

**KURDISH NATIONAL DISCOURSE: THE PKK
AND THE ŞEYH SAİD REVOLT**

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the degree Master of Liberal Studies in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

by

Adem Hakan Özoğlu, B.A.

The Ohio State University

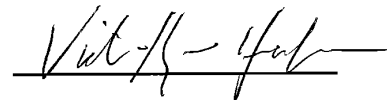
1993

Master's Examination Committee:

Victoria Rowe Holbrook

Stephen Dale

Approved by



Adviser

Liberal Studies
Graduate Program

*Değerli Profösörüm Victoria Rowe Holbrook'a
En Derin Saygılarımla*

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I express sincere appreciation to Professor Victoria Rowe Holbrook for her guidance and insight throughout the research. Thanks go to the other member of the examination committee, Professor Stephen Dale, for his support and encouragement. Gratitude is expressed to Sylvia Wing-Önder and Timothy Furnish for their assistance and advice. To my wife, Elizabeth, I offer sincere thanks for your unshakable faith in me and your willingness to endure with me the vicissitudes of my endeavors.

VITA

December 17, 1964

Born in Istanbul,
Turkey

1987

B.A., Istanbul University,
Istanbul, Turkey

1987-1989

Military Service in Turkey

1990-Present

Graduate Student at
the Ohio State University

FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: Liberal Studies

Studies in the departments of Judaic, Near Eastern, and Hellenic Languages and Literatures, Photography and Cinema, Cultural Anthropology, History, and Journalism.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| DEDICATION..... | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | iii |
| VITA..... | iv |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER | PAGE |

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

| | |
|---|----|
| A. SUFISM AND THE KURDS..... | 7 |
| a. <u>Şeyhs</u> in Kurdistan..... | 9 |
| b. The <u>Kadiri</u> Order in Kurdistan..... | 11 |
| c. The <u>Nakşibendi</u> Order in Kurdistan..... | 13 |
| B. DEVELOPMENT OF KURDISH NATIONALISM..... | 17 |
| a. The Şeyh Ubeydullah Movement | 18 |
| b. From the Creation of Hamidiye Alaylari (Hamidiye Regiments) to World War I..... | 21 |
| c. From World War I to the Treaty of Sevres..... | 25 |
| d. From the Treaty of Sevres to the Şeyh Said Revolt..... | 27 |

II. THE ŞEYH SAİD REVOLT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

| | |
|---|----|
| A. THE ŞEYH SAİD REVOLT..... | 30 |
| a. The Role of the <u>Azadi</u> (Freedom) Organization..... | 31 |
| b. External Involvement in the Rebellion..... | 37 |
| c. Religious Identity versus Nationalistic Identity..... | 40 |
| B. THE INTERRELATION BETWEEN THE ŞEYH SAİD REVOLT AND THE KEMALIST REFORMS..... | 44 |
| a. The <u>Takrir-i Sükun Yasasi</u> (The Law on The Reinforcement of Order)..... | 47 |
| b. Silencing the Opposition Press..... | 48 |
| c. The Progressive Republican Party and the Revolt..... | 50 |
| d. The Kemalist Reforms versus Ottoman Muslim Custom... | 51 |
| e. The Alphabet Reform: A Major Kemalist Success..... | 53 |
| f. Conclusion..... | 54 |

**III. THE KURDISH WORKERS' PARTY: THE LATEST PRODUCT OF
KURDISH DISCOURSE IN THE REPUBLICAN TURKEY**

| | |
|---|-----------|
| A. THE PKK MOVEMENT..... | 57 |
| a. The September 12 Military Coup and the PKK..... | 63 |
| b. Relations With Other Organizations..... | 73 |
| c. Analysis of the Participation in the PKK Revolt..... | 77 |
| d. Authority Structure of the Party..... | 78 |
| e. The PKK and Religion..... | 80 |
| f. Conclusion..... | 85 |

IV. CONCLUSION

| | |
|--|------------|
| A. COMPARING AND CONTRASTING THE TWO REVOLTS. | 89 |
| a. Differences..... | 92 |
| b. Similarities..... | 97 |
| c. Predictions..... | 100 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 105 |

INTRODUCTION

The first time I encountered the Kurdish problem in Turkey was during my military service in southeastern Anatolia. Until that time, I had believed that the Kurds and the Turks, along with other ethnic groups in Turkey, lived together in perfect harmony. I did not even feel a need to describe or categorize the Kurds as "others." The main reason for this naive belief was simply my ignorance. My experience with the Kurds was strictly limited to my growing up in Istanbul, the biggest metropolitan city in Turkey. Although the ethnic and religious mosaic can be readily observed in this millennia-old city, the problems of such groups are lost among Istanbul's daily complexity.

Istanbul is not the ideal place for ordinary people to perceive and understand the nature of the Kurdish minority discourse. It was only after 1984 that Kurdish separatism re-entered the discussions in Istanbul's coffee houses when the PKK or the Kurdish Workers' Party first started its terrorist attacks, which warned the new generation of Turks (like myself) about the seriousness of the Kurdish dilemma. The PKK's killing of innocent civilians

shook my beliefs about Turkish-Kurdish friendship and I blamed external interference without realizing the internal dynamics of Kurdish society.

During my mandatory military service, I was stationed in a southeastern city, Muş, where Kurds are the majority. Because the PKK had increased its attacks not only on civilian but also military targets, my feelings became very complicated; on the one hand, I held onto my delightful childhood memories about my Kurdish friends, but on the other hand I feared being killed by a separatist Kurdish organization's attack.

Since then, I have become very curious about the origin of the Kurdish problem. Shortly after completing my military service, I went to the United States where I felt I could find a better opportunity to study "minority discourse" in general, and "the Kurds" in particular. My first concern was to find Kurdish scholars so that I could learn their definition of the Kurdish discourse. The Kurdish Institute in New York had been my main target for contact. I called the director of the institute hoping to get help for my research. I told the lady on the phone that I was interested in studying Kurdish discourse and I would appreciate any help from them. After learning my nationality, the director's voice changed and she showed her biases, saying "You are a Turk, you are my enemy." I was no one's enemy, but after hearing her prejudice against me I felt no need to continue the conversation. That was the moment I began to realize the nature of the problem between the two parties: biased intermediaries who refuse to listen before making a judgment.

The PKK's increasing violence caused the Turkish public to develop a greater antipathy against the Kurds in general. When I expressed my feeling that it would be a big mistake to hate the Kurds without understanding what they want, I was labeled by some of my Turkish friends as "less than patriotic." I was not interested in this issue of patriotism, but I was interested in receiving answers to some questions: why the Kurds continually revolt against the central authority on every occasion and what are the *dynamics of the Kurdish discourse*.

After consulting a number of scholars, I decided to work on two uprisings for my masters' thesis: the Şeyh Said Revolt and the PKK movement. Since the Şeyh Said Revolt was the first and the largest scale uprising in Turkish Republican history, one can find plenty of information about this revolt and its effects such as the inspirational element in succeeding revolts. This revolt presents a clear case of Kurdish discourse in the early Republican era. My other reason for choosing this revolt is that there are many controversies concerning its identity and consequences. In order to make a valid comparison with the recent uprising, to explore the dynamics of the Kurdish minority discourse, and make some possible future predictions, the Şeyh Said movement has to be examined.

The PKK revolt is the second revolt I will focus on in my work. Although there are, presently, many Kurdish movements, the Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan (PKK), or the Kurdish Workers' Party, is the most violent and well-known movement among them. The PKK is also the most

successful movement in calling international attention to the Kurdish problem in Turkey. The main reason why I have chosen the PKK is that it is a good example of recent Kurdish discourse in Turkey. Since it is still under the influence of very hot political climate, I had a very hard time collecting reliable information and writing my thesis as objectively as possible in spite of my Turkish nationality. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the former leader of the Iranian Kurdish Democratic Party who was assassinated in the late 1980s in France, adds in his book Kurdistan and The Kurds: "No one who writes about his own nation, its life and struggle, can remain unbiased; I have tried hard, however, not to betray the principles of an objective approach to the facts under examination." I believe my objectivity about the Kurdish issue is no less than his. My only purpose in this work is to examine the revolt and analyze the social change in Kurdish discourse in time. *It is not my intention to praise or discredit any side which is mentioned in my work.* Nevertheless, I feel obligated to stress my personal belief, which is that any offensive which targets civilians should be severely condemned, no matter what the circumstances. Violence has its own logic and only creates more violence. Violence cannot solve a problem but only suppresses it temporarily. The Kurdish problem in Turkey is, in my opinion, the best example of the nature of violence. The fact that in the seventy years of Turkish Republican history, the Kurds have revolted nineteen times against the central authority seems to me clear proof that peace cannot be obtained through violence.

Religion has played a crucial role in Kurdish life throughout history. The unbroken tribal structure of the Kurds has meant that for most of the time Islam has been the only institution which has provided social and political order in the region. Sufism, in particular, is the main instrument of popular Islam that has operated for centuries to preserve the social order in most of the underdeveloped Islamic regions of the world, including Kurdish areas. Sufism, with its Tarikats (mystic dervish orders), constitutes a very significant place in Kurdish discourse. Hence, I have devoted my first chapter to (briefly) introducing Sufism and its most active Tarikats in Kurdistan. I have also placed a summary of the development of Kurdish nationalism in the first chapter to give readers background information.

My second chapter mainly discusses the Şeyh Said Revolt and examines the most controversial points on which scholars have different interpretations, such as the identity of the revolt and external interference. In the last section of the second chapter I have focused on "The interrelation between the Şeyh Said Revolt and the Kemalist Reforms" a consequence of the revolt which has not been deeply investigated. It is my conclusion that the Şeyh Said Revolt was partly responsible for the implementation of Atatürk's new modernizing reforms.

The PKK revolt is examined in the following chapter. Since this is a recent uprising, there has been plenty of information in the international and Turkish mass media. I also obtained first-hand information through my personal observation. Although I found sufficient data to write this chapter, due to the sensitivity of this topic, I had to be cautious about the

reliability of the information I gathered. The PKK movement is still active in Turkey, so in order to limit the time frame I excluded developments after early 1993 which at any rate did not seem to disprove my conclusion.

Finally, I have tried to compare and contrast the two revolts in order to observe the change in Kurdish minority discourse. I have also added my predictions for the future of the Kurdish movements in Turkey.

All Turkish words, regardless of derivation, are given herein modern Turkish spelling.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. SUFISM AND THE KURDS

Religion is deeply engraved into daily life and expresses crucial meaning for the Kurds. Kurdistan's social structure can be defined as a tribal state whose borders are drawn by religion and religious leadership. Hence, in order to describe the social structure of Kurdistan, one observes the different relationships between saints who play decisive roles in Kurdish reality, the Tarikats as religious institutions, and the believers. Even though the Kurds are mostly Sunni Muslims who follow the Shafi'i mezhep (a school of Islamic jurisprudence), it is possible, though rare, to encounter Christian or Jewish Kurds in the Middle East. Different Kurdish societies can also be distinguished by linguistic differences, and most importantly, by Islamic Tarikats. The Naksibendi and the Kadiri orders, the Yezidis, the Ahli-Hagg, the Alevi, and the Nurcu orders all coexist in Kurdistan. Due to their highly influential position, the Kadiri and the Naksibendi orders have captured the attention of social scientists like Martin van Bruinessen, whose work is considered among the best on Kurdish culture. The role of

the Şeyhs¹ as leaders of these Kurdish religious groups is another decisive symbol around which many debates have been centered.

In its broadest meaning, the word "Sufism" denotes Islamic mysticism. Although outside movements have had some influence, Sufism is definitely rooted in Islam itself. Its development began in the late 7th and 8th centuries when a perceived worldliness and loose morals in ruling circles evoked a strong reaction among certain pious people and new emphasis on the love of God. Sufism was considered heretical at times. The execution of Mansur al-Hallaj in 922, who claimed mystical communion with God, is an example of one orthodox reaction against a Sufi. By combining a traditional theological position with a moderate form of Sufism, Al-Ghazzali made mysticism widely acceptable in the Muslim world in following centuries. Sufis studied under a mystical guide to achieve direct communion with God. Some of the orders are considered to have played a very significant missionary role in the expansion of Islam. After the rise of Arab power, the Kurds first joined Persian rulers to fight the Arab armies; however, Persia could not resist the Arabs for very long and, like all of the conquered peoples, the Kurds had to either adopt Islam or pay a tax.² Before converting to Islam the Kurds were considered pagans. At any rate, the Kurds did accept Islam as their new religion. Since Sufism tends to modify some rules of orthodox Islam and thus promotes a less rigid or more flexible religion, one can consider Sufism as

¹ Tarikat leaders.

² Arshak Safrastian, The Kurds and Kurdistan. (London: the Harvill Press, 1948), 33.

an alternative way of existence. Sufism was more readily accepted among the Kurds than orthodox Islam.

The Kurdish social structure consists mostly of nomadic groups led by a tribal chief. However, because of the instability of the Kurdish position in the area (due to Christian raids) particularly in the 19th century, the Şeyh gained importance not only as a holy man but also as a political leader. That there are several ways in which a person can derive political and economic leverage from his association with the Divine is exemplified by the history of the Şeyhs in Kurdistan.³

a. Şeyhs in Kurdistan

The Şeyh's primary role is that of a holy man and religious instructor within a mystical order. Every person who wants to learn how to travel the mystical path needs a Şeyh. A popular saying exemplifies this: "He who has no Şeyh has Satan for a Şeyh." Because Şeyhs are intermediaries between God and the seeker, it is very important to find a Şeyh who is close to God. Among the Kurds this intimate relationship with God is achieved (generally) through the relation of personal blood ties with a Seyyid (a descendent of the prophet Mohammed). For this reason, Şeyhs trace their descent from Mohammed so as to gain influence and followers. This may also explain the Arab theory of the Kurdish heritage; "Kurds are Arabs."

³ Martin Van Bruinessen, Agha, Shaikh, and State: On the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan. (London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd. 1992), 205.

In the early 20th century, Şeyhs were able to practice their power not only on illiterate masses but also on some petty tribal leaders. The British vice-consul in Van, Bertram Dickson, expressed his opinion about the influence of the Kurdish Şeyhs by saying that "their (Şeyhs) power over the petty aghas is great, and they can usually force them to do their will".⁴ The claims of divine relationship also contributed to power struggles among the Şeyhs themselves. They were so highly regarded that the Kurds believed their pronouncements to be more binding than those of the orthodox representatives of Islam. The following statement by a twentieth century Kurd exemplifies this: "My religion is Kurdistan; my prophet is Barzani (a Nakşibendi Şeyh)." This extreme example should not be indiscriminately applied to all Kurds, but it does indicate the influence exercised by the Şeyh even in the late 20th century, when a majority of Kurds belonged to the conservative Nakşibendi order. The earliest mystics focused upon the mystical experience itself; theorizing about it--constructing speculative systems of interpretation for these experiences--came later, and it was only after the 14th and 15th centuries that Sufism gained political power in Kurdistan. The Şeyhs then became active not only in mysticism but in politics as well, and great revolts, led by the Tarikat Şeyhs rather than tribal leaders, took place, especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Iran and the Ottoman Empire. As the Nakşibendi flourished, there were conflicts between the Kadiri and the Nakşibendi Şeyhs as well. The Kadiri Şeyhs are said to have resented the increasing

⁴ Bruinessen cites Dickson, p. 211.

influence of the Naksibendi Seyhs. Until the 19th century the Kadiri had been the only active order in Kurdistan and the Kadiri leaders the most important religious leaders.

b. The Kadiri Order in Kurdistan

The Kadiri, founded by Abdulkadir Geylani (d. 1166) in Baghdad, was the first popular Tarikat. Although it is a Sunni Tarikat, the Kadiri exhibit Alevi-Batini features, especially in Africa, where the order does not necessarily fit the Sunni description. Esrefoglu Rumi (d. 1469) was the first representative of the Kadiri order in Ottoman Turkey.⁵ The spread of the Kadiri Tarikat across the Islamic world probably did not take place until the 15th century. The connections between Abdulkadir and the order that bears his name in Kurdistan are rather obscure. However, an important Seyhly family, sometimes referred to as Sadate Nehri, of central Kurdistan, claims descent from Abdulkadir through his son Abdulaziz, who is said to have come to Central Kurdistan to teach the Kadiri way. Kadiris believe that their silsile⁶ goes back to the Caliph Ali. Ali is said to have been a strong and impulsive man who liked to recite the Koran in a thundering voice. This thundering ritual challenged non believers. Following this tradition the Kadiris practice "vocal" rather than "silent" invocation, shouting recitations, employing drums and performing spectacular dances with knives, swords, and poisonous snakes. The Kadiri dervishes of

⁵ Yeni Turk Ansiklopedisi, vol. 7, p. 1614.

⁶ A chain and so a lineage, chain of spiritual descent.

Kurdistan made a show of marvelous attractions at regularly held meetings.

Although Kadiri dervishes trace their genealogy to Ali, they are not considered Shiite. However, unlike the Nakşibendis, the Kadiris had a reputation of being very tolerant of Shiism. This is exemplified by the fact that the Kadiris and the Shiites often attended each other's weekly meetings. According to the Kadiris, the differences between Shiites and Sunnis exist only on a superficial, exoteric level; on the esoteric level, there is little difference.⁷

Kadiri Seythood is solely designated by blood ties. That is to say, in order to be a Kadiri Seyh one must be a son of a Kadiri Şeyh. The Halifes (appointed representatives) of Kadiri Şeyhs do not, in general, become Şeyhs themselves, nor do their sons automatically become Halifes. Şeythood was restricted to two families, the "Berzenci Seyyids" and "the Sadate Nehri" (after the 19th century Nakşibendi Şeyhs also appeared among these families). Recently, only members of the Talabani family have received Kadiri Şeyhly İcazet.⁸ Bruinessen stresses that these restrictions made the Kadiri order unpopular in Kurdistan and prepared the way for Nakşibendi influence in the 19th century. For approximately four hundred years, the Kadiri order operated unchallenged in the area. It fit perfectly into Kurdish society as the representative of Sufism. Its role in

⁷ Bruinessen, p. 218.

⁸ Permission to lead a Tarikat in the name of his master

politics was particularly effective in resisting the Christian missionaries of the 17th century.

The Kadiri order, like the other orders, generally recruited its most active believers from the lower strata of the Kurdish society, mainly small or landless peasants. For that reason, the feudal areas were the ideal places for Şeyhs to settle, and influence the masses. The Şeyhs' influence did not, however, particularly affect large tribes (such as the Kaf) that sustained strong leadership or feudal areas where tribal conflicts were rare. Nevertheless, even in such areas, tribal leaders were irritated by the Kadiri Şeyhs' growing political influence. In time, the Kadiri order gradually lost its economic power as a large part of the common people transferred their financial contributions from the Kadiri to the Nakşibendi order or Şeyhs in the early 19th century. Furthermore, some Kadiri Şeyhs converted to Nakşibendi, in order to benefit from the rapidly growing influence of the new order. As a result, "A certain amount of rivalry and mutual jealousy always remained between Naqshibandi and Qadiri Shaiks."⁹

c. The Nakşibendi Order in Kurdistan

The Nakşibendi order emerged in Bukhara in Central Asia and developed in India. Its genealogy goes back to the Caliph Ebubekir, marking it as a Sunni Tarikat. Today Bahaeddin Nakşibend (1318-1389) is considered its founder. However, one can trace its beginnings to Ghaznavi times (962-1163). Its early characteristics as an order are obscure, but after the time of Hacı Yusuf Hemadani (d. 1140) it gained a

⁹ Ibid., p. 224.

definite identity. Since Nakşibendism claimed Sunni orthodoxy, it was supported by Sunni rulers. One of Hemadani's students, Ahmet Yesevi, is credited with having spread the Tarikat among the Eastern Turks, while Gujduvani, another student of Hemadani, is said to have spread the Tarikat in Khorasan. Both of these branches developed differently according to the milieu in which they spread. Mevlana Halid, a Kurd himself, is said to be responsible for spreading Nakşibendi in Kurdistan in early 19th century. After his first religious education in Baghdad, he became a disciple of Şeyh Abdullah, a Kadiri Şeyh. Later he went to India to progress in the Nakşibendi order in 1808. After one year, he received his İcazet, returned to Baghdad and accomplished his goal of converting his former Şeyh Abdullah from Kadirism to Nakşibendism. Moreover, he attracted large numbers of disciples, some of whom he appointed as Şeyhs of the order. These new Şeyhs in turn became secondary centers for the spreading of the order. These Şeyhs also appointed Halifes, who later became Şeyhs in their own right. "Thus, a rapidly expanding network was laid in Kurdistan."¹⁰

Another factor in the rapid spread of the Nakşibendi order was certain socio-political changes taking place in Kurdistan during the 19th century. This period of Ottoman history was characterized by an attempt at the re-centralization of power, and the central government was unable to adequately control Kurdistan. Hence in this period, with the support of the European powers, Christians missionaries allied themselves

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 224.

with local Christian groups against Moslems. Under such circumstances and conditions, the Kurdish religious leaders, by manipulating anti-Christian feelings, gathered a great number of Kurds under the umbrella of Naksibendism (which is more conservative than Kadirism). Bruinessen summarizes, "Due to Mevlana Halid's proselytizing activities, the number of Seyhs in Kurdistan had increased during the first three decades of the 19th century. Missionary activity and fear of Christian domination made the Kurds susceptible to propaganda stressing their Muslim identity, directed against Christians. The general chaos and lack of security (due to attacks upon the Moslems) that followed along with the decay and collapse of the Kurdish emirates, made many people turn to religion (i.e. to the Seyhs) to find security and assurance."¹¹

In conclusion, Islam has been a factor of both consolidation and diversification. It unified different ethnic groups like the Turks, the Kurds and the Arabs, but it was also a divisive point. Each society absorbed Islam differently and, in a sense, altered the religion to suit itself. Tarikats were established by the people who rose to become spiritual leaders. In Kurdistan, Tarikats represent Sufism in many different dimensions. As social organizations, for centuries they secured and provided comfort to people who derived great strength from their beliefs. Thus the role of Tarikats should not be discredited or belittled. Sufism, and more specifically, the Tarikats, emerged according to social needs.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 224-228.

The Şeyhs in Kurdistan have exercised great influence over the poor. Although they organized and managed the society in which they lived, they were also the target of many accusations. İsmail Beşikci claims that Şeyhs used their religious influence to legitimize abuse of the poor, independently or in collaboration with the central authority, and there is some truth to this.¹² On the other hand, the Kurdish nationalist movement found its first definition in the leadership of Şeyhs. Even secular Kurdish nationalists accommodate themselves to Islam through the Şeyhs. "This was never an easy thing to do since most of these nationalists consider Islam as one of the major forces oppressing their people."¹³ But in order to gain support for their goals, Kurdish secular nationalists have collaborated with the Şeyhs. Each power that has had an interest in the area has used the charisma of the Şeyhs for its own goal.

In order to gain a better understanding of the role of religion in developing Kurdish nationalistic consciousness, it will now be useful to review the history of Kurdish nationalism.

¹² İsmail Beşikci, Doğu Anadolunun Düzeni (Ankara: E yay.,1970), 246-249.

¹³ Martin van Bruinessen, "Religion in Kurdistan" Kurdish Times (Summer-Fall 1991, vol. 4), 5-25.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF KURDISH NATIONALISM

There seems to be little reliable information which documents the predicament of the Kurdish national consciousness before the 19th century. Only an epic, Mem-u Zin, written by a 17th-century Kurdish poet, Ahmedi Xani gives one a clue that the Kurds saw themselves as somewhat different from Turks, Arabs and Iranians. Although Mem-u Zin is now considered the national epic of the Kurds, the conception of nationalism in the 17th century was far from the Western-defined nationalism of our understanding today. Kurdish nationalism in the modern sense arose almost a century later than other nationalistic movements in the world. In the late 19th century, the Şeyh Ubeydullah Revolt, which marked the first internationally known nationalist movement of the Kurds in history, claimed an independent Kurdish state. It is possible, therefore, to say that the Kurdish nationalism emerged in this period, which was also a vulnerable time for the Ottoman Empire as reflected in the historical phrase "the sick man of Europe." Due to the defeats in the Balkans, the Ottoman government turned its attention towards the East in the mid 19th century. The new trend of nationalism in the Balkan countries ultimately inspired other ethnic groups in the area and it did not take long for the Arabs to create their own nation-states. The Ottoman Empire was disintegrating rapidly. The Armenians and the Kurds, as the only remaining distinct ethnic groups who were subjects of the Empire, wanted to establish independent states. Both movements created a great danger for the Ottomans who did not want to lose this strategic part (Eastern Anatolia) of the Empire.

Starting from the Şeyh Said movement in 1925, the Kurds have threatened Turkey's national integrity, however, the Kurdish nationalistic consciousness had started developing from the Şeyh Ubeydullah movement. The Kurdish nationalistic movements have passed through many stages until reaching today's position.

Robert Olson, in his book The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion: 1880-1925, divides the development of Kurdish nationalism into four periods and states that each period served as the base for the next stage. These stages can be delineated as follows:

1. The Şeyh Ubeydullah movement
2. The Hamidiye Alaylari from its creation to World War I
3. World War I to the Treaty of Sevres
4. The aftermath of World War I to the Şeyh Said Revolt.

In this section, I will briefly discuss these four stages in the development of the Kurdish national consciousness. The next chapter will be devoted entirely to the Seyh Said Revolt and its consequences in order to provide detailed information. The PKK movement, which is not mentioned in Olson's book, is the most recent stage of the Kurdish discourse in Turkey and will be focused on in a later chapter.

a. The Şeyh Ubeydullah Movement:

Although, according to some records, the first rebellions of the Kurds for greater autonomy came in the first half of the 19th century, the Şeyh Ubeydullah movement is considered to be the first stage of a greater Kurdish consciousness in the Ottoman empire. Until that time, the

Ottoman government had supported the semi-independent Kurdish principalities that were led by the tribal chiefs. These autonomous tribes were responsible for paying taxes and feeding the militia for the Sultan. Ottoman defeats in the Balkans in the latter half of the 19th century, made Sultan Mahmud II focus on the east of the Empire and the Ottoman civil administration was extended into the Kurdish semi-independent regions. Of course, the tribal leaders were disturbed greatly by the central government's new policy, fearing that their reign would soon be ended. As a result of this, the feudal lords led their followers into rebellion many times throughout the first half of the 19th-century. The region, in the mid 19th century, was full of many small principalities who did not want to share power with the Ottoman government. Even though they could be considered, at first glance "independent," it is false to say that these tribes had a unified nationalistic consciousness in the Western sense. Their main concern was to avoid paying taxes to the central authority. The Ottoman government, particularly during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) suppressed all Kurdish principalities and destroyed the authority of the feudal chiefs. The disappearance of the Kurdish chiefs caused anarchy and lawlessness in Kurdistan and ultimately paved the way for the emergence of religious figures as leaders for new Kurdish movements. It was during this period that the Tarikats gained increasing importance in order to fill the vacuum of power. Şeyh Ubeydullah, being a Naksibendi Şeyh, became very powerful over his illiterate and "fanatically religious" followers. Olson states that although the suppression of principalities

provided the context for the emergence of holy people as political leaders, the aftermath of the Turko-Russian (1877-1878) war encouraged Ubeydullah to declare his nationalistic program due to the war's outcome of devastation, famine, violence and banditry.¹⁴ It was also during this time that Armenians attacked and killed many Kurds in revenge for past attacks.¹⁵ Hence, the Armenian threat was another factor that tended to unite the Kurds under the leadership of Şeyh Ubeydullah.

In the meantime, the Nakşibendi leader, enjoying Ottoman help, moved into Iran. In 1880, Ubeydullah invaded northern Iran in order to stretch out his territory. This was the first part of his dream, his ultimate plan being to use his power against the Ottoman Empire and establish an independent Kurdistan that would stretch from eastern Turkey to northern Iran.¹⁶ In the end this Nakşibendi Şeyh failed when he was defeated by the Iranian army. Even the Ottomans took action against Ubeydullah upon his return to Ottoman territory. According to Olson, the Ottomans were forced to do so by European public opinion that the support of Kurdish nationalism could easily get out of control.¹⁷ In the end, Şeyh Ubeydullah was captured and exiled to Mecca, where he died in 1883.

¹⁴Olson, p. 5.

¹⁵ According to some sources many Armenians were killed by the Kurds in order to facilitate expanding Kurdish territory during the time in which the Kurdish tribes were strong enough. The Armenians and the Kurds were a major threat for each other throughout history more so than the Turks were.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷ European powers were strongly opposed to the Ubeydullah movement due to his policy against the Christian Nestorians. For that reason, the Ottoman government could be forced to take side against him, p. 7.

Ubeydullah's movement contained significant elements because this uprising made the Kurdish movement an international issue. Great Britain did not want the movement to fear that Iran would be drawn closer to Russia. However, the Russians did not prop up Ubeydullah because they had their own fears due to their previous failures in suppressing such a movement (i.e., Shah Samil); also, "they (The Russians) did not want to be robbed of the areas, some of which had majority Kurdish populations."¹⁸ Only the Ottomans had significant reasons for supporting the movement against Iran but not, of course, with the aim of establishing an independent Kurdistan.¹⁹

b. From the Creation of the Hamidiye Alaylari (Hamidiye Regiments) to World War I.

Until the early 19th century, Armenians settled mostly in urban areas and were craftsmen. The Armenian bourgeoisie who welcomed nationalism in the Western sense was a result of this urbanized character. They were more socially and politically organized than the Kurds and developed social institutions and an ideology against the central authority. The Ottoman Empire was thus faced with the threat of an independent Armenian state that could be established in an important geopolitical region. In order to reduce the Armenian threat, Sultan Abdulhamid formed a tribal militia or gendarmerie, led by chieftains, to police the Eastern provinces of the empire in 1891. These militias were named

¹⁸ Olson, p. 6.

¹⁹ The Ottomans thought that by supporting Ubeydullah, it might be possible to reconquer Sunni regions of Iran and the Turkish speaking region of Azerbaijan.

"Hamidiye " after Abdulhamid. According to some sources, the main purpose of forming these tribal gendarmerie was the following:

1. To suppress Armenian terrorism
2. To benefit from Kurdish military power
3. To support the anti-propaganda campaign against Russia and British Imperialism
4. To help spread Pan-Islamism
5. To gain better control over the Kurds²⁰

The Hamidiye regiments were used not only in the eastern part of Turkey but in the Balkans, where many of the Hamidiye officers had contact with Balkan nationalism. Needless to say, this experience of being exposed to the Western type of nationalism was one of the cornerstones of future developments.

Militarily, the Hamidiye Alaylari were modeled after the Cossacks. They were recruited from nomadic and semi-nomadic Kurdish tribes. Military training was provided by officers of the regular army. The Hamidiye units were not permanently mobilized and hence only received pay when they were on active duty. However, their families were exempt from most state taxes. By providing such a prestigious paid employment and a valid license to raid, the Sultan gained a strong loyalty among the Kurds and thus the Kurds referred to him as Bave Kurdan ("Father of the Kurds"). Robert Olson states that "The regiments were forbidden to unify except in times of war and only under the order of the commanding general."²¹ Despite the great prestige the Hamidiye Alaylari had on the

²⁰ For more information see Olson, pp. 7-15.

²¹ Olson, p. 9.

battlefields, they were later banned and their members were placed in the regular Ottoman army by the Young Turks in 1908.²²

According to Olson, the creation of the Hamidiye contained both positive and negative consequences for the development of Kurdish nationalism. The most negative consequence was the effect on intertribal Sunni-Shiite rivalries. Since the regiments were formed from Sunni tribes in accordance with Abdulhamid's Pan-Islamic policy, Shiite tribes felt insulted and were harmed by the creation of the Hamidiye regiments.²³ For this reason, Alevi tribes did not take part in any Sunni uprising; furthermore some even fought against Sunni Kurds in defense of the new Turkish Republic. Even today, the Alevi-Sunni difference is one of the main factors in preventing the Kurdish unification.

On the other hand, Hamidiye Regiments were an important stage in the emergence of Kurdish nationalism, in that they served as a fulcrum of Kurdish power.²⁴ The Hamidiye officers were trained in Istanbul with Turkish officers and identified with Turkish nationalism. In his book Olson claims that, the Hamidiye officers found Turkish nationalism similar to their own romantic nationalism. Before World War I the Regiments had served in the Balkans; the Kurdish officers, especially after the outbreak of the war, were exposed not only to Turkish but also to Balkan nationalism. In

²² Olson claims that the regiments were reorganized between 1908 and 1910, after the deposition of its founder, and the name was changed to Tribal Regiments by Mahmut Sevket Pasa, the commander of third army, p. 10.

²³ One of the Nakşibendi tribes, Cibran, killed a leader of Hormek (An Alevi tribe). Alevis never forgot this murder and even became enemies of the Sunni Kurds.

²⁴ Olson, p. 12.

this way, the Kurds experienced and realized the wider outlook of nationalism.

After the Hamidiye Alayları, Kurds appeared in the intellectual arena and formed many political organizations. The Young Turk revolution, particularly in 1908, led the Kurds to establish some organizations that later became very important Kurdish nationalist centers. The first organization was the Kürt Terrakki ve Teavun Cemiyeti (Kurdish Society for Progress and Mutual Aid). The society later published a newspaper named "Kurdistan" in Cairo. In Istanbul the Kurdish community built a school for the Kurdish population.²⁵ However in 1909, one year after its establishment, the Kurdish Society for Progress and Mutual Aid was shut down by the Young Turks who feared that such an organization could help the Kurds to develop their nationalistic consciousness. The second organization, Hevi-i Kürd (Kurdish Hope Society) was established in 1912. Founders of this organization were mostly from the Hamidiye schools and "their romantic nationalism paralleled that of the Turkish nationalists. This is one of the reasons that a number of Kurdish nationalists were among the founders and supporters of the Committee for Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terraki Cemiyeti)."²⁶ In big cities such as Istanbul and Diyarbakir romantic nationalism had grown out of social organizations; in Kurdish areas, the Tarikats were responsible for organizing the Kurdish masses for nationalistic purposes by using their religious influence. "Unlike the largely Turkified

²⁵ The Kurdish population numbered 30,000 in Istanbul, Olson, p. 15.

²⁶ Olson quotes Bruinessen p. 16.

urban Kurdish elite, the Tarikat Şeyhs were closely associated with the Kurdish masses and identified themselves with them."²⁷ Before the First World War, the Kurdish nationalists in Istanbul joined opposition parties such as the Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası (Freedom and Accord Party). Due to the Christian threat during World War I, Kurdish nationalists diminished their activities against the Turkish government and instead focused on defending and protecting the land they had shared for centuries with the Turks.

c. From World War I to the Treaty of Sevres

Immediately after the armistice of Mudros (31 October 1918), Kurdish nationalism became active again. Many Kurdish organizations were re-established not only by the effort of the Kurds but also with Turkish nationalist support. The Turkish support was probably given in order to benefit from these organizations during the drive against imperialistic power. British policy during this period was to use the Kurds against the Turks by promising them autonomy within a Turkish-dominated state under the suzerainty of the Sultan-Caliph who, according to Olson, would be a Turk. It was likely that the British thought an autonomous Kurdish state led by an Ottoman Caliph would serve them better than an independent Kurdish state.

During this time, the main difference among the organizations was that while some of them were advocating an independent Kurdistan, others were in favor of autonomy. Seyyid Abdulkadir, a son of the famous

²⁷ Ibid.

Seyyid Ubeydullah who led the first internationally known revolt, interestingly enough, seemed to be in favor of autonomy as opposed to his father's ideology of independence.

During the same time Serif Pasha, an influential Kurdish intellectual who lived in France, signed an agreement with the Armenian representative, Boghos Nubar, in Paris on 20 November 1919 which stated that both groups would support each other's independence movements against Turkey. This was an incredible development for the Kurdish nationalistic movement. While some of the Kurdish nationalists felt less threatened by Armenians, who wanted to establish an independent Armenian state in the same region where the Kurds wanted to have their own state, other groups strongly reacted to this collaboration due to pan-Islamic feelings, which were also encouraged by the Turks.

The dilemma of the Kurds from the armistice of Mudros to the Treaty of Sevres concentrated mostly on the question of autonomy or independence. Seyyid Abdulkadir, who preferred autonomy for a *unified Kurdistan*, hoped that Great Britain would help him to achieve his goal. However, the Treaty of Sevres did not provide the Kurds with a *unified* independent Kurdistan but instead it provided an international recognition as a distinct ethnic group. Consequently, the nationalists who were striving for an independent Kurdistan failed due to the lack of support from those who were in favor of an autonomous Kurdistan. Thus, those who advocated an independent Kurdistan were forced to seek independence

within the boundaries of the new Turkish Republic.²⁸ Robert Olson suggests that Great Britain was not willing to support an independent Kurdish state in Turkey; however, until mid-1921, British policy encouraged the Kurds to think that Britain would support their efforts to gain independence. During this time, those who favored a unified, autonomous Kurdistan were confronted by a British policy that secured itself in Iraq, where Great Britain was enjoying grand self interest.

d. From the Treaty of Sevres to the Şeyh Said Revolt

After the armistice of Mudros, Sunni-Shiite/Hamidiye-Non Hamidiye conflicts resurfaced. In early 1919, Mustafa Kemal issued a proclamation for the defense of Turkey against invaders. Although many tribes, and especially the Tarikats, replied positively to Kemal's defense proclamation, some of them such as the Alevi Koçgiri tribe thought that this was the right time to revolt and gain autonomy (they were also encouraged by the principle of self-determination proclaimed in President Wilson's Fourteen Points). Being encouraged by three articles of the Treaty of Sevres (articles 62-64 stipulated autonomy for the Kurds in Anatolia), the Koçgiri revolt broke out. This Alevi revolt, however, did not receive sufficient help from the Sunni tribes, due to the general opinion that saw this revolt as a Shiite movement. The Koçgiri rebellion was in a good position to receive international support for their activities and even aid from Britain, France and Greece. Although the Kurds were in contact with all three, according

²⁸ On August 30, 1923, Mustafa Kemal declared the new Turkish Republic. This is the official end of the Ottoman empire. The new Republic became responsible for all domestic and international policies including those concerning the Kurds.

to Olson "there is no evidence that they received support from any of them."²⁹ In the end the Turkish army harshly suppressed the Koçgiri rebellion which aimed to implement the stipulations of the Treaty of Sevres in favor of the Kurdish minorities in Anatolia.

The Koçgiri rebellion ultimately proved the weakness of the Kurdish nationalist movement in the post-World War I era. The reasons for this failure were:

1. Lack of European support
2. The tribal nature of the Kurdish Society
3. Lack of a Bourgeoisie
4. Lack of linguistic and religious homogeneity.³⁰

In the first rebellion in the Republican era, the Kurds learned that religious officials were more reliable than the tribal chiefs as leaders of rebellions and that their intertribal connections gave a certain necessity in creating an extensive unity.³¹

Another decisive development in this era of the development of Kurdish nationalism was the establishment of the Azadi organization, which is considered mainly responsible for the events leading to the Seyh Said Rebellion. According to Bruinessen, the foundation date of Azadi is not certain; however, it is accepted that it was somewhere between 1921 and 1923. The founder of the organization was Halil Cibran, a former member of the Hamidiye who was at that time a regular Ottoman army officer. He

²⁹ Olson, p. 33.

³⁰ Ibid., p.35.

³¹ Ibid., p.33

was also the same Halil Bey who was responsible for killing the Alevi tribal leader Ibrahim Talu.³² Many of the Azadi leaders were also officers in the regular Ottoman army. The Azadi organization had three main objectives: to eliminate Turkish oppression, to secure Kurdish freedom, and to develop a nation-state through British assistance (even refusing Russian help). Azadi wanted to incite small uprisings in Kurdistan to show the genuineness of its purpose. It was the primary fear of the Azadi officers that the Turks would mobilize a strong force against them by using the excuse that the Turkish forces were intended to attack Mosul. Another threat to Azadi was that the Turks would arrest the leaders of the movement in the Ottoman army and execute them. Thus the rebellion had to be activated before the time was ripe. Azadi organization will be discussed extensively in the following chapter.

³² Ibid., p. 42.

CHAPTER II

THE ŞEYH SAİD REVOLT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

A. THE ŞEYH SAİD REVOLT

In Turkish Republican history there have been many revolts conducted by a variety of opposition groups that were against the new radical Kemalist discourse. Although a few of them were organized by Turkic groups, the main threat to the new republic came from the Kurdish ethnic groups. Even before the Republic, the Kurdish minorities revolted against the central authority for different reasons. The most effective uprisings, however, were conducted by religious leaders as well as nationalistic leaders. After the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, the uprisings mainly took on a religious appearance. However, the role of nationalistic consciousness has been the major issue focused on in analyses of these revolts. The Şeyh Said Rebellion was the prime example of these kinds of uprisings, in fact, it was the inspiring factor for many following revolts.

The Şeyh Said Rebellion had elements of both a cause and effect relationship with other Kurdish rebellions. The Şeyh Said Rebellion is important not only because it was the largest scale uprising (according to

some sources as many as 50,000 people lost their lives)³³ but also because it coincided with the post-World War I era, during which England, France and the Soviet Union had imperialistic designs upon the Middle East. Most probably for this reason, the Kemalists often accused Britain of inciting uprisings in Turkey. Every single opposition was labeled 'incited by external factors.' This policy is still being followed in Turkey today.

In this chapter I will first discuss the role of the Azadi organization and later will analyze the revolt. Before focusing on the consequences of the rebellion, I will examine and compare different scholars' analyses of the same issues such as the 'external factors' and identity of the rebellion: religious or nationalistic. For a better understanding of the power structure of the Şeyh Said Rebellion, it is necessary to understand the role of the Azadi organization which served as its basis for the rebellion.

a. The Role of the Azadi (Freedom) Organization

The Azadi organization is considered the main source of the events leading to the Şeyh Said Rebellion. Many of the Azadi leaders were also officers in the regular Ottoman army. The Azadi organization had three main objectives: to eliminate Turkish oppression; to liberate Kurdistan and to develop their own country with British assistance (realizing that Kurdistan could not stand alone). Therefore, they refused Russian help in the hope of winning British support. Azadi wanted to incite small uprisings in Kurdistan to demonstrate the extent of their purpose. The main fear of

³³ Robert Olson thinks this figure is an exaggeration.

the Azadi officers was that the Turks would mobilize a strong force against them, using the excuse that it was intended to attack Mosul. A second fear was that the Turks would arrest the leaders of the movement in the Ottoman army and kill them. This would activate a rebellion before sufficient preparation could be completed.

The Azadi organization convened its first congress in 1924.³⁴ Şeyh Said, who was invited to the Azadi congress, was to be involved in the Kurdish nationalistic movement as the first time. Seyh Said was also related by marriage to Halil Cibran, leader of the Azadi organization. According to Robert Olson, Şeyh Said was invited to the congress due to "his great influence among the Sunni Zaza- speaking tribes northeast of Diyarbakir" not due to the fact that he was related to Halil Cibran.³⁵

The first Azadi-supported uprising was the Beytülşebab Revolt in September 1924. The Beytülşebab revolt made the Turks realize how well Azadi was organized. Thus the Turks committed more effort to spy on the Kurds. Due to the fear of Kurdish separatism, speaking the Kurdish language in public was forbidden by the Constitution of October 1924, soon after the Beytulsebab uprising. Azadi planned to employ religious symbolism, not only to attract the Kurdish religious leaders but also to take advantage of the conservative opposition against Mustafa Kemal. They even attempted to establish contacts with the ex-Sultan Vahdettin.³⁶

³⁴ Olson indicates that this date is not clear.

³⁵ Ibid. 46.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 92.

Yusuf Ziya, the leader of the Beytülşebab Revolt, was arrested and forced to confess the names of the leaders of other nationalistic movements in Kurdistan. Immediately after this incident, Halil Cibran, the leader of the Azadi organization, was arrested and executed in Bitlis. The Turkish government also attempted to interrogate Şeyh Said for information. This made Şeyh Said wonder if the Turks had discovered his connection to Azadi. Afraid of execution, he hurried to organize his rebellion and sent his son Ali Riza to Istanbul to consult with the members of the Society for the Rise of Kurdistan and Seyyid Abdulkadir.³⁷ It is clear that Şeyh Said needed support from the Kurds of Istanbul. He might have thought that through the Kurdish intellectuals such as Seyyid Abdulkadir, it would have been possible to obtain international help for his revolt. According to Metin Toker, Şeyh Said used his visits to the tribes under his religious influence to collect his annual fees, contributions and gifts as well as to preach to his followers and incite them for support.³⁸ Şeyh Said wrote letters both to the Lolan and the Hormek Alevi tribes, hoping for their participation in his rebellion, but the Alevis strongly refused the invitation and instead fought with the governmental forces against the revolt. Ironically, this was the same government the Alevis had themselves revolted against in the Koçgiri uprising in 1920. This is a very important indication of the difficulty faced by those who would like to achieve

³⁷ Ali Riza could also consult the Turks who were opposed to Mustafa Kemal.

³⁸ Metin Toker is son in law of Ismet Inonu, who was intimately involved in the founding of the Turkish Republic; his book, Şeyh Said ve İsyani gives detailed information about the revolt and Turkish policy towards the revolt.

Kurdish unity in the area. Alevis did not want to see an independent Kurdish state which would have been Sunni-led. Olson states that "the Alevi rejection of his (Şeyh Said's) overture greatly limited the potential area of rebellion."³⁹ Participation in the rebellion was not sufficient for a successful revolt. Three major Kurdish tribal confederations in central and eastern Anatolia, Babakurdi, Kurmançî, and Zaza, did not fully participate. Particularly in the Şırnak area, almost all the Kurdish tribes remained neutral. Olson suggests that the reasons for such non-participation can be delineated as follows:

1. The Turks bribed the Kurdish chiefs and tribes with large sums of money.
2. The Şırnak area, in contrast to Dersim (where the rebellion found many supporters) was rich in land and cattle, thus the Şırnak tribes preferred the security of peace to the threat of war.
3. The Şırnak tribes were waiting for assistance from Great Britain⁴⁰

On February 8, 1925, the revolt broke out, and 15,000 Kurds revolted against 25,000 Turkish troops.⁴¹ This was the largest scale Kurdish rebellion in history. Şeyh Said was soon able to control a number of dominantly Kurdish cities such as Elazığ, Muş, and Bingöl and he besieged Diyarbakir. The American newspaper, The New York Times, of March 11, 1925 described the Kurdish offensive as "5,000 Kurds Attack Turks At Diyarbekir." The news was as follows:

Sharp fighting has taken place at Diyarbekir. According to the official communiqué and supplementary details supplied by newspaper correspondents, who are unlikely in existing

³⁹ Olson, p. 94.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 108.

conditions to venture to exaggerate, the Kurdish Insurgents had concentrated for three days, and finally on Saturday night advanced in three columns, some 5,000 strong, under the personal command of Sheikh Said, the Dervish chief who started the revolt. The fighting lasted all night until morning, and resulted in much bloodshed. One column of insurgents, advancing from the south, appears to have succeeded in penetrating the Kurdish quarters by means of taking cover in ravines and trenches dug for drains. Certain of the inhabitants were waiting to join the insurgents in these ravines, and pressed on with them into the town, where eventually they were driven out and pursued by Turkish cavalry. Elsewhere the insurgents seem to have failed to force an entrance in the face of artillery and machine-gun fire, which killed a considerable number of them. Correspondents state documents were found by the Turks showing the insurgents intended to proclaim the independence of the Kingdom of Kurdistan after the capture of the town, and that letters were found from foreign manufacturers addressed among others to "the Kurdish War Office." The Turkish Government is sending reinforcements, and the opinion is expressed that the insurgents have a stronger organization than at first supposed....(P)art of the town of Diyarbekir has been destroyed by the artillery fire of the rebels. In recent engagements the rebels are said to have lost more than 300 men killed.⁴²

Due to stout resistance, Şeyh Said's forces had to retreat. This was also the turning point of the rebellion. From that point on, the rebellion started losing its power and had to retreat from the cities they occupied towards the mountains. On April 15, however, Şeyh Said and some of his fellow Şeyhs were captured. This led the tribes who participated in the rebellion to disintegrate, and the Turkish Army soon suppressed the rebellion. On 29 June 1925, Şeyh Said was hanged with 47 of his supreme leaders.

⁴² New York Times, "5,000 Kurds Attack Turks at Diyarbekir" March 11, 1925.

From Bruinessen's point of view, one might claim that the power structure of the Nakşibendi order was not suitable for or compatible with military operations. In essence, the reason for the military disintegration of the religious groups was simply the tribal social structure (which was very much disposed toward "blood feuds") among the Kurds. It is probably for that reason that the Kurds still have not been able to develop their social structure from a tribal system to that of a nation-state. The Şeyhs, however, apart from their spiritual leadership, did have the power to organize their murids (followers) militarily as well. As Metin Toker states "it is incorrect to see Şeyhhood only as a religious institution. The Şeyhs were not old people who sat in a tekke and received presents from their murids. The Şeyhs were feudalists who rode horses, skillfully used arms and were brave warriors."⁴³

Nevertheless, the Şeyh Said Rebellion, according to Bruinessen, was "better coordinated than that of the Sanusi's Bedouins." In the Şeyh Said revolt, military units were led by their own chieftains; whereas the Sanusi Şeyhs "dispatched (their) khalifas each to a tribe or sub-tribe."⁴⁴ In the end, national consciousness did not develop among many of the Kurdish tribesmen; participation in the rebellion consisted simply in following their chiefs, Şeyhs, or tribal leaders.

⁴³ Metin Toker, Şeyh Said ve Ayaklanması. (Ankara: Ruzgarlı Matbaası, 1968), 32.

⁴⁴ Bruinessen, p. 298.

After the rebellion, two issues were greatly discussed, not only by scholars but also by politicians in the international sphere. Since the rebellion took place at a very sensitive time (negotiations on Mosul in Northern Iraq) the Şeyh Said Revolt gained an international dimension. The Turkish government accused Britain of inciting the rebellion to create disorder in Turkey in order to prevent oil-rich Mosul from becoming a part of Turkey.

b. External Involvement in the Rebellion

Even though it is not proven, most of the Turkish scholars are convinced that the Kurds received help from England. They point to weapon catalogues sent by some British weapon companies and to letters which were addressed "To the Kurdish War Ministry." Metin Toker, a prominent Turkish journalist and the son-in-law of Turkey's second president, İsmet İnönü, asserts "it is also noteworthy how Şeyh Said found printing machines to print anti-governmental propaganda materials. They were, of course, printed outside and then disseminated to the rebels. These rebels were also wearing unfamiliar uniforms during the revolt and after the revolt some foreign money was found in their pockets. It was also understood that the rifles they used were foreign too."⁴⁵ Toker's assessments cannot, of course, serve as conclusive evidence and were not able to prove an external intervention. Moreover, Bruinessen disagrees, stating that "although the Kurds would gladly have accepted any arms offered from outside, it appears that they did not receive any.

⁴⁵ Toker, p. 41.

The firearms they used dated from the First World War or earlier. The militias all had their own arms. Russian soldiers who retreated in 1917 frequently sold their rifles for some bread. Many more arms were taken from the Armenians."⁴⁶

Nevertheless, London's pleasure at the Şeyh Said Revolt was very tangible. "The revolt provides a useful comment on the Turkish claim, which plays a large part in their Mosul case (...). The Third International also took it for granted that British imperialism was behind it."⁴⁷ Although the Turkish side continuously accused Britain of inciting and organizing the Şeyh Said Revolt, no serious evidence to substantiate their allegation was produced by Kemalists except, the confession of a British agent called 'Templeton' who had previously been in the Allied police and was (at that time) a private detective in Istanbul. He had entered into a 'highly compromising' correspondence with Seyyid Abdulkadir. The British disowned him and called him a 'Turkish agent provocateur'.⁴⁸ However, Metin Toker, in his book *Şeyh Said ve İsyanı*, asserts that although there was a British agent in Istanbul called Templeton, the one who had corresponded with Seyyid Abdulkadir was not Templeton but a Turkish agent who introduced himself to Abdulkadir as Templeton. According to Toker, Seyyid Abdulkadir negotiated with a Turkish agent (Nizamettin) instead of the real Templeton.⁴⁹ According to Ugur Mumcu, a famous

⁴⁶ Bruinessen, p. 292.

⁴⁷ Minutes by a high official at the Foreign Office on a consular despatch from Istanbul (FO371,1925: E1229/1091/44). From Bruinessen's #61 footnote p. 304.

⁴⁸ Bruinessen, p. 292.

⁴⁹ Toker, p. 52.

Turkish journalist and author, Nizamettin wore make up in order to make himself look like an Englishman, and was introduced to Seyyid Abdulkadir as the director of the Middle East department of Great Britain (İngiltere'nin Umumi Sarkiye-i Siyasiye müdürü). When Abdulkadir wanted to confirm Templeton's identity from the English embassy, it was too late, because his negotiation conditions had been already recorded and reported to Ankara.⁵⁰ While Mumcu and Toker agree that the British did become involved with the Şeyh Said Rebellion, Robert Olson who relies heavily on the British archives tries to prove otherwise. According to him, the British did not support the Şeyh Said Rebellion.⁵¹

On the other hand, Ugur Mumcu utilizes the case of Major Noel to examine British involvement. According to him, England was planning to establish a Kurdish state with British protection in 1919. This state would have included Bitlis and Van. The mission of Major Edward Noel (he is sometimes called the "second Lawrence") was to incite the Kurds against Mustafa Kemal.⁵²

During his interrogation, Şeyh Said's right hand man Kasim⁵³ (who was also his close relative) implied that Şeyh Said shared a close contact with the English government. When he was asked by the attorney general, "Did any foreign country pledge to help the Şeyh?" Kasim answered as follows: "Zazas told me that after capturing Diyarbakir, Şeyh

⁵⁰ Mumcu, Cumhuriyet, 11 June 1991, p. 14.

⁵¹ Olson, p. 128.

⁵² Mumcu, p. 14.

⁵³ It is claimed that he was a Turkish agent by Britain.

Said was going to send four of his men to the English agents and ask for their help in establishing a Kurdish government."⁵⁴

However, from my research I conclude that in the beginning the British government did support (maybe not actively) the revolt, but in the end, they thought that supporting Kurdish nationalism could easily get out of their control and incite the Kurdish nationalist aspirations in Iraq, where the British government had great interests. The Kemalists' victories against the Greeks and the fear that Turkey could collaborate with France or the Soviet Union were other reasons for Great Britain to change its policy. Collaborating with the Kemalists seemed a better course for Great Britain.

One other question being discussed even today is the identity of the rebellion. In order to utilize its relatively high international profile, the Şeyh Said movement has been claimed by Kurdish nationalists as well as radical Islamists in present day Turkey. My next section will deal with the identity of the rebellion.

c. Religious Identity versus Nationalistic Identity

A controversial point about the identity of the Şeyh Said Revolt concerns its nationalistic versus its religious roots. While most scholars agree that the Şeyh Said Rebellion involved both religious and nationalistic feelings, some scholars, as did Şeyh Said himself, strongly deny the suggestion that the revolt carried a nationalistic ambition. After he was captured, Şeyh Said clearly stated in his interrogation, "*I did not have any nationalistic purpose.* (Emphasis added) Our revolt was a Kiyam

⁵⁴ Mumcu, 19 June 1991, p. 14. He cites Attorney Örguevren from Dünya, 30 June 1957.

(a war to rescue religion). I did not have any intention other than saving my religion against Kemalist secularism. I was not aware of those who had nationalistic ambitions."⁵⁵

On the other hand, Bruinessen, convinced that Şeyh Said was lying, states "the revolt was neither a purely religious nor a purely nationalistic one. The nationalist motivation of those who planned it is beyond doubt, but even among them many were also emotionally affected by the abolition of the caliphate (...). *The primary aim of both Shaikh Said and the Azadi leaders was the establishment of an independent Kurdistan (emphasis added)*"⁵⁶ In order to better utilize his influence over the illiterate Kurdish masses, Şeyh Said used a religious discourse. However, he also kept Fehmi Bilal Efendi, "a blasphemer who publicly mocked religion,"⁵⁷ as one of his closest assistants because he was able to convince the nationalists. Since nationalistic propaganda could not be as effective as religious agitation, religious symbolism was employed in gaining mass support. Probably for this reason Şeyh Said accepted the title of Emir el Mücahiddin (commander of the warriors of the faith).

Robert Olson shares Bruinessen's conclusions about the identity of the revolt. His conclusion is that, "while the Sheikh Said rebellion was a nationalist rebellion, its mobilization, propaganda, and symbols were those of a religious rebellion (...). For the average Kurds who participated

⁵⁵ Mumcu, p. 14.

⁵⁶ Bruinessen, p. 298.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

in the rebellion, the religious and nationalist motivations were doubtless mixed."⁵⁸

Ugur Mumcu further lays out Turkish scholars' consensus about the issue; İsmail Beşikçi: 'the nationalistic face of the revolt is not as important as it is believed. This was a completely backward religious movement.' Arda Behram, a Marxist author, states that 'the Şeyh Said Revolt was nationalistic and revolutionary.' Yalçın Küçük states 'it is impossible not to recognize the religious color of the revolt, but, one should also pay attention to the nationalistic perspective of the movement. Abdullah Öcalan thinks 'it was a pure reaction against secularism; however, the nationalistic aspect did also exist.'⁵⁹ However, Uğur Mumcu does not believe in the İlerici (progressive) and nationalistic character of the rebellion. He clearly states that " it is certain that the revolt, which was organized and led by Nakşibendi Seyhs, embraced a *religious-Kurdish* Identity."⁶⁰

In my judgment, it is not easy to label the revolt as either nationalistic or religious. The Şeyh Said rebellion was more a tribal uprising planned by nationalists and operated by religious leaders. The Azadi organization was responsible for planning the rebellion, however, the religious agitation which provided mass participation was arranged by the Nakşibendi leaders. Since Şeyh Said was not only a religious person but also, according to Bruinessen, a "fervent Kurdish nationalist," he

⁵⁸ Olson, p. 154

⁵⁹ Mumcu, Cumhuriyet 20 June 1991, p. 14.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

played an intermediary role between the illiterate Kurdish masses and the Azadi organization. It can thus be assumed that a great deal of the Kurdish masses did not comprehend the nationalistic intent of the rebellion. Hence, the nationalistic ideology was kept privately among the Kurdish elites and some of the cooperative religious figures such as Şeyh Said.

In the next section, I will analyze one of the main consequences of the Şeyh Said Revolt, which has not been discussed deeply enough. I devoted an entire section to the domestic impact of the rebellion in order to emphasize the significant consequences the revolt had for Turkish policy making.

B. INTERRELATION BETWEEN THE ŞEYH SAİD REVOLT AND THE KEMALIST REFORMS AS A MAIN CONSEQUENCE

The purpose of this section is to re-examine the consequences of the Şeyh Said Rebellion and to stress the close relationship between the Kemalist reforms and the Şeyh Said Revolt.

The Turkish Republic, founded in 1923, quickly and quietly promulgated a series of radical modernizing reforms that were contrary to Ottoman Muslim custom. This was the beginning of a new era in Turkish history that later raised many questions, such as: how did Atatürk accomplish these new reforms in spite of the majority of the people's opposition? In order to answer such pertinent questions, the Şeyh Said Revolt needs to be carefully examined.

The Şeyh Said Revolt, being the first and the largest-scale Kurdish uprising, provided the right milieu for enabling the Kemalists to complete their planned radical reforms. According to Metin Toker, son in law of İsmet İnönü, who was Prime Minister at the time of the revolt, the new reforms were incompatible with the freedom that the Kemalists pledged. Hence, in order to apply these new reforms, the Kemalists postponed implementing democracy.⁶¹ Immediately after this revolt, a new law, called Takrir-i Sükun Yasası (The Law on the Reinforcement of Order), was passed from the new regime's National Assembly despite strong resistance by the opposing party, the Terrakki Perver Cumhuriyet Firkası (Progressive Republican Party).

⁶¹Toker, p. 44.

For a better understanding of the relationship between the role of the Şeyh Said Revolt and the power struggle in Turkey, one should look at the structure of the National Assembly and the distribution of that power. After the declaration of the Turkish Republic, two political parties were formed and presented in the Grand National Assembly, one of which was the People's Republican Party or Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, founded by Mustafa Kemal. The majority of its members were Turkish nationalists. The most important element of the People's Republican Party was its revolutionary identity, which was in opposition to the status quo. In contrast, the Progressive Republican Party, led by Kazım Karabekir, who was one of the most influential and successful generals in the National Independence War, was composed mostly of conservative-minded people. Due to this particular feature, the Progressive Republican Party was supported by mostly religious organizations which had been very powerful during the Ottoman Empire, by the supporters of the Sultanate, and by the majority of the Istanbul press which was unfriendly to the Kemalist style regime. In his book, Nutuk (The Speech), Mustafa Kemal made known his frustration with the Progressive Republican Party's growing strength and capability of competition.⁶² According to Mustafa Kemal, the Progressive Republican Party's main aim was to re-establish the Caliphate. He once publicly accused the Progressive Republican Party's program of being "a product of treacherous minds."⁶³

⁶²Atatürk, Nutuk. Ed. by Zeynep Korkmaz. (Ankara: Basbakanlik Basimevi, 1984).

⁶³ Ibid., p. 601.

Along with Kazım Karabekir (in the Progressive Republican Party) Rauf Bey was another influential figure in Turkish political life who many times stressed his opposition to the declaration of the Turkish Republic. Mustafa Kemal accused Rauf Bey of being a liar by stating that "It was Rauf Bey who encouraged Kazım Pasha by stating 'if you hinder the proclamation of the new regime, you will greatly help your country.' This man can never be a supporter of the Republic, even though his party is named the Progressive Republican Party."⁶⁴

Mustafa Kemal's frustration with the opposition party's resistance to his revolutionary approach was understandable. If the Progressive Republican Party had been able to take power, the reforms that Mustafa Kemal and other revolutionaries had planned for a long time would have never happened. Hence, it was obviously very important for Mustafa Kemal not to lose his power.

It is also clear that in the beginning of the new Turkish regime, these two parties were fighting aggressively for power. However, the balance of power was unequal in favor of the President and Commander in Chief, Mustafa Kemal. Even though the Progressive Republican Party's oppositional ideology seemed closer to Turkish society's internal dynamics, its leaders miscalculated Atatürk's political and military charisma. The Şeyh Said revolt was born out of such a confused situation. Even though

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 566.

many people lost their lives and Turkey lost the province of Mosul,⁶⁵ the revolt helped the Kemalists to silence the opposition and provide an appropriate milieu for the new radical reforms.

a. Takrir-i Sükun Yasası (The Law on the Reinforcement of Order)

This law deserves a special attention, for the Kemalists, who were represented in the Grand National Assembly by the Republican People's Party, legalized their actions in silencing the opposition groups by means of this law. İsmet İnönü, as soon as he became the Prime Minister, proposed it as a bill to Parliament. This new law was explained as a necessary step in giving the government extraordinary powers to deal with the Şeyh Said Revolt. However, it was aimed more at the opposing Progressive Republican Party and the newspapers which had created negative public opinion about the Kemalists. Accordingly, the bill consisted of three articles:

1. The government, with the president's endorsement, has the right to forbid the activities of any kind of publication, organization, incitement and attitude that can cause social disorder, backwardness and insecurity of the society.
2. The law will remain in effect for two years.
3. The related departments of the government will be responsible for the execution the law.⁶⁶

⁶⁵There is a big debate about the relationship between the loss of Mosul and the Şeyh Said Revolt. According to some sources, Mosul and the revolt are two different topics and did not affect each other. See Aziz Aşan, Şeyh Said Ayaklanması. (İstanbul: Sistem Ofset, 1991).

⁶⁶Aşan, p. 23 footnote # 25.

This new law caused great controversy in the Grand National Assembly. The draft was aggressively attacked by the Progressive Republican Party, which claimed that the law was very open to abuse, seeing that the government could use the law to suppress not only the Şeyh Said Revolt, but also to eliminate any political opposition. According to Rauf Bey, the revolt was not much of a threat to the new republic and "The Law on the Reinforcement of Order would bring a disorder."⁶⁷ Despite the Progressive Republican Party's strong opposition, the bill was approved on March 4, 1925.

Immediately after the law was passed, the government sent the Seventh Army Corps against the rebellion. However, the Seventh Army Corps was ineffective. The primary reason may have been that it had many Kurdish officers in its ranks, as Martin van Bruinessen believes.⁶⁸ Finally, the Eighth Army Corps, commanded by Kazim Karabekir, succeeded in suppressing the revolt.

b. Silencing the Opposition Press

At the same time, Ankara was watching the new developments very closely. Immediately after the law (*Takrir-i Sükun*) passed in Parliament, the government manipulated it quite effectively. The first action against the opposition was the shutting down of newspapers in Istanbul that had criticized the government. It was claimed that their publications had damaged the social integrity of Turkey and had

⁶⁷Ibid., p.21

⁶⁸ See Bruinessen's section concerning the Seyh Said Revolt in which the author provides reliable first-hand information.

endangered national security. On the 7th of March 1925 six newspapers and magazines, Tevhid-i Efkâr, İstiklâl, Son Telgraf, Aydınlık, Orak-Çekiç, and Sebul Reşat were instantly closed down.⁶⁹ Some journalists were even arrested because of the accusation made by Şeyh Said that they had instigated the rebellion through their publications. However, according to Aziz Aşan, the accusation was merely a pretext, since most of the rebels were illiterate. Avni Dogan, the prosecutor in the Şeyh Said trial, also comes to the same conclusion in his book Kurtuluş, Kuruluş ve Sonrası, that Şeyh Said's accusation against the journalists was an arrangement. Aşan also implies that if Şeyh Said pledged to accuse the journalists who were opponents to the government of aiding the revolt, his punishment would be lessened. "This can be taken as clear proof that the trial was manipulated to intimidate the journalists who displayed an anti-Kemalist consciousness."⁷⁰ Eleven journalists were arrested on the charge of "anti-reformist" activities; however, ten of those journalists were released after they submitted a letter of apology to Mustafa Kemal. The letter has been summarized as follows:

We are the loyal servants of your new regime which was a work of genius. We are not capable of criticizing your great reforms. Hence we have never opposed them. We are not guilty as charged. Our future will be directed by your forgiveness.⁷¹

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Mumcu cites Abdullah Dogan, Kurtuluş, Kuruluş ve Sonrası. (Istanbul, 1964).

⁷¹Mumcu quotes Taha Toros. Tarih ve Toplum. (Agustos, 1985).

Abdulkadir Kemali Ogutcu, the only journalist who did not sign his name to the letter, was released 4.5 months later on the condition that he not participate in politics.⁷²

c. The Progressive Republican Party and the Revolt

On the one hand, the Inonu government was trying to suppress the rebellion, and on the other, to silence the opposition. After the opposition press was silenced, the next move was to silence the only opposition party--the Progressive Republican Party. Even though Kazım Karabekir insisted that the Progressive Republican Party completely opposed this separatist revolt and labeled the rebels as traitors who exploited religion,⁷³ the party was closed down with the charge of "exploiting religion and supporting the revolt" on the June 3, 1925.

At any rate, it is undeniable that Seyh Said himself was sympathetic to Karabekir's party. In Atatürk's book, Nutuk, a letter written to Şeyh Said by one of his disciples is quoted, "In parliament, Karabekir's party is respectful to sacred law (Şeriat). I have no doubt that they will help us."⁷⁴ Therefore, according to Atatürk, the Progressive Republican Party was also partially responsible for the rebellion. He states, "When history researches the reasons for this reactionary revolt, it will find that the Progressive Republican Party's propaganda and its provocations in the eastern part of Turkey, along with its promises on religious issues were, the

⁷²Asan , p. 44.

⁷³Ibid., p. 48.

⁷⁴Atatürk, p. 603.

determining factors of the revolt."⁷⁵ Nevertheless, no convincing evidence was produced by Mustafa Kemal for the Progressive Republican Party's responsibility for the rebellion.

In my opinion Karabekir, like Mustafa Kemal, would not have tolerated any aspirations which would endanger the national integrity, such as the Şeyh Said movement, but certainly he was sympathetic towards Islamic movements. Since the Şeyh Said Rebellion was conceived as not only a religious but also nationalistic movement, the Progressive Republican Party took a position against the Şeyh Said uprising. As a matter of fact, İnönü later admitted that the activities of the party could have been tolerated. "As with any natural reaction against the radical reforms in anywhere in the world," says İnönü, "the Progressive Republican Party just represented the legal and natural reaction against our fundamental reforms."⁷⁶

d. Kemalist Reforms versus Ottoman Muslim Custom

The Şeyh Said rebellion was one of the major factors which allowed Atatürk to successfully promulgate a series of radical modernizing reforms that were contrary to Turkish Muslim custom. After the political opposition was eliminated, the stage was set for the new essential reforms which eliminated the semiotics of Ottomanism. According to Turkish reformists, everything that recalled the past had to be changed. The power structure of the Ottoman system and the power structure of the new

⁷⁵Ibid. p. 602.

⁷⁶Selek, *Anadolu İhtilali*. (Istanbul: Örgü yay. 1981), 719.

regime were incompatible in Mustafa Kemal's mind. In order to build a new healthy structure, it was necessary to clean up the rubble of a past that was extremely contrary to Kemalist ideology. To change customs that had developed over six hundred years, of course, required strict measures; but it was not easy for a person who had declared "democracy" to silence the opposition.

During the period in which Takrir-i Sükun was in effect, many reforms were realized. First, the Sufi orders, which were centers of power mainly in rural areas, were outlawed on November 30, 1925, with the aim of demolishing their power. With the Exile Law (Sürgün Yasası), other politically powerful groups such as feudal chieftains were singled out for elimination.⁷⁷ Following this, the Hat Reform and the Dress Code Reform were passed in Parliament in accord with Mustafa Kemal's intention to give a "Western" look to his country (28 November 1925). Also, the reforms dealing with the calendar, time, and weights and measures were passed in further efforts to break with the Ottoman past (26 December 1925).

Finally, the Alphabet Reform in 1928 was the main reform that directly targeted the changing balance of power. Every Medrese-educated person, in other words, those who had been a part of the Ottoman supremacy, became illiterate in one day. This major maneuver of Mustafa Kemal, which aimed to restructure power, found a suitable occasion due to the Şeyh Said Revolt.

⁷⁷Since the government was incapable of filling the power vacuum, political and economic instability became inevitable.

e. The Alphabet Reform: A Major Kemalist Success

To change written Turkish from Arabic script to Latin script was not a new idea. Toktamış Ateş, author of Türk Devrim Tarihi (History of The Turkish Reforms),⁷⁸ notes that the Europeans tried for the first time to write Turkish in Latin script hundreds of years ago. In the 14th century, the Franciscan missionaries published a Turkish dialect in the Latin alphabet.⁷⁹ During and after the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1918), another serious attempt was made by Westernized revolutionaries in the Ottoman Empire. However, the reactions from conservatives were very firm. For example, in the newspaper Hakimiyeti Milliye (5 March 1923), Karabekir disagreed with the alphabet reform attempt by stating "As if our Islamic alphabet is not enough, it was suggested that we should convert to the Latin alphabet. If we do that, the nation will be turned upside down."⁸⁰ The main concern of Karabekir was also the Islamic World's reaction. He adds, "The Islamic World could think that by converting the Islamic sacred alphabet to a foreign alphabet, the Turks would convert to Christianity."⁸¹ Professor Fuat Köprülü, a famous Turkish scholar, had a similar concern, arguing that changing the alphabet is not the way to become a modernized state.⁸² The discontinuation of Ottoman culture was the major point of focus for reaction. Most of the scholars were suspicious about the alphabet reform, sensing that the new regime would be

⁷⁸This book is being used as a main textbook in Turkish colleges.

⁷⁹Toktamış Ateş, Türk Devrim Tarihi. (İstanbul: İkt.Fak.Yay. 1980).

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 308.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

deprived of the cultural inheritance of the Ottoman Empire which created one of the important civilizations in history. Toktamış Ateş, in his text book, says that "certainly the alphabet reform caused discontinuation with the past, but the loss should not be exaggerated. On the contrary, this discontinuation was one of the aims of the Kemalists."⁸³

Even though the rebellion was completely suppressed, the government still felt the need to extend the time frame of the Takrir-i Sükun Yasası (The Law on the Reinforcement of Order). The extension, which was for two more years, gave the government an opportunity to allow the alphabet reform to mature. In 1927, Mustafa Kemal established and directed a committee for finding appropriate letters, and in November 1928 the Latin script became the new alphabet of Turkish. It is noteworthy that, just four months before the last extension of the Takrir-i Sükun expired, the new alphabet was approved by the Grand National Assembly (1 November 1928).⁸⁴

f. Conclusion

There have been many publications on the topic of the Şeyh Said Revolt. Most scholars agree that it is one of the most important uprisings of 20th century Middle Eastern history. Its importance is not due to its scale--which Metin Toker says is unimportant--but because of its consequences. I agree with Toker that the consequences of the Şeyh Said Rebellion are far more important than its military extent. However, I

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Takrir-i Sükun became ineffective as of 4 March 1929.

also disagree with Toker in the respect that I believe the revolt's scale was important in capturing international attention and inspiring many following revolts.

In this section, I tried to show the ways in which this revolt affected Turkish domestic policy and how Mustafa Kemal utilized the revolt to silence the opposition, which claimed to represent 600 years of history, morality, and culture. Any change in society is opposed by conservatism. For centuries, the Ottoman conservatives resisted the new formations firmly and successfully. Atatürk's reforms are important not only because they were necessary (which is debatable), but because they symbolize the victory of change over centuries of tight conservatism. The Law on the Reinforcement of Order (Takrir-i Sükun Yasası) was the bridge between the Şeyh Said Revolt and the reforms. In his book, Nutuk, Mustafa Kemal does admit that Takrir-i Sükun helped him in creating some of his reforms. "During the time in which Takrir-i Sükun was in effect" says Mustafa Kemal "we suppressed a *major* revolt (my emphasis) and provided peaceful conditions for the country. (...) If Takrir-i Sükun were not in effect, we would still have declared the reforms that were important for our nation's future. Nevertheless, it is correct to assume that this law facilitated the protection of our nation from the threat of reactionaryism."⁸⁵

Although the Şeyh Said Revolt had many effects on young Turkey's political future and Kurdish minority discourse, I have chosen the one least studied consequence. It is my personal belief that the issues or thesis

⁸⁵Ataturk, p. 606.

discussed in this section can allow better understanding of the strength and the importance of the Kurdish minority discourse in Republican Turkey. My following chapter analyzes the recent uprising (of the PKK) in Turkey.

CHAPTER III
THE KURDISH WORKERS' PARTY: THE LATEST PRODUCTION OF KURDISH
DISCOURSE IN REPUBLICAN TURKEY

A. THE PKK MOVEMENT

The Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan (PKK), or the Kurdish Workers Party is the most violent and well-known party among the Kurdish organizations in present-day Turkey. The PKK was formed as a socialist party aiming to establish an independent united Kurdistan. The party's origin is traceable to leftist Turkish organizations. The idea was planted by not only Kurdish but also Turkish university students. According to Martin Gunter, an American scholar, the idea was born at a meeting of a Dev-Genç⁸⁶ (Revolutionary Youth) branch in the Tuzluçayır district of Ankara in 1974.⁸⁷ In his interview with Mehmet Ali Birand, Öcalan provided background information about his organization. "The Turkish leftist movement was paying careful attention to the Kurdish question in the 1970s. The more intellectuals, workers and peasants saw articles about the 'Kurdish society' in magazines, the more excited they became. The central government lost its control over the nation and was ineffective in implementing the

⁸⁶ Dev Genç was a radical, leftist student organization in 1970s.

⁸⁷ Martin Gunter, The Kurds in Turkey. (San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1990).

official ideology among different social groups. The class struggle was very intense yet no social class had superiority to others. This was an important occasion for our birth. In spring 1973, I took 5-6 of my friends to the Çubuk Dam where we made a decision to establish the organization. You can call it a research group."⁸⁸

The organization was first called the Ankara Democratic Patriotic Association of Higher Education (Ankara Demokratik Yüksek Öğrenim Derneği); the group thereafter came to be known as the National Liberation Army (Ulusal Kurtuluş Ordusu), or more popularly as Apocus (Apocular)⁸⁹ which refers to the followers of Apo (Abdullah Öcalan, a dropout from the Political Science Faculty of Ankara University, was the Party's leader from the beginning. Apo is a nickname for Abdullah, which also means "uncle" or "dede" (holy figure) in Kurdish.⁹⁰) It took four years for the Apocus to become the PKK. During this four year period, Öcalan uniquely developed his organization and separated it ideologically from the Turkish left. The PKK dealt with ethnic suppression instead of class struggle; this, henceforth, was also its main difference from Turkish leftist ideology. The 1970s were a most vulnerable and most sensitive time for the central government. Anarchy (in a sense of government's inability to structure the social and political order) had reached its peak, resulting in a vacuum of power, particularly in the remote parts of eastern Turkey. It was during this period that Öcalan organized a series of meetings in

⁸⁸ Mehmet Ali Birand, Apo ve PKK. (Istanbul: Milliyet yay. 1992).

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.57 and Can Sancak Doğu Yakasının Hikayesi (Ankara: Nuans yay. 1991).

⁹⁰ Gunter, p.57.

which he carefully focused on such ideas as economic exploitation of the Kurdish areas in Turkey, how the Kurds were different from the Turks linguistically, culturally and structurally, and the question of Kurdish self-determination.

The movement received an unexpected positive response from a considerable number of the Kurdish people and, hence, the movement proclaimed itself a political party (which was immediately outlawed by the Turkish government) on November 27, 1978--four years after the birth of the idea--in the village of Fis in the Lice township of Diyarbakir. Identifying itself 'a Marxist-Leninist movement,' the PKK organized 2,000 members in 22 cities and 63 districts. Before September 12, 1980--the date of a military coup--the PKK's structural organization was based on 'hypothetical states' which were created by the Party's strategists. The PKK divided "Turkish Kurdistan" into three regions, each containing the following cities:

1. South Kurdistan State:

- Adiyaman
- Sanli Urfa
- Gaziantep

2. Central Kurdistan State

- Diyarbakir
- Mardin
- Siirt

3. North Kurdistan State

- Elazig
- Malatya
- Bingol
- Van
- Hakkari

-Kars
-Ağrı⁹¹

The secretaries of these three regions would also be the members of the PKK's Central Committee. There were subcommittees corresponding to provincial and local organizations operating under them.

The PKK's political meetings secretly continued in these hypothetical states. Öcalan was very successful in convincing the poor Kurdish peasants who were tired of suppression not only from the central authority but also from the Kurdish feudal lords. The idea of 'Kurdishness' was successfully transferred from the Kurdish university students in Ankara to oppressed peasants in southern Turkey where the majority are Kurds. At the same time, debates on an ideological level with Turkish leftist organizations also took place.⁹² In 1978, the party declared its program, according to which Kurdistan was "a classic colonial country colonized separately by Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria." Martin Gunter, an American political scientist who is the author of many articles and books about Kurds, underlines that "the small Kurdish area in the (former) Soviet Union was not mentioned."⁹³ According to the program:

"The development of colonialist capitalism in Kurdistan (...) was built upon the plunder and exploitation of the countries' resources" and "in the capitalist stage, the Turks are in the forefront of the forces colonizing Kurdistan." To overcome the reaction to this situation, the Turkish government had

91 Sancak, p.25.

92 Gunter, p.59.

93 Gunter, p.59.

implemented a harsh cultural policy and an intense campaign of assimilation.

Then, "the feudal landowners...(were) collaborating closely with colonialist capitalism" and were "taking the form of becoming comprador and collaborationist bourgeois, thus involving a profound repudiation of the nation." In addition to that "the intellectual strata (was)... developing in an atmosphere of Turkish language and culture. Most of these intellectuals (were) denying their nation and considering themselves Turks rather than Kurds.(...) Feudal and comprador exploitation, tribalism, religious sectarianism and the slave-like dependence of women," as "contradictions in society left over from the Middle Ages," would be cleared away. In regard to "the question of leadership" the Program declared that "the fundamental force of the revolution (would) be the worker-peasant alliance." The proletariat would provide "the ideological, political, and organizational leadership," while the peasantry would constitute the "main force" of the "popular army." Given "the colonialists' extremely harsh repression...the methods of struggle are of necessity based to a large extent on violence."⁹⁴

Hence the revolution would ensure that a number of specific "tasks" would be accomplished: (1) "All land belonging to landowners, except for patriotic elements, will be confiscated, nationalized and distributed free to peasants having little land." (2) "All the debts of poor peasants, usurers, and banks will be cancelled." (3) "The economy will be directed through central planning (and) priority will be given to the development of nationalized heavy industry." (4) "One of the Kurdish dialects will be

⁹⁴ Gunter cites the PKK's program in his book, p. 59.

encouraged to develop into the national language." (5) "The workers'-peasants' government...will...provide no military bases or privileges to any other country." (6) "To support the unity of Kurdistan...efforts will be made to ensure the closest possible support and solidarity among the revolutionary forces fighting in every section," i.e., Iran, Iraq and Syria. (7) "Friendship with the socialist countries, alliance with the National Liberation Movements and solidarity with the working class movement and democratic trends in every part of the world will be established."⁹⁵

After the announcement of the establishment of the PKK, the first actions focused on Kurdish chieftains and landlords in southeast Anatolia. The PKK accused some landlords of abusing and victimizing the local peasants. This underground Kurdish organization, in order to solidify its influence, even attacked other political groups organized in the same area. Interestingly enough, most of the organizations attacked by the PKK were Kurdish nationalists. For example; the KUK (National Liberation of Kurdistan), "a group that had established deep roots there among most of the different social elements," was attacked by the PKK.⁹⁶ The PKK, as the most violent and radical Kurdish movement, was later branded a "social chauvinist" by other illegal Turkish leftist organizations such as the Devrimci Halkin Birliđi (Revolutionary Unity of People), the Halkin Kurtuluđu (Liberation of People), and the KUK, a Kurdish leftist organization. According to Öcalan, "In the beginning the party was insufficiently

⁹⁵ Gunter, p. 59-60.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 62.

organized and its activities were ineffective."⁹⁷ For that reason, perhaps, the party's first revenues came from bank robberies. Due to the party's operating location (on Turkey's southeastern border with Iran, Iraq and Syria), arms and narcotics smuggling also provided a considerable amount of income to the PKK.⁹⁸ However, Abdullah Öcalan strongly rejected the PKK's involvement with any narcotics and smuggling. "We have been financed by our people" said Öcalan in his interview with Birand; but he also admitted that the PKK was involved in a few robberies in the beginning.⁹⁹ Although some students and worker organizations seemed to provide support for the party, most of the Kurds in the region, especially the intellectuals and bourgeoisie strata, resented the PKK's violent tactics and labeled them as 'brutal, reckless and irresponsible.' Until the military coup in 1980, the party was able to operate its propaganda with increasing freedom.

a. The September 12 Military Coup and the PKK

Starting in the 1970s, Turkey had been suffering from political-social instability giving way to terrorism and anarchy. The Kurdish activities in Turkey were just a small portion of the overall picture. Particularly, the PKK was still one of the weakest Kurdish movements among the other better organized Kurdish factions. Finally on September 12, 1980, the Turkish military took over and started demolishing every organization that was

⁹⁷ Dogu Perincek, Abdullah Öcalan İle Görüşme, (İstanbul: Sistem yayincilik, 1990).

⁹⁸ Gunter cites Steinitz., "Insurgents, Terrorists and the Drug Trade," The Washington Quarterly, (Fall 1985), 145.

⁹⁹ Birand, p. 90.

believed to be causing anarchy. According to official figures, the new military government placed on trial almost 20,000 suspects as of March 31, 1983. Over 15,000 of them were accused of being members of "left-wing terrorist" organizations, as opposed to less than 1,000 right wing group members who were detained on similar charges.¹⁰⁰ These figures illustrate that although some of the right-wing radical groups seemed to be harmed, in reality the coup's main aim was to destroy the left-wing establishments which were considerably successful in creating disorder in Turkey. The Kurdish separatism did not seem to be such a major threat to the new central government. Only 3,177 people were charged with "separatist actions"¹⁰¹ of which those in the PKK, by far the largest separatist group, accounted for 1,790. There are two possible conclusions which can be drawn from this figure: either (a) it proves that the PKK was very vulnerable and hence many of its members were easily captured, or (b) that the PKK members were involved in more illegal movements than any other Kurdish organizations. In my opinion both conclusions can apply to the PKK, as the largest Kurdish separatist movement. Nonetheless, Kurdish separatism was seen to be a secondary threat to the regime by the Turkish leadership. Not many predicted that the PKK would become the most important threat to Turkey's national integrity.

100 Gunter, p. 67.

101 Gunter cites this figures from the books 12 September in Turkey: Before and After. Ankara: Ongun Kardesler Printing House, 1982. p.245-50 and Anarchy and Terrorism in Turkey (1982) published by Evren's new government.

According to a retired MİT (Turkish National Intelligence Organization) officer, "for MİT, Ocalan was not a Kurdish nationalist. If one looks at the secret files of MİT from 1970 through 1979, one can see that he was described as an extreme leftist Kurd. He was not paid attention to very much. In fact, in the 1970s, Kurdish movements were considered leftist movements. They were put under surveillance. Their actions were known by the secret agents but since they were acting together with the leftists, their leftist features were emphasized and their nationalistic color was ignored." The retired officer went on to explain "We, as MİT, knew the reality but failed to convince the central authorities. They did not believe or want to believe us."¹⁰²

All and all, by 1983, the military regime seemed to break the backbone of the Turkish left, including Kurdish separatism. On the other hand, the incidents after 1984 showed that, instead of being destroyed, the PKK, in reality, gained incredible power. Now the question to be asked is how the PKK managed to survive while the other (mainly Turkish leftist) more powerful organizations were almost completely torn apart. Ocalan answers the question by praising his own sixth sense and leadership qualities: "In 1979, our position was a very critical one. On the one hand, other Kurdish organizations were attacking the party; on the other, the Turkish military was giving us such a rough time that we could not even breathe. In May 1979, I decided to escape from Turkey. Syria was the country I could easily infiltrate. My plan was to sneak into Syria

¹⁰² Birand, p. 99.

and then go to Lebanon where I could find a safe base for my organization."¹⁰³

In the end he not only managed to reestablish his headquarters in Syria and a military training camp in Bekaa Valley of Lebanon (This part of Lebanon is controlled unofficially by Syria) but also to contact Palestinian organizations (particularly the Hawatme). At that time the Palestinian organizations were not very happy with the policy that Turkey pursued against them. It was beneficial for a Palestinian organization to support a separatist organization which could, then, be used as pawn against Turkey. According to Birand, the Palestinians' purpose behind providing a camp, military training and weapons for the PKK was to utilize them for terrorist designs within Turkey.¹⁰⁴ "When the military took over," said Öcalan, "I managed to transfer my organization from Turkey to Lebanon. This was one of my major successes in saving the PKK from being deactivated. Other illegal organizations in Turkey were completely crushed. Their militants, weapons and even leaders were captured and imprisoned. During this time, however, my guerrillas were training in Lebanon." Abdullah Öcalan greatly enjoyed Hafiz Assad's support for his organization and hence reestablished his headquarters in Damascus during which time, however, his fighters engaged in military training in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon. According to Gunter, Öcalan "acquired a villa in that city (Damascus), traveled about in a red Mercedes provided by

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 107-108.

the Syrians, and enjoyed the protection of bodyguards from that state."¹⁰⁵

In July 1981, the PKK's first congress was held at the Lebanese-Syrian border. In round numbers, one hundred of the PKK elite who managed to escape from Turkey before the military coup attended; They criticized the party's tactics and organizational activities in this first PKK congress. The political report issued by the congress concluded that it was time to return to Turkey and to organize armed propaganda. Broad military and political training was called for. At the same time, the party extended its contacts to Europe. Particularly, West Germany and Sweden were targeted, due to compact Kurdish populations who were established there as workers or political refugees.

The year 1982 was a very productive one for the PKK. Israel invaded Lebanon and crushed every training camp in the Bekaa Valley. During that time, the PKK fought against the Israeli army along with the Palestinians. (The PKK was sharing the same military camp with the Hawatme allocated by Syria.) In the end, the Hawatme emptied the camp and retreated to remote parts of Lebanon in order to be safe from future Israeli threats. This created a very suitable opportunity for the PKK. The camp was totally occupied by the Kurdish Workers' Party. The PKK's active participation in opposing the Israeli invasion provided the party considerable credibility among the Palestinian organizations.

¹⁰⁵ Gunter, p. 71.

Under these circumstances, the Second Congress was convened, (20-25 August 1982), according to which the party would start organizing armed propaganda in Turkey. After the congress, Ocalan emerged in full control and from then on remained the 'only authority.' The political program of the Second Congress declared that the armed and the political struggle in Turkish Kurdistan would be managed together. The three stages of this combined struggle were identified as: (1) a strategic defense, (2) a balance of forces, and (3) a strategic attack period.¹⁰⁶ While preparing for the military struggle in progress, the party was very effective in recruiting members not only from Turkey but also from Europe.

In August 1984, the PKK established an armed unit called Hazen Rizgariya Kurdistan (HRK), or Kurdistan Freedom Brigades, which was better organized than the former guerrilla groups. Immediately after, the HRK established three armed propaganda units and named them *March 21, July 14, and May 18 Armed Propaganda Units*. The establishment of the HRK was announced to the world on the 15th of August 1984 when two very well organized attacks occurred on Eruh and Semdinli, two Kurdish villages, 200 miles apart. In each of these two attacks, about forty guerrillas sneaked into the villages and held them for one hour. According to eyewitnesses, during this one hour the PKK militants, by 'wearing a type of uniform' and by using mosques' speakers, tried to incite the villagers against the central authority; they were also wearing a kind

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 72.

of military uniform.¹⁰⁷ Another striking feature of these two attacks was that the insurgents even brought medical teams with them. According to many observers, this is clear proof of how well the HRK units were organized. Nevertheless, although these units were quite effective in 'hit and run' attacks, they were far from providing the military force necessary to create liberated zones in the region. Turkish authorities described the HRK as "a duplicate of the Vietcong."¹⁰⁸ The one thing the HRK did accomplish, however, was to bring a nationalist-separatist color to the PKK movement.

Realizing that armed propaganda was not sufficient for the creation of an independent Kurdistan, the PKK leadership decided to form a new military flank within the PKK. On May 21, 1985, the Kurdistan National Liberation Front, or ERNK, was created, and Öcalan's right-hand man Mahsun Korkmaz was named as its first commander. The ERNK's main purpose was to extend its offensive against Turkish military units and to organize local uprisings. The Turkish military, however, was prepared for such hit-and-run attacks. The Turkish military leadership in 1985 began taking PKK separatism very seriously. When the ERNK units launched offenses at their targets, they were shocked at the incredible number of Turkish military resisting them. The ERNK's military offenses in 1985-86 did not prove to be very successful, and the Kurds suffered considerable

¹⁰⁷ Birand, p.126.

¹⁰⁸ Gunter, p.74.

losses. Even the commander of ERNK, Mahsun Korkmaz was killed by Turkish troops in 1986.

In the 1980s, the PKK used the Iraqi border in order to infiltrate into Turkey, due to the fact that the Iraqi border with Turkey is longer than the Syrian border and less controllable because of its very mountainous terrain. Öcalan created new camps in Iraqi Kurdistan based on the agreement reached with Mesut Barzani, the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in early 1980s. According to the accord signed by Öcalan and Barzani, the two parties would collaborate with other revolutionary forces in the region and create new alliances. Northern Iraq was strategically important for the PKK's future. To retaliate against the PKK using the Iraqi border, Turkish air force jets bombed northern Iraq several times and also launched other cross-border army operations aiming to destroy the PKK camps.

In October 1986, the PKK held its Third Congress, according to which it established another sub-organization, the People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan or the ARGK. The goal was announced by the Congress: "in the period ahead for the tactical development to create a guerrilla army from armed propaganda and at the same time (to set) up the people's army and formally (begin) constructive work."¹⁰⁹ According to the decision taken by the PKK leadership, the HRK was abolished and the ARGK replaced the HRK units. Indeed, the difference between HRK

¹⁰⁹ Gunter quotes from the Turkish weekly Briefing Study. For more information see Gunter's note 3 in Chapter 5 p.68.

and ARGK was nothing but size. ARGK was supposed to be the army of the PKK. However, the following events proved that numerous military and political actions were taken in the name of ERNK, not the ARGK.

Another decision taken by the PKK's Third Congress was to attack the 'village guard system' and the village guards who were Kurdish villagers loyal to the regime. The village guard system was created by the central government in 1985. Ankara's purpose in setting up the village guard system was to protect villages in the southeastern Anatolia from guerrilla offensives. The guards were paramilitary forces supplementing the Turkish regular armed units.

The PKK reacted to this system aggressively by stressing that the Turkish government would make the Kurds kill each other, and warned the guards not to collaborate with the government. The heavily tribal structure of the village guard system demonstrated one of the most important dynamics among the Kurds: tribalism. That is to say, with a few exceptions, most of the guards belonged to the tribes whose leaders were threatened by the PKK's growing influence in their jurisdiction.

As a response to the village guard system, the PKK assaulted civilian targets in the area and killed many Kurdish civilians, accusing them of being 'collaborators.' The victims were primarily innocent women and children believed to be blood relatives of the village guards. On June 20th, 1987, the PKK guerrilla units massacred 30 Kurdish villagers, including 16 children and 8 women, in the village of Pinarcik of Mardin province. One month later, the PKK units attacked two more villages (Yuvalli and

Peçenek), and killed some 30 more civilians. Three more raids took place in the same region in August 1987, and 27 people (25 of them civilians) lost their lives.

With these massacres, the PKK managed to draw international attention to the "Kurdish problem;" however, the party lost its credibility in the eyes of fellow Kurdish, as well as non-Kurdish, organizations. Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, replied to the question of "why the PKK killed innocent civilians" in his interview with Mehmet Ali Birand: "I must admit that such events happened. In the beginning I did not think that this was the work of my organization. Unfortunately later it was understood that the guerrillas, with their primitive sense of blood feud, killed civilians."¹¹⁰ In another interview with Doğu Perinçek, Turkish journalist and the leader of the Socialist Party, Abdullah Öcalan defended the PKK by stating "my organization has killed women and children; I suffered as much as anybody else. But this is a war, and as you know, in wars many women and children die. Our war is one in which the fewest number of innocent people have lost their lives."¹¹¹

Although these bloody attacks in 1987 brought the organization international attention, in reality the PKK suffered many serious setbacks. The most important of all was that Barzani terminated his agreement with the PKK, accusing Öcalan's violent tactics of destroying the positive

¹¹⁰ Birand, p. 145-146.

¹¹¹ Perincek, p. 47.

Kurdish image in the West. This termination meant that the PKK had to give up its beneficial location in northern Iraq.

b. Relations with the Other Organizations

'Irresponsible actions' harmed the PKK's reputation among the other organizations, too. According to Gunter, "conscious of its need for new allies, the PKK issued a call to all Turkish Kurds for havakiri (action unity). The SPTK (Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan), the Rizgari and the Kawa, however, rejected the call because of Ocalan's violent tactics against civilians and, along with at least five other Turkish Kurdish organizations--including the KUK (National Liberation of Kurdistan), the Ala Rizgari, the PPKK or Pesheng (Kurdish Vanguard Workers Party) and the socialist wing of the KUK (KUK-SE)--established an alliance against the PKK called Tevger or the Kurdistan Liberation Movement."¹¹² The political program of Tevger called also for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state based on *political struggle* with no terrorism.

The more serious threat came from the Turkish leftist organizations. Dev-Yol (Revolutionary Road) and the Turkish Workers-Peasant Liberation Army (TIKKO) supposedly agreed to fight against the PKK if it continued to hit the civilian targets. Moreover, most of the Turkish leftist organizations went as far as labeling the PKK a 'fascist' Kurdish organization.

During this period, the leadership of the PKK was somewhat illogical in its declarations. Ocalan, on the one hand, was arguing that "The allegations of the Turkish rulers that the liberation movement attacked

¹¹² Gunter, p. 84.

civilians also is a shameless lie. The so-called 'civilians' are well-armed and well-paid mercenaries who bring dishonor to the name 'Kurd;'"¹¹³ on the other hand, he admitted that the killing of civilians by the PKK was an organizational mistake and declared he would punish the units involved in such killings. It was after this admission that the PKK regained potentially important allies from the Turkish left. Dev-Sol (Revolutionary Left) signed a protocol of cooperation with the PKK to support it in Turkey and abroad.¹¹⁴ As a result, while the Turkish leftist organizations who had an agreement with the PKK were able to send some of their members to rural areas in southeast Anatolia or the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon for training or to be hidden, Öcalan obtained safe places in the urban areas in exchange. This was the beginning of the era during which the PKK committed offenses in metropolitan cities.

The PKK also established a relationship with the Armenian nationalist organization ASALA or the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia. The Kurds and the Armenians have been considered by a majority of observers to be 'sworn enemies' whose irredendist claims against Turkey were simply incompatible. Prior to and during World War I, the two peoples ruthlessly attacked and killed each other in order to extend their territory. The Kurds and the Armenians, being radically loyal to different religious faiths, had little in common; however, after the Şeyh Said Revolt, these two groups of peoples collaborated against the mutual

¹¹³ Gunter cites National Liberation Front of Kurdistan, "Genocide: After the Armenians, the Kurds," (July 1987), 27.

¹¹⁴ Gunter cites Briefing, see his footnote # 85, p.95.

enemy 'Turkey' in 1927. The Hoybun, a Kurdish-Armenian organization, was established by the Kurds who managed to escape from Turkey after the Şeyh Said Revolt and the Armenian irredendist organization Dashnakians (established by Armenian nationalists who lived outside of Turkey).

Presently, a Kurdish and an Armenian organization, namely the PKK and the ASALA, declared their 'cooperation' against Turkey in Sidon, Lebanon on April 6, 1980.¹¹⁵ By then, ASALA members had reportedly joined PKK units when they fought against Turkish troops. Turkish authorities claimed that the PKK employed non-Kurd and non-Muslim guerrillas and declared that some of the killed PKK guerrillas were not circumcised. The Turkish newspaper Tercüman asserted that the PKK recruited Syrian Armenians, not only for guerrilla offenses but also for communication purposes; in this way the PKK would be able to use the Armenian language for secret messages.¹¹⁶ The importance of this Kurdish-Armenian agreement was that PKK fighters, who were exclusively traditional Muslims, were collaborating with a Christian organization that would launch offensives against fellow Muslim Turks and Kurds. This violated the social dynamics of the Kurds who suffered greatly in Armenian assaults during World War II. Although this was a dangerous ploy for the Kurdish Workers Party, the European magazine The Economist suggested that "It may be that a tactical alliance between Kurds and

¹¹⁵ Gunter, p. 114.

¹¹⁶ Tercuman, April 8, 1988.

Armenians, said to have been concluded some three years ago, is in operation on the ground. (...) Armenian brains and world-wide links combined with Kurdish military experience would produce a formidable guerrilla movement."¹¹⁷ Monte Melkonian, a dissident ASALA leader, described the PKK-ASALA cooperation as "more (...) a tactical ploy than a strategic alliance."¹¹⁸ The Kurdish-Armenian collaboration has occurred only at the elite level and was tactical. The lower socioeconomic strata of Kurds and Armenians usually were not aware of this cooperation, which violated both peoples' popular will. For that reason, the leadership of Kurdish and Armenian organizations avoided stressing their mutual involvement, in order not to irritate the lower social strata which provided public support to the movements.¹¹⁹ Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, in his interview with Mehmet Ali Birand preferred ambiguous answers to the question of the PKK-ASALA relation. According to him, there was no cooperation other than a few meetings between the two organizations, and even this, he said, has been exaggerated.¹²⁰ The PKK's association with a radical Armenian organization opposed to not only the Turks but also the Kurds who were against the PKK was utilized by the Turks to discredit the recent Kurdish movement in the eyes of the common Kurds.

¹¹⁷ Gunter cites "The Common Enemy," *The Economist*, (June 18, 1983), 55-56.

¹¹⁸ Gunter cites *Armenian Reporter*, (January 17, 1985), 2

¹¹⁹ From my experience in the region I can attest that the Kurdish peasants who provide military force to the PKK for example, are traditionalist Islamists and completely against such a cooperation with the Armenians.

¹²⁰ Birand, p. 187-188.

c. Analysis of the Participation in the PKK Revolt

According to Bruinessen the PKK's "members were drawn almost exclusively from the lowest social classes--the uprooted, half-educated village and small town youth who knew what it felt like to be oppressed, and who wanted action, not ideological sophistication."¹²¹ Particularly, the Turkish prisons were a source providing the PKK with guerrillas. Birand uses an interview with a non-Kurdish prisoner in his book: "The bad treatment in the Diyarbakir prison was so humiliating that it created solidarity among all political groups regardless of ethnic background. My organization was not a Kurdish one, but we were amazed by the way the PKK resisted the torture. Before, no one knew who they were; thereafter they became heroes in the prison. Their resistance created a "Kurdish" consciousness. In other words, state torture helped the PKK to grow."¹²² Indeed, the main reason for the PKK's growth is "regretful treatment" by the central authority of the Kurds. Action creates reaction. The inadequate techniques of the state helped suppressed peoples to organize against the state.

Western Europe was another region from which the PKK recruited active members, mostly immigrant and low-paid laborers. The Kurdish workers in Europe who experienced bad treatment and humiliation were given an honorable ideal by the PKK and were sent to Lebanon for training.

¹²¹ Bruinessen M.V. "Between Guerrilla War and Political Murder: The Workers' Party of Kurdistan," Middle East Report, (July-August 1988), 40.

¹²² Birand p. 119.

Again and again throughout history, rebel fighters have been drafted from the lower strata of society, young or middle-aged people who have nothing to lose. Since a portion of the Kurds in Turkey (and elsewhere) belongs to a lower social stratum, the Kurdish Workers' Party did not have great difficulty in finding man power. The other commonality among the PKK guerrillas is their loosely politicized character which is very effective in maintaining the proper discipline within a military structure. The participation of females as active guerrillas in military units is one of the most striking differences between the PKK and previous Kurdish revolts. Young women are employed as guerrillas in the military units, and their military training is not much different from men's training. Mehmet Ali Birand, during his visit to the PKK's camp in Bekaa Valley, notes the role of women; "during my visit to the camp, I saw four women militants with their weapons. Contrary to what might be expected, they were not serving food nor were they washing dishes. Instead, They participated in the exhausting guerrilla training."¹²³ However, gender relations in the organization are very strictly monitored. Male-female romance is prevented by the belief that such relationships can harm the discipline of the party.

d. Authority Structure of the Party

Although the PKK seems to a political party, the internal dynamics of it prove that the PKK is a "one-man" organization and that the distribution of power is very dissimilar to a democratic (in a Western sense)

¹²³ Ibid., p 166.

structure. Öcalan is the absolute figure, holding power and wielding authority. Öcalan's former right-hand-man Huseyin Yildirim (who later turned against Öcalan), underlined the same point, claiming that "there is no democracy in the party. He who opposes Öcalan's decisions is soon eliminated." He maintains that Öcalan is the only decision-maker and no one can dare to attempt to organize any action without consulting him.¹²⁴

Celal Talabani, the leader of the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), also criticizes the followers of Apo for idolizing him as a supernatural being. "We have counted 27 pictures of Öcalan in a single PKK published magazine," says Talabani in his interview with Rafet Balli, a Turkish journalist; "even Molla Mustafa Barzani (a legend Kurdish leader) was not idolized so excessively."¹²⁵

Mehmet Ali Birand further describes the authority structure of the PKK by stating that "there are three types of PKK members; those in Turkey, those in Europe and those who stay with Öcalan. Naturally, the last group occupies the second level of hierarchy after Öcalan who is the indisputable leader of the PKK, with his words being equal to a written constitution."¹²⁶

Apo's desire to control the organization in person opens him to many accusations of being a 'dictator.' However, the leader of the PKK denies all such accusations, saying "I hate dictatorship and I am not a

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.48.

¹²⁵ Rafet Balli, *Kürt Dosyası*. (İstanbul: Cem yay.3rd. edition 1992).

¹²⁶ Birand, p. 161.

dictator. On the other hand, I believe that it is necessary for the Kurds to be controlled by an authority figure to maintain order."¹²⁷

e. The PKK and Religion

Knowing that the Kurds are loyal to their religion, the PKK did not want to oppose Islam. Öcalan's main aim was to blend religion with Marxist ideology. However, this was not an easy thing to do. General belief among the ordinary Kurdish people held that religion and Marxism are incompatible. For most of the common Kurds, being a Marxist is equal to being godless. For that reason, Öcalan did not stress the Marxist-Leninist ideology of his organization, in order not to lose ground among the Kurdish community. He even attacked the secularism implemented by the central authority. Öcalan once claimed that "It should not be believed that secularism is progressive. Secularism, in fact, serves the Western imperialism by preventing nationalistic establishments in the Middle East."¹²⁸ In his interview with Doğu Perinçek he maintained that "one should oppose against as long as it collaborates with Western interests. However, secularism should be supported insofar as it reacts against backwardness. Religion in Turkey is grounded in reactionaryism, and enforcing religion together with religious ideology in Kurdistan is manipulative.(...) Islam is, in reality, a political revolution. It is a transition from tribalism to a state system."¹²⁹ In the same interview he also criticized the socialist approach towards religion: "Leftist movements

¹²⁷ Balli, p. 284-285.

¹²⁸ Gunter cites Serxwebun, (July-August 1989 no:91-92)

¹²⁹ Perincek, p. 100-101.

made mistakes in gaining public support. By ignoring religion have they pushed the ordinary people away from socialist entities. This resulted in lack of mass support for the leftist organizations. Therefore all leftist movements were sentenced to lose their power in Turkey. Hence, it is also the PKK's aim to correct these mistakes."¹³⁰

Election results from the 1970s to the present show that political parties who stressed religion have been voted for by 20% of the population in southern Anatolia, the highest percentage in the nation for any particular region. Compared to the Iraqi and Iranian Kurdish socio-political structure, religion is in the foreground among the Turkish Kurds. In other words, the political preference of the Turkish Kurds is for Islamic parties.¹³¹

In another interview with Rafet Balli, the leader of the PKK interpreted the increasing popularity of religion as a political preference in southeastern Turkey as follows:

Secularism and its implementations in Turkey have provoked reactionary circles and forced them to unify under an Islamic political party. I do not think that religion has developed. At the same time, the central authority, in order to prevent nationalistic consciousness, encouraged religion with the collaboration of Saudi Arabian capital. The Tarikats were supported by the government in order to pacify us, and our members have been recruited by the Tarikats. In my opinion, it is not the Islamic political parties but the Tarikats which have

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ The National Salvation Party (MSP) which after the 1980 military takeover came to be known as the Welfare Party (RP), is the leading Islamic party in Turkey and is very powerful in the Kurdish areas.

greatly developed. The Naksibendi Tarikat, especially, has gained increasing importance. Even The Turkish President Turgut Ozal is a member of this Tarikat.¹³²

Ocalan was wrong in stating that the Tarikats gained importance after the 1980s. It is my conclusion that the Tarikats have always been important in the region and active, not only in spiritual guidance but also in political influence. The Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) managed to raise its potential votes to 20-25% with the Tarikats' support. In contrast with the Seyh Said era, the recent political participation in the Tarikats has not come directly from the southeast part of Turkey but rather indirectly.

Because the Tarikats were outlawed, the RP accommodated the political activities of these mystic orders in its structure. Many Tarikat members captured highly influential positions in levels of government. In order not to be totally destroyed, the Tarikats in southern Anatolia replaced their direct non-conformist, reactionary tendencies with an indirect involvement policy. Involvement in the daily politics was re-established through Welfare Party. Thus, they could no longer be a target for the central authority.

The Tarikats' reaction against the Marxist Kurdish organization was pacifist and mild. Although some religious organizations became targets of the PKK, there is no evidence that the PKK harmed any Tarikat leader. According to my personal informants, the PKK does not dare to oppose Tarikats in the region because the reaction of the followers would be

¹³² Balli, p. 298-299.

unpredictable. In the same way, the Tarikats have not fought against the PKK as long as they do not interfere with the authority of the Tarikats.

The PKK has, however, been threatened by another religious entity in the region which has come to be known as the Hizbullah.¹³³ According to Ocalan, no religious organization that operates against the PKK; he says that the Hizbullah is a contra-guerrilla organization formed by the Turkish government in order to convince the public that the PKK operates from shaky.¹³⁴ However, a Turkish daily newspaper interviewed a Hizbullah member who claims that the Hizbullah is not a contra-guerrilla organization, on the contrary, it opposes the Turkish authority as much as it does the PKK.¹³⁵

Whether there is such an Islamic anti-PKK movement in Turkey or not, what is more important is how religion is used to manipulate Kurdish public opinion. A weekly Turkish magazine, Nokta, asserts that the central authority is utilizing religion in the southeastern Turkey through official religious institutions. İmams or religious preachers have been ordered by the government Religious Affairs Department (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) to preach against PKK separatism in their Friday sermons .¹³⁶

¹³³ "The Party of God," founded in Iran in 1982 in order to extend the Iranian Islamic revolution to Lebanon. According to the Turkish magazine Nokta the Hizbullah militants are trained in Iran before being organized in Turkey. Nokta, 23 August 1992, No:34 p. 11.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 11-15.

¹³⁵ Engin, A. Cumhuriyet. "Hizbullah: TC Bize Muhtac" 17 February 1993 p.1.

¹³⁶ Nokta, p.15.

Realizing that success is impossible without the support of ordinary Kurds, who are very religious, the PKK has employed religion in its propagandistic methods, contrary to its Marxist philosophy. Abdullah Ocalan's approach to religion conflicts with that of leftist ideology. In his book, The Revolutionary Approach to the Dilemma of Religion (Din Sorununa Devrimci Yaklaşım), the leader of the PKK praises the anti-imperialist aspects of Islam. Ocalan states that anti-imperialistic features of the religion, which also forms a part of the people's background, should be utilized in a such way that the PKK gains power.¹³⁷

The usage of religion as a tool can be readily viewed in a flyer handed out in Mecca and Medina to Kurdish pilgrims by the ERNK units (PKK's military branch). This presents clear evidence of how the PKK, a Marxist organization, uses religion in order to obtain Kurdish public support. The flyer is full of religious slogans, all of which are written in Turkish. For example, the very first sentence of the flyer is a quotation from the Koran, "In the name of God" (Bismillahi rahmani rahim). The flyer goes on to imply that the leader of the PKK, Öcalan, has been given a mission by God. "Every people and nation are worried by a tyrant," says ERNK in the handout, "and God sends a person with extraordinary quality to these suppressed people to help them. It is our leader Ocalan who has been appointed by God to save 35 million Kurds."¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Nokta quotes a section of Ocalan's book, p.14.

¹³⁸ The flyer was mentioned by Nokta, 23 August 1992 Year:10 No:34 p.14-15.

f. Conclusion

The PKK was born from Turkish leftist movements and adopted armed propaganda methods in order to disseminate its ideology. Although the party was named "the Worker's Party" in order to stress its Marxist-Leninist line, in practice, the class struggle was the last point on which the PKK focused its attention. The PKK, in the beginning, copied the Turkish leftist organizations' tactics which stressed class struggle. Because there are defined social classes in Turkey, it was not very hard for the Turkish leftist groups to apply Marxist ideology. However, for a Kurdish movement, Marxist methodology was burdensome to apply. Since there are not any clearly defined social classes among the Kurds, the Marxist ideology which stressed a "class struggle" needed to be reworked. Realizing that leftist approaches towards the ethnic problems could exclude the Kurdish society which is exclusively tribal, the PKK created a new ideology which mixed Marxism and religious ideology at the same time. Religion, for example, was used heavily to reach the Kurdish masses, unlike in other leftist movements. Heavy emphasis on Kurdish nationalism came to replace the Marxist ideology. This caused other leftist Kurdish organizations to label the PKK a "Fascist Kurdish organization." The Turkish left discredited Ocalan by accusing him of "practicing racism of the minority" in Turkey. In the end, classical Marxism has failed to provide an ideology for an independent Kurdish state due to the lack of participation from the majority of the Kurds, whose religious life plays a significant role.

Although the PKK accomplished the goal of consolidating the Kurdish nationalistic consciousness, it, like the other Kurdish movements in history, has failed to unite the Kurdish groups. In principle, Islam rejects nationalism and favors of the Ümmet (community of believers). At the present time, Islamic organizations are trying to unify against the leftist and the nationalist movements in the region. The fighting in the region is now mainly between the PKK and militarily organized radical Kurdish Islamic groups who oppose not only Turkish, but also Kurdish nationalism.

Tarikats, as the most influential religious organizations, are trying not to become involved in this struggle between militant Islam and the PKK. It is my opinion that the Tarikats' involvement in this struggle could change the balance of power.

Due to the fact that the PKK uses violence and terror as a main instrument of struggle, diplomatic relations with foreign powers have become almost impossible. In my judgment, the main reason for the PKK's emergence is the neglect on the part of Turkish governments; however, the chief reason the PKK survives is not only the internal motivations of the Kurdish society but also transnational support. There are 500,000 Kurds living in Europe: Germany shelters 400,000 Kurds, while France (60,000), Sweden (10,000), and Belgium (5,000) share the rest. Each of these states permits the PKK to operate a bureau which tries to organize the Kurds for an ultimate war against the Turkish state. A considerable number of the PKK guerrillas were recruited from Europe. The Kurdish question in Turkey provides a great opportunity to discredit

Turkey in the international arena, and the PKK becomes one the best tools to be used against Turkey.

Besides European countries, Syria also uses the PKK as a trump card. Threatened by Turkey's project to dam the Euphrates River, which could deprive Syria of its chief supply of irrigation water, Syrian President Hafiz Assad provided a training camp for the PKK in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon under the protection of Syria. After the Gulf War Saddam Huseyin, in order to punish Turkey for allying with the United Nations against Iraq, equipped the PKK with heavy weapons. As a result the casualties in the following year rose 95.6%, compared to past years combined.¹³⁹

One way or another, the PKK has managed to call international attention to the Kurdish problem in Turkey one more time. It is also an undeniable truth that by filling the vacuum of power left by the central authority, this radical Kurdish separatist uprising became a source of hope for many lower strata Kurds. Although it fails to unite different Kurdish fragments and create an independent state, it has proven and re-emphasized that there is a Kurdish problem in the region and that ignoring it is definitely not the solution. The PKK revolt is also a clear indication that violence coming from both sides cannot be a method to solve the problem; on the contrary violence only creates new problems.

¹³⁹ While the casualties by October 1991 were 2824, by the end of October 1992 this figure reached 5400. Between August 1984 (when the PKK started its offenses) to October 1991 approximately 403 people lost their lives from both sides annually. See Ugur Mumcu, Cumhuriyet, 26 October 1991 and FBIS-WEU 92/196, 8 October 1992.

The PKK's uprising could readily be described as a *blood feud*, seeking revenge against the Turkish central authority. The political sophistication of the Kurdish revolt is poor. The Marxist ideology that the PKK adopted is not a conscious choice, but rather was the only available option. During the time in which the PKK emerged, reactionary or non-conformist movements were identified with leftist ideologies. Hence, Abdullah Öcalan had to adopt leftist ideology in order to provide himself a foundation. If one looks at the practices of the party, one can see that, although Öcalan intends to use Marxist methodology, the structure of the movement is chiefly tribal and not based on politically sophisticated. Because of this feature, the PKK revolt exhibits both many similarities to the Şeyh Said Revolt and many differences. The following section will compare these two revolts, and hence try to observe what changes have occurred in the Kurdish nationalist discourse.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

A. COMPARING AND CONTRASTING THE TWO REVOLTS

Throughout history, humans have identified with, and devoted their loyalty to, particular social or political groups with which they are identified. However, the boundaries of these social and/or political groups change over time. In the twentieth century, people have been identified first and foremost with the nation in which they are born. In other words, humankind's sense of belonging appears in the twentieth century in the form of a "nation-state." The national ideology of every nation state presents the nation as an eternal socio-political group to which every citizen should devote his/her loyalty. Every nationalist movement in the world imagines or creates its past in order to legitimize this ideology. According to Anthony D. Smith, "Of all the visions and faiths that compete for men's loyalties in the modern world, the most widespread and persistent is the national ideal. Other faiths have achieved more spectacular temporary success or a more permanent footing in one country. Other visions have roused men to more terrible and heroic acts. But none has been so successful in penetrating to every part of the globe, and its ability to attract to its ideals men and women of

every sort, in all walks of life in every country. No other ideal has been able to reappear in so many different guises (...)."¹⁴⁰

Needless to say, Smith is referring only to the twentieth century in his statements. Historically, the nation-state is a fairly new concept. For thousands of years, people have felt loyalty to their tribe, their religion and their king. "They were, "as Ernest Renan puts it, "flocks led by a son of the Sun or by a Son of Heaven (...). Classical antiquity had republics, municipal kingdoms, confederations of local republics and empires, yet it can hardly be said to have had nations in our understanding of the term."¹⁴¹ Even though it is debatable, many scholars agree that the concept of nation arose only after the French revolution. Religion gradually lost its power to structure society and, in many ways, nationalism superseded religion. People found a new ideology to die for, such as "independence, freedom."¹⁴² However, as Henry Grunwald argues, "Given such messianic megalomania, national freedom did not lead to individual freedom. On the contrary. In the name of the French nation, Paris long suppressed the national aspirations of Bretons and Normans; as soon as the Hungarians gained a measure of independence, they did the same with their Slavic minorities."¹⁴³ After two world wars, over ninety nations have declared their existence with a new sense of nationalism

¹⁴⁰ Anthony D. Smith, Nationalism in the Twentieth Century, (Oxford: Martin Robertson & Co. Ltd. 1979), 1.

¹⁴¹ Ernest Renan, "What is a nation," in Nation and Narration. ed. by Homi Bhabha. (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 8-22.

¹⁴² Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflection on The Origin and Spread of Nationalism, (London & New York: Verso, 1991), 2.

¹⁴³ Henry Grunward, "The year 2000: Is it end or just the beginning?" Time, 30 March 1992.

quite different from their previous allegiances. In today's world, the traditional nation-state is changing its structure again. Nations are exploding in two directions. Less stable nations are moving downward into smaller ethnic or religious units under the name of "national self-determination," such as Yugoslavia and the former USSR, whereas more developed ones are moving upward into larger units which is what political scientists call "neo-functional structures." The European Community is the most striking example of the latter type group.¹⁴⁴

Unstable communities contain many dissatisfied elements in their social formations. Dissatisfaction eventually creates conflicts which lead to violence and anger. In order to create a new nation, these dissatisfied units incite enmities which create an impossible to fix gap between the other units of society. Violence is considered legitimate in service of ideology. In reality, violence and anger are not necessary to the process of forming a nation, nor are they beneficial tools to halt separatism. On the contrary, violence only leads to social instability. Dissatisfied units again aspire to new national formations.

At this point, however, a number of questions should be asked, such as: If Henry Grunwald is right that "It makes no sense for every tribe, every cultural community to try to be sovereign,"¹⁴⁵ then what are the limits of the twentieth century's most used and abused concept of national self-determination? How can one accommodate such incompatible

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

concepts as self determination and unification? In this chapter, I will narrow down these questions to the Kurdish minority discourse on self determination in Republican Turkey. In order to show what has changed in Kurdish discourse, I will also compare and contrast two Kurdish rebellions: the Şeyh Said and The PKK Revolt.

The Şevh Said rebellion was the largest-scale uprising in Republican history, and most of the scholars agree that it was the inspiring factor the many following revolts. The PKK Revolt, on the other hand, is described as the most violent and internationally known uprising in Turkish Republican history. Each revolt perfectly mirrors characteristics of its era. In my opinion, although in form and methodology many things seem to have been changed, in essence the Kurdish discourse has not developed in terms of national self determination. If one looks at the weaknesses of the Şeyh Said rebellion, one is amazed that the same weaknesses still exist today.

a. Differences

In my judgment, the main difference between the two revolts is the structure of their leadership. Although the Azadi organization was largely responsible for constructing the rebellion, the Şeyh Said revolt was led entirely by religious leaders under the supreme command of Şeyh Said, a Naksibendi Şeyh. Because of a solid religious status quo in the area, Islam was the main factor in mobilizing the Kurdish masses to revolt. The nationalistic color of the rebellion was hidden behind religious slogans which were widely utilized by the leadership. The leadership of the revolt,

realizing that nationalistic propaganda could not be as effective as religious agitation, thus employed religion to gain mass support.

The leadership of The PKK Revolt, however, has felt no need to put on a religion facade. On the contrary, the leadership adopted Marxist ideology which excluded religious agitation by its very nature. However, recent developments have proved that the PKK, realizing the heavily religious structure of Kurdish society, began employing some religious slogans in the movement.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, no religious person took part in any stage of the rebellion.

Another difference is the participation in each of the two revolts. According to Robert Olson, the author of the book The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said: 1880-1925, the active participation of the Şeyh Said Revolt was 15,000,¹⁴⁷ while the PKK had, according to Süleyman Demirel, 2700 militants in Turkey and nearly 7,500 in northern Iraq.¹⁴⁸ The PKK's militants were highly trained and well equipped, whereas the participants of the Şeyh Said Revolt had no adequate prior military training and were ill-armed.

The PKK Revolt was the first Kurdish movement in Turkish Republican history that employed militant women so actively. Mehrdad Izady, the author of the book A Concise Handbook, The Kurds, states, "The PKK commands roughly between 10,000 and 15,000 peshmergas, with the

¹⁴⁶See the chapter titled "The PKK."

¹⁴⁷Olson, p. 108.

¹⁴⁸FBIS-WEU-92-172 3 September 1992, p.38.

highest number of female recruits of any Kurdish guerrilla group."¹⁴⁹ The Şeyh Said and the other following revolts exhibited traditional structures and the Kurdish women's role in these movements was restricted to logistic support. The PKK Revolt is the only one that underlined the role of women. According to Ocalan, the leader of the PKK movement, one of his goals was to free Kurdish women from traditionalist oppression and to utilize the potential power of Kurdish women.¹⁵⁰ The Şeyh Said Revolt and the following revolts maintained tribalism and traditionalism; the PKK movement, on the contrary, directly attacked the values that preceding movements had praised.

Between the Şeyh Said and The PKK Revolts, there were tremendous developments in technology throughout the world. Although it cannot be said that the PKK maximized their technology, especially in communication, compared to the Şeyh Said Revolt the PKK is much better at disseminating their ideology. The use of the printing press to promote a separatist movement in the time of Şeyh Said was limited to only a few typewriters, whereas the PKK managed to publish two newspapers, Berxwedan and Serxwebun, as well as a number of magazines.¹⁵¹ In 1991, Turkey's lawmakers removed the ban on the Kurdish language and allowed the Kurds to publish newspapers in Kurdish.

¹⁴⁹ Mehrdad Izady, The Kurds: A Concise Handbook, (Washington, Philadelphia, London: Taylor & Francis International Publishers, 1992), 217.

¹⁵⁰ Birand, p. 42-43.

¹⁵¹ Mumcu, "Kurt Yayinlari" Cumhuriyet, 11-22-92, p.17. Mumcu cited the information gathered by a German research institute, Turkei Kritisich-Informationen zur Lage der Menschenrechte in der Turkei und Turkishche-Kurdistan.

Thus, the printing press took a greater role in promoting Kurdish national consciousness.

The Western type of nationalism in most of the Middle East countries has been imposed from the top of society. Not many leaderships have wasted their time creating national consciousness. Nationalist movements have mostly been led by intellectuals, tribal leaders, or revolutionary military groups, and it was only after the creation of a nation state that nationalistic consciousness was taught to succeeding generations. With the disappearance of the transition generation, nationalism became the official ideology of states. The PKK movement exhibits subtly different characteristics. As opposed to other contemporary Kurdish movements, the PKK leadership did not consist of any of the elite groups. Leaders of the movement belong mostly to the lower level social strata. Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, himself was a son of a landless peasant. Throughout history Kurds have failed to create powerful enough political elites, whether bourgeois or intellectual, to lead separatist movements against the central authorities in the Middle East. In order to exist, the Kurdish bourgeois needed to collaborate with the national bourgeois of the center. The PKK movement, by adopting Marxist principles, wanted to transfer the leadership to the lower strata who had every reason to rebel because they felt excluded from enjoying the benefits of the center. Although this is a quite important change in emphasis for the Kurdish nationalist discourse, the possibility of success for

a nationalist movement lead by peasants and proletariat is, at least in my opinion, debatable.

Another difference between the two revolts derives from the increasing mobility of the Kurdish population. Domestic migration has increased enormously since 1920s. According to Turgut Özal (a former Turkish President who was very active in solving the Kurdish dilemma of Turkey), presently "60 percent of the Kurdish population live in the western part of Turkey."¹⁵² Over half a million Kurds live in Istanbul itself; ¹⁵³ this number was much lower in the early Republican era. Thus, the possibility of assimilation or integration into the host culture in western Turkey becomes stronger. In the same way, as a result of this integration intermarriage increases. Although the new Kurdish status quo in Turkey seems to favor integration, in reality the PKK movement has proved that there is still considerable potential for Kurdish national self-determination. If the Kurds continue to feel oppressed or excluded from political power, urbanized Kurds might become the backbone of a new Kurdish nationalist bourgeois class reclaiming their own roots to legitimize separation.

Although at first glance, the PKK and the Şeyh Said revolts seem quite different, upon closer examination one notices that there are as many similarities as contrasts. It is my conclusion that change in the Kurdish discourse was not very dramatic. The same weaknesses that the

¹⁵² FBIS-WEU-92-172, 3 September 1992 p.39.

¹⁵³ Kendal Nezan, "Kurdistan in Turkey" in A People Without a Country: The Kurds & Kurdistan, ed. by Gerard Chaliand, (New York: Olive Brach Press, 1993), 39.

Şeyh Said Revolt suffered constituted the same obstacles for the PKK movement. Studying the similarities between both revolts will provide enough evidence for my point.

b. Similarities

The PKK insurgence and the Şeyh Said Revolt are both separatist movements aiming to form a Kurdish nation-state in the Western sense. In the Şeyh Said movement, religion was used to reach the ultimate goal; however, since the concept of ethnic-based nationalism opposes the principles of Islam, Kurdish self-determination, in order to supply mass participation, was presented to the Kurdish masses as the "rescue of Islam." The PKK leadership clearly declared its ultimate goal to the world by ignoring the power of religion. Recently, however, the PKK came to feel the immediate need to accommodate several religious slogans, realizing the dense religious social structure in eastern Anatolia.¹⁵⁴

In the twentieth century, Kurdish discourse adopted many different ideologies for separation from Turkey. In this century, the periphery's opposition to a center was theorized as national self-determination. Being the world's largest stateless ethnic group, the Kurds adopted the idea of self-determination to show their dissatisfaction with the center. Although each Kurdish revolt appeared under a different guise, the common goal was to form a unified Kurdish state. The identity of the revolts was only a side-show which aimed to mobilize masses towards national self-determination. Şeyh Said wanted to establish a Kurdish state

¹⁵⁴ Look the chapter titled "The PKK movement."

in the Western sense and to implement Islam within this Kurdish nation. In the same way, the PKK movement aimed to form a nation-state and to establish socialism. No Kurdish revolts' leadership favored internationalism whether pan-Islamic or Marxist. In essence, Marxist or Islamic propaganda was nothing but manipulation to reach the supreme goal, which was to create a nation-state. Kurdish movements have adopted popular opposition ideologies in accord with their times. For example, in the 1920s, active opposition to the central authority was identified with Islam. Therefore, the Kurdish opposition appeared under the guise of Islam. In the 1970s, Marxism was the antithesis of the central ideology in Turkey, so the Kurdish movements installed Marxism as a new ideology. However, Marxism did not completely fit the current context of Kurdish society. The PKK movement arose as a Marxist organization not because the Kurdish leadership believed that Marxism would be a perfect choice for opposition, but because in reality it was the only ideology that was believed to have a chance to oppose the center. At this point, I will not hesitate to claim that the Marxist dimension of the PKK movement is as open to discussion as is the religious dimension of the Şeyh Said Revolt. In my opinion, the main reason why Abdullah Öcalan and his friends chose Marxism was to follow the fashion and to collaborate with other leftist opposition structures that were shaking the authority of the central government. In fact, one of the founders of the PKK, Haki Karer, who was later killed, was a Turkish leftist.

In the same manner, abolition of the caliphate constituted a great opportunity from 1925 onward for opposition movements to hind behind religious motives. Any movement in the 1920s had to apply religious agitation and the Tarikats, being non-conformist institutions, were widely used to implement popular opposition against secular statehood in Turkey. In conclusion, like any other separatist movement, both the PKK and the Şeyh Said movements adopted the popular opposition discourse of their times. Opposition discourse in Turkey is changing again, from Marxism to radical Islam, and future Kurdish movements likely will apply this ideology as their new discourse. It is my assessment that most of the time the main ideology of opposition in Turkey has not been determined by minority movements, but rather by the Turkish groups who constituted an alternative to the central authority.

Another similarity between the two revolts is the international approach to Kurdish self-determination. Although it is a fact that the PKK Revolt enjoyed more transnational support, as with the Şeyh Said Revolt, the support was manipulative. It was not sufficient to form a nation state but rather aimed to weaken Turkey in the international arena. Although scholars disagree on how much the Şeyh Said Revolt helped Britain to take Mosul away from Turkey, I believe it is naive to think that the Mosul question was not solved in favor of Britain after the Şeyh Said Revolt.

c. Predictions

According to historical records, Kurdish movements in history have appeared under different guises. Throughout history Kurds have not been completely assimilated, nor have they managed to form a Kurdish state. Kurdish identity crises gained different dimensions with revolts, organizations, and international treaties. Especially after the First World War, the Kurds were sentenced to reside in five distinct states with five different cultures. As a result of this, under the influence of each host culture the Kurds structured sub-cultures. The Kurdish language, for example, is written in three different scripts in the Middle East: Arabic, Latin and Cyrillic. Today the Kurdish population is estimated to be 20-25 million with over 3% birth rate. There are many independent nation-states on the present world map with only a few hundred thousand inhabitants; why is there not a Kurdish nation that governs this largest stateless ethnic group? Like many scholars, Robert Olson analyses the Kurdish movements and concludes that a "lack of unity" is the primary reason for the Kurds' failure to form an independent state.¹⁵⁵ Some of the Kurdish intellectuals, like Gassemlou, the former leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran who was assassinated in France in 1989, accuses imperialist countries of preventing the establishment of a Kurdish state in order to further their imperialistic designs. I, without a doubt, subscribe to the assertion that 'lack of unity' among the Kurdish groups as the major impediment to Kurdish self-determination; however, in my opinion, while

¹⁵⁵Olson, p. 156.

studying the Kurdish problem one should ask why there is no Kurdish unification. I suggest that the nature of the vulnerable Kurdish social structure is as responsible as the imperialistic designs of such countries as Russia, England, and France. The biggest misfortune for the Kurds is that their homeland is situated in one of the world's most strategic areas. According to Helga Graham, this is "the core of the (Kurdish) problem."¹⁵⁶

In order to have an independent Kurdish state, unification of all Kurdish areas is necessary. A Kurdish state within only Turkey cannot be independent, because the harsh geographical features of Turkish Kurdistan preclude agricultural self-sufficiency. An independent Kurdish nation would also need oil reserves in Iraq and the fertile lands of Iran. In other words, Kurdish nationalists have to challenge the national integrity of at least three powerful Middle Eastern states. At the present time, this would require strong international support, as well as a strong enough political and ideological discourse to challenge Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi nationalistic consciousness. A new state would possibly change the present power structure in the region and the degree to which the West would benefit from the new power structure are very unpredictable and open to speculation. There is one probability however: the Kurdish leadership would not want to provide any better deals to transnational entities than do the current power centers. The West would not want to risk its relations with the present governments in the region. This is the

¹⁵⁶Helga Graham, "Introduction: The Kurds, Cinderella of Liberation Movements," in Laizer, Sheri's book Into Kurdistan Frontiers Under Fire, (London and New Jersey: Zed books Ltd., 1991), 1.

main reason why the West has betrayed the Kurds many times in history. Alternative support from the former Soviet Union never materialized for the same reason. The international community has always regarded new entities in the Middle East with suspicion. Therefore, the support from transnational sources, in my opinion, will not be sufficient for the Kurds to establish a nation-state in the near future. The help from the West to the Kurds is manipulative and the Kurdish question is being used as trump card in international politics to pressure the existing Turkish government. On the other side of the coin, although Kurdish nationalistic discourse has developed greatly in the last century, it still is not ready to challenge any of the established nationalistic ideologies, much less any combination of them.

The PKK movement in Turkey aimed to develop mutual discourse among Kurdish groups, however, it failed to unify any of the Kurdish organizations. Furthermore, most of the time, the PKK was shunned by other Kurdish groups due to its violent methods. One of the major aims of the Kurdish Workers' Party was to destroy the existing status quo in the eastern Anatolia, which was extremely tribal. As a result of that, the PKK was challenged by most of the tribal leaders. The majority of the tribes fought along with Turkish security forces in order to protect their reign in the area against the PKK guerrillas. The Turkish government organized some of the opposing tribes as an alternative armed forces, which were called Köy Korucuları, or Village Guards. Although the Village Guard System in some ways resembles the Hamidiye Alayları, unlike the Hamidiye

Alayları, which was mainly utilized to confront the Armenian threat, the main purpose of establishing Village Guard System was to pressure and to encourage the disintegration of Kurdish movements. Remembering the opposition of the Lolan and Hormek tribes to the Şeyh Said Revolt, one can readily predict that in the future, too, it will be quite difficult to form a unified discourse against the center. In this respect the PKK movement, in spite of noticeable differences in the presentation of the opposition, has been another version of the Şeyh Said Revolt. The PKK movement was more successful in spreading its ideology to the masses than the Şeyh Said revolt due to technological advancements in communication. The easy accessibility of information, however, did not serve to create a fixed opposition, on the contrary, it widened the gap between Kurdish movements in the modern world. Religion-oriented new Kurdish movements are an example of my point. Other than Turkish military forces and Kurdish tribal units, the PKK movement is presently being challenged by Kurdish religious radicals who are not Tarikat members. Kurdish discourse in Turkey is approaching a new dilemma of identity.

Religion is again emerging on the political stage. In today's Turkey, Islamic ideology is becoming the main opposition to the center and it is my prediction that Kurdish discourse, too, will adopt religious slogans to oppose the central authority. That is to say, it is inevitable that the PKK will be challenged and threatened by an Islamic movement in the near future. However, the creation of an Islamic Kurdish state is also unlikely due to the fact that Islam conflicts with the idea of a nation state unless it

is manipulated. As I indicated earlier, whatever ideology is adopted (Islamic or socialist), the main target of Kurdish discourse is to devote its loyalty to the ethnic base of a nation-state. Given the fact that the Kurdish people are deprived of a strong bourgeois who play an intermediary role between the tribal Kurdish masses and the intellectuals, an Islamic-oriented movement has a better chance to organize the opposition than does an ethnic-oriented one.

Kurdish question in Turkey is viewed differently by both sides. According to Turks, it is a threat to the nation's integrity; on the other hand, most Kurds feel that the problem is Turkish oppression. For centuries, the Kurdish periphery and the Turkish center have been locked in a violent struggle stemming from a failure to communicate. Furthermore, the Kurdish nationalist discourse and the Turkish response to it have become a vicious circle repeating itself. Unless this circle is broken, the Kurdish discourse could very possibly appear in another guise- an Islamic one.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London and New York: Verso, 1991.
- Aşan, Aziz. Şeyh Said Ayaklanması. İstanbul: Sistem Ofset, 1991.
- Atatürk, M. Kemal. Nutuk. Ed. by Zeynep Korkmaz. Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1984.
- Ateş, Toktamış. Türk Devrim Tarihi. İstanbul: İkt. Fak. Yay., 1980.
- Baldick, Julian. Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism. London: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd., 1989.
- Ballı, Rafet. Kürt Dosyası. İstanbul: Cem Yay., 3rd. edition, 1992.
- Belsey, Catherine. Critical Practice. London & New York: Routledge, 1980.
- Beşikçi, İsmail. Bilim Resmi İdeoloji, Devlet-Demokrasi, ve Kürt Sorunu. Bonn: Kürdistan Yurtsever Aydınlar Birliği, 1990.
- _____. Doğu Anadolu'nun Düzeni: Sosyo-Ekonomik ve Etnik Temeller. Ankara: E-yayınları, 1970.
- _____. Milletlerarası Sömürge Kürdistan. Paris: Institut Kurde de Paris, 1990.
- _____. Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkasının Programı (1931) ve Kürt Sorunu. İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1991.
- _____. Kürt Aydını Üzerine Düşünceler. Ankara: Yurt Kitap Yayın, 1991.

- _____. Ortadoğuda Devlet Terörü. Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1991.
- _____. Tunceli Kanunu (1935) ve Dersim Jenosidi. İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1990.
- Birand, M. Ali. Apo ve PKK. İstanbul: Milliyet Yay., 1992.
- Bois, Thomas. The Kurds. Beirut: Khayat, 1966.
- Bruinessen, M.M. van. Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan. London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd. 1992.
- Cin, Hakki. ABD'nin Kürt Sorununa Yaklaşımı ve Stratejisi. Ankara: Türkiye Fikir Ajansı, 1988.
- Dogan, Avni. Kurtuluş, Kuruluş ve Sonrası. İstanbul: 1964.
- Entessar, Nader. Kurdish Ethnonationalism. Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publications, 1992.
- Esengin, Kenan. Kürtçülük Sorunu. İstanbul: Su Yayınları, 1976.
- Firat, M. Şerif. Doğu İlleri ve Varto Tarihi. Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1981.
- Ghassemlou, A. R. Kurdistan and The Kurds. Czecholovakia, Callet's, 1965.
- Ghassemlou, A. R. People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan, ed. by Gerard Chaliand; translated by Michael Pallis, London: Zed Press, 1980.
- Gilani, Sayed Taher. The Struggle for Political Independence: A Case of Kurds, MA. thesis, The University of Texas at Arlington, 1987.
- Gökalp, Ziya. Kürt Aşiretleri Hakkında İçtimai Tetkikler. Ankara: Komal, 1975.
- Gunter, Michael. The Kurds In Turkey: A Political Dilemma. Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990.

- Izady, P. Mehrdad. The Kurds: A Concise Handbook. Washington, Philadelphia, London: Taylor & Francis, Inc., 1992.
- Jwaideh, Wadie. The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Its Origins and Development. Ph.D. thesis, Syracuse University, 1960.
- Kizilkaya, M.- Nebiler, H. Dünden Yarına Kürtler. İstanbul: Yurt Kitap yayıncılık, 1991.
- Küçük, Yalçın. Kürtler Üzerine Tezler. İstanbul: Dönem yayınevi, 1990.
- Kutlay, Naci. İttihat Terakki ve Kürtler. İstanbul: Koral Yayınevi, 1990.
- Laber, Jeri. Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Kurds of Turkey. New York: US Helsinki Watch Committee, 1988.
- Laizer, Sheri. Into Kurdistan, Frontiers Under Fire. London: Zed Books Ltd., 1991.
- Lytte, Elizabeth. A Bibliography of The Kurds, Kurdistan, And The Kurdish Question. Monticello: Concil of Planning Librarians, 1977.
- Mardin, Şerif. Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.
- Mcdowall, David. The Kurds. Great Britain: Minority Right Publications, 1992.
- Mojab, Shahrzad. "Women in Politics and War: The Case of Kurdistan" (working paper), East Lansing Michigan: Michigan State University Women in International Development, 1987.
- Nezan, Kendal. "Kurdistan in Turkey," in A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan. Ed. by Gerard Chaliand. New York: Olive Branch Press, 1993.
- O'Ballance, Edgar. The Kurdish Revolt: 1961-1970. London: Faber, 1973.
- Olson, Robert. Shaikh Said and the Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism 1880 - 1925. Austin: University of Texas press, 1989.

- Parmaksizoglu, İsmet. Tarih Boyunca Kürt Türkleri ve Türkmenler, Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1983.
- Pelleteire, Stephen C. The Kurds: An Unstable Element in The Gulf. Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1984.
- Perinçek, Doğu. Abdullah Öcalan ile Görüşme. İstanbul: Sistem Yay., 1990.
- Qazzaz, Shafiq Tawfiq. Nationalism and Cultural Pluralism: The Kurdish Case, Ph.D. thesis, The American University, 1971
- Renan, Ernest. "What is a Nation," in Nation and Narration. Ed. by Homi Bhabha. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Rohat. Çagdaş Türk Edebiyatında Kürtler. İstanbul: Fırat, 1991.
- Sadillili, Vedat. Türkiye'de Kürtçülük Hareketleri ve İsyanlar. Ankara: Kon Yayınları, 1980.
- Safrastian, A. The Kurds and Kurdistan. London: The Harvill Press, 1948.
- Sancak, Can. Doğu Yakasının Hikayesi. Ankara: Nuans yayınları, 1991.
- Seferoglu, Şükrü. 101 Soruda Kürtlerin Türk Boyu. Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1982.
- Sekban, M. Şükrü. Kürt Meselesi. Ankara: Kon Yayınları, 1979.
- Selek, S. Anadolu İhtilali. İstanbul: Örgü yay., 1981.
- Sevgen, Nazmi. Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Türk Beylikleri: Osmanlı Belgeleri İle Kürt Türkleri Tarihi. Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1982
- Smith, Anthony D. Nationalism in the Twentieth Century. Oxford: Martin Robertson & Co. Ltd., 1979.
- Steinitz, M. "Insurgents, Terrorists and The Drug Trade," The Washington Quarterly. Fall, 1985.

Süleyman, Sabri Paşa. Van Tarihi ve Kürt Türkleri Hakkında İncelemeler. Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1982.

Toker, Metin. Şeyh Said ve İsyanı. Ankara: Rüzgarlı Matbaası, 1968.

Toros, Taha. Tarih ve Toplum. Agustos, 1985.

Trimingham, Spencer. The Sufi Orders in Islam. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Yalçın-Heckman, Lale. Tribe and Kinship Among The Kurds. Frankfurt; New York: P. Lang, 1991.

Zana, Mehdi. Bekle Diyarbakır. İstanbul: Doz Basım ve Yayıncılık Ltd. Sti., 1991.

Zirinsky, Michael. A Study of Kurdish Nationalism and Its Effect on United States Foreign Policy, MA thesis, The American University, 1968

NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES:

Armenian Reporter

Briefing Study

Cumhuriyet

Dünya

Foreign Broadcast Information Service

Hürriyet

Kurdish Times

Middle East Report

Milliyet

New York Times

Nokta

Serxwebun

Tercüman

The Economist

Zaman