector are often accepted as oppressed casual workers.

As in the case under study, when the informal economy is flourishing and the institutions of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq become unable to exercise laws and regulations, the division between the 'formal' and 'skilled' labour and the 'informal' and 'unskilled' appears less distinct. Otherwise speaking, in the KSM, both the most skilled Indian labourers at the hot phases of the production process and the least skilled refugee labourers at the cold phases of the production process were at the bottom in the hierarchy of labour. This is because their positioning in terms of class and labour was mediated through bargaining positions of the ethnic groups to which the migrant workers belonged, depending on their access to economic and social resources.

Physical and Social Separations of Labour

In the steel mill, I observed that the formal and informal relations and work arrangements reflected, legitimized, and strengthened the existing inequalities of 'differential bargaining power' among migrant workers, which denied, concealed, or distorted the realities of domination and power (Driessen 1992:196). I will now turn to these physical and social hierarchies, separations, and work arrangements among the labour force to show how workers become isolated from each other and become differentiated along vertical alliances based on cultural and racial discourses engaging in the devaluation of labour and the reproduction of marginalization through cultural exclusion.

Labour hierarchies in the workplace were clear, with the Turkish and Kurdish (from Şemdinli) labourers at the top, and the Indian, Yazidi, Sunni Arab, and Kurdish (from the Makhmur refugee camp) labourers at the bottom, which corresponds to their wage inequality and differential bargaining positions. At the steel mill, the typical wage paid to a Turkish skilled or semi-skilled labourer was around $1,500–2,000 a month, compared to skilled or semi-skilled Indian labourers, who were paid around $400–800. There were a few Turkish and Indian engineers who were paid more than this, but the amount paid to Turkish engineers was again at least double that paid to Indian engineers. Although Indian workers were considered 'skilled and experienced' workers, given that most of them had been previously employed in the steel industry in north-east India, most of them were underpaid compared to similar positions occupied by Turkish or Kurdish workers. Most Indian workers had no choice but to accept these conditions, since underpaid or jobless Indian workers who seek remunerative work are fleeing dire living conditions at home.

In the KSM, there were three labour camps: the 'Indian Labour Camp', the 'Old Labour Camp', and the 'New Labour Camp'.[62] The camps comprised large dormitory-style buildings subdivided into rooms with separate bathrooms in each room and a common kitchen in each building. The facilities include three meals a day, water, appropriate clothing, accommodations, constant electricity, and air conditioning were provided for migrant labourers. The labour camp also included recreational spaces in the form of a swimming pool, a synthetic football pitch, a small cafeteria, an eating area, a conference room, a barbeque corner, and four small villas with a beautiful view of a fountain and green park for VIP

[62] In the Gulf States, he term 'labour camp' is often used to indicate different types of housing for labourers (see Gardner 2010b; Marsden 2008; Dresch 2006 for more detailed discussion on migrant labour camps). In Iraqi Kurdistan these camps were generally located at industrial companies located around large Kurdish cities.

guests. In 2015, the unused villas (due to ISIS risk) started to be demolished and it was decided to build an office instead.

Figure 25. The Indian Labour Camp

Source: The author

In the camp, migrant men typically lived with four to six individuals to a room, although these numbers varied significantly. For instance, in the Indian Labour Camp, migrants typically lived six to eight individuals per room, while in the New Labour Camp, Kurdish migrant men (from Şemdinli) lived two to four individuals to a room. The Indian Labour Camp was squalid, overpopulated, and grim as compared to the other labour camps. Most Muslim migrant workers believed that the Indians were not cleaning their rooms and taking care of their clothes, as they were non-Muslims and had not learned to clean themselves properly. In contrast to these perceptions, I found that it was common for Indians to have a small shrine corner in their rooms and therefore to prefer to enter the room without shoes; most of them considered cleaning to be a divine quality that one must practise to invite and welcome Hindu gods into the labour camp (see Figure 35 in appendix).

Generally speaking, the predominant variable for the segregation in the labour camps seemed to be language and ethnicity (compare Gardner 2010b in relation to labour camps in

the Gulf States). Indian men who spoke Hindi were roomed in the Indian Labour Camp, while senior Turkish engineers and some of the senior Kurdish migrants (from cities such as Batman, Diyarbakır, Mardin, and Şırnak in Turkey) were roomed in the old labour camp near the rolling mill. In the new labour camp, the young Kurdish migrants from Şemdinli were all placed together with a number of Kurdish migrants from the Urmia region of Iran. Thus, migrant men were inclined to share their rooms with other migrants with whom they could talk and relate, as Gardner (2010b:56) has also observed in other labour camps across the Gulf region.

Segregation along language becomes less clear when we look at the Indian labour camp. There were around 650 Indian men in the Indian labour camp. The Yazidis were accommodated in the Indian labour camp starting in September 2014, even though the new labour camp had vacant rooms and plenty of space for the new workers. Furthermore, while Yazidis and Indians spoke different languages, the Yazidis shared both the same Kurdish traditional culture and language with the Kurdish workers (Yezidis speak the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish similar to that of Kurds from Turkey). The Kurdish workers from Şemdinli did not want to share their labour camp with non-Muslim Yazidi, men who were nicknamed '*şeytana tapanlar*' (devil-worshippers), and they managed to keep them from entering the camp, despite their common language and cultural traditions.[63] The Muslim workers thought that Yazidis should stay with other '*gavurs*' (non-believers), i.e. the Indians, who had been nicknamed 'elephant worshippers', 'cow worshippers', or '*sünnetsizler*' (the uncircumcized). Likewise, Sunni Muslim Arab refugees and migrants were also placed in the Indian labour camp and separated from the rest of the Muslim ethnic groups.

It should be also noted that certain rules were more stringent for the residents of the Indian labour camp. For example, leaving the production complex required double-signed documents, as the residents of the Indian labour camp were not encouraged to leave the steel mill. There was also an electronic system at the gate that tracked all workers' departures and entrance times using their faces; the system tracked all labourers, but much more strictly for the Indian camp residents. Some of the security officers were able to bend the rules for others, but not for the residents of the Indian labour camp. The Indian labour camp was monitored by various security cameras for 24 hours a day and patrolled by the Herki security personnel from the Herki village. Other migrant labourers were not unescapably subject to such restrictions and instructions in practice. Finally, alcohol consumption was strictly prohibited

[63] On the basis of their praying for Melek Taus, since non-Yazidis have related Melek Taus with Shaitan or Satan (See Allison 2018, 2014 for more detailed discussion on Yezidis).

in the Indian labour camp, whereas managers habitually overlooked alcohol consumption in the other two labour camps.

The insecurity and uncertainty in the district were also used as an instrument of separation and control particularly for the Indian contracted labour. Mr. Raj and other managers often discouraged Indian labourers from, and even sometimes blacklisted them for, leaving the production complex on the grounds of insecure conditions in the district under ISIS threat. Most Indian labourers who arrived after the ISIS crisis were warned and instructed in the strongest terms against individual attempts to flee during ISIS attacks, reminding them of the fate of the previous Indian workers who were reported as lost. Violence in the district was widespread and unpredictable, and Indians, as 'ethnic aliens' in the region, constituted the most vulnerable group. In order to avoid violence and kidnapping attempts, Indians should continuously engage in full cooperation with KSM managers in reporting each other's absences from the labour camp.

Information here was the key to mitigating anxiety. While managers required Indian workers to share all information about their activities, Indians claimed that their Indian managers deliberately withheld information in times of ISIS attacks and violence so as to keep the workforce at ease and able to perform their daily tasks. It was widely agreed that the mill maintained discipline and uninterrupted production by concealing information from the workforce. Indian workers explained to me that this created more insecurity amongst them, as they suspected that the situation was worsening, giving them a feeling of helplessness. One factor exacerbating a worker's insecurity was the fact, or so I was told, that the mill had no action plan for emergencies. This fostered further distrust amongst the Indian workers towards the Indian managers. For instance, one Indian scrapyard labourer explained his feelings of doubt and confusion about whether to act alone or to trust his Indian managers in the event of an ISIS assault:

> I don't know what to do if ISIS comes. Should I run or stay with my colleagues at the mill? If I run and save myself, then what? Where am I going to go? I don't know anyone. So I guess I should stay here. I should wait for others to come and save me. I feel paralysed and powerless, because there's nothing I can do to save my own life. When I hear that ISIS is coming, I sing a song and concentrate on my work. The workers near the furnaces are lucky; they don't hear anything over the machines. In the scrapyard, one can hear the shots easily and see smoke and

> fire in the distance. This creates more anxiety and starts a spiralling vicious cycle of negative thoughts.

It was well known among migrant workers that there was no evacuation plan in the event of an ISIS advance on the mill. Emergencies were handled on the spot. In other words, the mill's policy was not to manage risk pre-emptively, which would have involved carefully analysing a situation and assessing processes to determine potential solutions, but opted instead to adapt quickly to unwanted events or crises on the basis of managers' individual efforts. In August 2014, when the mill was shut down at the last minute in the face of an ISIS advance, the mill managers could not find drivers or arrange for vehicles to evacuate the workforce of around 700–750 people. Unfortunately, some Indian labourers got lost during the crisis when they panicked and tried to escape the mill on their own. The problems that Indian workers faced were often solved through the help of their fellow Indians. For this reason, most of them believed it was vital to stick together and to cooperate with India Co. Tours & Travels in times of crisis. Although the Indian migrant labourers distrusted the mill, given that there were no pre-planned procedures or escape routes established for emergency situations, most were nonetheless forced to remain with the rest of the Indians, stay in touch with the India Co. Tours & Travels, and wait for the mill to take action.

Last but not least, Indians' anxieties and concerns often became a source of humiliation and victimization. Indians were accused of being 'half-man' and shamed for their fear. Kurdish and Turkish workers often joked with and teased Indians about their cries or how they would cry whenever news of an ISIS attack reached the mill or shots were heard in the distance. At these times, Muslim managers and workers often teased Indians saying things to them such as '*Bak sünnetçiler şimdi kesmeye geliyorlar!'* (look, circumcizers are now coming to do some snipping), '*ISIS gelince kafanı kesmeden önce pipini kesecek'* (if ISIS enters the mill, the first thing ISIS will do is circumcize you [Indians] before cutting your heads off), '*sizinkini kesinceye kadar biz çoktan kaçmış oluruz burdan*' (we [Muslim workers] will be able to flee from the mill while ISIS is busy dealing with you [Indians]). When Muslim workers snipped with their fingers at Indian labourers like a pair of scissors teasing them about circumcision, some Indians would smile and reciprocate by snipping with their fingers back at them or raising their hands in the air and uttering words such as 'Allah Allah' or '*amin amin*'; others would take the matter seriously and start crying or running from the shop floor. This would result in laughter and applause amongst the Muslim workers and managers.

Turkish and Kurdish workers often described Indian and Yazidi workers as '*sulugöz*' (soppy), because whenever bad news from the frontline appeared, one could find an Indian or Yazidi worker bent over with grief, sobbing to himself, in a distant corner. To make them cry in front of the others, some Kurdish workers would tease the Indians and Yazidis by telling them that ISIS was drawing near. In response, some of the Indians and Yazidi men would act as if they were crying by rubbing their eyes with their hands.

Muslim workers also joked about eating Indian food and spices, especially cumin and coriander. Since these spices were felt to cause a certain amount of bad odour, Muslim workers often teased the Indians that the foul odour in the toilettes could also keep ISIS from entering the Indian labour camp. Muslim workers thought that if one ate a lot of Indian food, one's urine might even smell a bit spicy when it hit the toilet bowl. For this reason, Muslim workers should also eat Indian food to keep ISIS out of the steel mill, according to Kurdish and Turkish workers in the steel mill.

In the labour camp, the loss of personal items was also a subject of conversation and rumour, creating and reproducing hierarchies in the division of labour. If anything was lost, broken, or damaged in the labour camp, Indian, Yazidi, or Sunni Arab workers were the first people accused of theft or damage, depending on the item lost. For example, if a bar of soap went missing, Yazidis were the first to be accused and teased because they were considered to be smelly and dirty. The Yazidi men were instructed by the managers of the mill to be cleaner in their personal habits and appearance and more disciplined in washing their clothes. From that time on, some of the Turkish and Kurdish workers claimed that the soap was starting to disappear from the common bathrooms and toilettes in the old and new labour camps and demanded restrictions on Yazidis entering their camps. In contrast, if a bottle of alcohol was lost, then the Indians were accused, since they were often considered alcoholics or drunkards. Furthermore, if a condom went missing, then the Indian and Yazidi workers were accused, because the Muslim workers thought that those men often engaged in homosexual conduct in the mill to earn some extra cash. Finally, if money was missing at the mill, then the Syrian and Iraqi refugees were often charged with stealing and interrogated, because one believed those men to be motivated to steal from others given their desperate need to earn cash. In the summer of 2015, security cameras were installed as a theft prevention measure after a spate of thefts occurred in the scrap metal yard (see Chapter 1); these raised trust issues about the reliability of the Yazidi men recruited in the steel mill.

Yet against this background, Indian and Yazidi workers were often appreciated by the Muslim managers and the rest of the labour force for their calm and friendly temperament.

They were known to be helpful and hard-working, as compared to the Herkis, who were considered unreliable, lazy, and stubborn. While the Yazidi and Indian men would handle all the tasks given to them in a disciplined and responsible way, the Herki men would often be the butt of gossip about how they were not able to finish an assigned task. Indians and Yazidis were considered more eager to work more and to increase production as much as possible, while the Herkis were infamous for slowing down work output in the mill. Furthermore, while most of the Herki men were also considered 'liars' who make false promises, Indians were considered honest and obedient people by nature among the Muslim managers. Indians were also calm and unaggressive, even when they were teased and made fun of by the rest of the work force.

In contrast to the Indian labourers, Herki men who had kin and a rural base near the steel mill could demand their rights and engage in resistance and in blameful discourse against the steel mill and its managers. For the Herki, one's total household income derived from various sources such as from taxi-driving, trade, small-scale subsistence farming, and salaries from the Regional Government. In contrast, Indians, Yazidis, and the other displaced men had no alternative but to sell their capacity to work, as they had no other means of subsistence nor local rural base or kinship support. For this reason, both Yazidis and Indians cooperated in order to sustain their livelihood under violence and contract bondage, while the Herki engaged in a power struggle with the mill (see Chapter 1).

The effects of various spatial control mechanisms, regulations, and social patterns of exclusions and inclusions, as well as the histories of violence developed and upheld complex status hierarchies amongst the labour force, creating new bases for formal and informal ethnic, racial, and religious hierarchies. These were also reproduced through everyday conversation, rumour, and humour, which naturalized 'labour hierarchies and job categories, blurring the lines between employment and life outside working hours' (Bolt 2011:138). The compositions of workforce groups, differentiated by ethnicity and religion were produced and reproduced through these formal and informal processes, separating and alienating workers one from one another. In this configuration, physical and social separations become productive for capital, creating divisions amongst workers despite devaluation and exploitation that would rather result in fostering resistance.

Conclusion

As seen in this chapter, the influx of refugees and displaced persons coming from war and conflict zones and from economically depressed, poverty-stricken areas has created a cheap labour commodity frontier in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The refugees and migrants were brought into the production process as unskilled, uncontracted, and flexible workers in sufficient numbers to ensure processes of accumulation. Thus, in this part of the world, the terms 'displaced' or 'refugee', on the one hand, and 'labour migrant', on the other, converge, comparable to Bolt's (2011:14) excellent analysis of agricultural migrants on 'settler farms' across the Zimbabwean-south African border regions.

First and foremost, the present chapter challenged the widely assumed connection between industrial capitalism and free labour. 'Free labour is often considered to have been a precondition for the development of industrial capitalism' (Parry 2005:146). Yet, in the case at hand, as in many contemporary cases of effectively 'unfree' free labour (Calvao 2016; Frantz 2013, 2006; Banaji 2003), the conditions in which migrant labourers work at the mill suggest a contradictory relationship between 'freedom to contract' and 'the absence of freedom' in practice (Bose 1988:912).

It was also shown in this chapter that the composition of work groups blurred the lines between contracted/formal and uncontracted/informal. Workers were so differentiated by ethnicity, religion, and remuneration that the organized sector workers were scarcely more privileged than those in the unorganized sector, in the manner that Parry (2013) has shown in his seminal article on contract labour in the Bhilai Steel Plant. For him, contract workers in the public-sector Indian plant were distinguished from informal and irregular wageworkers. By contrast, here, workers' differential bargaining positions did not coincide with the distinction between formal and informal sector employment. The two categories of workers described in this chapter (the contracted and regular Indian labourers versus the uncontracted and manual refugee workers) should not be regarded as two distinct classes, because their bargaining positions remained similar to each other in the context of growing formalization of the informal and the informalization of the formal labour arrangements and precarious working conditions. Thus, the intertwined process of dispossession, political disorganization, and displacement involved in the making of industrial expansion linked distinct categories of labour under the same class position in relation to capital.

One last point to be made concerns the interdependence between flexibility and rigidity. The flexible form of capitalist production depends on the rapid appropriation and

subsequent exhaustion of uncontracted migrant men, because these men can be hired and fired at any time, following a rise in demand or a decrease in production. The absence of a work contract and the deregulation of labour market have created a productive zone for capital to exploit cheap and informal refugees and migrants deprived of their social and economic means. By contrast, the devaluation and exploitation of Indian migrant labourers who ensured the stability and security of the production process, relied on strict regulations and contracts serving to 'suppress workers' bargaining power' and to create labour relations that can be categorized as 'bonded' under the rapid industrial expansion (Frantz 2003:1072).

In short, understanding flexible accumulation in this context requires attention to its dependence on highly inflexible and structured arrangements of a group of bonded workers which serve to keep production reliable. That is, for profitable production in the factory, the flexible absorption of physically uncorrupted and uncontracted migrants depends on there being contracted, highly regulated (both physically and legally) and bonded (through indebtedness) Indian migrant labourers. Thus, while the absence of an employment contract and deregulation reproduced the devaluation and the exploitation of migrant labourers, the existence of a contract and labour regulations regulated the devaluation of Indian labourers and the unregulated utilization of their labour force.

Chapter 4
Ethnic Labour and Flexibilization of Production

Introduction

Analysis of industrial production as conversion of scarce resources into valuable output falls short of explaining 'the social embeddedness of capitalist forms of livelihood', as Mollona (2009:xvi; 2005:543–544) has shown theoretically and with respect to the ethnographic articulation of factory, family, and district in Sheffield.[64] That is because industrial production is an ideological and social space as much as an economic one. Unlike despotic capitalism (see Allen 1994; Mintz 1985) or debt bondage (see Gooptu 2001; Engelshoven 1999), which coerce employees into work, hegemonic capitalism exploits labour indirectly by increasing workers' motivation and readiness to engage in manufacturing (see Parry 2005:145–148 for a further analysis of hegemonic capitalism; Burawoy 1985, 1979; Braverman 1974 for the wider political and cultural context of industrial production). Accordingly, exploitation occurs through 'consent' rather than 'coercion' by manufacturing ideologies, work cultures, and ethnic and racial alliances, as well as differentiations.

Drawing on Sanchez's (2012) seminal article on rationalizing the casualization of labour in an Indian company town, this chapter explores the role of ethnic solidarities and nationalism in facilitating the fluctuating production regime at the steel mill in the Iraqi Kurdistan context. In doing this, it sheds light on the wider political and national context of industrial production, notably the role of traditional solidarities and divisions along the Turkish–Kurdish ethnic cleavage in facilitating the casualization of the Kurdish migrant workers and the flexibilization of the production regime at the steel mill. Thus, the chapter observes labour forms within their cultural contexts, particularly focusing on how the cultural, ethnic, kinship, and historical factors become essential to the way workers 'engage productively with local and global forms of capital.' (Narotzky 2018:35).

In the conclusion to this chapter, we shall visit the questions which the ethnographic data invite: Is it useful to think of migrant workers at the mill as a single working class? What are the different political and cultural paths by which labour is associated with capital (Narotzsky 2018:34)? And finally, are workers estranged from one another, and how is consent formed beyond industrial production at the steel mill?

[64] See Bolt 2014:116 for another ethnographic example of this embeddedness in relation to sociality of wage.

Instability and the Rotation System

Relying heavily on oil revenue, the Iraqi Kurdish economy has proved extremely volatile since the establishment of the KRG. The majority of people in the Kurdistan Region were financially dependent on public sector employment (approximately 70%), itself dependent on petroleum income. The petroleum sector, in return, was vulnerable to the fluctuation of oil prices and to the fallout from the long-running legal dispute between Baghdad and Erbil over the latter's independent petroleum sales. Worse yet, the flow of oil was exposed to and occasionally disrupted by theft and pipeline attacks, especially along the Kirkuk–Ceyhan pipeline connecting the region's fields to Turkey's southern port of Ceyhan.[1] These losses exacerbated the fiscal woes of the KRG, which in 2014 faced a budget shortfall due to low oil revenues and high expenditures associated with the military campaign against ISIS. From the beginning of 2014, fluctuations got worse and the economic growth rate slowed. The business sector felt the pinch of insecurities and uncertainties of the economic and political environment in the region. In order to survive, business, too, had to adjust to dramatic and sudden changes in the market. Since the beginning of 2014 efforts were therefore made to keep labour and capital investments as flexible as possible.

For the steel mill the two main challenges in this context of macro-economic instability concerned the scrap metal supply market and the demand for iron bar. First, the growing feud with Baghdad and the fight against ISIS sometimes led to closure of certain border crossings and made access to scrap difficult. Second, the demand for iron bar depended on the level of government spending and foreign investment, which were both fluctuating with the unsettled macroeconomic and political conditions. Consequently, a plant of the size of KSM required flexibility and resilient strategies to cope with such unstable periods so as to remain profitable. Some divisions of the steel-making process – in particular the rolling mill and the scrap metal yard – were increasingly subjected to 'flexibilization' and 'precarity' to offset the inflexibility of long-term and large-scale ventures in mass manufacturing.

KSM employers had long understood that the cheapest and most skilled workforce would be drawn from India. Since the Indian labourers were employed for lower wages and contracted to live in the labour camps for periods of about two years, the steel mill was required to retain them over both low and high seasons of production. The cost of keeping an Indian worker on the shop floor was nearly 50 per cent cheaper compared to that for a

Kurdish worker from Şemdinli. By employing some 400–450 Indian workers, the steel mill could sustain the standard production level at 600 tons a day. In addition to the contracted, permanent Indian labourers, the mill kept a small number of contracted Turkish engineers to support and control the production process. These skilled and permanent Turkish staff were offered better conditions at work than the other workers. Some of them enjoyed private quarters during the night – a clear privilege – and were served more meat at the managers-only food court, as well as being given bonuses for work well-done.

The uncontracted Kurdish workforce at the rolling mill, where regional ethnic identification, kinship, and rural ties are prominent, hailed essentially from Şemdinli, a small town in Southeast Turkey bordering both Iran and Iraq. It lies close to the steel mill, a bus trip of about 10–12 hours through the Ibrahim Khalil border gate between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Turkey. The town is located even closer in the minds of the Kurdish migrant steel workers since it encapsulates their social and emotional life. Most relied on patriarchal networks of support in the form of advice, childcare, and finances, not to mention invaluable emotional support, in times of periodic yet also unforeseen unpaid leaves as we shall see below. Kurdish workers were not fully proletarianized thanks to the connections they maintained with their rural homes and the land (see Potts 2000; Potts and Mutambirwa 1990:678 for worker–peasantry connection and how the triumph of capitalism is contingent on immigrants' preserving access to rural refuges). Self-identification with their hometown allows Kurdish workers from Şemdinli to be hired and rehired since supervisors also tend to recruit their kinsmen and co-villagers for the production line.

At the steel mill, the key managerial mechanism ensuring profitability is that of a rotation of Kurdish migrant workforce between home and work. If, say, there is low demand for rebar, then the mill can cut back on production and labour costs at the rolling mill. In other words, the mill can reduce the time worked and decrease the number of uncontracted workers at the rolling mill, as the platform can be stopped and restarted at little cost whenever necessary again. During periods of low demand, uncontracted Kurdish workers are sent back home to Şemdinli on unpaid leave based on the rotation system whereby they would spend around a month or two with their families at home. This unpaid leave of absence allows for workforce reductions prompted by market fluctuations and scrap metal shortages, so as to temporarily reduce operating expenses without going through the complications of a layoff or risking a permanent loss of workforce. In this way a worker could be away from his job while still retaining his work status. Meanwhile, the steel-making department, operated by the lower-paid Indian workers, continued to convert liquid iron from a blast furnace and steel

scrap into iron slabs, which could be cooled down and stored for the next stage, the casting process, at a later time. In the meantime, demand for iron bar was met from existing stocks.

For the managers, low demand for rebar is not as bad as a rupture in the supply of scrap metal, which can halt production and drive the steel mill and the subcontracting firm to close. As long as the steel platform is in operation, however, the excess slab produced during the low-demand period can be stored and set aside for later processing on the rolling platform. When demand climbs back up, the number of working hours and workers from Şemdinli can be increased to meet higher production requirements and the previously made metal slabs kept in storage reheated and transformed into iron bar for sale.

Indeed, in earlier years, the management had thought of replacing some of the workers at the rolling mill with Indians in order to lower the cost of labour. However, although the wages of Indian labourers were much lower than those of the Kurdish, the managers realized that keeping a number of workers from the region who retained connections with their rural homes and lands was more manageable and profitable in view of the rapidly changing business cycles in the region. Recruiting an Indian worker through an agency and bringing him all the way from India would cost more than recruiting a Kurdish worker from Şemdinli, in given the fluctuations in production over time.

The rotation system is the magic wand of the steel mill's managers, placing Kurdish workers in a position between permanent and casual employment that allowed the mill to operate as a highly flexible site of production. Instead of being fired at times of low production, these workers are sent back to their homes in Turkey on unpaid vacation and recalled to work later as soon as production recovers and demand for labour increases. Most of the uncontracted Kurdish workers live in extended families of parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, all near each other or in the same household. For this reason, loss of income for a month or so was tolerable; workers could feel financially protected, depending on other breadwinners in their extended families.

The situation was different for the rest of the uncontracted workforce. For example, the Yazidi workers who were employed during the high season for simpler tasks were often laid off during the low season. Once a Yazidi worker was let go, he was rarely re-invited to work at the steel mill because his job required no particular skills beyond those of any job-seeker. Such men are abundant outside the factory gates and ready to do any job. Thus, the steel mill's employers had no reason business-wise to keep in touch with previous workers of Yazidi background. Those poor people, however, had to continue earning money somehow, since most of them lacked any rural home or base to support them during periods of forced

unemployment. It is they who remain much more vulnerable to the precarious work regime at the mill, the memory of which haunts me to this day.

Most of the uncontracted migrant workers from Şemdinli were also young and uneducated, having come to work on the shop floor for the first time, but over time these workers acquired abilities and experience in the rolling mill. Unlike the less fortunate Yazidis or even the contracted, skilled Indians, they became privileged and were paid higher wages over time. Their higher wages and better working conditions were sustained only by the contribution of cheaper workers who found themselves placed lower in the bargaining scheme prevailing at the mill.

Before closing this subsection, it would be useful to summarize and highlight once again the organization of production and work arrangements, which translate into an interconnection between 'rigidity' and 'flexibilization' at the steel mill. On the one hand, we have the stable and secure work, albeit lower-paid, of Indian labourers contracted on the steel platform, where production continues day and night and scrap metal is melted non-stop. On the other hand, we have the precarious work at the rolling mill, which adapts to market conditions. In this context, the work of the unskilled refugees and migrants from Iraq, Turkey, and Syria is crucial for the steel mill in its structuring of a flexible production regime and dealing with macroeconomic fluctuations. Due to the low-skilled nature of the positions filled by these refugees, the steel mill was easily able to lay them off and replace them with other refugees and migrants whenever necessary. Nevertheless, the jobs at the rolling mill required some level of experience, and the steel mill faced significant transaction costs were a new recruit to be hired. What the factory did instead, therefore, was to place semi-skilled Kurdish workers from Şemdinli in a kind of rotation in times of weaker economic activity and to call them back to the shop floor when their labour became needed once again.

Ethnic Context of the Rolling Mill

At the rolling mill, the shop floor was dominated by Kurdish migrant workers aged 17 to 31 from Şemdinli and surrounding villages. Most Kurdish workers mobilized their kinship and ethnic connections in crossing the border.[2] The main reason that there were so many migrant labourers from Şemdinli was Mr. Salih, the creator and one of the main shareholders of the mill, who was also from Şemdinli and known to be eager to provide employment to young people from his hometown. He provided opportunities for young Kurdish men in the town, and later, new migrant labourers were able to follow, in a chain, packing their bags and

leaving home to go work at the steel mill. Some of these Kurdish workers from Şemdinli arrived in Iraqi Kurdistan with official ikame documents issued and distributed by the KDP to members of some tribal groups in Şemdinli, in return for voting support prior to the Iraqi Kurdistan legislative elections of 2005. I realized some others crossed the border without legal documents and only obtained work permits later through contacts at the steel mill.

Most of the Kurdish migrant workers at the rolling mill were either related by kin or knew each other from their hometowns. For example, Murat, who was working in maintenance at the rolling mill, had three brothers and two cousins on the same shop floor. In another case, Salim, who was working as a welder at the steel mill, brought one of his brothers when the company decided to recruit more welders. I met childhood friends working side by side at the rolling mill, kin groups eating together in the company cafeteria, and brothers sharing the same room. One of the workers even arranged his marriage with his workmate's cousin on the shop floor. I went to his joyous wedding ceremony, which was also attended by several of his migrant co-workers and supervisors from the rolling mill.

Most Kurds from Şemdinli recruited in the rolling mill were proud of being Kurdish migrants from the north. For them, Kurds from 'Northern Kurdistan' had high moral values such as 'freedom', 'gender and economic equality', and 'social justice', as compared to the Kurds of 'Southern Kurdistan', who were assumed to believe in the lesser values of 'consumption', 'leisure', and 'self-indulgence'. Most of the younger Kurds were highly politicized in the increased political polarization and ethnic conflict both north and south of the Turkish–Iraqi border. They followed the news; always remaining up-to-date on political developments, and even campaigned on social media via their phones. In the Turkish general elections of June 2015 and November 2015, migrant workers obtained leave from the mill and collectively hired a bus to go vote in Şemdinli. There were, however, no attempts to create a trade union at the mill to unite workers across nationalities, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, even though a Kurdish migrant worker from Şemdinli did attempt at once to create an association in Iraqi Kurdistan for the Şemdinli Kurds. In this context, the rolling mill was not just a platform where the steel runs back and forth between the rollers, but also a place for the extension and reproduction of kin networks and ethnic brotherhood. For example, Mustafa, one of the supervisors at the rolling mill, describes it as a 'little Şemdinli' where '*heval*s*'* (which literally means 'friend' in Kurdish) work together in mutual support and brotherhood:

> I call this place little Şemdinli, because there are more than 60 people from Şemdinli working together side by side. Some of them are from our town and

> some of them are from villages near Şemdinli. Some of the workers I have known since childhood. They used to play football in the streets and are now working here with me. Indeed, some of them have grown up here. I'm like their older brother, so most of them come to me if they need anything. We're beyond being brothers here. We are *heval*s, and we all work with discipline and motivation, and we protect each other in a feeling of brotherhood against enemies and threats.

While in Kurdish, *heval* literally means 'friend', it also means 'comrade'. This word has been politicized, since PKK members call each other *heval*. In fact, the word *telebe* (student) was used as a neutral label for the guerrillas (see Aras 2014:86–87 for a detailed discussion of the term heval). As Aras (2014:86) explained, this name remained connected to the first group of guerrillas and the founders of the PKK, most of whom were university graduates and students. In the later periods, the term shifted to *heval* among PKK sympathizers, which established when villagers and guerrillas came to know each other through visits made by PKK members for their survival needs and to spread propaganda (Aras 2014:86). In this specific context, the term *heval* included, but was not limited to, PKK members. Calling one another *heval* denoted a common origin which did not require additional explication among the Kurdish workers. It meant a combination of characteristics, values, and signs of shared memory of Turkish state oppression and resistance against it, a word that could unite the Kurds against the Turkish workers and managers at the steel mill. The word did not refer to a practical and organic link between a worker and the PKK or the guerrilla movement, but it rather signified a political stance and a shared sense of belongingness and an ethnic 'we'.

Ethnic Fatherhood and Rotations

As mentioned before, the flexible rotation employment system at the rolling mill, operating within the framework of a competitive market mechanism, allowed the steel mill to fine-tune its production in response to the rapidly changing economic and political context. Migrant workers from Şemdinli were enlisted and scheduled under the control and directorship of Mr. Zoro, the human resources manager at the mill who had himself been forced to flee Turkey to Iraqi Kurdistan in 2004 after being expelled from law school in Turkey and charged with terrorist propaganda. According to him, the terrorist propaganda of which he was accused consisted of singing Kurdish songs, shouting slogans, and dancing. He was first detained by the police and then started receiving death threats that eventually drove him out of the

country. In Iraqi Kurdistan, after doing some manual jobs such as gardening and cooking, he started earning his living in the construction sector as a supplier of materials to different agencies alongside a friend in Erbil. By chance, he recounts, a few months later, while working at a construction project, he met Hatice, the daughter of one of his clients, and fell deeply in love.

His wife-to-be came from a wealthy family in Soran, a city in Iraqi Kurdistan bordering Iran and Turkey. And her father, Tariq Rwandzi, agreed to their marriage, on condition that he would reside in Soran with Hatice for the rest of his life. He was given the name of Zoro, which was that of Tariq Rwandzi's deceased nephew, as well as the nephew's *ikame* card and Iraqi nationality – not very common but also not entirely unique in Iraqi Kurdistan. From then on, he was known as Zoro on official papers. He settled near his father-in-law's residence in Soran and given employment, through a contact of his father-in-law, in the *Asayish*, the Kurdish security organization. Though educated at a high school level, with his new official identity Mr. Zoro was now officially uneducated, preventing him from advancing professionally in the Asayish. He later found employment at the KSM as a stock administrator through a contact of a friend of his from Şemdinli. Eight years later, Mr. Zoro became the mill's HR manager and was from then on accepted as the 'father' of the young Kurdish migrant workers coming from the Kurdish towns of Turkey at the steel mill.

I often met Mr. Zoro at night, after the end of the working day. Over the weekend, from Thursday to Sunday, he drove back home to Soran, a trip of around two or three hours, depending on the traffic. He had an expensive Toyota Land Cruiser, which he drove between Erbil, Soran, and the mill. He liked to drive his car fast, and others in the car were often scared by his rash driving. For Mr. Zoro, the Land Cruiser was suitable for mild off-road excursions, cheap to run, and fairly easy to drive. As the vehicle went along a rugged road at high speed and with lots of traffic, he would turn up the volume to listen to Turkish/Kurdish singer İbrahim Tatlıses and tell us, 'Don't be afraid, *gundi*s (villagers), this is a jeep!' In the boot of his Land Cruiser, he carried various guns and small explosives including a rifle and a hand grenade. With the Land Cruiser and various armaments in the boot, Mr. Zoro said that he felt comfortable and safe driving back and forth in the day and at night, usually alone.

During the working week, however, he would sleep at the steel mill and spend evenings in Erbil at a place called *Myhane.* Hidden away in the heart of the vibrant Christian district of the capital city, Myhane was a Turkish restaurant where men and women sat together at tables draped in blue linen cloths and full of meze selected from colourful trays. I spent most of my evenings with Mr. Zoro in Myhane meeting different people, coming with

distinct qualifications, backgrounds, and life stories. The one common trait, though, running through the stories was homesickness and desperate attempts to avoid thoughts of home, family, and life in Turkey. For Mr. Zoro, Erbil was *the city of broken hearts*, and Myhane lay at the centre, like a chapel, where all those broken-hearted people would meet every night and tell their stories of regrets, ideas, and desires, cultivating some hope for tomorrow.

Most of the Kurdish workers respected Mr. Zoro for his economic success and the fact that he seemed to be a hard-working man. Nevertheless, in the minds of several Turkish workers, Mr. Zoro was a person with recently acquired wealth, perceived as ostentatious and lacking in good taste. He was regarded as culturally inferior, coming from a lower-class background, lacking in pedigree and subtlety, and taking advantage of his wife's wealth by buying everything he needed to show off including his luxury jeep.

Mr. Zoro was the manager responsible for directing employee-related processes at the mill except with regard to the Indian and Turkish contracted steel workers and engineers. He worked with his assistants, each of them representing the group of workers divided by regional ethnicity. For instance, while Suat, as an Iranian Kurdish worker, dealt with the Iranian–Kurdish workers, Ali, being himself a Kurdish refugee from Makhmur, dealt with the refugee workers coming from the Makhmur camp. In recruiting Turkish and Indian workers, Mr. Zoro's duties consisted mostly of paperwork, such as handling human resources forms, payroll time sheets, and work instructions. Nevertheless, for the rest of the workforce, in particular for the Kurds from Şemdinli, Mr. Zoro was more than an officer or manager. He stood as a sort of 'ethnic father' with whom one could really talk and whose understanding was consoling and inspiring.

With his assistants, Mr. Zoro juggled the flexible working hours, which were complicated and not easy to manage. During a downturn, he would reduce the number of workers and/or the hours they worked, and at a time of production increase, he would call them back to work so that production could regain full capacity to meet the rising demand. He had to be very careful, though, in dealing with the working schedules of the Kurdish migrant workers in order to be what he called an '*adaletli patron*' (a fair boss). He once told me that he knew very well that for a worker, staying too long at the parents' house could cause problems, so he had to make small talk and arrangements to make the system work both effectively and in a way sensitive to workers' needs. For Mr. Zoro, the rotation system required a good planning strategy to meet the mill's needs currently and also in the future, as well as a warm-hearted manager to keep migrants who travel back and forth surprisingly motivated and interested. He explained below how the rotation system could reduce the cost

of the workforce without losing employees permanently:

> Most of these workers came here when they were 18–20 years old and literally grew up in the mill. I have a father–son relationship with my workers. I was like one of them when I arrived here. I worked hard and [in doing so] saved my life, as I had no other choice. I believe this is true for all the workers coming from Northern Kurdistan. We need to open our eyes and watch our backs. If they can work hard here and be careful, then there is a good life for them. Life here is hard, and one has to be both calculating and strong. I watch Kurdish workers' backs, so they should just open their eyes and work hard here. Taking care of them requires a lot of effort on my part. If I'm told to reduce the number of workers, then I have to do it. But it's up to me to decide how to go about it. I first ask if there are volunteers who want to go home for some reason, such as having a wife who has given birth recently, weddings, funerals, or – I don't know – maybe their families are in need of support for everyday care for a certain period of time. If there are some such men, those workers are given priority, which keeps another worker who doesn't want to leave on the shop floor. There are always people volunteering. Otherwise, I choose. This isn't an easy job, and it requires a lot of conversations and specific arrangements. I sometimes lend them cash or give them advance payments when they're in need; I talk to their families, visit them in their homes, and arrange little benefits and rewards for them. I've always used my mind and heart together to do this job, otherwise I would be unsuccessful at managing.

Mr. Zoro would present himself as the guardian of the Kurdish migrant workers and as the head of an informal brotherhood in the absence of a formal labour organization at the steel mill. For him, it was time for Kurds at the mill to work hard and come together instead of being divided between 'managers' and 'workers', all the more at a time when the Kurds should unite and put forth their strength. For Mr. Zoro, Kurdish workers and managers needed each other to get past the transition period successfully and protect the interests of the steel mill in order to support the founding of a modern Kurdish state in the region. For him, the separation between the worker and the mill management should be less pronounced under the situation of war and transition in the region. In return, the steel mill should prioritize recruiting Kurdish workers from Turkey and provide them with higher wages and better

working conditions than the other workers.

Mr. Zoro often reminded the Kurdish workers that bringing success to the steel mill was a national duty for them because iron and steel formed the basis of modern roads, railways, hospitals, airports, and skyscrapers, signs of an independent Kurdish state to emerge. He often characterized Turkish workers as self-interested, accusing them of being hostile to the wider agenda of Kurdish national independence and only concerned with earning as much cash as possible and then fleeing from the district. In contrast, he described Kurdish workers from Turkey as the owners of the steel mill and as parts of a wider nation-building mission.

Mr. Zoro aimed to empower Kurdish workers to fight injustice. For him, the issue was one of liberation from political oppression more than from economic exploitation; Kurdish workers should refrain from physical pleasure and personal material calculations and work hard to improve themselves. In this regard, training and education were significant for all the Kurdish workers in the steel mill, who should improve their abilities and strengthen their skills, in a process cultivated through cooperation between Kurdish managers and workers. In recognition of his worldview, Mr. Zoro organized several training sessions, workshops, and other short-term, topic-specific education programmes, such as on learning English, an employee code of conduct, preventing water-borne diseases, personal cleaning, and protection from HIV infection.

Mr. Zoro was specifically involved in sex education for the migrant workers to protect them from HIV. When engaging in small talk and conversation with the Kurdish workers, he often warned them against sexual intercourse with South and Southeast Asian women in Erbil. For Mr. Zoro, most of those women brought HIV from their countries into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and the spread of the disease was a real threat to the Kurdish society. In such casual conversation, Kurdish workers from Şemdinli often accused Turkish workers of engaging in sex with those women in Erbil. Kurdish workers from Şemdinli, afraid of being contaminated by dirt or germs, even often avoided sharing spoons or drinking water from the same glass as Turkish workers at the mill. Most Turkish workers, in return, did not attend the training sessions and workshops organized by Mr. Zoro in the steel mill, as most saw themselves as exempt from the regulations binding Kurdish migrant workers.

At the steel mill, I witnessed several occasions of tension between Turkish and Kurdish workers from Şemdinli. One evening a fight erupted over what should be watched on the TV in the canteen area. Most workers would prefer to watch TV on their mobile phones, but on that evening, the Turkish and Kurdish workers had different preferences over which

TV channel should be on, and a conflict arose and evolved into a political quarrel when the Turkish workers accused the Kurds of watching a TV channel founded and still funded by the PKK. Another frequent source of tension at the rolling mill was speaking Kurdish in proximity to Turkish engineers and managers. In another case, tension escalated in the rolling mill when the Kurdish workers from Şemdinli spoke Kurdish near a Turkish engineer while working together on fixing a technical issue.

On these occasions, while the Turks accused the Kurdish workers of being immature, irresponsible, and having attitude problems at work, Kurdish workers in turn accused the Turkish workers of having a discriminatory attitude towards the Kurdish identity and language. Kurdish workers often charged Turkish workers and managers of 'racism' towards Kurdish workers in the rolling mill and of seeking to limit the use of Kurdish to ethnic banter rather than employing the language for work-related purposes.

Most Turkish workers considered Kurdish workers from Şemdinli to be 'PKK Kurds', silent allies of the PKK against the Turkish nation. Speaking in Kurdish around Turks was often taken as an 'insult' and interpreted as harbouring 'a secret agenda' against them. It was often believed that the Kurds from Turkey had a 'double face': one of them public, supporting Masoud Barzani or Tayyip Erdoğan, and the other one 'private', supporting PKK's jailed leader Abdullah Öcalan (see Yurchak 2006: Ch.7; Navaro-Yashin 2002: Ch. 5; Wedeen 1999: Ch. 3 in relation to state authoritarianism and cynicism). The Turkish workers at the mill often claimed that no one should trust the Kurdish workers from the north. In this context, when a Turkish worker arrived at the mill, he was advised to share a room in the labour camp only with another Turkish worker and to lock the door twice. Some of the Turks did not even want to share a taxi ride with a Kurdish worker while going to or returning from Erbil. Being Turkish, I was also advised not to go on picnics in remote areas with Kurdish workers, as I could be kidnapped and taken to the Qandil Mountains as a hostage. In the Turks' opinion, Kurdish workers were capable of doing anything to earn extra cash including kidnapping Turks, seen as their deeply hated enemies.

In the context of political polarization at the mill, the more secure, permanent, contracted, and therefore privileged, position of the Turkish workers often emerged in Mr. Zoro's discourses as 'ethnic domination' rather than a rational decision when he spoke with the Kurdish workers from Şemdinli. In other words, the racial and ethnic characteristics of the Turkish permanent workers and managers became integral to the legitimating discourses of Mr. Zoro, who often labelled contracted Turkish workers as the cause of the mill's high costs. He often motivated uncontracted Kurdish workers to work hard and to improve themselves so

as to progress in the steel mill and to replace the Turks in the future, as he had done himself.

This situation can be compared to that described by Sanchez (2012:808), where Bengali executives in the Indian company town of Jamshedpur continue to invoke 'paternal authority' and 'durable ethnic stereotypes' with regard to their primarily Bihari labourers, but without fulfilling their traditional protective duties against the decline of employment security in the region. Sanchez's (2012) key informant is Paul Chatterjee, a Bengali Catholic and accountable for the 'company's public relations and community outreach programmes'. Mr. Chatterjee claims to be a role model and a father figure who concerns himself not only with the output but also the culture, personality, and ethics of his labourers, in a manner Sanchez (2012:809) characterizes as 'the synthesization of spiritual and civic concerns'. In the meantime, Mr. Chatterjee engages in creating and replicating 'a racist discourse' concerning 'Bengali cultural superiority' and the cultural poverty of Bihari employees on the shop floor. Sanchez's (2012:818) main argument is that 'fixed cultural prejudices' and 'ethnic division' between Bihari workers and Bengali managers are deployed to organize and to legitimate flexible accumulation in the Tata company. At issue in Sanchez's (2012) work is the articulation of capitalism with culture and the continuation of traditional ideologies in a new flexible mode of production. Yet this flexibilization of production has not yet spread to the entire work setting, as the Tata company continues to employ permanent workers who enjoy job security. Yet, the devaluation of Bihari employees, and the differentiation between younger and older Bihari employees, particularly in relation to devaluation of labour and the role of cultural essentialism, remained less developed.

When compared with the Indian context, the Kurdish case has both similarities and critical distinctions. In Jamshedpur there is a shift from a stable labour and employment regime into an unstable and flexible one as India's economic liberalization went ahead during the two decades since the 1990s. According to Sanchez (2012:809), in the past Tata workers had been given lifetime employment, healthcare provision, and affordable housing. In the KSM, there is no such past or shift from that past. The steel mill here was born specifically into and expands onto irregularity and precariousness of the work and labour environment in Iraqi Kurdistan. In the Kurdish context, everything was transient, including the company's massive metallic structure itself (see Chapter 1). The mill does not have a long history, as does the Tata company. Indeed, it was unclear whether the steel mill would stay put for a long time, especially as the possibility was discussed of moving it to Northern Syria to reach cheaper scrap metal in the middle of war. Thus, there was no longing or nostalgia for a company town model with affordable company houses, traditional high wages, or stable and

secure employment of the past, as in the Indian case. Likewise, the past was not a template for the future; there was no vision of returning back to old, prosperous golden days in the region. Unlike the Tata workers, Kurdish workers were labour migrants, who travelled between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan and were expected to contribute to the total household budget in Turkey. In this way, Kurdish migrant steel workers had a village refuge and social base to which they could return for subsistence unlike the Tata workers (see Sanchez:814 for an explanation of why Tata workers cannot return to their village). Thus, the KSM is characterized by migration, whereas Tata company is not. At the KSM the devaluation and casualization of workers is entwined with patterns of migration.

Similar to Mr. Chatterjee, Mr. Zoro, who is the steel mill's human resource manager and the father of the Kurds coming from the Kurdish towns of Turkey, articulates authority and control over the semi-precarious Kurdish workers through a language of shared Kurdish oppression and suffering in Turkey. This is actually not a bond of brotherhood between all Kurds, but is restricted to the Kurds from Turkey, who require mutual support and cooperation. Mr. Zoro helps workers get married, arranges dowries, goes to their weddings, lends money when they most need it, communicates with workers to ensure a fair rotation, provides workers with cleanliness training, helps them to do exercises and learn English, and even closely follows the Kurdish workers' sex lives in order to protect them from HIV infection. The rationale is that if Kurdish migrant workers make sacrifices and establish a harmonious father–son relationship with Mr Zoro, similar to what the senior Bengali Manager Pramod emphasized in the Jamshedpur context (see Sanchez 2012:818), the steel mill will be more successful. In the Iraqi Kurdistan context, the steel mill was seen to be under pressure, not because of a neoliberal Kurdish government as in the case of Tata company, but from *dış güçler* (foreign powers/threats), particularly the Turks, Iranians, and Arabs, who were described as jointly conspiring to limit the success of the Kurds and of Kurdistan's modernization and political independence. By articulating this ethnic and political threat into the material production process in the context of war and Kurdish modernization, Mr. Zoro worked to appease the division between the interests of the Kurdish workers and those of the steel mill.

Similar to Sanchez's (2012) ethnography, industrial production in this context redeployed earlier discourses and structures in the casualization of workers. Yet, the material reality does erupt from time to time and create contradictions, as when the steel mill management chose to hire a Turkish manager for the rolling mill where the workers are predominantly Kurds from Turkey. In Sanchez's (2012) text, it is uncertain to what extent the

ideology described is all-inclusive and hegemonic. It would appear that the ethnic and cultural language cultivated by Kurdish managers and Kurdish workers coming from Turkey is less effective than the deployment of traditional identifications in the Indian case.

It is openly recognized by all in the mill that its operation is a matter of earning dollars rather than of ethnic sacrifice. At home, Kurdish workers do not earn the salary they receive in Iraqi Kurdistan. When their dollar earnings are exchanged into Turkish Lira, the sum represents a substantial income, comparable to that of a state-employed doctor in Turkey. In contrast to 'non-permanent workers' coming from 'traditional Tata families' who 'hope to rejoin the aristocracy of labour' (Sanchez 2012:810), Kurdish migrant workers in this context wanted to stay on the shop floor earning dollars for as long as possible, to build their own houses and to start their own, albeit small, businesses in Turkey near their families. Here the factory was a temporary place, including for Kurdish employees.

Under the auspices of Mr. Zoro as a Kurdish manager, an ethnic father from Northern Kurdistan, most Kurdish workers saw unpaid leave as a sort of vacation and felt comfortable in returning back home rather than looking for a new employment. This rotation system at the rolling mill, which operated on the basis of a set of factors more complex than a simple economic reasoning of work and wage, deserves a closer look, as it entails an emotional and social interaction based on ethnic memories, discourses, and sentiments between Kurdish managers and Kurdish workers. In practice, Mr. Zoro's normalizing ethnic and paternalistic discourses are subverted and challenged, opening an uncomfortable gap where personal and ethnic relations are subject to continuous ambiguity and uncertainty.

Rotations as Seen by Labour

One evening after work in September 2015, Mr. Zoro called Musa on the phone and asked him to take an unpaid leave of absence for a month. Musa was a Kurdish worker from Şemdinli employed at the rolling mill. A forklift driver, he moved iron bar stocks from the rolling mill to vehicles. That night he quickly packed his bags and called me to spend some time in Erbil before he took his bus the next morning to Şemdinli. He was not at all upset about Mr. Zoro's decision, as he was also planning to take a break and to see his wife in Şemdinli after having worked four months without an interruption. He had saved almost all of his wages for the last preceding months, around $3,500. He was planning to help his father, a construction worker, build an apartment building to make a home for his three sons and their families under the same roof. Musa left in the morning with presents he bought from a

shopping mall we visited that night in Erbil, looking forward to the pleasure and privilege of spending some time relaxing at home.

For Kurdish migrants like Musa, the breaks were not intolerable, as most of the men were married and had left a wife behind at the family home in Şemdinli. In some cases, Kurdish workers themselves asked to be granted unpaid leave for a month or longer for events such as planning a wedding, expecting a baby, arranging funerals, or offering support to the family. During such breaks, most workers took the time for leisure, trips, sleeping in late, and social activities with friends back in their hometowns. Furthermore, some of the migrant workers would use the idle time to further their family businesses, such as working seasonally in the family's fields. In these periods, Kurdish migrant workers did not consider themselves unemployed, but as on a 'break from hard work' or 'taking some time off for oneself', opportunities away from the routine of work and isolation at the steel mill. Thus, the rest was welcome, although tolerable only if it did not go on too long.

Such periods of idleness would not last longer than eight weeks. During that time, Kurdish workers felt confident that they would eventually be recalled, based on their past experience and personal network at the mill. For this reason, none of the Kurdish workers from Şemdinli looked for other jobs upon being given leave. When they left the mill they would even leave some personal belongings in their room, which they saw as a guarantee of their return. For Kurdish migrants, if the steel mill did not plan to recall a worker back, it would ask him to collect all his personal belongings from the labour camp. Mr. Zoro knew this and would therefore often add on the phone something along the lines of 'You may leave your personal stuff in the room' to indicate that the worker would be recalled.

For Kurdish migrants from Şemdinli, working as a steel worker in Iraqi Kurdistan was a profitable activity. The average wage paid to a Kurdish worker from Şemdinli was around $1,000 a month, which converted into Turkish lira in 2015 was equal to TL3,500, more than what a typical state-employed teacher was paid in Turkey, and almost three times the TL1,300–1,400 paid to an average unskilled worker. For example, Musa earned around TL800 a month working in Hakkari as a waiter before coming to Iraqi Kurdistan in 2010. He never imagined that he could earn his present wage. Furthermore, while at work, Musa's expenses were also covered by the steel mill, allowing Musa to save more and relieving him from reliance on his family's budget. Hence, although employment at the mill was flexible and insecure, migrant labourers – and their families – chose to stick with the steel mill, mobilizing their ethnic and kinship ties to keep their employment there as stable and as long as possible. For Musa, there was only one goal: to keep his job at the mill to the best of his

ability.

In September 2015, the salaries of non-contracted workers were all cut by 20 percent due to low rebar demand. When he implemented this pay cut, Mr. Zoro kept most of the Kurdish workers from Şemdinli on the rolling mill platform for more than six months without a pause. However, when demand recovered in March 2015, salaries were not raised again in line with the production boom. Instead, some of the Kurdish workers were asked to work overtime in return for additional pay. Migrant workers then began working harder for the same wage they had been receiving a few months earlier for less work. When production needed to be further increased to some 750–800 tons/day to meet the demand, Yazidi workers were recruited, who were then asked to leave the production line once the demand was met. In January 2015, the steel market turned down again and struggled for the next few months, which led to production cuts and new declines in employment.

In October, a month after Musa was given an unpaid leave, he had still not received a call from HR at the steel mill. Musa told me that in the first month of his leave, he was well behaved and sensible at his father's house and that he was respected for his efforts to have worked abroad and contributed to the welfare of the whole family in Şemdinli by sending money regularly. Tensions rose, however, when there was a delay in recalling him back to work, resulting in a general sense of uncertainty and unease at home. When Musa had neither been summoned back to work after a month nor been rotated with any other worker due to further production cuts in the rolling mill, he started to see himself as a guest in his own home and felt stressed and uncertain about what to do and how to take action to return. Musa explained how the excitement and pleasure of being at home turned into panic by the end of the month, fuelling fights and increased tensions within the family:

> I have no complaints: I'm treated like a king when I arrive back home. I always get all my wishes and never feel rushed for anything. I sleep until noon, and my wife makes my breakfast when I wake up. I read a lot, I like to do puzzles and brain-teasers. I sometimes go out and chat with friends all day. Towards the end of the month, if I get a phone call from the mill, everybody rushes to cook my favourite meals and to make homemade food and package it up for me to take back to the mill. Everybody continues to be happy and cheerful. The problem begins when I don't get a call from the mill. Then, every one immediately starts worrying, and the positive atmosphere turns into a mood of uneasiness and fights for no reason. Every day everyone asks whether there is any news from the mill

> yet. As time passes, it becomes more annoying and irritating. I call my workmates and try to get information about the situation so I can predict the likelihood of being recalled soon. I've never stayed at home more than two months, but somehow I felt nervous and anxious all the time and stressed because there's always a chance of never being recalled, even though it's never happened to any of us.

Musa started to make phone calls daily. He called his workmates and relatives from Şemdinli to obtain information about the situation at the steel mill and tried to anticipate when he would be called back. Musa's father had good relations with Mr. Salih's relatives in Şemdinli; however, Musa preferred not to ask his father to use his relations to get him recalled to the steel mill. These relationships were highly valued and could be used for more important requests such as asking for a job for a new person from one's family. Musa wanted to use his own networks instead. On the phone a week later, he talked to Ali, a distant relative who is a good friend of Mr. Zoro, to remind him. A few days later Mr. Zoro called Musa and talked about the economic difficulties stemming from political problems in the region and asked him to wait another two weeks. Mr. Zoro also asked Musa whether he needed cash, and he had a long conversation about Musa's family in Şemdinli. Before hanging up, Mr. Zoro also added that he would have called him back immediately if it were up to him, but explained how things depended on Mr. Cevat, the Turkish manager of the rolling mill.

Mr. Cevat was known as the person who wanted to replace Kurds from Şemdinli at the rolling mill with Turkish steel workers from his hometown. Mr. Cevat was a mechanical engineer and a successful executive who had laboured for several years at different steel mills and gained substantial experience. He was in his sixties and had had a brilliant career at the KSM over the previous six years, breaking production records at the rolling mill. He was the only Turkish worker in that section of the factory and had problems with Kurdish-speaking workers from time to time.

In March 2015, Mr. Cevat did not give Kurdish workers a day off to celebrate Newroz. Instead, workers from Şemdinli remained on the shop floor all day. Mr. Cevat explained that his decision was not political, but rational, that is, to sustain production and to meet rising demand. However, workers from Şemdinli came together and protested to him with the backing of Mr. Zoro, who believed that it was the right of Kurdish workers to celebrate Newroz. However, Mr. Cevat, as an engineer, believed that the ethnic ties at the mill had to be played down rather than supported, and he defended the idea that it was necessary to

break the power of workers from Şemdinli at the rolling mill to create an impersonal and rational organization. In his mind, this action would enhance the economic rationality of corporate policies at the mill and the effectiveness of the formal decision-making processes.

Guardian of the Kurdish workers, Mr. Zoro was Mr. Cevat's greatest opponent. Most Kurdish workers from Şemdinli would have preferred for Mr. Zoro to be the manager of the rolling mill, but Mr. Zoro did not have the necessary mechanical experience and technical knowledge as did Mr. Cevat. The job at the rolling mill was technical in nature, and mechanical interventions were required. The partners of the steel mill would therefore never agree to appointing Mr. Zoro as manager of the rolling mill. Instead, the owners of the mill kept Mr. Zoro, who had good relations with the Kurdish workers from Şemdinli and their families, as HR manager to arrange the workers' flexible scheduling, and Mr. Cevat, as a technical expert whose work included the smooth operation of the machines, in a kind of balance. The two never seemed to get along, though. On the one hand, Mr. Zoro accused Mr. Cevat of being a mere technical engineer who ignored people's needs and a nationalist who had the agenda of furthering the interests of the Turks at the expense of the Kurds at the mill. On the other hand, Mr. Cevat accused Mr. Zoro of being an uneducated PKK terrorist whose aim was to use workers from Şemdinli as a ladder to move up in the organization's work hierarchy.

In June 2015, a big scandal erupted at the mill. Mr. Cevat was accused of engaging in sex with a Kurdish worker's wife who had come to visit her husband in Erbil. Kurdish workers began to circulate rumours about sex tapes of Mr. Cevat and accused him of humiliating the Kurds by taking advantage of their low economic status. The issue sparked unease among the Kurdish migrant workers and further opposition to Mr. Cevat. The incident coincided with Mr. Cevat's unsuccessful attempt to introduce some skilled Turkish workers into the rolling mill. In return, Turkish workers, in support of Mr. Cevat, accused Kurdish workers from Şemdinli of slander and lies. The Kurdish worker who was accused of selling his wife for cash and promotion was laid off from the steel mill, and Mr. Cevat left for a while on sick leave until the accusations subsided.

In the midst of these events, Mr. Zoro called Musa and asked him to come back two months after his departure, when production was needed to meet rising demand in the market. Musa blamed Mr. Cevat for his prolonged unpaid leave and appreciated Mr. Zoro's efforts in collectively protecting the Kurds from Şemdinli against threats from the Turkish managers. Musa took the home-cooked food he had brought with him and gathered some of his workmates and Mr. Zoro in his room to share it. I was also invited to this gathering, since I

spent more time with the Kurds from Şemdinli than with the Turks at the mill and was often considered to be allied with the Kurds. Musa wanted to have me join them because I had followed up on his previous situation and reminded Mr. Zoro about him several times over his two-month absence, including at Myhane in Erbil.

Ethnic groups of workers often accused each other of engaging in manipulation and 'conspiracies' to further their own group's interests at the expense of other groups. A common arrangement was for 'a power figure', the manager, to provide stability and security as much as possible, and his personal followers who, in return for some assistance, emphasized their trustworthiness and backing to the patron's plans (Scott 1972:92). For the Kurdish workers, Mr. Zoro and his staff and officers were the major source of protection, security, and access to employment or a work benefits. Mr. Zoro was in a position to supply benefits and services that the Kurdish workers from Şemdinli and their families needed for their survival and well-being. In return, the patron, Mr. Zoro, asked for his clients' help in finding out what his rivals were up to and in creating alliances to assist him and to protect his position and power at the mill.

In Burawoy (1979:85–86), the capability of a worker to manufacture faster is taken as leading to predetermined returns. Similarly, in the eyes of Kurdish workers, the steel mill was also a kind of 'game area' between different ethnic and religious groups, a site where ethnic linkages were incorporated into management. Here, the game was not mastering the production process, but rather keeping oneself on the shop floor for as long as possible. For Burawoy's Chicago company labourers, the mode of production was secure and stable (see Sanchez 2012:822 for another comparison). In the steel mill, however, Burawoy's (1979:77–81) 'playing the game' was less a matter of production strategies than of manipulating ethnic and rural ties to enter into power relations and thereby to keep one's job on the shop floor and the dollars flowing as long as possible. This situation simultaneously created efficiencies (cheapening of Kurdish workers) and inefficiencies (removal of experienced personnel on ethnic grounds) for capital and expanding accumulation.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the deployment of ethnic and rural ties at the rolling mill and their relation to the fluctuating production regime, particularly, in a comparative perspective with Sanchez's (2012) ethnographic case in the Tata company town of Jamshedpur. Workers' ethnic and cultural identifications and discourses helped to legitimize and thereby to rationalize flexible accumulation at the steel mill and to strengthen resilience of the overall management system in the face of economic and political instability. By mobilizing networks of ethnic patronage on the shop floor, the steel mill reinforced ethnic solidarity among Kurdish workers in the context of political transition and war.

For the Kurdish migrant workers, the village remained the centre of their social, economic, and emotional life, and most relied on patriarchal networks of support in the form of advice, childcare, and emotional support in times of unpaid leave. As we have seen, the rotation system is operated in the steel mill that positions uncontracted and semi-skilled Kurdish workers between permanent and temporary employment. Particularly, in the rolling mill, regional ethnic identification and kinship and rural ties expanded as supervisors recruited their kinsmen and co-villagers for the production line.

In line with this, workers became bonded to their supervisors through ethnic and rural ties and vertical lines of patronage without the expansion of horizontal class alliances. In contrast to the Indians and the refugees and migrants from the rest of Iraq, the Kurdish workers from Şemdinli were not fully proletarianized due to the connection they maintained with their rural homes and the land, a theme that is also underscored by Maxim Bolt (2011:3–4) in relation to 'informal channels of remittances' and rural refuge between South Africa and Zimbabwe (see Potts 2000; Potts and Mutambirwa 1990; Wolpe 1972; Chandavarkar 1994 for worker–peasantry connection).

Clearly, the steel mill did not operate in a manner detached and segregated from the wider cultural context. It was not just a place where scrap metal was recycled, but was also an ideological site for the articulation of politics, history, and memory. What was at stake in the rotation system was not only the reduction of labour costs and the increase of labour flexibilization at the mill, in a manner analogous to Sanchez's (2012) case in Jamshedpur. Rather, by emphasizing ethnic bonds and loyalties – such as were expressed in the rotation system – the policy of the mill at times provoked ethnic conflicts on the shop floor and the labour camp that were not without cost to the factory.

Worker resistance (where it emerged) remained atomized and individualistic: workers sought to keep good relations with managers in order to maximize the time they spent on the shop floor and thus their pay (see how atomized workers create individualized resistance in De Neve's 1999 ethnographic study on the power loom weaving sector in India). Where workers initiated a more systematic and better coordinated effort to meet the growing uncertainties and risks, they acted along the lines of their 'ascriptive' identities (ethnicity, regional origin) against the other ethnic and religious groups at the mill. Such forms of resistance evidently reflected the experience of previous ethnic solidarity and state repression in Turkey.

The case at hand also reinforces the point that it may be necessary to look beyond the workplace to understand forms of collective action (see Nash's 1979 ethnography on Bolivian tin miners on how a communal sharing of pre-Hispanic symbols and rituals motivate workers to recreate their solidarity against management). Although industrialization has entailed the separation of labourer from the control of work discipline, a continuity existed between rural and ethnic ties and industrial production, which enabled the so-called 'free' precarious labour to operate in dependable forms in two significant ways in this context (Parry 2005:146).

First, far from industrialization disembedding these workers from their social relations and village refuge, the flexible production regime at the steel mill exploited and reinforced the embeddedness of workers in kin networks, the village refuge, and connections with co-workers, similar to what Chandavarkar (1994:122) has shown in relation to the origins of industrial capitalism in India. At some respects similar to the Chinese factory workers described by Ngai (2005), who are kept in a constant state of job insecurity by restrictive migration and ethnic procedures, Kurdish migrant workers become 'floating workers' suspended between the rural and the urban, the modern and the old, and the individualism of wage labour and the traditional collectivism of Kurdish tribalism (see Chapter 5). By setting up a labour rotation system that mobilizes and relies on ethnic relations outside the mill to reproduce relatively cheap and semi-skilled labour power to its profit, the steel mill realized a relatively secure and continuous capital accumulation, as Meillassoux (1981[1975]:95) described.

Second, consent and cooperation between Kurdish managers and the workforce work through exploiting distance and distrust between contracted and secure Turkish migrant workers and uncontracted and flexible Kurdish workers (see Ong 1987 for how ethnic 'otherness' underpins the feeling of harassment among the young unmarried female workforce under the foreign male authority in Malaysia). The Kurds have also been elevated

over all the other workers on the grounds of regional identification, most particularly over the Indian workers, but also over the Yazidis and Arab Sunnis, as a form of ethnic bonding with a compassionate, evangelist industrialization. Consequently, the discourse of an ethnic 'aristocracy of labour' at the mill makes the Kurdish workers from Şemdinli a stable and easily disciplined casual workforce. In return, by using ethnic and kinship networks inside the steel mill, the workers become entrepreneurial and adaptive, acting upon their own strategic and emotional resources, notably their ethnic and national connections and rural belongings to cope with dislocations built into the precarity of their position in capitalist production.

Chapter 5
Bargaining with Patriarchy and Market

Introduction

Ethnographies of industrial production have documented not only the macro and formal economic processes in factories (see Carrier 1995, 1992; Thompson 1991[1967]; Dumont 1977; Dore 1973), but also the experience of work under contemporary capitalism and its relation to subjectivity and political consciousness (see Ferguson 2013; Freeman 2009; Ngai 2005; Salzinger 2003; Yelvington 1995; Ecevit 1991). Correspondingly, in this chapter, I shall move from macro processes to worker's subjective experiences of labour, thus 'looking at labour as an experiential category' (Mollona 2009:2). Otherwise speaking, 'beyond the understanding of labour as a wage relationship with the owners of the means of production that enables workers to make a living', I take it here as a life-long practice relationally interwoven into concrete life (Narotzky 2018:31).

Following the theoretical approach of Vigh (2009:424, 425), I here conceptualize migrant labour as 'moving within a moving environment' in the context of Hiwa district. Thus, by situating labour within a moving economic and social environment (see Vigh 2009:426), I shall explore how the fluctuating environment shapes individual beliefs, feelings, and action, and structure consciousness and struggles in everyday life. In doing this, articulations as well as contradictions between the capitalist mode of production and domestic economic relations will be particularly focused and studied.

Within this theoretical lens, the present chapter revolves around the personal life story of Ferman, a Kurdish migrant labourer from Şemdinli, and his changing relationship to patriarchal family and the product of his wage labour in an unsettling Iraqi Kurdistan environment. Facing both patriarchal control over his earnings and emerging opportunities for investing his wage for his future, Ferman tries to cope with structural forces and to incorporate these into his reading of present possibilities and alternative routes for his life. His efforts lead him to adopt various strategies such as rupturing family ties, rationalization, self-repression, or compromise, which animated contradictory beliefs and actions in daily life (see Lambek 2016:6–7; Berliner and et al. 2016 for an individual-centred and phenomenological approach on the study of contradictions and inconsistencies). Consequentially, Ferman's experience in this case prompts us to question how people 'come to terms with, make use of,

and adapt their shifting situations' (Behrends and Schareika 2010:85) in an environment characterized by constant instability?

Instabilities as Context

From 2014, one of the sectors most affected by the economic recession was the real estate market, which experienced stagnation and relative decline. Consumer spending subsided, property prices collapsed, capacity utilization at cement plants fell, and work on many projects came to a halt (DeWeaver 2015:2). Between 2008 and 2013, the real estate market had been a sector in which a considerable number of middle-income citizens in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq had been reinvesting most of their cash due to rising demand and prices (see Zebari 2013 in Aziz 2017:111). Since the commercial banks and stock exchange market were not fully developed, investment opportunities for Kurds were very limited (see Zulal 2011). Consequentially, real estate became practically the lone form of investment and saving opportunity for the Kurds.

In the market's heyday, between 2008 and 2013, dozens of luxurious villas and apartment buildings, many of them gated with guards and security installations, were built all over the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, especially in the capital Erbil, where property prices in some locations competed with those in metropolitan cities such as London and Dubai. The market seemed increasingly promising, and the price of a building would double and triple almost immediately after a construction was finished. For example, a plot of land in Erbil's Bakhtiyari neighbourhood which was sold at around $250,000 in 2012 would have cost a mere $5,000 in 2005.

With the economic downturn in 2014, the real estate market crashed and housing prices dropped dramatically. Since some oil companies and related tertiary businesses (mostly headed by expatriates) left the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the demand for office space and housing has been suffered further decline. Furthermore, consumer spending was dampened by the insecure conditions and increased risk of ISIS terror, entailing further declines in real estate prices. Some real estate companies shut down their businesses and left the region. Several building projects endured partial and uncompleted at several phases of development. Half-finished, abandoned constructions began to provide refuge for hundreds of displaced people from Mosul and elsewhere in Iraq.

In this volatile context, Ferman began to detect uncertainty in the market and to plot his escape from the steel mill in the near future by investing in the real estate sector now. He

realized that he was ‘caught in the structure of waiting’ in the labour camp (see Crapanzano 2003:16 in Cooper and Pratten 2015:11). That is, he perceived choosing a life in the labour compound as a ‘living death’, and the chances and potential offered by Erbil’s changing market as being alive. For him, market fluctuations generated new opportunities for his earnings and the power to plan for a different future. In other words, Ferman’s dreams of being rich provided ‘a structure of force’ and motivated him to invest his monthly wages in the market. In other words, for Ferman, hope was converted from a ‘passive faith’ into ‘an active state of mind’, that is, into practical action (see Zigon 2009:254–255). His hope shaped through languages of chance and an ‘entrepreneurial mind’ was premised on the idea that in uncertain times ‘things can change’, as Cooper and Pratten (2015:11) wrote.[65]

Ferman began to leave the labour compound after work to explore Erbil’s suburban neighbourhoods, examining dozens of apartment buildings and plots, as he saw an opportunity to get rich by buying land cheap and selling it dear once the multi-year economic boom returned. He explained to me that the economic recession in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq had been a source of motivation for him to seize the chance of a lifetime. He posted on his Facebook newsfeed that the Chinese expression for ‘crisis’ consists of two characters, one representing ‘danger’ and the other, ‘opportunity’. He held the belief that conditions that appear bad in the market may turn profitable. He became enthusiastic and excited about his future plans in the declining market, while most of his workmates in the rolling mill were worrying about their employment security. By contrast, Ferman worried about making a late start in investing in the real estate sector, realizing that the economy seemed to be recovering when he saw that the stocks of rebar at the mill had been reduced.

Alone he had no savings to invest in the real estate market, but together with his brothers working at the same mill, he could purchase a piece of land and sell it during the next boom in the price of land. He would repeatedly explain to his brothers that he was expecting another economic boom in the near future like that of 2008–2013, as soon as petroleum prices recovered back to the $70–80 price range. He said that the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was expected to gain independence from Iraq soon, which he thought would eventually transform Erbil into a world-famous oil city. This strategy would provide a way to earn a lot of money in a short period of time and to become wealthy at a relatively young age, according to

[65] For Parry (2005:150, 153, 154), there is no doubt that industrial work is repetitive and often executed under exploitative conditions, yet for some, industrial work remains preferable to working the land. Here, too, Ferman considered working at the steel mill the best option, and it provided him a new sense of self-worth and possibilities for positive change.

Ferman. He said, ‘I know a young real estate broker who became a millionaire just a few years ago. Overnight almost. Everybody envied him.’ Ferman dreamt of becoming like him by taking a risk now and becoming rich in the near future.

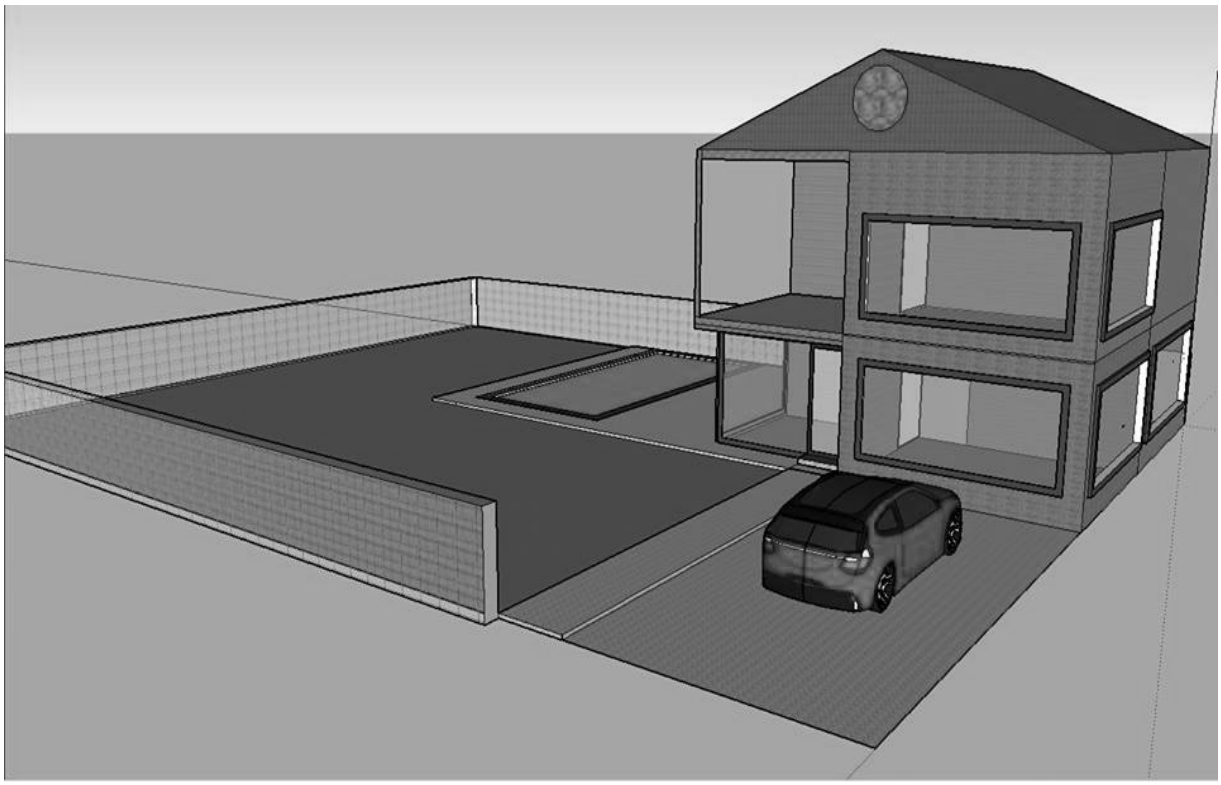

Figure 26. The exterior of the Ferman’s house

Source: Ferman

In June 2015, Ferman found a piece of land of around 200 m² that was worth $50,000 in Kesnezan, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Erbil where land prices had dropped dramatically since 2014. The owner of the property told Ferman that the land had been worth around $120,000 a year before, indicating that the price had dropped by more than half within a short period of time and would soon rise again after the crisis as in the past. Ferman visited the land in Kesnezan a couple more times and started to sketch his future house plans online with a 3D modelling computer programme called *Sketch Up*. He furnished the rooms with sofas, rugs, tables, and lamps, and he placed a red sports car in front of his future house alongside a swimming pool. For Ferman, there was just one more thing: he had to convince his father, who collected the remittance cash and decided where to spend it.

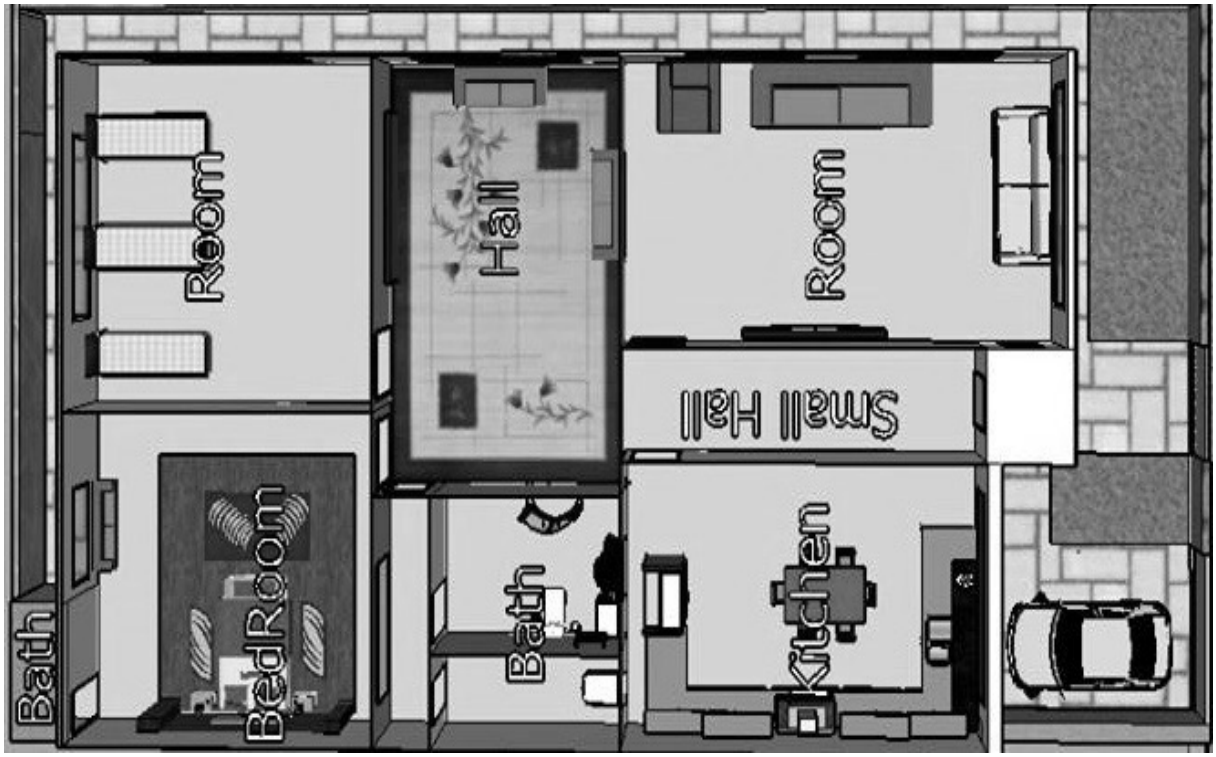

Figure 27. The interior of the Ferman's house

Source: Ferman

Remittance Cash

On one Thursday afternoon in June 2015, Ferman took unpaid leave and left the steel mill. He spent that night in my flat, as he had a bus ticket to go back home on the following day. Kurdish migrant labourers preferred to spend their last hours active in the city, buying electronic goods, cigarettes, and in some cases alcohol, in order to make some extra cash for themselves when they crossed the border. Nevertheless, strict social customs discouraged the distribution of alcohol in Kurdish villages in the north, so those who traded in alcohol needed to sell it before they arrived home when travelling from the south to the north.

Ferman looked stressed and concerned when I saw him on Thursday evening. I later learnt that he was carrying a large sum of money, about $4,000, which included not only his own two months' salary, but also the salaries of his two brothers. Many times during the evening, he looked in his wallet to make sure the cash was still there. He was inevitably worried that others would realize that he had so much money on him or that he could accidentally misplace it. Not leaving anything to chance, he wore a money belt under his

clothes to avoid having to carry any more cash than usual in his pockets. However, he was still stressed and recited all the verses he knew from the Qur'an the whole evening long to ward off being pickpocketed.

Most of the migrant workers do not have a bank account in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq where they can deposit their earnings and from which they can make transfers back home. The region's banking sector was still underdeveloped and mistrusted in 2015. Financial services often take a lot of time and effort, and they can entail a steep transaction fee. Due to a traditional wariness toward saving money at a bank and mistrust of the banking system, most people in Iraqi Kurdistan prefer to keep their cash at home in safe boxes.[66] Kurdish migrant workers also saved their cash in safe boxes in their rooms and sent remittances to Şemdinli with relatives or co-villagers.[67]

Ferman earned around $1,200 a month. He kept $200 of pocket money in a tin can in his room and sent the rest to what he and his brothers called the *ortak havuz* (total family income pool). The total family income pool was controlled by his father, Mahmut, who claimed greater knowledge of day-to-day expenditures and the ultimate responsibility for arranging marriages and providing housing to his sons and their wives and children in Şemdinli. According to Ferman's calculations in June 2015, together with his three brothers, around $4,000 was handed over to his father each month, which which is an incredible amount of money in Turkey.

Ferman had an elder brother Mehmet, the oldest son of Ferman's father Mahmut from his first marriage. Mahmut had three sons and a daughter from Ferman's mother, as well as a son and three daughters from Mehmet's mother – all of whom lived together in the same house in Şemdinli, where Ferman's wife, who was from Urmia, came after her marriage. Mehmet was married to an Iranian Kurdish woman who was also from Urmia, and his wife and children were living in Topzawä, a small town populated with families from Şemdinli, located roughly 35 km to the east of from Erbil. Mehmet was earning a bit more money, around $2,000 a month, and was also sending part of his wages to his father. However, as Ferman explained, Mehmet often sent his wages to his father by himself, so Ferman did not

[66] Nevertheless, I have seen Turkish workers who have bank accounts in Erbil and make money transfers. These workers prefer not to carry large amounts of cash in their pockets when returning back by bus to Turkey because they are afraid of being robbed by PKK guerrillas on the road.

[67] Some migrant labourers from Şemdinli, particularly those who possess both an Iraqi and a Turkish passport, first travel to the east side of the border (instead of to the Ibrahim Khalil Border Gate, a bridge crossing the Khabur River, which is the legal international border entrance between Iraq and Turkey) and cross to Şemdinli on the other side of the international border on foot along the road. Although considered illegal, such crossings seemed to be neglected by the Turkish military authorities if the perpetrator had both a Turkish identity card and an Iraqi passport, according to the migrant labourers. This cut the travel time by nearly half.

know how much his older brother had been contributing to the common pool, but often assumed that he was sending half of his wages.

For Ferman, his standard wages belonged to his family and were therefore kept separate from his own money, taken out and counted from time to time, and carried back home with almost 'ceremonial solemnity' (see Pine 2002:76). The wages which had to be carried back home was the most prestigious symbol of 'being a breadwinner' and 'caring for the family'. Turkish earnings in Şemdinli were used to keep the household going and to provide for basic needs that could be met through farming and trade. In contrast, the money earned in dollars was often spent to buy tractors and other machinery or building large brick houses (see Pine 2002 for comparison in relation to different currencies representing different social values and symbolic meanings in Poland).

Ferman's father had also promised to build a house for each of his sons in Şemdinli with the remittances he received, but he had no time to oversee the long building process, which necessitated the permanent presence of a trustworthy person – often a father or an uncle in Şemdinli – to supervise the expenditure of cash for building materials. Ferman had been sending almost all of his wages to his father each month for the past three years, like his brothers. Yet, his father had not managed to finish Ferman's house. When Ferman returned from Şemdinli a month later, he told me that only a slight part of the house had been built. As the opportunity cost of sending wages back home increased with the opening of alternative possibilities in the market, the question of how much money was accumulated and how it was spent became a matter of curiosity and a source of concern for him.

The Never-Ending House

Ferman get married in June 2014, and before the wedding, added another room to his own house on the same plot to be occupied by Ferman's new wife. Ferman's father's house, made of *biriket* (concrete blocks made of coal slag and cement), had a small corridor, one living room on one side, and another one on the other side, through which a sleeping room could be accessed. At the end of the corridor were a toilet, a bathroom, and a kitchen. Ferman explained that the house is always 'in progress', that is, its form changes based on the future needs of their occupants and their economic and financial status.

Ferman and his wife's room was added to the east side of the house. His father hired craftsmen and workers (as assistants to the craftsmen) who gave instructions on how to expand the house and helped to establish contact with tradesmen for construction materials. Ferman's

father painted the ceiling and walls, applied varnish to the wooden floors, and made ready the room where Ferman's wife would stay after their marriage. Ferman himself replaced the shower and bought new bedding and furniture for their bedroom. On the walls of their bedroom, he hung calligraphy of verses of the Qur'an with the names of Allah and Muhammad.

In addition to the room added to the main house, Ferman's father had promised him that he would build a separate dwelling where Ferman, his wife, and their future children would live all together in the future, that is, once Ferman had saved enough money to return permanently to Şemdinli. For Ferman, this seemed like a remote dream that could not be reached. When would he return? How much money did 'enough money' mean? Was he sentenced to work in the factory until he got old? What was happening to the money he earned? Was it accumulating?

Ferman could not see any progress in his promised house over the preceding two years, although his father did show him the plans of the house and had placed some bricks in front of the main house. Ferman put these bricks under a tent to keep them out of the rain, but he found them back in the garden when he returned. He phoned me with a bit of regret and explained that he later realized the bricks were not for his future house, but were rather stepping stones to help walk through the muddy waters after the rain in the garden. He started to question what his father was doing with $4,000 being remitted each month, and he worried about whether the savings could be used for an investment:

> I'm not sure how he manages the $4,000 cash per month. He tells me that he's building me a house, but when I look with my own eyes, I can't see any progress. He kept telling me that it was going to be finished soon. I'm not sure how long I should keep sending him money. I've been sending him money for two years now, and I'm sure I would have made a fortune if I had managed that much cash every month. Every time I come back home, he keeps telling me stories about how he raised me with so many difficulties. He makes me feel obligated to pay back my debt. I somehow understand how he feels, but on the other hand I think that parenting implies sacrifices, and I would never tell my son in the future that he owes me something because I raised him. I sometimes think that I should bring my wife over here and stop sending cash back home. If I can do that, I can get rich, because there are so many opportunities in the market right now, and then I can help them more in the future.

When Ferman returned from Şemdinli, he continued to visit the plot of land in Kesnezan and negotiated for an even lower price. Ferman had realized that the price of several things on the market was falling, and there were numerous opportunities on the market, which would bring large amounts of cash in a short period of time. He explained to me how to 'game' in the market: 'In these times one has to invest however one can. When you have a few small gains, you build on them. Then, you take the next step, because you've had a taste of success.'

At the end of September 2015, he took the cash he was sending home with his brother out of his pocket and counted it in front of me. It was obvious he was disappointed because he has to send it to his father, and after the counting is finished, he told me, 'I earn so much useless cash'. He then put the blame on himself and said, angrily that he had never had the real 'son-to-father' conversation he should have had much earlier.

Rupture

Ferman built up the courage to talk to his two brothers about investing in a piece of land about that he had been thinking about for a while. He asked them to pool a portion of their wages instead of sending it all home and to invest in the land in Kesnezan. When Ferman asked his younger brothers to pool a part of their money for investing, both agreed with him, but they asked him to first discuss the issue with their father. Following this, Ferman called his father on one evening in August 2015 and explained that he would like to use a portion of his wages to invest in a plot of land in Kesnezan and explained the opportunities in the real estate market in Erbil. His father did not like the idea and became immediately angry and defensive on the phone without even thinking about the point being made, as Ferman told me after the conversation. After quarrelling with him on the phone, Ferman's father accused him of being unfaithful to him and asked Ferman to remove his wife from his home if he did not want to send his wages:

> He told me *sana hakkımı helal etmem* [I will not give you my blessings], if you do not send me your money . . . and I had better leave home . . . and never come back again. He is erasing us from his life because of money, you see? Look, he is making me his own enemy. He knows that I can't take my wife to the labour camp. He's threatening me. While we give him our wages, he only gives us *harçlık* [pocket money]. My brothers [his younger brothers from the same mother] can't say anything because they're afraid of being sinful by standing against their

> father. He's always saying *sana hakkımı helal etmem*, but it is what he is doing is *zulm* [cruelty or unjust acts of exploitation, oppression, and wrongdoing, whereby a person either deprives others of their rights or does not fulfil his obligations towards them], and Islam stands for justice and commands us to speak out against injustice.

Here, Ferman becomes conscious of 'the dark side of kinship' (Geschiere 2003 in Cooper and Pratten 2015:7), where guiding ideals and norms were destabilized and distorted through experience (see Ferguson 1999).[68] Ferman accused his father being a 'liar', since he was supposed to be building Ferman a house, whereas Ferman did not see any progress in that endeavour. The ideal Ferman held up for his father became articulated in the very face of uncertainty when 'coded ideals rise to the surface as a mode of questioning' (Stewart 1996:196). In other words, ideals of family responsibilities surfaced in the face of their denial, as here a father was acting worse than a stranger to Ferman by refusing to talk with him.

Ferman was disappointed by his father's words, but he wanted to explain that he would use the cash to earn more money, which would be profitable for all of them in the end. He became angry at his father's lack of respect for his ideas. He told that he no longer felt any compassion toward his father and recalled that his father had beaten him every day for as long as he could remember. He had never bought Ferman a present and had decided everything for him throughout his life including the work that he did and the woman he married. For two years he had been sacrificing his youth working at a steel mill in what he called 'the prison' for the sake of his family, whereas is father was being too selfish in his attempt to control all the money Ferman earned.

His father made him feel indebted to his parents and asked him to return his moral debt in cash. For Ferman, his father's behaviour was *ayb* (roughly meaning disgrace, defect, or shame), as he was putting something immaterial into material terms. Ferman felt experienced and assured in dealing with his father after reading on the Internet about what other people did in similar situations (see Anderson-Fye's 2010 ethnographic case study for how a rupture in the routine of everyday life shapes consciousness).[69] His father wanted

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[68] In real life, people feel a desire to push their relatives close to their ideal projections, and they may feel a responsibility to approximate the ideals they believe in (Ferguson 1999).

[69] In Anderson-Fye's (2010:332–333) ethnographic work of 'cultural change and posttraumatic stress', it is explored how ideas and images from a television programme shape the consciousness and well-being of a Belizean adolescent girl named Maria. Maria understands the maltreatment she has had before with a new term abuse through the stories of other women who are telling similar experiences in the context of U.S.-based TV programme *Oprah*. Here, the rupture ('precipitating events of her diagnosis related to globalizing cultural

Ferman to feel indebted to him, which was termed ‘emotional abuse’, as Ferman had realized a couple of weeks earlier. He said, ‘It is a painful truth you’ll need to face. You’re not going to like it, but it is true. Everybody believes that family is important, but the truth is that cash is more important.’ Ferman was now unsure about his father’s truthfulness and confronted a plethora of unexplained, ambivalent feelings towards him, as he explained later: ‘One of my sides is feeling love, fear, and respect to my father, and another side is feeling anger, embarrassment, and frustration.’

Ferman did not talk to his father for a month. In the meantime, he continued to talk with his wife and mother back home when his father was out of sight. He heard that his father had asked his sons not to talk to Ferman until he apologized and admitted that he was wrong. Mehmet, the eldest son, talked to Ferman and asked him to apologize and restore his affection and care for his father. Ferman explained that he had never been disrespectful to his father. Their conversations broke off when Ferman asked Mehmet about how much cash he was sending his father each month. Mehmet got angry and accused Ferman of being unfaithful to the person who had found him the job in the rolling mill at his father’s request. To this Ferman replied, ‘What is the meaning of finding a job for me, if you take everything I earn?’ Their relations broke after that, for a month or so.

Following this, Ferman questioned whether a break with his father would mean isolation in terms of exclusion from his father’s kin network and inheritance. Mehmet would always support his father in front of others, because he was his father’s eldest son and the second ‘head’ of the household. In Ferman’s opinion, their father gave Mehmet preferential treatment. Ferman blamed Mehmet of being double-faced, having found a pretext to cut off his relations with Ferman in order to take sides with his father. Ferman, explained that Mehmet’s main motivation was to control the common pool by getting on his father’s good side at Ferman’s expense:

> Though Mehmet is well aware of the situation, he would never support me in front of our father, as he sees himself as the mighty son . . . the firstborn son . . . the second head of our family. He says he supports me, and then you don’t hear from him while discussing these things with my father, you know. He’s afraid of being written out of the inheritance. He’s jealous of me because I am cleverer than

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change’) unbalances the consciousness and calls forth action to receive a ‘PTSD diagnosis, making her one of the first documented cases with the disorder in her country of origin’.

> him. I know how to play with money. He doesn't want me to control my own earnings because he knows I'll get rich while he remains a working class man. That's why he takes sides with my father: to stop me and to keep things the way they are and not to try to change them.

Here, the patriarchal control is more 'one of situation than of character', as Caldwell (1978:566) conceptualized in relation to high-fertility regimes. He (1978:566) explained that, family members are usually powerful only if they support the traditional situation. Drawing on his theoretical insight, Mehmet become more powerful in the family when he supported the traditional norm, that is, when he exhorted a weak and old patriarchal father to exert control over his son. In such patriarchal domination, a strict control against deviance is often sustained as a many of male peers back in the village felt threatened by continuing behaviour of disobedience or resistance concerning the loss of economic or reproductive decision-making, as underscored by Caldwell (1978:566–567). Sons could choose to break the rules, but the cost would be too great, as a familial network was vital for economic survival in a highly uncertain and insecure political and economic environment (see Kandiyoti 1988 for how 'women strategize within a set of concrete constraints', which she labelled as 'patriarchal bargains').[70]

In her book *Moral Laboratories: Family Peril and the Struggle for a Good Life*, Mattingly (2014) argued, 'ordinary routines of family life are crucible for an ongoing, indeterminate process of moral becoming', a process that she calls 'moral laboratories' (Mattingly 2014 in Carpenter-Song 2016). Mattingly (2014) underscores that these experiments are being manufactured through the day-to-day processes and interactions, but the contexts she looks at are not all that everyday. Her own conceptualization of daily life is characterized not simply by routine, but also by the unforeseen. For instance, her analysis of Dotty reveals that a life-changing accident or diagnosis (sickle-cell anaemia) leaves parents in an invidious position (Mattingly 2014: Ch. 5).

While it is indeed possible to see experimentation in kinship relations in the routine and the everyday, it seems that suffering – that is, experience out of the ordinary – forms the primary catalyst in moral laboratories (Mattingly 2014 in Carpenter-Song 2016). Stated

[70] Kandiyoti (1988:274) argues that 'different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct "rules of the game" and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression.'

differently, there should be some force, that is some break-up or split, such as in this case the economic weakening and the change in the value of wages, which creates a tension and mismatch between ideals and practice, setting the moral laboratory in motion. Shifts in ideals, in relation to shifts in the environment, constitute a process of affect, an energy, or a force, where the subject is activated to reinterpret him/herself through a process of textualizing the world, thus being pushed into 'moral laboratories', similar to Miller's (2001) ethnography in North London which focused on the experience of shopping in everyday life, revealing how the rupture between the ideal partner imagined in kinship relations and the actual partner as experienced in day-to-day life create instabilities and fluctuations. In this case, for Ferman, rupture was the opportunity that appeared in the market with the crisis. Yet, it was also necessary to protect himself from other expected or unknown instabilities in a rapidly changing environment.

Movement

Ferman decided to take a risk and believed that, as an entrepreneurial man, he could trust the market and be better empowered to act, instead of subjugating himself to the power of his father. At the end of September 2015, he did not send his wages back to his father and asked his wife to go to his mother's house in Urmia for a time until he found a place to bring her near him. However, Ferman's mother did not allow her daughter-in-law to leave the house and instead supported her staying in the house. In the meantime, Ferman's mother explained to her son on the phone that if his wife might become 'bored at home' alone, perhaps resulting in actions that would diminish her honour as a woman, so she should never be left home alone should Ferman ever rent a home near the steel mill and bring her there.

Diane King (2008:317) writes, 'a Kurd's "*namus*" or honour is one of his most precious possessions'. In social contexts with honor killings, a suspicion or gossip about a woman's sexual misbehaviour may have serious consequences (see Alinia 2013; King 2008; Mojab 2004, 2002; Mojab, Shahrzad, and Hassanpour 2002a, 2002b for more comprehensive accounts on honour killings). As King (2008:324) has shown in the context of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, leaving a wife alone at home can reduce the namus of the woman and her husband's family and ancestry. For this reason, newlywed women in particular are never left alone at home. Broadly speaking, the bride's social life passes around her household and kin (see King 2008:324) has shown. Any woman who needs to travel usually has to be

accompanied by her mother-in-law, sister-in-law, aunt, or some other relative from the immediate family (see King 2008:324).[71]

For Ferman too, a Kurdish man's reputation relies on his capacity to control his wife. In Şemdinli, his mother and father ensured that if his wife went somewhere, she did so with kin, and her public life revolved around the vicinity of her household and immediate neighbourhood. However, should she have joined her husband near the mill, she would be alone in a house away from her kin while Ferman was at work. Indeed, Ferman had great trust in his wife, and as he told me, he was in love with her in a romantic way. He was sure that she would never do anything that could harm their love were she to stay at home alone. However, his mother warned Ferman that he should not trust their romantic love, but that he should put his trust in his mother instead, as she had a great deal of life experience and was always looking out for her son's well-being. After speaking with his mother, Ferman became quite indecisive and did not know what to do.

In the meantime, one of Ferman's workmates, a Kurdish worker employed in the rolling mill named Hasan, was laid off, the first of several workers who were forced to leave the mill due to the halt of construction projects and the depressed housing market in Erbil. Hasan was an assistant floor supervisor, and he was laid off after working in the same place for four years. 'The reason he was laid off is just plain bad luck,' Ferman reasoned. For him, Hasan had been laid off because he was one of the highest-paid employees at the steel mill and the managers had decided to remove a few of the higher paid workers to cut costs.

I was later told that the management discovered that he was a poor performer, not doing his job well enough to keep it. It was easy to lay off a worker at the mill; an employer could terminate the employment of an employee without notice and could simply say, 'Leave now,' without any further explanation. The employee was then allowed to go back to his room in the labour camp and was required to pack up and leave the same day under close surveillance by the security guards until they reached the exit gate. Most of the workers had been put out of work with the assurance that they would return when things improved. However, in this instance Hasan was laid off without explanation or compensation just before a holiday that he was scheduled to take. He was simply informed that his job had been terminated because the company could no longer 'afford' it. He had no employment contract with the company and could be fired without cause or notice.

[71] Generally speaking, interviewing women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was troublesome for a male anthropologist. Those who want to look at gender dimensions in depth may read Diane King.

Lack of job security and of guaranteed income meant uncertainty for migrant labourers, leading to personal strain. Many workers were unable to evaluate their future income because they had no fixed hours, no plan, or no savings for the future; at times they could not make ends meet. Once situated between push-and-pull forces that generate migration networks, migrant labourers become vulnerable, a fact that had important implications for individual labourers whose cash and life were interdependent. Migrant labourers feared being sacked and losing their livelihoods as a result of the economic downturn, especially when new infrastructure projects were halted and less money flowed in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq due to falling oil prices.

As uncertainty set in, a profound feeling of insecurity weighed down on migrant labourers. Ferman too felt insecure due to the swings in the market, which left some vulnerable and others enriched. Seeing his previous workmates becoming unemployed, Ferman decided to be more careful about dealing with market forces as he had no one to rely on, and he decided to put more effort into securing his current work and attempting to compromise:

> The situation seems to get worse here by the day. There are rumours about reductions in the workforce and that workers will be laid off due to the company's poor performance. We are praying for the market to turn around. I've built a life here and figured things out. It's hard for me to imagine going back home. I'm smart enough to know what to do. But if you don't know what will happen tomorrow, how can you have expectations about the future? I'm concerned about time, especially with the current economic situation. That is, about the time when I have to go back home. I sometimes feel I'm strong enough to stand alone here, but I forget that nothing is stable here. Everything changes from one day to the next, and you have to deal with it. You have to learn how to make sense of things and predict changes and to move and position yourself. That sums up our life here. You have to play the game.

Life was full of uncertainties for migrant labourers, but as Ferman puts it, most of them have learned how to live with the day-to-day uncertainties and to make choices and decisions by predicting instabilities and to move and position themselves in relation to changes (see Vigh 2006:420). In this process, patriarchal networks based on the economy of affection and wages turn out to be vital for Kurdish migrant workers. As Ferman noted, 'Whether you like it or

not, you have to sustain good relations with the people back in the village, and you have to have a house somewhere.' Whenever workers come to see wage earning as an insufficient means to support oneself and one's family independently, they fall back on the economy of affection to survive, fulfilling family obligations and supporting the household budget whenever possible and needed.

In short, the market meant both an escape route and a lost job for Ferman. To bring his wife to his side meant both an escape from his father's patriarchal domination and at the same time other uncertainties concerning his wife. He wanted to get out of the labour camp in order to embrace 'the open-ended possibilities in the city' (Cooper and Pratten 2015:12), but the threat of losing his job left him in doubt.

He had been at the steel mill for years and thought he could keep his job, but he also realized that it could be just a matter of time before he became unemployed. He thought the paternal household could be a source of protection within the better risky setting. He could trust his abilities to get rich, but in the absence of job security, familial support networks were necessary and needed.

Restoration

In October 2015, the price of iron bar had dropped to $280 and migrant labourers were aware that sales forecasts were not being met. When sales were low, some of the Kurdish workers were told to go home pending an increase in sales. In the meantime, Ferman bought three tons of iron bar, which he planned to sell at a higher rate in the summer when construction would be at its peak, and he decided to send the rest of his two months' wages back home with his brother, who was given an unpaid leave of absence starting October 2015. I asked Ferman why he had changed his mind and sent his earnings to his father. He replied, 'I earned my wages, but they belong to my family.' On the one hand, he wanted to save his earnings for an investment. On the other hand, if he was told to take an unpaid leave, he would not have been able to go home. There would have been no place to go. He added, 'They are taking care of my wife. She is comfortable, and that's what's important to me.' This in spite of the fact that on other occasions he had told me that his wife did not feel comfortable and satisfied and that she wanted to be near Ferman in Erbil.

In October 2015, a reconciliation took place between Ferman and his father and patriarchal relations were restored, after Ferman sent part of his wages back home with his brother, providing a favourable pretext. Ferman's mother called her son and after talking a few

minutes she handed the phone over to her husband. Mahmut was kind and helpful on the phone, Ferman told me. He talked about how he continued to suffer from his back pain and other ailments and then asked Ferman if he needed anything from Şemdinli, such as clothes or home-made food. Ferman remained on the phone a long time listening to his father talk about his illness, after which he asked his father to take a rest. His father said that he was old now and wanted to see his grandson in his arms. In return, Ferman explained to his father that the family's well-being was more important than his individual aspirations (compare Wikan's 1990 ethnographic work on Wayan Wijaya).[72]

Following the conversation, his father decided to send Ferman's wife to Topzawä, where Mehmet's wife lived. Ferman spent some time with his wife in Mehmet's house, where he was welcomed by his wife with home-made food and warm hugs. When Mehmet and his wife went to Iran to visit their relatives, Ferman called his mother to come to Topzawä to stay with his wife, who was now alone. He told me that his wife was afraid of being alone. Ferman's mother spent three weeks there and then returned back to Şemdinli with her daughter-in-law. When Ferman's wife was in Şemdinli, he left the house for his brother Mehmet and his wife, who had returned from Iran and returned to his room in the labour camp. Shortly thereafter, Ferman heard that his wife was pregnant.

In the meantime, the price of real estate in Erbil also continued to fall. Ferman worked overtime and began to do some small-scale trading of electronics and other goods across the border between Turkey and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He wanted to borrow from the bank so he could have more cash for trading. He questioned whether taking an interest-bearing loan would be a sinful act for which God would punish him. For Ferman, '*Riba* (debt usury) based

[72] Wikan's (1990) ethnographic study on Wayan Wijaya, describes a Balinese man who was fired by his employer and friend Ketut Artje, a respected member of the community. After his termination, Wayan begins to 'behave publicly in strange ways' (213), such as letting his hair grow, staying out for the night at times, sleeping under the bridge, giving free vent to his feelings of desperation in places outside the home, and writing letters of complaint and appeals both to people he knew well and those he did not know not so well. Wayan's routine of daily life was drastically interrupted, as were his feelings and relations to his kin, especially his wife, who did not side with him, his once respected and beloved senior employer Ketut, who had made an unjust decision against Wayan, and the people in the local community who did not help Wayan to raise the issue of discrimination. In the end, a reconciliation took place between Wayan and Ketut, family harmony was restored, and Wayan was reintegrated into the community. The routines of everyday life were restored when he was offered a respectable job. His behaviours were accepted as improper but at the same time understandable and in some cases even sympathetic in the community because Wayan was seen as a person in transition due to his break with his employer and wife. In this case, similarly, Ferman's behaviours against his father were seen as both improper and acceptable because Ferman was seen as *delikanlı*. *Delikanlı* literally means crazy-blooded, referring to a young, tough, and rash adolescent whose behaviour can be tolerated to some extent due to his experience in life. It is usually a complimentary and flattering term for young adult men. Ferman's father and mother, as well as his older brother, often called Ferman *delikanlı* and considered his improper behaviours as effects of his transition from adolescent into adulthood, which created a reason and base for understanding and negotiations.

loan was a sin that one should flee from and keep far away from it by all possible means.' Even the need for housing did not make it permissible to deal with riba, according to Ferman, because one could always rent a place. However, with the increasing trading opportunities, he needed additional capital to conduct more trade, which pushed Ferman to reconsider his ideas about taking out a loan from a bank.

In February 2016, we prepared Ferman's documents and applied for a small loan in Turkey, at a time when I was leaving the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. I later continued to receive news from Ferman, and he told me that he had changed his mind about taking an interest-bearing loan. Indeed, I later learnt that the bank had rejected his loan application due to the fact that he had no collateral. He asked me if he could borrow $100 from me. I decided not to extend him a loan this time, since he had not paid me back from the previous time.

At the mill, Ferman was getting a bad reputation among migrant labourers in the labour camp as the sort of person who 'only takes and never gives back', but he denied that he had borrowed money from me and not returned it. For Ferman, one had to wait a bit for a return on the investment. He told me that he was a trustworthy person and that he always paid his debts, but in the market he was an investor, which meant that he needed first to make as much as possible before paying back his debt.

From time to time, Ferman presented an image of himself as a breadwinner, obedient, and a good worker who hoped that he was being a good son to his father and husband to his wife. This self-image was consistent with an image of his parents and elders constructed in terms of a cultural ideal: parents and elders provided everything to Ferman, and they consequently deserved perfect obedience. At other times, he saw himself as an independent entrepreneur who could employ various strategies to meet his personal goal of becoming rich. On one side, the market opened up new possibilities for his earnings and produced new values and ideas, which become a social force and an effective resource for change against the dominant, domestic relations and values. On the other side, the possibilities remain limited as the market itself relied on domestic relations to reproduce cheap labour. It is in this context that our conversations transcribed in my field notes often contained inconsistencies and rapid shifts in valuations.

Conclusion

Cooper and Pratten (2015), Vigh (2009, 2006), and Greenhouse, Mertz, and Warren (2002) have explored shifting and fluid research fields. Drawing on their theoretical insights, in this

chapter, I sought to depict individual action and social interaction in an unsettled environment in the Kurdish context and read of the life of a migrant labourer, Ferman, who adapted, combined, and invented strategies to come to terms with, or make use of, his changing situation under contradictory forces.

As local value regimes intersect with the money form of value, different forms of agency, exploitation, governmentality, resistance, and negotiation emerge (Narotzky 2018:35). In this 'critical junction of value and worth (lessness)', both locations and people are relationally rearranged by the expansion and contraction of capital (Kalb 2013:11).

Market value is expressed in everyday culture through discourses and economic instruments that compel Kurdish workers to adopt neoliberal versions of the entrepreneurial and independent self, resulting in distinct 'ways of hoping and planning in the face of disempowering circumstances' (Jackson 2002:15). At the same time, far from creating self-reliant workers, uncertain, precarious employment conditions led migrant workers to retain their dependence on their village base and patriarchal networks of support. Put another way, the market produces hope for a happy future and yet despair and uncertainty in the face of repeated economic crises and precarious industrial production.

Workers trapped in this uneven modernism and industrialization are poised between the dream of entrepreneurial success and freedom from patriarchal control at home. In return, these delusions and conflicting value practices, or what De Angelis (2007) termed 'value struggles', constituted ongoing inconsistencies in the lives of migrant workers.

Graeber (2001:68) argued that any action or process only becomes meaningful 'by being integrated into some larger system of action'. So, if we interpret 'words and behaviours in context' (Berliner 2016:3), that is, under different value systems, then what may appear as inconsistencies can be interpreted as efforts to reconcile multiple orders of reality that are simultaneously present.

Chapter 6
Contradictory Moralities of Sex, Work, and Body

Introduction

In this last chapter of the thesis, I turn to another individual life story of a Kurdish migrant labourer focusing on how 'critical junctions' linking global capitalist developments with everyday fields and local political economic histories mark both body and perception of working men (Kalb 2013:8). In the case at hand, Rojan, a Kurdish migrant labourer from Turkey, was concerned that he might have contracted HIV/AIDS from a sex worker at an Erbil massage parlour. While Rojan admonished himself and worried about disease, he did not want to get tested for fear of losing his job and being deported back to his hometown, Silopi, a small town bordering with Iraq and Syria, in the south-east of Turkey. I specifically explore how Rojan experiences uncertainty – from routine employment insecurities to possibilities of life-threatening HIV infection – in relation to the policies of the Regional Government, sexual norms and attitudes in the labour camp, and the cosmologies of familial honour and shame back in the home town. Following Dilger (2009:207), at issue here is, this time, how are bodily experience of doubt and moral sensitivities of HIV amongst Kurdish migrant workers relationally articulated with the socio-cultural construction of the infection at the labour camp and displacement in the market?

Drawing a relational and structural theory of disease causality from Dilger (2009, 2008, 2003), Smith (2007, 2004), and Parker (2001), the present chapter argues that medical and social weakness of migrant workers against the risk of HIV infection is mediated by socio-political cultural factors. Being a migrant steel worker on the margins of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and its precarious market in the Hiwa district should therefore be seen as a bodily and moral experiment. Thus, as we examine the cultural and structural factors that mediate 'the structure of risk and of possible responses to HIV' (Parker 2001:165), industrial sites in Iraqi Kurdistan will appear as moral spaces of human existence under the expansion of contemporary capitalism.

Dark, Purple Spots

On one evening in January 2015, Rojan texted to me that he needed to talk to me about something. I was returning to Erbil after my English class at the mill and texted him back that I would be leaving soon and would see him the following day instead. He texted me back that 'it is a matter of life and death' and asked me to stay in his room that night. I did not worry at the beginning and thought he was concerned about some embarrassing gaffe he had made with his girlfriend, Şirin, who was waiting to marry him in Silopi. I decided to see Rojan for a half-hour visit and then take a taxi back to Erbil, since I was teaching the following morning at the University of Kurdistan, Hewlêr. I walked towards the Rojan's room in the old labour camp and found him waiting in front of his door. I laughed and joked with him asking whether Şirin had changed her mind about the marriage. Suddenly there was a chilly silence. His face fell. He looked as if he had been crying. His eyes were glossy with tears, and the flesh around his eyes was red with grief. I became a bit anxious and asked him how he was, to which he replied, 'If I tell you, do you promise not to tell anyone?' I walked into his room and sat on the edge of his bed. Rojan insisted I take an oath, swearing to God to keep the whole matter secret. I did as he requested and asked him to tell me what the problem was. He took off his sweater and showed me his back. His skin was filled with flat or slightly raised dark purple spots. Tears began to flow from his eyes, and said that he felt alone and had no one to tell.

My stomach turned. I suspected what the issue was, as the migrant labourers often considered purple skin spots on backs, shoulders, and legs to be the symptoms of AIDS. Indeed, purple skin spots may also be found with other forms of disease, but most of the migrant labourers regarded them as early signs of HIV/AIDS. They believed that as the immune system breaks down and is unable to fight off certain infections, the body cannot deal with the unhygienic environment of the labour camp and shop floor. Rojan asked with a tone of fear in his voice, 'Have I got HIV?' I started to explain to him that the spots appearing on his skin could be a symptom of some other illness and tried to calm him down to the best of my ability. He continued to cry and told me that he did not want to die of 'an evil disease'.

I asked him, whether he had been tested. He replied, 'I am too nervous and scared to get tested.' He added that he had been tested four months previously and had come back clean with the blood test in the ikame, the place dealing with the residency requirements for foreign nationals, where a sample of blood is taken yearly from all expatriates and incoming workers to test for diseases or disorders that could affect the work process or spread to others in places

of work. He started to explain that he had also been losing weight over the previous couple of weeks even though he was eating a lot of rice, one of the main dishes served at every meal in the canteen.[73] I asked Rojan why he was so afraid of having AIDS if he had given a blood sample four months before and the result was clear, given that nobody had called back to tell him that he had tested positive. He sat back, shaking his head in disappointment, and explained, 'I saw Ruby again three months ago.'

Ruby, the Filipino Masseuse

The official Iraqi Kurdistan working week is a five-day week running Sunday through Thursday, with Friday and Saturday being the weekend. Private companies were not obliged to observe the Friday–Saturday weekend, nor did they need to observe government-only holidays. At the mill, the rolling mill was often stopped on Fridays. Kurdish migrant labourers enjoyed their day of rest every Friday unless it coincided with either the half-day mechanical equipment maintenance conducted every two months or any periodic burst in overtime work to meet rising demand for iron bar. Every Friday morning, Kurdish labourers would bathe, put on their best clean clothes and cologne, and assemble at the mosque for Friday prayer. The imam from the nearby village of Hiwa often counselled young migrant labourers on urgent matters facing them, such as the consumption of alcohol and *zina* (adultery), both of which are considered major sins in Islam. In almost every sermon that I attended the Imam would warn, 'If you commit zina you will be digging your own grave; surely, your shame will be great!', while the young Muslim men listened to him carefully with their heads hanging down.

Following Friday prayers, which ended around noon, migrant workers would often ring up Memu, a taxi driver from Hiwa village, to come and take them to Erbil. Memu was using two mobile phones corresponding to his two different jobs: the first as a taxi driver and the other as peshmerga in the Minister of Peshmerga Affairs, although he had only been to the office once or twice. The journey from the factory to the city cost $20 round trip, which was actually not as expensive as migrant labourers indicated, especially when the ride was shared by three or four workers. It was also just a once-a-week expense, as most of the migrant labourers would not go to Erbil during the rest of the week unless they had some essential reason to do so. The drive from the steel mill to Erbil normally took around 20–25 minutes, depending on traffic conditions. The road got busier if there were large vehicles, mostly with Turkish and Iranian plates, carrying crude oil and goods in the left turn lane. Small cars

[73] This rice often gave rise to jokes among the migrant workers for causing weight gain.

usually preferred to use the right side because the road was less encumbered. The road was asphalted in some parts, but other stretches consisted of little more than trails, muddy in the rain and dusty the rest of the time (see Figure 31 in appendix). In wintertime, it was common to see a vehicle stuck in the mud and people pushing it out. In summertime, one often saw crashes on the road due to high winds and blowing dust, causing near-blackout conditions. All year long, the road was crowded with sheep, goats, police officers, sex workers, traders, migrant men from South Asia selling watches, sunglasses, and prepaid telecom top-up cards, food trucks selling snacks, and makeshift filling stations selling fuel in front of homes.

In Memu's car, while driving to Erbil, the discussion would often start with rumours at the steel mill. Memu was a curious man and tried to learn every detail at the steel mill, taking care to listen to migrant workers' comments on rumours and events. The discussion would then revolve around politics. With four or five men in the same car, the conversation would inevitably turn to love and sex. Memu was also famous as a 'part-time *pezevenk*' (pimp) who knew the hotels and spa centres where the best young sex workers worked in Erbil. He was working as a go-between, connecting sex workers with clients living in labour camps. On one of our drives to Erbil, he leaned forward, cleared his throat, and started telling us about the secretive houses on the outskirts of Erbil where the wealthiest members of society came together and slept with attractive women from abroad such as Julia, a young Filipino woman. He would tell at great length how 'sweet' Ruby was and how 'Ruby [was] the best', with a sense of wonder and his always mischievous sense of humour. The last time Memu had seen Ruby was at around eight o'clock on the previous evening, when he dropped off her at Khanzad American Village, a luxurious residential complex on the booming outskirts of Erbil. A few days earlier, he had dropped her off in the morning at another villa somewhere to the north of Ankawa, known as the Christian suburb of Erbil. 'Oh, sweet Ruby,' Memu moaned once again and told us that he could arrange a date with her if one of us would like to spend the night with her, a woman who slept with only the wealthiest residents of Erbil. Kurdish migrant labourers all laughed at this and applauded him wildly for his effort in marketing Ruby, and all of them implored Allah to heal Memu, forgive him, and change his ways.

Despite being against frequenting sex workers in principle, some of the Kurdish migrant workers would visit Thai or Lebanese massage parlours and spa centres, which proliferated with the expansion of oil sector in Erbil. Migrant workers could get what spa centres advertised as 'full massage treatments' and what workers called a massage with 'a happy ending', meaning that the massage ends by bringing the client to sexual climax. In

these massage parlours and spa centres, there was often an entry fee, typically ranging from $40 to $100, which included a 40- to 60-minute massage. If a client wanted a sexual service at the end, he needed to negotiate that with the masseuse, which required tipping her depending on the service provided. Some of the migrant labourers had been to several massage parlours, which were staffed by women from all over the world, and they could even recall the names of the various masseuses from different ethnic backgrounds and track them down in different massage parlours in the Christian district of Ankawa, the heart of Erbil's night life.

The Filipino Masseuse Ruby was a 32-year-old woman who had first come to Erbil in late 2012 as a domestic worker. She was contracted in a high-rise luxury apartment complex in Erbil. Her duties consisted of looking after an elderly Kurdish woman who was deaf and could not speak. When Iraqi Kurdistan's economic boom turned to bust in the beginning of 2014, Ruby's employer cut her salary from $350 to $250 per month, using the economic recession as an excuse. Ruby talked to the tourism agency that had arranged her move to Erbil and asked to be transferred to another house. While waiting, she lived a couple of more months with the same employer.

During this time, her employer, being afraid of that she could be tempted to leave, became reluctant to let her leave the house unaccompanied, similar to what Frantz (2008:628) has observed in relation to Sri Lankan domestic workers in Jordan. The agency found a job at a Chinese health and spa centre in Ankawa where Ruby's wages went back up to $350 per month, and she started living with ten more Asian women in the same house rented on the west side of Erbil near the spa centre.

There Ruby started working as a masseuse, earning more cash than her monthly salary, as Kurdish men continued to visit masseuses and tipping them despite the economic recession in the region. Later, she started going out with her Kurdish clients for private services during time off, where she could make a large amount of cash without depending on the spa centre, and also found Memu, who started to find customers for her one a day a week.

Rojan was one of Ruby's first customers, and Rojan had sex with her for the first time in 2015. From then on, he continued to see Ruby from time to time, sometimes in Erbil, sometimes near the steel plant, as Memu brought Ruby to the district and offered his car as a room to Rojan, as well as to other men.

How to Have Sex?

As we have seen, the expanding industrial production in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq have attracted large numbers of Kurdish migrants from the south-east of Turkey. Alongside the household surveillance left behind, young Kurdish migrant men experienced significant modifications in their lifestyle as a consequence of the transformations in their life activities and introduction to a diverse series of commercial ideas, comparable to what Puri and Busza (2004:145) observed with respect to how young migrant workers in Nepal experience considerable deviations in lifestyle due to ruptures in their life arrangements. Thus, in this case too, the social organization of extramarital sexual relations among Kurdish migrant labourers was fashioned by ambitions for modern consumption, the impact of urban fashion, and shifting anticipations concerning sexuality. Furthermore, I realized that young Kurdish migrant men started to experience more sexual freedom when they left their families in Turkey and feel more pressures from co-workers persuading them to engage in experiential sexual practices (see Zheng et al. 2001 in Puri and Busza 2004:146; Shah 2006; Guest 2000 for comparison). Taking this in mind, at the same time, most working men (particularly Kurdish) in the steel mill context tended to keep their sexual experiences undisclosed not only from their wife or families, but from everyone at the mill (compare Smith 2007:1000 in relation to men's extramarital sexual relations and secrecy in south-eastern Nigeria).

Quite paradoxically, while denying their own involvement in the practice, Kurdish migrant men at the mill often talked about sex and shared their fantasies with each other. In these conversations, I realized that women from South and South-East Asia were the most desirable ladies for young Kurdish men. Particularly, Thai and Filipino women were considered to have an excessive desire for sex and thus be able teach young Kurdish men how to have sex. Migrant workers often described Thai and Filipino women as the 'slanted eyes' who are also described as 'little devils' full of sexual passion, who seduce men and then have 'wild' and 'free sex' (see Carrillo 2002 for the relations between sexual passion, spontaneity, and HIV). In contrast, Kurdish workers generally saw their marriages as a lifetime project, and the outward face of the man and his household to kin and community (see Smith 2007:999 for comparison). For this reason, marriages and Kurdish wives were often considered to be 'private matters', and women in marriage were often seen as 'mothers' who were reluctant in sexual relations and active sex life unless for the purposes of having another child. To explain the issue from a different point of view, on the walls of their rooms, some of the young Kurdish migrant labourers posted pictures of beautiful Kurdish guerrilla women,

holding weapons and flowers against a background of mountains. Kurdish workers described them as respectful mothers of the Kurdish nation and virgins who have sacrificed their life for the rest of the Kurds. Nevertheless, women from the East and South-east Asia were nicknamed '*çekik gözlü paralı asker*' (slant-eyed mercenary) and were constantly imagined as engaging in hard-core sex in a military uniform, with characterizations stressing their cold mood and domination over Kurdish men based on their individual experiences. According to Rojan, those women were coming from militarized countries such as China and Vietnam, where women were more disciplined and strong. In this manner, he often fantasized about Vietnamese girls arriving at the labour camp as mercenaries with their guns and uniforms and fighting against the ISIS, while at the same time making love with Kurdish migrant men on the shop floor to keep their morale high.

Rojan was one of my informants who had no previous sexual experience before coming to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He had a girlfriend from Silopi, but he had not even attempted to kiss her because, as Rojan explained, he is planning to marry her in the future. It should be noted that Rojan regarded himself as a religious man and was against sex before marriage in Turkey. However, when Rojan came to Erbil for the first time, he became absorbed in discovering new experiences:

> I used to live in a small town. There was nothing to do. We used to get together with friends and be bored all day. I was helping my father, who was raising vegetables on our farmlands. You know, you work all day, and then go back home and watch TV. You spend your whole time at home and on the land. I had a girlfriend, but we didn't do anything more than text each other on the phone. There was an Internet café. I used to go there and watch erotic films. I sometimes chatted with women online. Once I went to Mersin to visit my uncle and saw women in bikinis on the beach and became excited. I was also praying at that time. I used to read Qur'an and believed that zina was the worst of all the sins. When I came to Erbil, I saw all the things in real life that I could only read about or see on the Internet. I started to live alone for the first time in my life. It was a big freedom for me, you know. I started earning my own cash and spending as I wished. I had sex for the first time here. You know, with Ruby, it was like in the porn films. She directed me step by step and taught me how to have sex.

Rojan did not want to use a condom the first time he engaged in sexual intercourse, as he had been instructed by his work mates that if he used a condom, he would not really understand how it felt. Most of my informants who had sexual relations for the first time of their life seemed to refrain from using condoms, as they tended to believe that they ruined or at least decreased the pleasure of sex. Thus, in the labour camp, common perceptions existed that condoms represented a barrier to exultant experiences (see Smith 2004:1002–1003 for how men's social construction of condom use or non-use shape individual sexuality), so an experienced man would never use a condom and would even take it as an insult to his masculine self-image and reputation (see Hart 1994 for gender ambiguity among men as clients to sex workers in Spain).

Most of the Turkish workers at the steel mill considered themselves masters at having sex and in a position to give advice to 'young', 'shy', and 'inexperienced' Kurdish migrant workers. The most common advice I heard was, 'It was better not to have sex than to have sex with a condom.' In this sense, 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 1995) required having sex without a condom as opposed to with a condom. Condom use or non-use becomes an important resource in the building of a masculine self (see Hartley 2011:41–45 for comparison in relation to how young men's alcohol consumption are related to their opinions about masculinity). Thus, individual, peer, and cultural factors came to be articulated to influence men's condom use.

Rojan explained to me that when he refused to use a condom in his first sexual experience, Ruby did not insist on it. Rojan was concerned about Ruby's relaxed attitude regarding condom use. He asked me, why didn't she urge him to use condom? Does this mean that she had nothing to be afraid of? Had she discovered that she was HIV positive? If so, why didn't she care about other people and protect them from the virus?

According to Rojan, Ruby did not insist that Rojan use a condom because she knew that she was clean and that Rojan was also having sex for the first time in his life.[74] Rojan blamed Memu, as he was aware of Rojan's virginity and had probably informed Ruby about the situation. He felt shy and silly. Yet, Rojan did not tell anybody about his anxieties and worries out of fear of being teased and made fun of by his workmates at the steel mill. In the meantime, he continued to have sexual relations with Ruby over a number of months,

[74] Suggesting to use condom could be equal to claiming that one's partner was unsafe, as Smith (2007:1002) described in relation to 'men's extramarital sexual behavior in the context of modern marriage'.

sometimes with a condom and at other times without, until she disappeared, or left the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as Memu claimed.

Labour Deportations

Any foreign person who wished to enter the region and wanted a residence permit for business or for any other purpose needed to take the medical tests to ascertain that the person did not test positive for HIV. It should be also noted that for all those who leave the region for three months or longer, another blood test is obligatory at the time of their entrance into the region.

The blood test was conducted at the residence office on the west side of Erbil and could usually be obtained within two or three days. Based on my own experiences, the residence office was often crowded with applicants, mostly women, anxiously awaiting their appointment with documents in their hands. Similar to what young Kurdish migrant workers described, it seemed also to me to be one of the most chaotic places I had ever visited, with dusty trees in pots, broken plastic chairs at the entrance of rooms, piles of documents and papers on the ground, and officials coming, going, and chatting back and forth loudly with one another. It was hard to avoid thinking about how documents do not disappear or get lost here or the blood tests misfiled.

The tests started to be applied strictly when the KRG witnessed the concern for HIV and fear of contagion in 2014–2015 following the increase of migrants, refugees, and IDPs, together with the heightened risk of sex trafficking and forced labour due to economic and social vulnerability in the context of war.[75]

In 2014, the region registered 19 official cases of HIV and AIDS, but it was believed that more people were infected unknowingly, because not much testing was being done on local residents (see Neurink 2014). Due to the stigma present in Kurdish society, where most of HIV positive people were considered to be homosexuals, local Kurds, fearing marginalization, refused to receive treatment (see Jamal 2012).

For migrant workers, deportation was one of the main measures used to control the spread of the disease into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Foreign workers who tested HIV-positive were not allowed to stay in the region and were sent back to the states from where

[75] In Erbil, migrants and refugees were widely perceived to be a risk group, seen as being polluted by the consequent risk of HIV infection. However, a recent study was conducted with 880 Syrian refugees and 2,975 native Iraqi volunteers to measure the proliferation of HIV, and it was found that prevalence rates of HIV are low and nearly the same (Hussein et al. 2017).

they arrived. The KRG did not provide foreign workers release from deportation or propose health benefit alternatives to their deportations to states in which they might encounter adversity or vengeance (see Trafficking in Persons Report 2017).

The absence of medical support and the threat of deportation only increase the spread of HIV infection, as sufferers and people who run a high risk of HIV infection refrain from formal and legal processes for treatment. Thus, in the face of deportation, migrant workers, especially sex workers and women subjected to sex trafficking, who may be at high risk of carrying HIV, prefer not to be tested again after they have entered into the region. These women and men are often afraid of losing their jobs, often go underground, avoid official procedures, and chose to live as unauthorized in the region. As the KRG continued to punish and deport people who were HIV positive, as a measure for controlling transmission of the disease, victims of involuntary labour and sex smuggling, including children, became more marginalized and increasingly 'invisible', impeding the KRG's efforts to fight HIV transmission (see Trafficking in Persons Report 2017).

One should also consider here that the Kurdistan Region of Iraq did not follow the new Iraqi Labour Law (2016) which included protections for foreign workers. Instead, the KRG relied on its patchwork of labour regulations and procedures. In the absence of a strong legal framework and institutions protecting victims, migrants unfortunately remain exceedingly susceptible to diverse practices of weaknesses and exploitation. The result was an increase of unrecorded HIV cases in the region.

While security and law prosecution officers, cab drivers, unlawful gangs, and local groups of people engaged in the sex work networks, yet the KRG continued to punish and deport patients and sex workers, who then become further marginalized and devalued in the process (see Trafficking in Persons Report 2018, 2017). Consequently, the KRG failed to prosecute companies and chains of people engaging in or facilitating sex work and trafficking, exposing sex workers to HIV risk and human rights abuses, and therefore, increasing the spread of infection to the rest of the Kurdish society (see Igulot 2017: Chap. 5, 6 for the relational articulation of political environment with the risk of HIV infection in Uganda).

In short, while the KRG used deportation as a way to reduce behaviour associated with the rise of infection risk, quite paradoxically, this strategy actually contributed to the spread of unregistered infections (see Parker 2001:164 for how forms of structural violence shape vulnerability to HIV infection). Thus, in the absence of strong institutions protecting workers' rights and of regulations that incite the involvement of high-risk individuals in tests,

migrant workers in the region remained unidentified and become vulnerable to risk of HIV infection and human rights abuse.

Societal and Moral Setting of HIV/AIDS

In 2014, I realized that, earlier, one of the migrant workers had been deported from Iraqi Kurdistan to Iran. According to one version of the story, he had been working at another steel mill in the region. Rojan told me that the Iranian migrant worker had decided take an HIV test, because he felt anxious about the symptoms of rapid weight loss and unusual blemishes on his tongue. He avoided seeing a doctor at his workplace and went instead to a private hospital in Erbil to take the test. When he learnt that he had been diagnosed as having AIDS, he immediately fled from his work, afraid of being deported back to Iran. For months he took on manual, on-call, and home-based jobs in Erbil and then arrived into KSM. He started working in the scrap metal yard, and a few months later he was arrested and deported from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This event and revolving stories, rumours, and gossips around the case continued to raise concerns and anxieties among the young migrant worker throughout the entire fieldwork period.

Migrant workers at the mill were afraid of being diagnosed with HIV or other blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis C, which would result in the termination of their work and deportation. With the event, some workers became panicked and anxious when they learnt that the tests that were most commonly ordered for the ikame could not directly detect an HIV infection. Workers became aware that AIDS could develop over several years; one could be HIV-positive and live with the virus without being aware of it.

For most of the Kurdish workers, it was better to live as HIV-positive with no symptoms than to be diagnosed, as the latter would result in losing one's job and being stigmatized and rejected from the rest of one's family back in Turkey. Most workers would not consider treatment because of the cultural construction of the disease, even though HIV is manageable with timely, consistent treatment: the amount of virus in an infected person's blood can drop to undetectable levels, and the life expectancy of someone with HIV can be as long as that of someone without it.

Following the dismissal of the Iranian worker, Rojan told me that he was exposed to rumours and stories about the disease more than ever over the following months. He started inspecting his body with his hands on a daily basis as if searching for sores of some type and keeping a daily record of his weight. He became paranoid of losing weight and therefore

started to eat more food, he claimed. When he suspected extreme and unexplained fatigue after work, he decided to exercise so as to gain energy and to keep himself in condition. To counter any memory loss, depression, and other neurologic disorders, he started to play brain games to improve his memory and to delay brain decline. Finally, Rojan started to pray again and stopped drinking alcohol and visiting massage parlours in Erbil, saving his cash for an emergency situation.

In the meantime, instructions and seminars were being given to migrant workers on how to prevent HIV infection and on the benefits of spending time at the labour camp, which was considered a 'second home' that protected migrant workers from the threats of modern liberal life and conspicuous consumption in the capital city of Erbil. While aiming to protect young migrant workers from HIV, workplace seminars drove workers to get rid of condoms for fear of their being seen in their rooms or in their pockets.

Kurdish managers at the steel mill often perceived HIV, which spread from person to person through sexual contact, including anal, vaginal, or oral sex, as *a symbol for the moral degeneration of Kurdish society*, comparable to what Dilger (2003:209) described in the context of rural Tanzania. Migrant workers nicknamed women coming from abroad, especially those from China, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines, as also '*şeytani orospu*' (evil prostitutes) and saw them responsible for the spread of '*şeytani hastalık*' (evil disease). At the steel mill, migrants who had sexual contact with Asian prostitutes were respectively described as being 'irresponsible Kurds', corrupted by their insatiable desire to 'fornicate', bringing affliction upon the rest of the Kurdish society.[76]

As Dilger (2007:207) brilliantly explained, these social and ethical discourses on sex and HIV/AIDS shape workers' strategies and tactics in dealing with the risk of HIV infection and alienate migrant workers from each other as well as from their kin. For instance, when Rojan saw purple patches appear on his skin, he could not tell anyone, afraid of being stigmatized and bullied if he tested positive. Instead of going to a doctor, he kept his health problems secret, unknown even to his best friends and closest workmates. The discourse on impure modern Erbil life, blame, and 'deservedness' marginalized and isolated Rojan even before the infection was diagnosed and drove him to look for moral clues to believe the disease was not manifesting itself in his body:

[76] See Dilger (2007:208-210) for the different interpretation of the HIV infection as 'immoral disease', 'wichcraft', or 'violation of a taboo' in the African context.

> I guess these lesions are from an allergy. They have been subsiding the past few days. I feel better. I'm glad I've stopped drinking alcohol. I sent some cash to my sister instead. She is attending secondary school. She calls me every day. I will see her studying at a university, inshallah. I bought a present for my fiancée as well, and I'm sure she will be happy. I prayed for her all day last week. I love her, and I'm sure I'll be a good father for my children, Insallah. I'm a good person. I don't go to Erbil and spend cash on leisure anymore. I promise I will be more responsible and make my family and friends proud of me. I am a good person, right? Good things happen to good people, inshallah.

In the labour camp, if a man fell ill, lost some weight, left the labour camp every day, drank alcohol, earned cash from gambling, went to the scrap metal yard at night, which was known as a place for casual sex, or started losing hair or exhibited bodily infections associated with HIV, this was considered as 'a symptom of a bad life' (see Dilger 2003:210 for how a particular 'illness or deceased person was perceived as either good or bad'). It seems that socio-economic inequalities generally drive the chance of HIV transmission, but it is also anxieties about 'masculinity', 'social reputation', and 'morality' that constrain migrant men from taking precautions to reduce their own risk or from seeking the help of co-workers and health care (see Smith 2007:1004). It is in this process that young migrant men became alienated from their own bodies as they rejected diagnosis and treatment under the social control of their workmates, co-villagers, and the managers at the steel mill. Thus, a disease that could be diagnosed, treated, and potentially cured, becomes here something to be concealed from others and rather healed through individual striving for moral and spiritual purification. Migrant workers experienced anxieties and fears, as well as projections concerning the threat of a deadly disease, which also transformed everyday work and life at the steel mill into a moral struggle in addition to an economic one.

Working Until One's Death

Rojan's salary was around $1,350 a month, of which he sent back $1,000 each month to his father, who relied financially on a combination of farming, trading, and remittances from his only son, Rojan. The rest of his wages and his overtime earnings, which could amount to almost $500 per month, he kept. Rojan decided to help to his father as much as possible and to move his marriage date earlier. For him, marriage and fatherhood were sacred and valued

institutions that protected men from the corruption of modern life and its dangers, such as conspicuous consumption, leisure, and zina. His father had wanted him to marry before he left the house, but Rojan opposed the idea. He explained to me that he should have listened to his father's words. According to Rojan, his father knew the threats of urban life and wanted to protect Rojan by providing a spouse. It would have been the right decision to focus on his work and save more up cash for his family and marriage, which would make him a good son, husband, and breadwinner.

About a week after these conversations, an unfortunate event occurred. Rojan realized that purple lesions were appearing on his skin. He lived with these lesions over a period of months without speaking of them to his workmates and without going to the doctor. He refused to see the doctor at the steel mill and hesitated going to a private hospital in Erbil. Over time, some of the lesions became larger and others disappeared, according to Rojan. His health condition was stable as he continued to work, and he did not experience chronic diarrhoea and nocturnal sweats, symptoms often seen at later stages of an HIV infection.

Rojan's doubt was not resolved, but gained a more fluctuating character. Otherwise speaking, when the topic resurfaced in everyday conversations in the labour camp, he became more stressed and concerned, and he became paranoid about getting sick. At other times, he was less concerned and stopped reacting. Thus, his concerns and stresses were also bodily rather than merely reflected experience:

> I feel anxiety all the time. But it changes from time to time. Salim [one of Rojan's workmates] came to my room last night and talked about AIDS the whole time. Fuck him; he me stressed me out again. I felt really bad and cried. I thought there was a bad germ in my blood spoiling me. When he left, I cried. I checked my skin again and read some stuff on AIDS. I became more anxious and depressed. That night, I couldn't sleep, and I tossed and turned in bed. But in the morning, I felt better, as the routines of day took all my attention. I felt better and healthier that week, until I saw a lesion appearing on my legs. I became panicked again. Thoughts were going round and round in my head. There was nothing I could do but wait until the bad thoughts went away.

Rojan had decided to tell the dilemmas and concerns he faced to one of his workmates, but he changed his mind later out of fear of betrayal. He started to question all the relations around

him: Was the other a trustworthy friend? What if he spoke to someone else? And how could he explain the situation he found himself in to his mother and father? Unable to sleep because of his concerns, Rojan was soon overcome by the question of how he had arrived at this point in the first place: Who had introduced him to Ruby? He expressed his anger and hatred towards Memu, who had first introduced him to Ruby. Yet, Rojan said, some of his friends were also responsible for talking about sex all the time and urging him to engage in sexual intercourse. 'They should help me now,' Rojan decided, yet he could not trust them. He began to fear that many of the relationships in his life were starting to collapse (see Shah 2009 for the dialectics between the certainty and uncertainty of social relations in the face of a rupture). Similar to Shah's (2009:284) key informant Chotu, 'who begin to fear that many of the relationships of which we are a part might collapse', for Rojan, uncertainty took away all previous security in his relations and made everything seem fragile.

One option for Rojan, as he explained, was '*dağa çıkmak*' (going to mountains) and becoming an armed guerrilla for the rest of his life.[77] He had four brothers and two sisters. None of his siblings was in Qandil, but one of his paternal uncle's daughters and two of his maternal uncle's sons had died as guerrillas in the mountains. Rojan believed that Qandil was a liberated area at the crossroads of the decaying societies of Iran, Syria, Turkey, and Iraq. He told me that he felt very different when they visited Qandil for the first time in his life for the celebration of Abdullah Öcalan's birthday. He felt different, he explained, because numerous Kurdish freedom fighters were buried there, some of them in unmarked graves, which generated an affect of *hüzün* (grief) on him. Rojan clarified, '*Silopi'de bir erkek çocuk dağın hakkıdır bilesin; ama bu en az birdir; bir erkek çocuk işe gönderilir para kazansın diye; bir erkek çocuk da babanın yanında kalır ona yardım eder*' (In Silopi one son belongs to the mountain, another son is sent to work, and the last one stays at home to help the elders). Rojan explained that he had become 'the son sent to work', as he was the oldest son, while his brothers were continuing their education in secondary school.

Rojan could take a test to see whether he was HIV-positive, and if positive he could flee to Qandil to live the rest of his life as a guerrilla. He could cleanse his soul there – by sacrificing his 'sick body' for the rest of the people. His family and friends would call him a '*şehit*' (martyr) and remember him with respect and immense gratitude for the part he played

[77] The Qandil Mountains are a mountainous area in Iraqi Kurdistan where Iraq's borders with Iran and Turkey meet. The district belongs to the Zagros mountain and is challenging to reach, with an extremely rough and rugged landscape. Since the zone is distinguished as a reserve and headquarters for the PKK, '*dağa çıkmak*' (going to mountains) or specifically '*dağ*' (mountain) implies joining the PKK, participating in the armed struggle against the Turkish state.

in the Kurdish revolution. In contrast, if he were diagnosed as HIV-positive and deported back to Turkey, he would have to wait to die at home, facing the blame and tension for his sinful lifestyle, placing financial and emotional burdens on family members (see Dilger 2008:216 for comparison in relation to returning to the family home with AIDS). Rojan explained, 'Our society would prefer to see me as a martyr than as a sick man suffering from an immoral life and sexual desire. Instead of putting them into a situation where they are ashamed of me, I would give them something to be proud of.' He continued:

> Can you imagine what my family would say to my fiancée's family? No one would accept our family's moral integrity anymore. Then they would have no choice but to leave Silopi. I don't want my family either to shoulder the burden of care for me or to feel stigmatized and rejected by some of their relatives and neighbours. I would instead make them proud of me and remember me as a good, moral person who sacrificed himself for the others. I will die in the mountains, so that no one can find my body and diagnose it. I will die as a hero, not as a sick man.

From time to time, Rojan met with guerrillas in Erbil and listened to their stories about how life was going in Qandil. Going to the mountains could be a relatively more secure and safe place for Rojan, away from his concerns, dilemmas, and insecurities, yet he was unsure about whether he was now betraying his family, who were in need of economic support. The long-run violence between the Turkish state and PKK in the Kurdish region of Turkey has devastated local formal economies and aggravated poverty, leading in some cases to abandoned villages and migration. For example, Rojan's family had to flee from Silopi in the recent heightened clashes in the summer of 2016 following the breakdown of the two-and-a-half-year ceasefire between Turkey and the PKK. Rojan's family had been forced to leave their house and farms and to stay as guests for three months at the home of one of their relatives in Şırnak.

Rojan had no choice but to work overtime and to limit his own spending so he could contribute more; for years, a portion of his own savings has gone to the repair of the family home, which was affected by the earlier clashes. As a result of the lack of economic infrastructure and increasing violence, his family had fallen into chronic poverty.[78] In this

[78] Indeed, many families from his hometown in Turkey have become dependent on remittances coming from the young men of the household. Under these circumstances, the young men, who earned the wages with his labour,

context, for Rojan, besides imposing the emotional and financial caregiving burden for his disease on family members, deportation would mean the economic collapse of the family, leaving members unable to survive.

From time to time, Rojan accused himself of being a porn-addicted deviant who paid for sex with strangers. He believed that Qandil was a place where only those with a strong will and freedom from doubt were able to go and sacrifice themselves. He explained to me that if he wished to be remembered as a moral and good man then, he should not pretend to be sacrificing his life. For Rojan, the guerrillas were people who deprived themselves of pleasurable experiences from themselves for the sake of the national ideal. By contrast, Rojan had to accept that he had chosen to follow his personal pleasures and desires and was now behaving cunningly to gain a status that he did not actually deserve. For him, Qandil deserved people who have killed their sexual desires and personal interests:

> You know, guerrillas do not make love. They remain single for their entire life. It is forbidden to engage in sex in the mountains. They become like sisters and brothers to each other. They believe in higher pleasures, such as freedom, revolution, and independence. They die as virgins. They chose to live this life, not like me, you know. I'm not sure which one is better: to lie to oneself or to others. I'm unsure as to where my sick body belongs.

Rojan continued to work at the mill for a period of months, yet at the same time, from time to time he thought about fleeing to Qandil. In January 2016, he visited his family and fiancée in Silopi, spending a month there before returning back to the steel mill. He refused to get tested in Turkey because he was scared of being diagnosed as HIV-positive, even though I had found an NGO that would have conducted a quick, free, and anonymous HIV test for him in Turkey. He explained his refusal to get tested: 'I have learnt to live with the spots. I don't want any further uncertainties in my life from now on.'

For him, it was easier to deal with himself than with others, which was the reason that he wanted to keep his health problems a secret from others. From time to time he was unsure about what to do for his deteriorating health conditions, but over time he had learnt to deal with his sufferings and concerns. Thus, his suspicions, doubts, uncertainties, and ambiguities

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saved little or nothing to deal with economic, social, or physical instability. Young migrant men like Rojan became lifelong labourers in whatever contexts they found themselves, with the increased emotional and financial burden of debt to the family left behind.

gained a sense of ordinariness for him that he accepted, and for better or worse, he did not want to change it. When I saw him for the last time in February 2016, before I left Iraqi Kurdistan, Rojan told me, 'I will work here until I die to support my family and myself, so that they will remember me as a good son.'

Conclusion

In this chapter, the Hiwa district was introduced, this time, as a peripheral industrial frontier for the expansion of HIV vulnerability (see Lyttleton and Amarapibal 2002 for a similar case of HIV vulnerability in the Thai/Lao border zone). It was shown that structural and cultural forces perform a crucial function in determining the shape and extent of the risk and uncertainty of HIV infection for Kurdish migrant workers in the Iraqi Kurdistan context (see Parker 2001:168). HIV infection was seen to distract the order in the steel mill's work arrangement and reproduction in the Kurdish nation; it was related to the moral decline of city life in Erbil, a place that migrant workers should stay away from (see King 2008 for how 'reproductive sovereignty' and the defence of boundaries were writ large as the logic of honour killings was extended from 'lineage to state' after the establishment of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq). Consequently, the moralizing and stigmatizing discourse concerning the disease as a sign of inferiority became an integral part of the work ethic at the steel mill, shaping actions and tactics among young Kurdish migrant labourers for dealing with the risk of HIV (Smith 2007, 2004; Dilger 2007). In such a moral space of bodily experimentation, of struggle, and of possibility, migrant workers experience further conflicted feelings, insecurities, and uncertainties.

As Pelkmans (2013) argued in his book, *Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies,* doubt is often interpreted within a focus on 'activity', rather than 'inaction'. For him, doubt is rather 'a facilitator of action by triggering a need for resolution' (Pelkmans 2013:4), as it appears in ethnographic works of High (2013) on religious reflexiveness amongst Mongolian miners, Bartha (2013) on delusion on capitalism in Hungary, and Naumescu (2013) on disbelief amongst adherents of an Orthodox church in Romania.[79] Doubt can also lead to inactivity when resolution bears a high risk of bringing further insecurity and uncertainty, as in the case of Rojan, for whom asking help from others and HIV testing could result in joblessness and a rupture in the flow of family life. In his life,

[79] I here reconceptualize doubt more as a contradictory force leading to inactivity, and also as 'bodily', following Martin Frederiksen's (2014b) interpretation of doubt in relation to Pelkmans' (2013) ethnographic work.

forms of suspicion, doubt, and uncertainty gain a sense of ordinariness, something that can be accepted as normal and part of everyday life (see Green's 1999: 55-68 work on Guatemala for the transformation of fear into 'a culture of fear' and 'a way of life'). In short, the cycles of hope, despair, doubt, and disillusion gained and lost their force, as Rojan experienced symptoms of the disease in his body over time. Yet, he refused to be tested, since he believed that trying to resolve his doubt could bring yet more uncertainty to his life. Thus, instead, he chose to live with his uncertainties, doubts, and anxieties and learnt how to deal with them alone.

Conclusion

Inconsistent Field Notes

In this thesis we have followed migrant workers struggling to manage their everyday existence against wider political and economic transformations (see Greenhouse, Mertz, and Warren 2002:3). First, we explored the landscape of the Hiwa district, considering how regulated and unregulated markets, and destruction and reconstruction were entangled throughout the capitalist production process at the steel mill (see Chapters 1 and 2). Then, we turned to the devaluation and exploitation of labour at different intensities and organizational levels (see Chapters 3 and 4). Finally, we focused on the conditions-of-being under contemporary capitalist accumulation through the individual life stories of migrant labourers and their engagement with risks and opportunities, as they dealt with the contradictions in their lives as a series of negotiations with the shifting circumstances in the environment (see Chapter 5 and 6).

In this conclusion, I will reflect on the contradictions entailed in maintaining a patriarchal domestic economy alongside proletarian factory work and on *the articulation between structural fragmentation of social and political systems and individual contradictions in emotion, motivation, and action* (Berliner 2016; Lüscher 2004:8; Ewing 1990:262). From where do structural contradictions arise? How are structural contradictions related to individual inconsistencies? How do actors live with contradictory emotions, thoughts, and behaviours (Berliner 2016:2)? It is to these difficult questions that we return in this conclusion.

When I was conducting the research in the steel mill for this dissertation, I was puzzled by what I found: the continuous appearance of inconsistent explanations and behaviour among the Kurdish migrant workers. At different times, the same person offered different explanations, which ultimately left me with confusing narratives. The trouble continued after I finished my fieldwork and returned to London. My notes about the Kurdish migrant workers were full of inconsistencies. In some cases, I contacted the workers online to try to confirm and to understand the inconsistencies and conflicts in their descriptions. In order to understand inconsistent accounts meaningfully, I needed to resituate in context actions or information I had recorded in field notes. Though I did not spend as much time with the Indian and refugee migrant labourers as I did with the Kurdish migrants, the notes I took about their explanations and conversations were more consistent. In the following parts,

I will unpack this situation, and its potential structural explanations, using a relational approach.

Heterogeneity

In the 1970s, Marxist anthropology argued against functionalism's conservatism and the static nature of analysis, and instead concerned itself with the differential distribution of power within a structured system (see Bloch 2004 [1975]) and the lines of potential opposition and contradiction in the social structure (see Donham 1999 and Terray 2004 [1975]). In this theoretical vein, Meillassoux (1981[1975]: 96) critically claimed that dialectical materialism had conceptualised value being transferred from one mode of production to another through the mechanism of primitive accumulation, but that not theorized the continuous extraction of value through preserving the relations within a dominated mode of production. Capital grows and operates not merely in terms of strictly capitalist norms of production and reproduction, but also by relying upon other modes of production, thus sustaining 'heterogeneity' at the structural level (Meillassoux 1981[1975]:96). For Meillassoux (1981[1975]:97), the confrontation of different modes of production should not be viewed as entailing the substitution of one for the other, but rather their mutual transformation or dependency on each other (see Chapter 5). In this heterogeneity, capitalism faces difficult contradictions as it becomes dependent on other modes of production and multiple (sometimes opposing) value systems to reproduce itself, a situation that also marks the negotiation and construction of personhood under these homogeneous systems.

Capitalism situated different groups in distinct relationships, in a manner observable relationally in the bodies and beliefs of migrant workers in the Hiwa district. Refugee and Indian workers depended on wages and shelter, and they were almost fully proletarianized. Completely separated from their social and material means of production, they had become proletarians who had only cheap labour power to offer to the large capitalist firms. By contrast, Kurdish migrant workers enjoyed a contradictory mixture of domestic economy and modern factory production, the rural and the urban; they combined patriarchal domestic relations with proletarian factory work (compare Ferguson 2007:609, 618 in relation to flow of labour population between urban and rural areas in Zambia). In this configuration, they enjoyed better livelihoods but also contradictory relations. Given the support their families offered during production cuts, the steel mill did not pay the true cost of production – a

mechanism of exploitation which simultaneously maintained and eroded the different life domains so articulated, as underscored by Meillassoux (1981[1975]:97).

To deepen the discussion, Kurdish workers were in a condition of social dependency, yet at the same time absorbed in contractual relations as wage-labourers in factories where they enjoyed relative freedom. Comparable to what Harold Wolpe (1972) wrote concerning the cheap labour and reserve-subsidy thesis in relation to labour reserves in South Africa, it is undoubtedly to the benefit of the mill that Kurdish workers should be encouraged to go back to Şemdinli, during the production cuts, an arrangement under which the steel-manufacturing can acquire experienced labour at lower cost. Consequently, social ties to the village, patriarchal values and gender roles, marriage, and Kurdish ethnic solidarity were encouraged and valued in the steel mill.

From the perspective of Kurdish migrant workers, the mill could be seen as akin to Carrier's (1992:544) 'early factory production'. Carrier (1992:543) depicted how the factory incorporated household relationships, while at the same time developing production outside of the household during the early factory production phase of capitalist development. Consequently, while the system in the KSM is closer to Carrier's (1992:544–547) modern factory production, with capitalist managerial supervision of production and the worker's subordination to production rhythms, older familial and community relations between workers and their assistants were nonetheless reproduced in response to the need for flexible production (compare Bolt's 2011:249–251 work in relation to Zimbabwean agricultural workers in the Limpopo Valley).

In the rolling mill, almost all of the workers were from Şemdinli. These migrant men were connected through kinship and rural ties, some of them working with their brothers and cousins and others with their friends from the same neighbourhood in Şemdinli. This transformed the production platform into a place for the extension and reproduction of kin networks and ethnic brotherhood. Living in a region of political instability, economic fluctuations, anxiety, and insecurity, workers from Şemdinli united to protect their own interests and to work as long as possible under the flexible production regime. The cooperation of these workers reflected a mixture of affective and utilitarian motives characteristic of systems where social and financial relations are intertwined. Cooperation reflected the cultural valuation of mutual ties and obligations among workers who hailed from Şemdinli, and thus had a strong moral dimension. In return, supervisors oversaw the devaluation and casualization of their employees, drawing on the political idioms of paternalism and of ethnic and rural ties, cultural essentialism, and the distance and distrust

between ethnicities to legitimate their procedures, as discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to Sanchez's (2012) work.

In short, the steel mill secured and sustained a more or less stable Kurdish workforce that could draw on patriarchal support and a rural base in times of unemployment, permitting the factory a flexible work regime under volatile economic conditions. Thus, far from disembedding labour from social relations, the pattern of flexible production reinforced the significance of patriarchal support networks and strengthened the pre-industrial characteristics of the workforce (Chandavarkar 1994:122). In return, Kurdish workers often used their kinship and ethnic alliances for manipulation and games on the shop floor to make their employment more secure. The Kurdish workers' attempts could be seen from the perspective of Carrier's (1992:552) observation that 'workers frequently found informal ways to assert their control over production and to introduce sociality into the impersonality of the firm.'

As for the Indians, the organization of the work force can be compared to what Carrier (1992:547–549) termed the 'modern factory system', in which work takes place within increasingly impersonal spaces, according to functional roles, defined by contracts. Indian labourers were brought into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as 'free' labourers under the work contracts provided by global tourism agencies. The Indian labourers were indeed free to sell their labour, but not free to break their contracts or to sell their labour outside the existing contract. The contract bound the Indian workers to their employers for a two-year period and for that time created labour relations that can be categorized as bonded. Under the contract, during the term of service, Indian workers could not quit, change jobs, or choose a new employer without Mr. Raj's consent. Thereafter, 'an excess' Indian workforce is again 'made free' to migrate again and again to distant countries through other contracts where they hope to re-establish their livelihoods.[80] Production on the steel platform continues 24 hours, seven days a week, and the scrap metal is melted down non-stop. In this organization, Indians were crucial to keeping production on the steel platform running at the standard minimum level. Depending on the level of demand and scrap metal stocks, the refugees and migrants, in contrast to the contracted Indians, were recruited and laid off following macroeconomic fluctuations.

Finally, refugees and migrants fleeing from the civil war in Syria, ISIS terror, Shia Islamist paramilitary organizations, the Iraqi army, and the violent conflict between

[80] This is related to the downsizing of steel mills in India, which is another important dimension for understanding the flow of Indian steel workers into regions where steel production and workers are in high demand, such as in Iraqi Kurdistan, Syria, and Iraq (see Dasgupta 2017 for the economics of the Indian steel industry and its restructuring).

Turkish state and the PKK all ended up at the gate of the steel mill as a reserve army of labour to be absorbed when needed and pushed out when not. War and ethnic conflict in the region drove people from their social and economic means of production, driving whole populations to desperately seek waged employment as vulnerable, malleable workers (see Polanyi 2001[1944]:71–81).[81] The context of violence enabled uprooted migrants' labour to be bought and sold as easily as possible. The migrants became the fully proletarianized wage labourers, the poorest in the region, having lost their roots in their villages of origin and forced to sell their labour. In this regard, although violence to labour was less direct than what Marx's early stage of 'despotic capitalism', Mintz's (1985) Caribbean sugar plantations, and Allen's (1994) coal mines in Japan, migrant workers in the steel plant can be seen to have been coerced, not to have consented, to sell their labour (see Parry 2005:145–153 for the alternate use of 'coercion' and 'consent' in industrial production).

The different groups of labour force stand side by side at the mill in variable degrees of precariousness, exploitation, and devaluation. Understanding accumulation in this context requires attention to the dependence between the highly inflexible and structured arrangement of the contracted labour force and the highly flexible and informal labour force, permitting an interconnection between 'rigidity' and 'flexibilization' at the steel mill. Kurdish labourers from Şemdinli could be seen to be in the middle of the organization of labour – between bonded Indians and precarious refugees and migrants at the mill. Kurdish migrants from Şemdinli were not fully proletarianized, as opposed to the contracted Indians and uncontracted refugees and migrants; they retained their rural base and patriarchal networks of support during periods of unpaid leave. These were floating workers similar to the refugees and migrants at the mill, though floating not from one company to another, but rather between the steel mill and the village, the rural and the urban, the modern and the traditional.

In return, the steel mill divested the cost of the reproduction as well as that of maintenance during low market demand, onto the 'traditional' or rural sector from which it drew the workforce it needed. In these contradictory and fragmented work and labour arrangements, whereby some of the labourers were kept as unregistered and informal in a state of transience, others were forced to work in bonded conditions through strict formal

[81] In *The Great Transformation* (2001[1944]), Polanyi argues that fragmentation made possible the creation and intensification of capitalist production in the case of 19th-century England. For him, a market-oriented capitalist economy depends on markets in labour and land, which have to become commodities for purchase and sale.

work contracts, and yet others were suspended between urban industrial production and rural village patriarchal hierarchies. All became interconnected and dependent on one another so as to ensure production at high profits but at lower costs.

As Don Kalb (2015a) brilliantly explained, capitalism manufactures an expanding relational ground by engineering the co-existence of different forms of production in different degrees and integrating diverse relations with creativity. In other words, according to its own forms of production, capitalism integrates different bargaining positions, dependencies, and relations, and uses different mechanisms in order to extract and accumulate surplus value. This process establishes a different relationship for each of the different categories of labour, creating opportunities as well as risks. Under this relational articulation and heterogeneity, multiple uncertainties arise over time, and shape body and personhood in a contextual, relational, and dynamic manner (Kalb 2013:3).

Uncertainty

In the field, uncertainty was experienced by migrant labourers sometimes as a pervasive sense of weakness, and at other times as a structure of feeling for hope and positive change. In line with the ethnographic material, I envisage uncertainty in its positive as well as its negative form, by borrowing a theoretical insight from Cooper and Pratten (2015). For Cooper and Pratten (2015:2–4), while uncertainty, in its negative sense, refers to 'a lack of absolute knowledge', a helplessness and incapacity 'to predict the outcome of events', it can, in its positive sense, also be a social resource to create relationships, resources, as well as roles and responsibilities. While uncertainty limits the capacity to identify and predict critical changes, it also turns into a force, and invites action to transform both the disadvantaged condition and the fragile self, as Susan Whyte (2009:213–214, 1997:19) has shown in relation to how people living with uncertainty under adverse conditions undertake pragmatic tactics and strategies for the betterment of their lives.

In her book *Who Knows Tomorrow?* Calkins (2016:2) writes that uncertainty is 'a lived experience'.[82] That is, uncertainty does not exist as an independent, self-directed, and external circumstance. It is rather contingent on the conditions, i.e. it is contextual, related to people, institutions, happenings, and circumstances. In other words, the experience of

[82] Within the cultural perception and dependence paradigm, several ethnographic works (Calkins 2016; Cooper and Pratten 2015; Pelkmans 2013; Geissler and Prince 2010; Zigon 2009; Whyte 2009, 1997) have explored the phenomenology of suffering, the experience of doubt, and individual ways of dealing with it (see Calkins 2016: Chap. 1 for a review of cultural perception and dependence paradigm in sociology and anthropology).

uncertainty is entwined with human sociality. Consequently, as human sociality changes, the experience of uncertainty also changes. In relational and eventful terms, it is thus experienced in various degrees by different people over time according to their capacities and resources.[83]

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq had both a growing market and lucrative opportunities and a field of rising dispossession and displacement. Social fields are in constant change, with the multiplication and fragmentation of structural forces, which intrude into the body and mind of migrant workers.[84] Put another way, conflicting value practices or 'value struggles' (De Angelis 2007:30) emerge between different modes of relation and structural fluctuations under capitalist transformation.

The resulting uncertainty turns into 'an inevitable force in the subjective experience of life' in the Hiwa district, as Johnson-Hanks (2005:366) indicated in relation to young Beti women in Cameroon whose lives have been shaped by continuous uncertainty that motivates them to strategize. That is, the shifting and fluid circumstances of the articulation and integration of opposing structures and conflicting valuing regimes incite desire and action in strategizing the everyday life. Mediated by different uncertainties, these desires and actions are manufactured in relation to continuous (and often contradictory) external social forces.

In the case of Ferman (see Chapter 5), the economic crisis and the collapse of real estate prices in Erbil were recast as hope for an economic change to break out of the labour camp. The crisis generated the imagination of a different future, where potentialities of optimism in the city were counterpoised to life in the labour camp perceived as a living death. The shifts in the economic and political landscape pushed Ferman to bargain with patriarchal power over the flow of remittance cash and to reconsider the ideal place for his family relations. This led to 'some calling forth, some rupture in the flow of family life, to set the moral laboratory in motion' (Mattingly 2014 in Carpenter-Song 2016). Yet, as time passed and the crisis felt increasingly restrictive, and as Ferman's workmates became unemployed overnight, Ferman's individual curiosity and exploration turned into calculations and expectations of social cooperation against the unstable market. The market, which was previously seen as a solution to escape the labour camp and patriarchal control, then worked to reproduce dependence on his rural refuge and patriarchal network of support, mirroring the market's reliance on domestic relations to reproduce cheap and flexible labour.

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[83] For Beck (1992), technology produces new forms of risks that constantly require a response and adjustment to changes.

[84] Recently, anthropologists, in particular Comaroff and Comaroff (2001, 1999) and Moore and Sanders (2001), have examined how feelings of insecurity, doubt, uncertainty, and anxiety arising from the precariousness, contradictions, and opaqueness of the market, are frequently expressed in popular religion, occult, and spirit possession (see Dein 2016:3 for further discussion about the anthropology of uncertainty, witchcraft, and risk).

In the case of Rojan (see Chapter 6), uncertainty took a distinctly bodily form. The KRG's policies in dealing with the labour migration of sex workers and risk of infection with HIV/AIDS formed the background to Rojan's worries that he may have contracted the disease from a sex worker. These circumstances sometimes encouraged him to repress and at other times to express his predicament in relation to the political and economic environment. Having his body traversed by multiple and often conflicting moral and social forces and the risk of infection, Rojan remained unable to resolve his doubt and learnt to live with it instead. Consequently, his ambivalent explanations and conflicting self-representations were all he could rely on in his ongoing negotiations with the shifts and changes of the social, moral, and economic context. Thus, on the margins of a dysfunctional Regional Government, industrial work and life could produce different forms of uncertainties not only through economic and political forces, but also in equal measure through bio-economic and cultural forces. [85]

In brief, within the uncertainties of everyday life under contemporary capitalism in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, workers' moods unremittingly swung between fear, confusion, doubt, and hope. Against this background of changing uncertainty, workers came to embrace contradictory thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, as they negotiated economic marginalization, precarity, the politics of integration and disintegration, economic growth, of speculative boom and bust, and fluctuating industrial production.

Negotiation

As underscored by Rita Astuti (2015:105), 'taking the people we study seriously' has reappeared in recent years as an essential target of the ethnographic challenge (see Astuti 2015 for the philosophical underpinnings of this approach). In relation to this case, following Astuti (2015:119), this imposes the analytical challenge of taking migrant Kurdish workers' contradictory explanations and conflicting behaviours seriously, by listening to them cautiously, at distinct instants of their lives, particularly when they were involved in seemingly inconsistent behaviours, such as (see Chapter 5) locating and associating oneself to patriarchal household relations, traditional social practices of marriage and ethnic and religious solidarities on the one hand, and individualism, consumption, sexual freedom, and the desire for private property on the other. In these, men consciously construct knowledge and ideas, and manipulate selves and situations depending on contexts. Thus, the effort to be

[85] See Pelkmans and Umetbaeva (2018) on money lending and 'moral reasoning on the capitalist frontier in Kyrgyzstan'.

consistent actually seems to me secondary to the necessity of adapting successfully to changing circumstances.

Against this background, rather than seeing persons and bodies as individual, singular, and complete, I came to see them as relationally constituted and permeable, as never-ending, that is, as work in progress. Thus, persons and bodies are continuously negotiated in specific times and places and in reaction to varying situations and social relationships. In this respect, persons become the objectification of the different social interactions and coincidences that have gone into their making, as described by Santos-Granero (2011:183) in relation to being-hood and people-making in native Amazonia.

Multiple structures and regimes functioning simultaneously and in varying states of incompleteness (see Appadurai 1996:182–188) create integrations and disintegrations within the cultural system itself, which in turn operate on an individual level and constitute an ongoing tension in the social body. As discussed earlier, at a structural level, the patriarchal domestic economy and the proletarian factory here are articulated and functionally integrated. In this configuration, while the domestic economy valorizes family ties, communal values, and patriarchal solidarities, the capitalist value-transformation valorizes personal liberation, individual consumption, and sexual pleasure, within the construct of an entrepreneurial self. Thus, under the globalizing value regimes of capital accumulation in the region, the mind and body of the male worker form a site for the articulation and confrontation of different valuing systems.[86] In a word, articulation must occur within the person, and some resolution or negotiation of the inherent incompatibilities must take place.

It is in this context that particularly my Kurdish informants became self-contradictory – swinging between excessive valuation of one value system and continuing dependence on the other. Squeezed between the patriarchal domestic economy and proletarian factory work, between marriage and sexual freedom, the rural and the urban, and continuity and change, they felt 'torn apart' by the contradictory pulls that emerge in this fragmentation of life works. The resulting sense of being pulled in opposite directions under multiple fragmented and piecemeal social forces transforms individuals into a site of experimentation in relation to their bodies, sexuality, kinship relations, options for spending money, and ideas of the ethical (see Mattingly 2013:16, 26 for how moral becoming involves sentimental experiments in personal selves). In this context, some contradictions and confounding structural changes

[86] Such an approach abandons the centrality of the individual emphasizing 'the connections across different spheres of activity, recognition, and value', that is acknowledging 'the multiple ways in which actions are socially embedded and recognized' (Goddard 2017:39).

were ‘repressed or passed over in silence while others were expressed or deeply felt’ by migrant labourers, as Michael Lambek (2016:6) described.

Kurdish migrants engage with changing circumstances and see these as opportunities to move into better positions, while attempting to hold onto their current social and economic positions, should turn things against them. In the process they develop a flexible form of self that allows for holding multiple contradictory self-representations. Put differently, workers relied on multiple self-representations drawn from chains of personal experience to deal with their confounding and shifting environments.

In this context, I realized that my Kurdish informants continuously reconstituted themselves into new self-representations in response to multiple external changes. At times they presented images of themselves as traditional, rural, and communal, as the potential masculine husband, obedient son, and hard-working breadwinner, while at other times their self-representation became that of an entrepreneur drawing on various strategies to manage uncertainties and to achieve goods, new relations, experiences, values, and personal worth. Thus, for them, inconsistent thoughts and actions are both a product of a fragile world and a tool through which they deal with and resist the fragility around them.

Considering everthing, borrowing a theoretical insight from Lambek (2016), I do not see my informants’ shifting self-representations and ambivalent explanations as anomalies, but rather as actions and performances of bridging between competing demands of conflicting social structures and individual action (see Connidis and McMullin 2002:558–559 for structurally manufactured contradictions). So, the bodies of my informants bore the signs of ‘ongoing argumentation’ with the moving environment of boom and bust, political disintegration, war and violence, displacement, and uneven globalization.

Bodies and personhoods here are more like ‘battlefields’, as Virno (2004) put it, or/and ‘sites of contradictions and negotiations’ played out by different value systems and practices, as De Angelis (2007:30) portrayed. If contemporary capitalism in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq can be seen as an economic experiment at the macro-political and macro-economic level, its savage laboratories are found in everyday life, and the test subjects in these laboratories are the region’s marginalized people themselves.

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Appendix

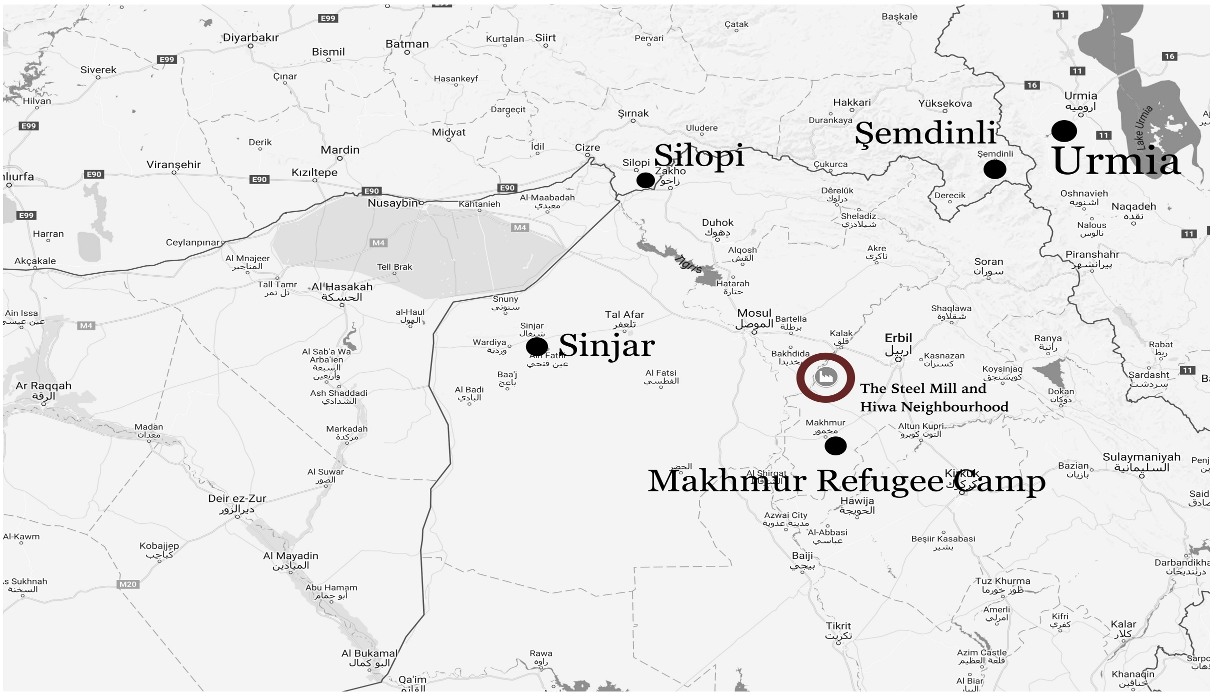

Figure 28. Migrant labourers from the region, 2015

Source: Google Maps (adapted)

Figure 29. Migrant labourers from India, 2015

Source: Google Maps (adapted)

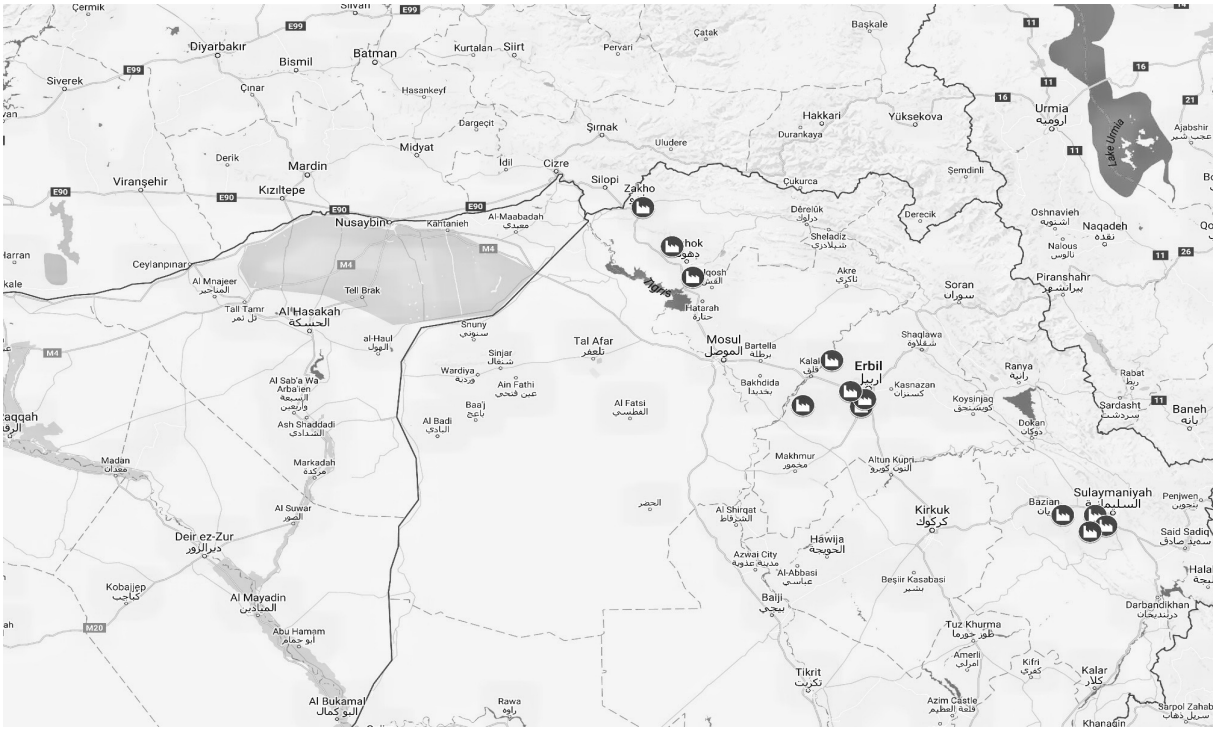

Figure 30. Steel companies in the region that proliferated between 2006–2016

Source: Google Maps (adapted)

Figure 31. The Erbil–Gwer Road, 2015

Source: The author

Figure 32. The Herki graveyard

Source: The author

Figure 33. A scrap metal dealer

Source: The author

Figure 34. A scrap metal yard, an area where several scrap traders accumulate scrap

Source: The author

Figure 35. A small shrine in one of the rooms in the Indian camp

Source: The author