

Why Care?

Introduction by Gina Lennox

While I was tearfully undergoing crises of belief—both spiritual and human—due to an avalanche of love and war experiences in this book, many non-Kurds around me were asking, “What have the Kurds got to do with you or me?” Or I was told, “People deserve what they get.” Such questions and comments inspired this introduction: “Why is the plight of the Kurdish people relevant to you?”

In a general sense, although our sensitivities may be media-blunted, if we stop caring about our fellow human it reflects on ourselves and the world we create. Ignorance can be bliss. It can also pave the path to hell on earth.

But more importantly, I believe the Kurds, who claim to be the largest nation of people without a homeland, are on a front line of struggle that all of us face in a world that is being rapidly transformed by global forces. In their present form, these forces show little regard for human rights, democratic process or the environment. The Kurdish people’s aspirations for cultural integrity, religious freedom, economic sustainability and political self-determination are those of all humanity. Thus the reasons for their present circumstances need to be understood for their own sake and also as invaluable insights into the state of the world: “There but for the grace of God go I.” As the world shrinks, we must start thinking about solutions.

The momentum of modernism is forcing us all to face new frontiers of a personal, sociopolitical and ecological nature. It can be argued that those who are making the critical decisions are not the leaders of nation states but a faceless group of international financiers, weapons and chemical manufacturers who are neither democratically elected nor accountable to the people. Throughout history there have always been elites subjugating the people for their own benefit, but never before have they had the technological means to make the world their chessboard. This grand imperialism has become known as globalisation. Many peoples, including the Kurdish, became its victims in a carve-up of Africa and the Middle East after World War One and of Asia after World War Two. More recently, many living in more privileged societies have been made aware of its consequences.

Likewise, it was only in the last decade of the twentieth century that the plight of the Kurdish people became more generally known. After Saddam Hussein, president of Iraq, invaded Kuwait in August 1990 and the Americans and their allies chose to defend Kuwait’s oil fields, the Allies feared chemical attack above all. It was then that the media mentioned Saddam Hussein’s previously ignored chemical attacks on Kurdish civilians in 1987–88, culminating in the chemical bombing of the town of Halabja, where between 5000 and 12,000 civilians were killed. Have you ever seen the pictures of dead babies wrapped in the arms of mothers lying in the streets?

After the Allies’ victory in forcing Iraq’s withdrawal from Kuwait, the world media

followed the uprising of the Shi'ite Arabs in the south and the Kurds in the north of Iraq in March 1991. Reports continued to cover the two million Kurdish refugees fleeing from Saddam's tanks and helicopters across snow-covered mountains into Iran and Turkey, an estimated 500 people a day dying from cold, hunger and illness. Then silence.

But eight years later, in February 1999, the Kurds hit the world stage once again with reports of Kurdish demonstrations outside Greek embassies around the world. The demonstrations were in response to a Kurdish leader from Turkey, Abdullah Ocalan, having been arrested in Nairobi and taken back to Turkey as a result of a collusion of international forces acting outside the law. The justification of these agencies was that Ocalan was a terrorist. Kurds consider him a leader of a nation. Since 1984 he had directed an armed struggle against the Turkish government's systematic policy of genocide of its 19 million Kurds. It was subsequently reported that he was to be kept in isolation on the prison-island of Imrali. Then silence.

So who are these people? By consensus, rather than any accurate census, they are a nation of between 25 and 40 million Indo-European people, who unlike many ancient peoples, have miraculously survived many thousands of years in a region called Kurdistan. Evidence of culture and burial rituals in the area date back to 35,000 BC. Evidence of the first agriculture, pastoralism and village life has been found in the fertile mountains of Kurdistan, a part of the Fertile Crescent, dating back to 11,000 BC. Seven and a half thousand years ago, their homeland gave birth to the precursors of 'civilisation', defined in terms of the development of a hierarchical society where an elite can accumulate wealth through agriculture, crafts, including metallurgy and trade, thus building public buildings and trans-community power structures. Subsequently many kingdoms and empires were established in the area.

While oppression of the Kurds began in earnest with the invasion of Islamic forces in the seventh century and continued with the invasions of Mongol and Turkic tribes from Asia, it was not until 1639 that Kurdistan was divided between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. Despite this division, many Kurdish emirates remained largely independent of their overlords. This long-held autonomy was lost completely in 1923, when the League of Nations divided Kurdistan between Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria (small parts having already been incorporated into the Soviet Union's republics of Armenia and Georgia). Ever since, Kurdish freedom fighters, writers, politicians and ordinary citizens have been executed or sentenced to long terms in prison for wanting the right to speak and write in their own language and have a say in their own affairs.

Few Jews, Christians, or Muslims realise that their religious and cultural heritage is entwined with the Kurds. Kurdistan is classified as northern Mesopotamia. It was in Kurdistan that the earliest monotheistic religion, known as Ezidism, was practised. (The other ancient monotheistic religion of the Mandaeans, which continues to be practised by Sabaeans in the south of Iraq and Iran, may have a common heritage.) Noah's ark is said to have come to rest in Kurdistan. Abraham is believed to have escaped to Kurdistan, where members of his family lived, because his city-state of Ur was under threat of invasion around 2300 BC. In 600 BC Nebuchadnezzar II, thought by some to be Ezidi, conquered Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders were taken to Babylon and were exposed to ancient Sumerian and Akkadian cuneiform tablets outlining legends of Adam, the first

offspring of a god and man and a great king saving his family, animals and seeds from a flood by building a boat. It was in Babylon that the exiled Jews began compiling the present-day Torah and some archeologists believe it was in this time that Jews became truly monotheistic. This was the time of the Mede dynasty, the Medes being Ezidi and one of the ancestral people of the Kurds. The empire of Medea extended from Cappadocia to Tehran and, some say, as far as Afghanistan. The half-Mede, half-Persian 'King of Kings' Cyrus the Great, was responsible for releasing the Jews from their captivity in Babylon in 539 BC, although Babylon remained a centre of Judaism for many centuries.

Later, the teachings of the Medean prophet Zoroastra, who can be seen as a reformer of Ezidism, described a struggle between good and evil and states of heaven and hell, concepts which were to have a profound impact on the Christian and Muslim religions. Similarly striking echoes of Ezidi and Zoroastrian rituals are found in all three modern monotheistic religions.

Thus this microcosm of the Fertile Crescent has impacted on history for at least 13,000 years, as it continues to do. The eight-year Iraq-Iran War was a direct outcome of an agreement to stop the Kurdish revolution in Iraq five years earlier and Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was one outcome of the Iraq-Iran War.

Since the division of Kurdistan in 1923 there have been over 50 Kurdish uprisings. All have been cruelly squashed. The Kurdish homeland has been systematically wiped of its villages, agriculture and people. Between 1960–2000, a minimum of 10,000 Kurdish villages and their agricultural base have been destroyed. At least 500,000 men, women and children have been slaughtered by their own governments. Going back to World War One, this figure easily could exceed one million, not counting the 800,000 Kurds killed during World War One (of whom 500,000 were civilians), the 700,000 Kurds killed by Russians and Armenians and the hundreds of thousands killed in World War Two, when the Kurds fought on the side of the British. As well, about seven million in Turkey and Iraq have been deported from villages into camps and overcrowded towns with no compensation and no work. Up to one million have become political prisoners. These figures are estimates—there are no accurate statistics.

In terms of systematic government policy, as opposed to an irregular outburst of violence or international war, the scale of this genocide is comparable to the worse genocides of the twentieth century: the 40 million killed, frozen or starved by Stalin's programs and purges in the 1930's and 40's; the 35 million Chinese starved and killed by Mao Tse Tung's policies between 1949 and 1970, including the two million killed in the Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1966–69; the one to two million Christian Armenians killed between 1915 and 1922 by the Ottomans and Mustafa Kemal in Turkey; the six million Jews and six million non-Jews killed in Nazi concentration camps between 1939 and 1945; and the 1.5 million Cambodians killed by Pol Pot's bullets, overwork and famine between 1975 and 1977. In fact in the twentieth century, it is estimated that 100 million people have died by their government's own hand, compared to the 40 million who were killed by international war.

The Kurdish genocide has at least three distinguishing features. Most importantly, it is internationally supported by the Western World in terms of military hardware and the training and financing of the governments that carry it out. This applies particularly to

Turkey, its government by far the worst oppressor of Kurds. As well, its sheer time scale exceeds all others, for it continues to the present day. Thirdly, there is no end in sight.

So why does the West, so willing to go to war against Milosevic in the former Yugoslavia, with the UN and other agencies increasingly intervening in internal affairs in the name of human rights, continue to supply its military and financial aid to Turkey and other countries which deny human rights to Kurds?

Historically the Kurds have always been a fiercely independent people living on some of the richest agricultural lands in the Middle East. This land is situated on the path of the old Silk Road and thus has been subject to invasion from all sides. The Kurds' land-locked homeland has been kept an educational and economic backwater, even after the British discovered some of the world's richest oil fields there in the 1890s. Unlike the Jews and other oppressed peoples, because the Kurds form tribal societies separated by mountains, with many religious and political persuasions, dialects and alphabetic scripts, they have been unable to unite and take advantage of the window of opportunity to form a nation state between 1920–1923.

Arguably, the next significant opportunity to declare an independent state is being missed at this present time. After the USA and its Allies declared a no-fly zone in northern Iraq, banning Iraq's airforce north of the 36 Parallel, the Kurdish people elected a regional government, proposing to become part of a democratic confederation of Iraq. While most non-assimilated Kurds dream of an independent Kurdistan, the leaders have resisted putting a referendum to the people, arguing that to establish an independent Kurdistan is unrealistic, justifiably fearing a bloodbath.

Personally, I do not know which is harder to achieve—democracy in Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria, or a nation state called Kurdistan, although more people would benefit from the former.

Today the Kurds are estimated to number 19 million in Turkey (28.4% of the population), 6.4 million in Iraq (24 %), nine million in Iran (12.6 %) and 1.6 million in Syria (9.2 %). There are populations in Armenia, Georgia, Russia, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, an estimated 200,000 Jewish Kurds living in Israel, and growing diasporas in Europe, the home of about one million Kurds, the USA and Canada, where more than 35,000 Kurds now live, and Australia, the home of some 12,000.

What is most relevant for the future of Kurdistan is that the sources of the rivers that supply water and electricity to Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria and other countries lie in the mountains of Kurdistan. Water is the future's elixir and far more essential to life than oil. As oil was in the 20th century, water will be to the 21st, Kurdistan being rich in both. As well, overland access to the oil-rich republics of the former Soviet Union is through Kurdistan. For these and other reasons of sovereignty and the strength of existing alliances, neither the ruling nation states nor their international allies want a united independent Kurdistan, or a series of autonomous, federal states within present borders.

However the changing dynamic between nation states, international organisations such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation, as well as international financial and business monopolies, may have huge impacts on the Kurdish struggle. With the increase in the Kurdish population relative to other peoples in the region and their recent and rapid social

evolution in terms of urbanisation and education, the communicative power of new technologies exposing people in both Kurdistan and the diasporas to diverse ideas, the growing empowerment of Kurdish women, the possibility that Turkey will join the European Union and, above all, the looming ecological crunches, who knows what the future will bring? If the Kurds devise some long-range, well thought-out strategies in terms of the role they can play in the Middle East and take advantage of sudden changes, they may realise their dream.

Nevertheless, the obstacles appear overwhelming. With enforced urbanisation the Kurds are losing their primary source of independence: life in sustainable villages. Natural resources such as the forests that feed the river systems have all but been destroyed. No oil refineries, food processing or manufacturing industries are being developed in Kurdistan and they continue to face very strong opposition on all government fronts. In lurching from one crisis to another they remain fractionalised and the need for charismatic leaders who demand absolute loyalty (from family to nation) is perpetuated.

Good leaders continue to be assassinated as was Qazi Muhammad in 1947 and Dr Abdul Rahman Qassemou in 1989, or exiled as was Mostefa Barzani in 1946 and 1975, or imprisoned as was Leyla Zana in 1994 and Abdullah Ocalan in 1999. To survive other leaders have been forced into dubious alliances, defying the Kurdish saying 'Even if the enemy becomes a bridge, do not cross it'.

Moreover, a militant form of Islam is gaining a political and social foothold in Kurdistan. In one terrible scenario, Kurdistan will become part of a larger dynamic that may be fostered to replace communism: that of a militant form of political Islam being the new enemy of the Judeo-Christian West.

Western readers may dismiss the Kurds' unenviable predicament as being no concern of theirs, but no Western consumer can turn away from the Kurds' plight unless they deny their own culpability. Most of us in Western societies live relatively well from the exploitation of others.

If nothing else, the Kurdish struggle is of relevance for purely selfish reasons. The wheels within wheels turn rapidly in Kurdistan and magnify the forces and patterns at play in the world. These forces are causing more and more people to flee as refugees. You may find one is your neighbour. It is highly likely you will live or work beside a refugee, whose life experiences are so foreign it is as if he or she comes from another planet. Then there are the controversies of what to do with asylum seekers. In Australia we imprison them in detention camps! Do we have any idea of what they have been through already? To listen to or read about the Kurds' history, culture, society and individual experiences enhances one's understanding of people, society and international processes. This helps us reflect on the nature of our own society and our rights and responsibilities in it.

As more people in Western societies question the ecologically unsustainable and inequitable world the present international order is producing, there may come a time when they want to change the way it is operating. They will then have to ask themselves: When should we take a stand? What strategies should we employ? What processes do we want to put in place to minimise harm and maximise the rights of the individual

while also enhancing the common good? In a world facing ecological crises, this common good is global. Thus we can all learn from the international nature of the Kurdish struggle.

Mostly this struggle has been violent. The sociopolitical climate is a determining factor. When national and international bodies are based on nationalistic, religious, capitalist, communist or other one-dimensional criteria, the people struggling against these forces also tend to use nationalism, religion or social class to unite. Their means of struggle reflect the means by which the rulers stay in power. In this way, cycles of oppression are perpetuated.

The cost of armed struggle is enormous, as will be shown in this book, yet few oppressed peoples have achieved liberation through peaceful means. Even the famous case of Gandhi's passive resistance in India involved decades of bloodshed between Hindus and Muslims before and after independence. Other exceptions to armed struggle are Tibet's and Burma's, their outcomes yet to be determined. Many indigenous populations' aspirations for self-determination have gained some ground in the last forty years—since 1967 Australia's indigenous people have become citizens of their own country—but this is because the people in power have had a change of consciousness. Obviously this is the preferable way for Kurds too.

The stakes are also high. Many Kurds in this book talk about a wish for democracy and freedom although they have little experience of either. In the West many take our system of democracy for granted. Yet democracy of the people, as opposed to democracy practised within a ruling body, or the development of institutions to make democracy possible, is a fairly recent phenomenon, with the outstanding exception of Greek states in the fifth century BC. Two and a half thousand years ago, all male citizens of Athens over the age of eighteen, irrespective of their economic status, directly elected people into office. Office bearers were paid, which opened positions to the less privileged, and were subject to annual elections.

From the 1760s England allowed male landowners to vote in a constitutional monarchy, but modern democracies only developed in America after the War of Independence in 1775 and the establishment of a constitution in 1798, then in France, on and off during the 1800s. Universal suffrage, where women had the right to vote as well as men, is as recent as 1902 in Australia (excluding the indigenous nations), 1918 in Britain and 1920 in the USA.

The transition from a monarchy or republican dictatorship to democracy is a long, hard road—one that can change direction gradually, by subtle processes, or suddenly by coup, war or revolution. It can be argued that genuine democracy is realised and maintained only in societies where there is tolerance and trust. In dictatorships you simply imprison or kill your enemy. In a genuine democracy there should be no threat of death, imprisonment or economic hardship when an individual or group shows signs of weakness or lawful dissent. There have to be checks and balances to enable economic sustainability and a high standard of education for all, a free decentralised media, an independent and accessible justice system, a military controlled by a democratically elected parliament and public accountability for all private and public institutions. The size of these institutions and the regions they control are also important

considerations. Now assess what is happening in our democratic nation states according to the above criteria.

Today so-called democracy exists in relatively few countries. While these societies enjoy a degree of tolerance, social mobility and choice as never before, we are maybe too trusting of the strength of the fragile institutions that support democracy, especially as they are being increasingly undermined by transnational monopolies, international laws, and decisions made by unelected elites.

All Western democracies are based on the rule of the majority. Yet even this principle needs to be rethought in an increasingly pluralistic world due to its failure to represent diverse groups, especially the disadvantaged, at all levels of decision making.

While working on this book, and reflecting on the significance of the development of democracy in the 20th century, I became aware of the strong parallels between the tools of social control—namely, the use of violence, imprisonment and food queues in the Middle East—and the use of TV violence, unemployment and the bureaucratic queues in Western societies. The fear, insecurity, distrust and pessimism produced by these tools of control, coupled with a lack of social services, produce divided, easily manipulated societies.

Another observation was how a society's dynamics can completely change in just 10 to 20 years. This change can be the result of a people's movement such as women's liberation or civil rights, or the Iranian revolution of 1979. Or it can be designed from the top, as in Mustafa Kemal's and Saddam Hussein's fascist regimes and the economic rationalists' neo-liberalism that is determining the New World Order.

These dramatic political, social and economic changes have a huge effect on individual behaviour and thinking. For example, when people say "Greed is fundamental to human nature," one only has to think of all the peoples around the world, including the Kurds, who have lived a village life for aeons and who were and still are more than willing to share what little they have. Many cultures believe in sacrificing their personal well-being for the common good. Yet because capitalism thrives on individualism, we are taught to think and behave as if the need for independence, profit, power and pleasure invariably determine the human condition. I would argue they are more usually the characteristics of leaders.

Freedom is a complicated concept, yet it is a word that has inspired many revolutions and evolutions. What does it really mean, even if defined as freedom from oppression? How a young Kurd might define it may be quite distinct from Buddha's definition. To be free to drive a car on the road, one must follow the road rules. Self-determination or freedom of choice carries with it responsibility. Liberty and equality, individual freedom and the notion of the common good, are values which impact on each other and are often at cross purposes.

What is most frightening is the number of revolutions, including those you will read about, which have had no detailed blueprint for replacing the present situation with something more just. Often there is blind hope that change will be for the better, yet little preparation for it. But as will be shown in this book, it is becoming increasingly vital to think about the issues and to put into place practices, even of a personal or underground nature, to ensure a better future.

This book is made more significant in that it is the first time Kurds from all over Kurdistan have had the opportunity to speak for themselves in English, occasionally using Kurdish words that, in their nation of origin, they may go to prison for using. Their essays, life stories, short fiction and poems represent a time of social revolution and evolution.

Until now, most books about the Kurds have been authored by non-Kurdish, male observers using a single voice of authority. Past books have concentrated on Kurdish history and politics invariably from the male standpoint. Yet it is my view that only by attempting to understand the richness, diversity and vagaries of individual experience, memory and belief can one fully explore the interrelationship of the Kurdish predicament, especially in terms of man and woman, family and nation and its application to our own survival.

My interest in the Kurdish people goes back to 1991, when I heard about their plight in northern Iraq. It developed in 1994 when Michelle James, a woman who lived next to a Kurdish refugee family in Melbourne, asked me to do some research for a documentary. My interviews with Kurds from northern Iraq became a series of three radio documentaries for the ABC. The stories haunted me for four years, so it seemed they deserved a book.

What initially attracted me was these people's sense of humanity in the face of extreme suffering. I was curious to know how they survived mentally and emotionally. Through working on this book I have come to understand the sources of the Kurdish people's strength. Most of all, strong beliefs can make suffering easier to bear than if one is alienated from belief. I decided our beliefs, rather than the availability of food or our life experiences, make us who we are. Also, collective forms of suffering can ease the pain more than if one suffers in isolation. As well, human nature is so plastic it can adapt to the most horrific conditions.

However I soon became aware of the terrible debilitating effects of centuries of oppression. Behind the humanity was sometimes a substrate of depression, anger and distrust. This was understandable, given the extremity of suffering. An intolerance to difference and a readiness to pass judgement, so harsh that few can survive unscathed, were also understandable, given the culture of community, the dictates of Islam and recent history. What underscored all this was a lack of forgiveness, especially of Kurds of other political persuasions. Again, this is understandable. The more violent the suffering, the harder it is to forgive, but without forgiveness, one cannot rise above past experience.

At times I became frustrated by extreme passions that fuelled noble dreams, which were disconnected from a will to act. People talked about unity—again, a hard goal in any society—but when given the opportunity to unite, were hesitant. As one individual said, "I am a sick person because I come from a sick nation. It is sick because it has existed in a state of war and oppression for 1400 years." Yet it is a miracle of humanity that in this book you will read about so many intelligent, compassionate, brave, stoic and refreshing dimensions to the Kurdish psyche. Since the late 1980's a new psychology is developing in Kurdistan, one that is far more willing to embrace democratic processes.

Starting with my contacts from 1994 and with help from Michelle James in Melbourne and Dr Peter Cavanagh in Sydney, I made further connections with the Australian-

Kurdish community. Partial funding came from the Community Cultural Development Program of the Australia Council for the Arts (1998) and later from The Myer Foundation through the Jesuit Refugee Service in Sydney (2000), as well as the NSW Ministry of the Arts (2000).

Over three years, I interviewed people and connected with others who wrote their own essays or short stories either in Kurdish, Arabic or English. The criterion for selection was that all contributors had to be residing in Australia.

It was particularly hard to find Kurdish women willing to go through the process. Many were housebound and felt they did not have sufficient English, or were too shy, claiming they lacked knowledge and experience to make a significant contribution. Those who worked and had a family felt pressured for time. In Middle Eastern societies, very personal matters are not openly discussed and the Kurdish diaspora continue to be influenced and fragmented by Kurdish stereotypes, values and politics. Even Kurdish associations in Australia are often answerable to a party back in Kurdistan.

The other area of difficulty was interviewing people from northern Kurdistan sympathetic with PKK. No-one was willing to speak in detail as an individual or as a spokesperson for PKK. I can think of a number of reasons. The Kurds in Turkey have been denied and oppressed more than any other Kurds. This does little for confidence and self esteem. The nature of PKK is a reaction to the extreme fascism of Kemalism. Many outsiders view the organisation as terrorist, but see other Kurdish political groups as justified in their struggle. Since Ocalan's imprisonment, the Turkish government lets Ocalan rule from his prison cell, no-one knowing whether his often-surprising statements are the result of brainwashing or government censorship. PKK has chosen to keep Ocalan as their leader as a show of loyalty and defiance. In the midst of all the confusion as to the future direction of PKK and fear of retribution by both government and PKK, people were unwilling to commit themselves to print and often those who did so spoke anonymously, unwilling to reveal personal details.

Each interviewing process took between three and 14 hours of tape, four contributors being interviewed through a translator. Interviews were then transcribed and with English being a second language, the same amount of time, or more, was spent checking details with each contributor. Many were reminded of experiences that they preferred to forget. Public domain facts were checked with reference books wherever possible.

Then the editing process began. In the editing, patterns and rhythms of speech were rarely retained, because of the difficulties of reading English as a second language, but Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish and Farsi words were kept as important dimensions of Kurdish culture. Once the interview had become a working draft of oral history, with further points of confusion or details being clarified, the contributors were shown their stories to read, check and change. This is a critical stage in the oral history process. The spoken word is often more ambiguous than the written and in an interview, especially in a person's second, third or fourth language, time sequences, details and emphasis can be inadvertently misrepresented.

When reviewing their story, contributors could choose to change their names and cut or change anything. A number of revealing details had to be cut because of a concern for the safety of family and friends back in Kurdistan or fear of reprisal by governments

if they returned to Kurdistan. Only two contributors chose to pull out of the book entirely, even though to speak out and be published is a very courageous act, not only because of the danger but also because much of the material is controversial. That so many decided to use real names and retain the details of villages, dates and opinions is a testimony to their personal bravery, love for their people and country, their wish to inform the world and their heartfelt desire for change.

After a contributor approved a draft of their story, it was further polished and edited for structure, flow and avoidance of repetition. However, it was important to retain differences of observed or remembered fact, myth and opinion, even if contradictory, because the relativity of reality informs our thoughts, choices and actions. In relation to these discrepancies of personal truth, some Kurds involved expressed a concern that this book would too much reflect the capricious views of 'ordinary' people. Yet I believe these are as important as those of the academics, which are also included. In all societies, large numbers of people lack the knowledge or time to explore the depth of issues. Their mentality can be formed by myths and rumours, but these often have great social influence, particularly in societies where there are few academics and which rely on oral tradition.

The book is divided into four sections. These divisions are as artificial as the borders that divide Kurdistan, but for ease of understanding I decided to structure the book in this way because the modern history of southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq) is so different to that of northern Kurdistan (eastern Turkey and north-west Syria) and eastern Kurdistan (north-west Iran).

As for those who chose to write in Kurdish or Arabic and have their work translated, it soon became apparent that translation is an art in itself. Many thanks to Haji Alhajani, Eziz Bawermend, Hussein Tahiri, Isma'il Qaradghi, Benaz, Omar Sheikmous, Dr Muhammad Kamal, Dr Toma Hamid, Kamran Avin and Gafoor Muhamad from Kurdistan, Sam Zakhary from Egypt, Myra Cheera from Lebanon, and Loretta Jew and Skye O'Neill from Australia for their work in translating. Also, thanks to Dana Kadar for checking facts and supplying additional material for 'A Musical and Poetic Tradition'.

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Most of all, I wish to express my deepest appreciation and respect for the Kurdish people who shared so much of their life experiences, time, patience and generous

hospitality. When I made my initial approach, they had no idea about the length and depth of the journey on which they were embarking! I might add—nor did I!

It is hoped that this book will inspire much-needed archeological and other academic research. Most of all it is hoped that it will contribute to a sense of empowerment, for the Kurds to feel no longer 'we have no friends but the mountains'. Healing the psychological trauma of an abused individual is hard enough. Having a whole population suffering from generations of physical and emotional trauma requires an international political and socioeconomic movement to support constructive processes, to allow a time of peace so people can gain a sense of safety and start thinking, rather than reacting in the midst of adrenalin-charged danger. For the Kurdish people to realise their dream of being recognised as a nation and to be able to live in peace with their neighbours in whatever way this can be negotiated, they need friends, both individuals and institutions.

We can choose to be ostriches sticking our heads in the sand and saying, "I'm okay," or "I have too many problems to worry about yours." But if chaos theory is correct, that the movement of a butterfly's wing can cause a cyclone somewhere else, then how much more concerned should we be about the ongoing denial of 40 million people in a major world crossroad?

Existing powers have the ability to control populations and exploit the world's resources as never before. Yet thanks to better education and communication, to the potential power of a collective mind and to united action and the global nature of social and ecological problems that make change imperative—coupled with the laws of synchronicity, chance and those of a metaphysical nature—no major event, process or outcome is ever completely in the control of a few humans, no matter how powerful.

Knowledge is one form of power. Compassion is one form of humanity. My greatest source of hope is humankind's miraculous capacity to transcend suffering with a vision that is qualitatively different from anything it has experienced. Individuals who do this can inspire others to work patiently towards a more peaceful, democratic world.