ABSTRACT

This paper will take up the case of a local Turkic-speaking group (Iraqi Turks or Turkmen) that seeks to challenge the Iraqi national identity through their claims over what they call Turkmeneli (the land of Turkmen). The latter constitutes a diagonal swath of territory running from Turkish and Syrian borders down to the Iranian border, and covers the three major cities of northern Iraq, namely Mosul, Arbil, and Kirkuk. Iraqi Turks can be taken as an example of what Rogers Brubaker (1996) calls “double-minority”—a self-defined ethnic group dwelling in one nation-state and yet represented as an extension of a ‘dominant’ ethnos of a neighboring country with strong ties to both nation-states; in this case, Iraq and Turkey. The claims the community makes on each of the two states are different: Of Iraq they claim citizenship and with Turkey they claim cultural affinity; an affinity based on a common imperial past, a common language, and a common mytho-history of ethnic origins. In my paper, I argue that the nationalization of Iraqi lands after the WWI, the forced attachment of Mosul to Iraq in particular, led to the rise of ethno-territorial consciousness among the Turkmen, particularly the middle class Sunnis who lived in Kirkuk, a city that was once ‘the stronghold of Turkish sovereignty’ in Iraq. I will inquire into the contemporary manifestations of such state of consciousness as I refer to what I call “cartographic mode of identity marking,” a way of demarcating ethno-linguistic identity that the Iraqi Turks have developed as a response to marginalization and forced displacement by the colonial and post-colonial Iraqi governments.