

From subject to object of history The Kurdish movement in northern Iraq since 1991

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Setting the stage

To what extent are Kurds objects or subjects of their history? This question stood at the centre of a conference that was organised in Berlin¹ some years ago and for which this paper was originally written. The answer depends, evidently enough, on what we mean by subject and object. Both concepts have a prominent place in the Western gallery of master terms, along with other twin terms such as culture and nature, body and soul, thought and feeling. Elaborating on the relation between subject and object has since Immanuel Kant been one of the guiding themes in Western philosophy of knowledge. When related to a people's history, however, the twins enter the semantic field of nationalism. History is implicitly or explicitly conceived as the history of nations and their relations to each other. They are the players on the stage of times, and are either masters of their own destiny, hence subjects, or subjugated to the rule of ethnic others, thus becoming the object of foreign powers. A nation can only thrive and write its history according to its own political and cultural project, if it is free from such domination. To be subject of history means being master of one's own future, it means national self-determination.

The twin terms are of special importance to existentialist philosophy and have also influenced nationalist thinking, especially through the notion of a nationalist project which transforms a nation from object to subject of its destiny. In nationalist existentialism, such as developed by intellectuals² who have been influenced by Sartre's *Questions*

1 »Between imagination and denial: Kurds as subjects and objects of political and social processes«, a conference organised by the Kurdistan Working Group of the Free University of Berlin, May 1998.

2 See for Latin America Guzman Böckler 1986; Díaz-Polanco 1989. Wimmer 1995, chapt. 7 offers an overview.

de méthode (1957), the project of national self-determination is inscribed in every peoples existence; in order to realise it, in order to become subject instead of object of the historical process, political leaders have to take into account first the cultural and psychological characteristics of their nation, secondly the historical and social specifics of the environment that determine the political means at disposal, and then transgress in a third step the limits that these characteristics and determinations impose in a true act of existential self-realisation.

What is the role assigned to intellectuals in this struggle for national liberation? Anthropologists and psychologists should help building an awareness of the singularity of ethnic culture and personality, a task that has been fulfilled with particular verve for example by Kenyatta for the Kikuyu or Jean-Marie Tjibaou for the Kanakians, both of them anthropologists and nationalist politicians. Historians, sociologists and political scientists should contribute to the act of liberation by analysing the limits and possibilities that the social environment offers to the nationalist project—most of the literature written by Kurdish intellectuals belongs to this type of analysis.

How can social scientists that are not directly involved with nationalist politics react to these claims? I can see at least two possible answers. The first is nowadays the most common one. It consists in a deconstruction of the nationalist project itself. In fact, it is rather easy to show for example that the notion of historical continuity and ethno-cultural homogeneity that the nationalist vision of the world implies does not conform to an empirical reality full of discontinuities³ and heterogeneity⁴. The meaning of the term Kurd for example has changed considerable since the times of the great Kurdish emirates of Baban or Erdelan in the 16th and 17th century. And the political ideals of famous Kurdish leaders like Bedr Xan Beg of the Emirate of Botan, Şêx Mehmûd Berzencî, leader of important Kurdish rebellions in the 1920s, or of Şêx Ahmed Barzani were far away from what nationalist thinkers later attributed to them. Their political aim was to revitalise faith and to enlarge the territory controlled by their mini-empires.

³ See e.g. Behrendt 1993.

⁴ Bruinessen 1997.

Their claim to be *sayyid*, thus descendants from non-Kurdish, Arab families, was intended to support their aspirations to leadership.

The second way of addressing the nationalist question from a non-nationalist point of view consists in rephrasing the problem so that it makes sense for social scientists as well. We no longer ask: Are the Kurds subject or object of history? Rather, we try to name the conditions under which a nationalist movement gains momentum, enlarges its following and eventually even reaches the goal of establishing its own nation-state. The closer a nationalist movement comes to success, the more it perceives itself as being subject, the further away it gets from reaching its goal, the more it deplores being object of history. This second, more sympathetic strategy is the one I am going to pursue in this paper.

I will limit the discussion to the political developments in Northern Iraq since the end of the second Gulf war in 1991. During these years, I visited the region five times, the last time in the Summer of 1997. This period is of particular interest for the topic of this paper, since during its first half the Kurdish movement was able to realise its nationalist project to an extent never expected before, while in the second half of the period what has been achieved before was destroyed in factional fights between the different Kurdish political parties. While during the first three years a process of state building could be observed amidst an atmosphere of nationalist euphoria, in the following years the semi-autonomous state has disintegrated and devoluted while disillusion regarding the Kurdish project spread among the population. Almost everywhere in the world sympathetic to the sufferings and plights of the Kurds, the establishment of an autonomous region in Northern Iraq was perceived as the chance of the century for the Kurds becoming finally subjects of their own history. The chance was missed, not because of another brutal intervention of the Iraqi government, but largely due to the inability of the Kurdish parties to seize the opportunity. Nowadays, history in Northern Iraq is made by Turkish army detachments, Iranian secret services, Iraqi government agents, and, last not least, the hundreds of expatriates employed by the different organisations of the United Nations implementing the oil-for-food agreement.

The representatives of the two nationalist parties whom I was able to talk to some years ago, attribute this tragedy to the lack of political

maturity of the other side and by the dividing influence of their outside allies. Ordinary Kurds in Northern Iraq, however, share with most of the world's opinion the almost complete disillusionment regarding the party elites. If the Kurds have become again objects of history, they blame the selfishness and shortsightedness of Talabani, Barzani, and other well-known leaders.

In what follows, I would like to present a slightly different view of the recent history of Northern Iraq. I will try to show that given the political opportunity structure and the power distribution in the region, the Kurdish party leaders did not really have other options to choose than a strategy of conflict with regard to their rivals. In the following section, I would like to describe the actors in the political field of Northern Iraq, as it developed after the defeat of Saddam's troops in the second Gulf war and after the establishment of an internationally protected zone for the Kurds in Northern Iraq. In a second step, I will suggest an explanation for the political strategies the Kurdish party leaders pursued in this political environment.

The actors

For each group of actors in Northern Iraq, we first have to describe their respective power base, then go on to briefly outline their relations to other actors, and finally make some remarks on their way of perceiving the political reality of the region. Let me start with the two largest Kurdish parties of Iraq, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

Before the end of the second Gulf war, the two parties had different bases from which they recruited political support. The KDP of Barzani relied much more heavily on an alliance of tribal leaders and fighters than did the PUK of Talabani, which had retained its original character of a party rooted in the milieu of urban intellectuals and professionals. Both parties re-entered Northern Iraq after Saddam's troops had been driven out by allied forces. As most of the Arab government officials, all of the security forces and most of the Arab civil populations had fled to the South, the parties could fill an almost complete vacuum of power. During the process of state building that followed their rise to power, they became structurally more and more similar.

Their power base nowadays consists of four different segments of the population: First, both of them formed or renewed alliances with

tribal leaders who were able to mobilise their armed followers and thus helped to broaden the military base of the two parties.⁵

Secondly, the Kurdish civil servants of the former Iraqi government entered the new provincial bureaucracy financed largely through the parties and thus became political clients of their respective leaders. As the regional economy, suffering from the UN embargo of Iraq and the Iraqi embargo towards the disloyal North, collapsed almost completely,⁶ the parties enlarged the bureaucratic apparatus in order to grasp the support of the professionals. For example, the administration of the governorate of Suleimania augmented its staff from 80 to 150 000 persons between 1991 and 1996.

As a third group of followers we can count the refugees of Iranian camps. After 1991, they began to return to their villages that had been destroyed during the so-called Anfal campaign against the rural Kurdish population in 1988 or even in 1975 after the breakdown of the semi-autonomous Kurdish state in Northern Iraq. The returnees depend heavily on outside political and financial support in rebuilding their systematically destroyed villages. In exchange for this support, they offer their political loyalty to the respective party and guarantee that they will indeed repopulate the region with Kurdish inhabitants. This transfer of political capital is organised by the strongmen of local groups, who had already disposed of privileged relations to Iranian government officials and thus controlled access to jobs and international aid.

A fourth group is constituted by the inhabitants of the so called collective towns, where the remaining rural population was resettled after 1988 by the Iraqi government in their attempt to dry out the sources of guerrilla support. In these towns, villagers depended largely on the food rations that were distributed through the machinery of the Iraqi welfare state. These distributions were administered by local political brokers who often established a firm control over their dependants. The brokers were incorporated into the clientelist pyramid the two parties built up after they had taken over the North. They could mobilise numerically important support for example during the first

5 For details see Wimmer 1997.

6 See Bozarslan 1997.

and last elections in the North in 1992,⁷ since the inhabitants of collective towns make for 22 percent of the population of Northern Iraq.

Thus, independently of their different histories and of any remaining ideological differences, both parties show a similar structure of political support, comprising tribal leaders, former civil servants of the Iraqi administration, returnees from Iran and the inhabitants of collective towns. All these different sectors of the population are integrated in a complex web of patron-client-relationships leading up from humble village dwellers or an urban professional and his family through different intermediaries and power brokers to the leaders of the two parties.

The maintenance of these coalitions is very costly. Since relations between patrons and clients are principally more fluid and less stable than for example those between members of the same clan or of a group defending common material interests, they have to be stabilised by a continuous flow of resources trickling down from top to the base of the clientelist pyramid. If tribal leaders do not receive weapons and money, they will eventually change their alliances—unless they belong to the nucleus of the tribal confederation around a party leader; if government employees do not receive at least a small salary or some other form of compensation, they can change their patron; if the inhabitants of the newly built villages or of the collective towns are not assured support in the form of food rations, agricultural inputs, infrastructure and so on, they can negotiate a better deal with another regional provider.

From what sources can the two parties cover the costs of maintaining these alliances? Since the state building process started from the scratch and the economic situation was catastrophic from the beginning, it was impossible to levy general taxes on the population. The oil revenues are completely under the control of GOI forces. Lacking international recognition as a government, credits from development banks or from friendly governments are out of reach for the embryonic administration of Northern Iraq. Three sources remain.⁸

First, the customs and street taxes levied on trucks coming from and going to Iraq at the two border posts to Turkey and Iran. The border

7 On the elections see the report by Hoff et al. 1992.

8 General informations regarding the economic situation can be found in Bozarslan 1997 and Hussein et al. 1993.

post to Turkey for example generates around 50 000 US dollar income per day. The second sources are the resources that international NGOs, GOs and UN organisations provide. Either they are channelled directly through Kurdish NGOs allied to one of the two parties and staffed with former government employees. Alternatively, the projects of relief agencies implementing their own programmes can be directed towards those villages, regions and sectors of the population whose political support has to be secured. In fact, if we hold a map of destroyed villages against a map showing the 65 percent of them already rebuilt by different NGOs, we get a very clear picture of the geographical distribution of political alliances. As a third source of income the direct financial contributions by the states of the region respectively their secret services has to be mentioned. It is well known that Iran, Turkey and Syria financed and still finance to a smaller or larger extent different political parties in the North, the Turks the parties of the Turkmen and sometimes the KDP, Iran a radical Islamist party as well as temporarily the PUK, Syria during much of the nineties the PKK and temporarily the PUK, Saudi Arabia the Islamic Movement and different NGOs allied to them, and so on.

Thus, the Kurdish parties and their embryonic government apparatus depend heavily on outside support. This brings me to the other groups of actors in the political field, the relief organisations on the one hand and the governments of neighbouring states on the other. Let me start with the first ones. The international NGOs, GOs and UN organisations have in common that they act according to the logic of budget maximisation. Having larger operations, more projects, longer term programmes, more staff, more four-wheel-driven cars, and more walkie-talkies than other comparable organisations is the goal of these players in the political field of Northern Iraq as it is elsewhere in the world. Parson's law, according to which bureaucracies want primarily to grow, applies in an almost perfect manner to these organisations, despite all rhetoric of local capacity building that supposedly allows humanitarian organisations to retreat from operations as quickly as possible. NGOs and governmental relief organisations are oriented towards the donor community as well as governments and public opinion at home, to which they want to show that they are indeed helping the Kurds to overcome the traumas of persecution and of the systematic destruction of their homeland. However, in order to be

able to implement their own projects in Northern Iraq, humanitarian organisations depend on the political protection of the two Kurdish parties. They have thus entered symbiotic relationships with one or two of the parties in order to be able to get things done in the field.

For GOs, especially the American OFDA and the British ODA, another important political goal of their activities was to establish a foothold in the North in order to demonstrate to the government of Iraq that they were in control of this part of the country. The UN organisations had still another political agenda to fulfil, as several high ranking UN officials pointed out to me in Baghdad and Erbil. Two points are worth mentioning. On the one hand, contrary to NGOs who often look for partners from what is nowadays called civil society, the UN is by principle oriented towards co-operation with governments. Seen from their point of view, the UN is the global player and governments the local ones that have to comply with the declarations and programmes decided upon by the assembly of nations. Because Northern Iraq lacks an internationally recognised government, the UN took the administration of the Kurdish parties as being their counterpart and invested considerable energy in capacity building. However, since the UN was assigned the task of implementing the oil-for-food agreement between Iraq and the Security Council in the Northern part of the country, they came under tremendous pressure from New York. The 1986 programme being the biggest humanitarian operation ever undertaken by the UN, it was perceived as a great opportunity to prove to the world or, more specifically, to the US congress, that the United Nations were more efficient, more accountable, and more professional than its reputation would have it. The more the UN leave things to their counterparts, the less probable an efficient performance of the whole operation will be. The tendency is thus to control as much as possible of the resource flows and distribution procedures under the 1986 programme.

Even more important for the political dynamics in the North are the different neighbouring governments that have their own specific interests in regional developments. All the neighbouring states of Northern Iraq have one strategic interest in common, namely to prevent Northern Iraq to develop into a fully independent nation-state of the Kurds, which would have spill-over effects on their own Kurdish population and the different Kurdish guerrilla forces. On the other hand,

neighbouring governments want the Kurds in Iraq to be strong enough to be a useful pawn in fighting against Saddam's regime in Baghdad and against the other states in the region, with which they usually maintain rather conflictive relations, despite attempts to co-ordinate their policies with regard to what they perceive as the »Kurdish problem«: Syria with Turkey because of the water problem and the military co-operation between Turkey and Israel; Turkey with Iran because of the pipeline issue and of general strategic competition in Central Asia; Iran with Iraq because of territorial disputes around the Shatt-al-Arab and of the control of the Persian Gulf; Iraq and Syria because of water problems again and of rivalry for Arab leadership. Each of these governments uses with varying intensity the Kurdish forces of the other states as a card in the poker for regional hegemony: Syria and Iran supported, up to the late nineties, the PKK, Turkey the KDP against the PKK and from 2000 onwards also the PUK against PKK,⁹ Iran the PUK against the KDP and Turkey, Iraq the KDP against Iran and the PUK, and so on, with changing alliance structure and varying intensity of the relationship. The United States and in its tow the government of Great Britain use the Kurdish card mainly as a pledge for a definitive solution of the conflict with Saddam Hussein.¹⁰ They probably would like to see Northern Iraq developing into their satellite state in the Near East, but they are not in a position to realise this strategic goal because this would surely lead to serious disturbances of relations to the NATO member Turkey, an important ally since the break up of the Soviet Union.

The tragedy

In summary, the three different groups of actors in Northern Iraq rely on different power bases, pursue different political strategies, and hold different views of the same reality. The Kurdish parties have to secure outside support through international relief agencies and through the governments of surrounding states in order to nourish the clientelist pyramids they have extended after their rise to power. The relief organisations depend on budgetary allocations and public support in Western countries in order to maximise their operations in the

⁹ Cf. Barkey 2000

¹⁰ Gunter 1999

field. In the case of the UN, a unified and efficient counterpart would be needed in order to prove their own effectiveness to the world, thus the tendency to remain as much in control of the oil-for-food programme as possible. The neighbouring states and the US want to have the semi-autonomous Kurdish state strong enough to survive as long as Saddam remains in power and weak enough to not ignite the fires of Kurdish separatism within their own borders.

If we now put the actors of the scene »in motion« and look at the recent history of Northern Iraq, we see a very complex and ever changing structure of relationships, of tactical alliances, factional fissions and fusions, we are confronted to an endless history of betrayal and renewed friendship, peace talks and party fighting, of clandestine agreements and surprising changes of sides, all this happening sometimes in front of and sometimes behind the curtains. It is impossible to give a detailed account of this political drama within the context of this paper and on the basis of the rather sketchy information available.¹¹ Let me just mention the most important events, such as the fratricidal wars between the KDP and the PUK in summer 1994, January 1995, in summer 1996 involving Iraqi government troops fighting on the side of the KDP and driving the PUK forces temporarily over the border to Iran, and finally in summer 1997. Worth mentioning are also the fights of the KDP against the Turkish PKK and of the PUK against the Islamist groups (IMIK) supported by Iran (in 1993/1994) and later against the PKK (starting in autumn 2000) and the Jund-al-Islam. In these wars, and especially since the KDP has forged an alliance with Saddam, the dream of a united and autonomous Kurdistan has receded out of reach.

There are several reasons to believe that this outcome was almost inevitable, contrary to Kurdish opinion that often blames the stubbornness and hard-headedness of Kurdish party leaders for this tragedy. In what follows, three arguments will be presented that contradict this version of the story—as they do the »tribalistic atavism« thesis popular in Western newspapers and policy writing.

First, the sheer complexity of a political field composed of a high number of actors, each pursuing opposed strategical goals, makes politics a very risky undertaking. Since every actor has more than one

¹¹ For a summary up to the late nineties see Leezenberg 1997

possible alliance partner and since alliances are not based on long-term shared interests but on common enemies, no stable coalitions can form. In such a volatile political environment, tactics is everything and strategy becomes a luxury. Northern Iraq's politics can be compared to a chessboard on which several games are played at the same time with the same figures. Every move that is made with a figure in one of the games changes the constellation in the other games as well. Too many possibilities of interpreting the moves of the counterparts and too many counterparts with which to forge alliances result in unpredictable actions of the players and in a general destabilisation of the system. Better than by a n-players prisoner's dilemma or other toys of game theory, this interpretation is confirmed by the way the actors themselves perceive the political environment. Even high ranking and very well-informed Kurdish politicians do not dare to make predictions for the immediate political future. What lies beyond the time horizon of two to three weeks, only Allah knows, they say, and indeed, they are right.

This brings me to my second point, a political culture argument or, if one prefers Bourdieus terminology, a reference to the specific habitus of the actors involved. Since they have been brought up with the multiple-game chess just described, they have developed an attitude of systematic mistrust towards possible alliance partners. Being masters of short-term tactical thinking, they are amateurs in developing long-term strategies. Having experienced innumerable episodes of betrayal, of unforeseen change of sides, and of blurring lines of conflict, it is very improbable that the two main Kurdish parties invest in a long-term relationship of mutual trust and fine-tuned co-operation. Some of the senior politicians with whom I had the opportunity to talk in 1996, only a few weeks before Saddam's troops entered the North and helped the KDP drive the PUK out of Erbil, were very aware of the fact that the tragedy of Iraqi Kurdistan's recent history was also due to this political culture of mistrust. One of them, an impressively ruthless and hard-boiled member of the political bureau of one of the parties, told me this: »You know, we still have not stopped thinking like our grandfathers who attacked each others in tribal feuds and factional fights. In the mountains of Kurdistan, yesterday's enemy is your best friend tomorrow, so how can you trust today's friends?«

Perhaps this statement exaggerates the binding force of cultural traditions. It comes close to what one could call a rhetoric self-orientalisation. We know that people can indeed develop new strategies and modes of thinking if opportunity structures change in a stable way. But it is nevertheless true that many opportunities are lost because they are not perceived as such through the lenses of habitualised schemes of thinking. The resulting filter effect does indeed reduce the space for historical contingency and accounts for much of the continuities we observe even over periods of seemingly radical change.

When resources dwindle and political competition becomes fierce, relations of trust are even more difficult to establish in Northern Iraq. My third argument centres on this aspect, on the political economy of party competition. It is the very fact that the Kurdish parties depend on outside resources in order to stabilise their political following that prevents them from engaging in co-operative ventures. Lacking access to international credits, intergovernmental aide or internally generated tax revenues, they depend on alliances with outside governments who don't want the political experiment of an autonomous Kurdistan to succeed.

This dependence has steadily increased because access to the other main sources of revenues, those provided by international relief agencies, has diminished, for two reasons: First, most of the NGOs and GOs have stopped their operations once the reconstruction of villages has been completed; no other activity guarantees a similar financial volume—and thus acknowledged and unacknowledged overheads—and is equally visible and sellable to the donor community at home. Moreover, since the oil-for-food programme has been announced, most international NGOs and GOs that still implemented or financed projects left Northern Iraq because donor contributions dried out when it became clear that the UN would pump every six month food, agricultural inputs, medicaments, as well as water and sanitation infrastructure worth 240 billion US dollar into the region. The UN organisations, however, are much more difficult to manipulate and their activities cannot as easily be directed to ones own clients; earning a hidden overhead in order to feed the swelling ranks of dependants becomes an extremely complicated task when resources are controlled by a UN that wants to prove its accountability and effectiveness to New York and Washington.

In such a situation and under the worsening conditions of an economy ruined by the wars and almost a decade of double embargo, the only stable internal revenue that guarantees political survival in the face of mounting competition are the customs at the border post to Turkey and Iran. As a closer look at the military moves of the two parties reveals, it was indeed the control of these two strategic posts that was at stake during the several warlike confrontations. And in the different peace talks that led to short-lived agreements such as the one of Dublin or Paris, the equal distribution of tax revenues from Khabur was usually the only non-military point mentioned and according to some observers the main reasons the agreement failed. Thus, lacking access to the revenues of Khabur, the PUK had to secure outside support and entered a military and financial alliance with Iran. This in turn threatened the position of the KDP, which then changed sides and formed an agreement with the enemy number one, Saddam's regime in Baghdad.

Conclusion

Let me summarise the three arguments: First, the sheer number of possible alliance partners and the fact that no two actors pursue identical long-term goals explains the volatile and fragile nature of political alliances in Northern Iraq. Secondly, through the process of habituation of strategic dispositions and internalisation of probabilities, a general culture of mistrust has developed which tends to perpetuate the structure of the multiple-game chessboard. Thirdly, the fact that the semi-autonomous Kurdish state depends almost completely on outside resources and that these outside resources have dwindled over the years render a co-operative strategy all the more improbable. These three point cannot explain the details of political history of the last decade, but they explain why we cannot explain it: The unpredictability of alliance structures and thus of the course of action form central parts of the picture that I wanted to draw. The three hypotheses help to understand why the fratricidal wars between the Kurdish parties have broken out and why it was almost impossible to establish a co-operative relationship between them, although they subscribe to the same political vision of an autonomous Kurdistan. This vision has once again become out of reach, and history seems to repeat itself. If Saddam would be replaced by a figure acceptable to its neighbours and the US, outside support for the Kurdish parties would break down

almost completely and the nationalist project would start again from where it was left in 1975.

Thus, if the analysis presented in this paper is useful, and I agree that much more research would be needed in order to establish its validity, it is not so because it helps the nationalist project to go ahead by indicating a way out of the labyrinth of political and economic constraints in which it is currently trapped. The three hypotheses put forward are even less useful if we are looking for moral and political judgement—unless we take the above as a kind of scientific excuse for the behaviour of Kurdish politicians.

Drawing such conclusions would mean, however, conflating the logic of scientific and of political/moral discourses. However, giving an answer to the question »Why does this happen?« is a completely different task to responding to the question »Is what happens good or bad?«. ¹² Understanding the obviously cynical and purely power-oriented behaviour of the Kurdish parties, the governments of neighbouring states, the UN and the USA, does not mean justifying it. A true moral and political judgement would have to start from the assumption that they *could* have acted in a different way if only they *had* oriented themselves towards other political and moral goals. Such reasoning involves contra-factual argumentation, since people have acted as they have. Moreover, the answer depends on the moral standards according to which people are expected to act: If we think that Kurdish political leaders should rather die than forge an alliance with Saddam Hussein, we judge past behaviour differently than if we think that they should only enter into negotiations if this really helps to realise Kurdish autonomy. Both contra-factual argumentation and the setting of moral standards lie outside the realms of social scientific discourse—although they evidently influence each other constantly.

Thus, a social science look at the realities of Kurdish politics and its international environment does not help to resolve the burning political and moral questions that developments in Northern Iraq pose to us. It merely helps to understand why the act of existential liberation, such as envisioned by nationalist intellectuals, could not be completed in Iraqi Kurdistan at the turn of the 21st Century. The Kurdish leaders were not able to transgress, in an act of existential dimensions,

12 For a more systematic point see Wimmer 1995, chapt. 1.

their cultural and psychological dispositions as well as the specifics of the political environment in order to realise their political aspirations. However, from a social science point of view, it is rather improbable that humans become subjects of history in this existentialist sense, moulding the flow of time according to their will, diverting the river of events in beds they have designed.

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