

The Freedom to Think Kurdistan

James Kelman

The Kurdish struggle is part of radical history, as any struggle for liberation is, but how can this particular history remain such a secret? Must it remain a secret? The Kurds refuse to be buried. Those of us who are not Kurds should not look away. If we wish to delve further there is much to learn, much to discover.

I recommend immediately an essay herein by Mehmed Uzun. This will advise you that there is not just a country but a nation whose name is Kurdistan. Didn't you know this? Why didn't you know this? What are the defining qualities and attributes of a nation? How do we recognize a nation?

How many artists are there in Kurdistan? How many people? How many children? What languages do they speak? What do their people do and how do they live, and where do they come from? And is it mountains and flatlands they have? Are there rivers and lochs? What are their songs and their stories?

In the last interview given by Abdullah Öcalan before his incarceration, more than twenty years ago, he was asked to account for "the PKK's bad image." At the time fifteen Kurds were on trial in France, "accused of being terrorists." Öcalan was quite matter-of-fact in his reply: "France is making a lot of concessions to Turkey. Politics are often based on material interests. We, the Kurds, we have nothing to give."

Except themselves, which they have committed to the struggle for the past hundred years.

—James Kelman, from the Introduction

The Freedom to Think Kurdistan features an introduction and eight essays on the struggle of the Kurds, derived from talks that James Kelman gave at public meetings between 1991 and 2018. The book acts as a primer on the historical and current political situation faced by the people of Kurdistan, while an Afterword from 2020 returns to themes of culture and imperialism in the English-speaking world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Kelman is a Scottish novelist, short story writer, playwright, and essayist whose many literary awards include the Booker and James Tait Black prizes. He was born in Glasgow in 1946 and left school in 1961, moving around and passing through Los Angeles for a brief period in the mid-1960s then in various jobs in various places in England. He started writing at the age of twenty-two: ramblings, musings, sundry phantasmagoria, stories, whatever. In 1969 while working in London he met and married Marie Connors from South Wales. They settled in Glasgow, where he has lived as writer, father, and grandfather. Kelman has been a vocal supporter of the Kurdish people and campaigns regularly with Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan. For further information go to jameskelman.net.

ACCOLADES

"A true original . . . A real artist . . . it's now very difficult to see which of his peers can seriously be ranked alongside [Kelman] without ironic eyebrows being raised."

—Irvine Welsh, *Guardian*

THE FREEDOM TO THINK KURDISTAN

JAMES KELMAN

James Kelman FOR PM PRESS

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