Estelle Amy de la Bretèque’s book is a valuable empirical contribution to the study of contemporary oral practices in the Caucasus region. Her work looks at the role among Yezidis of Armenia of a particular form of enunciation called *kilamê ser* (literally: ‘words about’) by Yezidis themselves, and referred to as ‘melodized speech’ by the author. The Yezidis are comprised of kurdophone (*Kurmanji*) communities who moved from Anatolia to the Transcaucasia region following their subjection to significant persecution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yezidism is a monotheist religion, likely deriving from Zoroastrianism and sharing common ground with Islam, Christianity and Gnosticism. However, the religion is not based on a holy book. The Yezidis are endogamous and are seen to be a closed community.

In the opening of the book, Amy de la Bretèque begins by presenting some extracts of *kilamê ser*, principally recalling heroic figures. Through her analysis of these *kilamê ser*, the author shows that in Yezidis’ minds, the concept of heroism is always associated with ideas of suffering and sorrow. She also explains that through the use of new dissemination formats (audio recordings), melodized speeches are circulated on a wider scale and, as such, shape regional political processes.

The second part of the book, which is much longer, is dedicated to performative and pragmatic analyses of *kilamê ser*. What we learn is that *kilamê ser* are distinctive forms of expression themselves. They clearly differ from daily speech given their particular tone, and they cannot be interpreted as songs (*stran* in Kurdish) given their specific semantic content. The particularity of *kilamê ser* is in the themes they touch upon, which unlike regular songs centre around suffering. For the Yezidis, joy and sadness cannot be expressed in the same mediums: joy is expressed through singing and music, while sadness is expressed through words. Through the analysis of *kilamê ser* performed during funerals, Amy de la Bretèque also shows that the recitation of the deceased’s kin helps to construct complex networks of relations between those who share the same grief. She concludes this part of the book by stating that the melodizing of words creates a suspended space of emotions that everyone can enter.

In the third part of the book, the author considers the actors involved in the practice of *kilamê ser* and the gendered nature of its performance. She explains that women who formulate *kilamê ser* during funerals are usually over forty years old (which allows them to speak in the presence of men) and have generally experienced suffering in their own ‘burning hearts’. As for the men, rather than drawing on their own emotional experiences, they rely on their instrument (*duduk*) and their technical abilities to provoke emotion and sorrow. The author also raises the important
relation between space and the notion of exile in Yezidi kilamê ser. We learn that the latter is key for Yezidis, and is associated with existential suffering. Moreover, it helps to communicate different forms of separation and dislocation experienced by Yezidis in the course of their personal trajectories and collective displacement. Suffering, exile and sorrow are intertwined and are at the heart of the themes evoked in kilamê ser. To conclude, Amy de la Bretèque explains that this culture of suffering and loss, expressed through melodized speech, is a constitutive element of Yezidis’ relationship to life.

The work of the author is thus very rich on an empirical level. She provides a meticulous linguistic and musicological analysis, and an impressive and invaluable set of translations. One can similarly welcome the unique format of the book, as the extracts of the kilamê ser mentioned within are also available for consultation as video or audio materials on a website. Nevertheless, the book suffers from a certain weakness on a theoretical level, and in its inability to address larger anthropological considerations. The principal issue here is that the author seems to have taken the kilamê ser as both a means and an end to her ethnographic research. In fact, her interpretations and effort to theorize sometimes give the impression of going around in circles and can seem at times tautological. No direct links are made, for example, between the practice of kilamê ser and the particular religious system that Yezidism constitutes. Besides these elements, the book’s merit is its compilation of very precious materials on a practice and a community that are both almost unknown.

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Even thirty-five years after the Iranian revolution, the extent of rural participation in it remains the subject of an open-ended debate. In their article published during the revolution, Farhad Kazemi and Ervand Abrahamian (1978:262) argued that Iranian peasants did not engage in ‘large-scale rebellions’ or ‘protracted revolts’ because they were ‘fatalistic, passive, and conservative’. According to Kazemi and Abrahamian, the persistence of tenant sharecropping, subsistence agriculture and the geographic isolation of villages prevented the emergence of an economically independent and ‘outward-looking’ middle peasantry that could escape the grasp of large landlords, come into contact with urban radicals, develop a collective class consciousness, and contest the central government (ibid.:292).

Four years later, Eric Hooglund (1982) countered Kazemi and Abrahamian’s argument by demonstrating that Iranian peasants around the city of Shiraz did not come to the Shah’s defence, but rather actively participated in the revolution that led to his downfall. According to Hooglund, the Shah’s 1962 land reform did not