

My Father's Rifle – A Childhood in Kurdistan by Hiner Saleem.  
Atlantic Books 2005.

For a book of a mere 141 pages, My Father's Rifle packs an enormous punch. The rifle in question, a Czech-made Brno, belonged to the father of Azad, a young Kurd whose idyllic childhood was foreshortened and blighted by the growing hostility of the Iraqi regime towards the Kurds.

Azad's story summarises in microcosm the tragedy of the Kurdish people, particularly but not exclusively at the hands of successive Iraqi dictators, most infamously Saddam Hussein, and of their deep and hopeless longing for the establishment of a true state of Kurdistan, spanning the borders of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

My Father's Rifle is also replete with characters: Azad's parents, his siblings, an artist called Sami, his cousin Cheto, and various Ba'athist apparatchiks, teachers, officials and soldiers. It is a haunting tale, and particularly so for those who may remember the footage from Halabja after the village was gassed by Saddam, for the bodies were of people just like those who walk these pages.

This is a powerful story, and one that it is hard to recommend too highly.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh